McCulloch made many of these same points in a critical review of Chalmers's *On Political Economy*, published in the *Edinburgh Review* in October, 1832. CEJ argued that Scottish agriculture demonstrated that yields could be improved significantly if farmers were educated to utilize scientific methods — and there were economic incentives to reward those who actually worked the land.

No less important were the magazine’s pointed essays on governance in the domestic sphere. “Husbands and Wives,” from September 29, 1832, attempted to right a power imbalance within marriage. Despite all the books of advice spelling out the duties of wives to husbands, almost nothing has been written on the responsibilities of husbands to wives, despite the fact that

the man is to blame in nine cases out of ten where an alliance proves unhappy . . . Yet, with these numerous and undeniable facts [of spousal abuse by husbands] before the world, no writer thinks of preventing such evils by pointing out and enforcing the duties of the party from whose misconduct they chiefly spring. A small portion of our columns, therefore, will not be unprofitably bestowed on a subject of so much importance. (1:35: 273)

By arguing for the rights of the most vulnerable, CEJ moved to fill a moral gap within the culture.

Still, CEJ has impressed some later commentators as timid — or, worse, complicitous in a corrupt system. Richard Altick wrote that the magazine’s editorial caution had

its own unhappy side. [William] Chambers was acutely conscious that he was walking on eggs: as a man who staked his fortune on the success of the paper, he could afford to offend no one. This cautiousness led him to steer away from most, though not all, controversial subjects and to exercise tireless vigilance over the paper’s prose. . . . Inevitably blamelessness shaded into innocuousness; in his zeal to avoid giving offense on any side, Chambers kept from the *Journal* the qualities necessary to win working-class readers accustomed to the hard-hitting commentary of the political press and the melodrama

of the sensational Sunday papers. Certainly the middle-class readers who formed the base of the magazine’s support gave the Chamberses ample reason for caution, as they explained on January 31, 1835:

It is our habitual impression and conviction, from all we have ever learned from the details of our circulation, that a few delinquencies in the ethics of the Journal, or even a few transgressions of the bounds of good taste, not to speak of partizanship in politics, would instantly prove its ruin. . . . We can declare that numberless
topics which the conductors of hardly any other periodical would think objectionable, are avoided by us, and that we hardly ever receive a contribution from the most practiced writers, which does not require purification before we deem it fit for insertion. (IV:157:1)

CEJ had to avoid offending the moral sensibilities of a significant portion of its readers or dealing overtly with politics, while still producing a serious weekly. Yet, as we have seen, even in its first year, CEJ spoke out courageously on basic issues of social policy, and it would become increasingly progressive and outspoken.

Another criticism has come from Kevin Gilmartin, who argued in Print Politics that CEJ, along with the Penny and other cheap periodicals, represented an attempt by “print capitalism” to “offer a less coercive solution” [than outright suppression] to the challenge of the radical unstamped periodicals.48 While there is no evidence that CEJ attempted to “suppress” the unstamped, quite obviously it offered a competing view of the world. William was careful to disassociate CEJ from radical periodicals, which, he wrote in his Memoir, “had dealt principally in invective, of which no good can come.”49 William may well have been correct, since as Gilmartin himself has observed, on balance the “radical controversy [of the unstamped] had more in common with the reformation sense of a trial of truth than with subsequent theories of interest negotiation in a democratically structured public sphere. Suspicious of Whig complicity, radical publicists set out to uncover truths obscured by corruption, and to silence rather than to persuade their opponents.”50 Since a central goal of CEJ was to open a “democratically structured public sphere,” it employed a rhetoric different from the unstamped, particularly in the treatment of social problems, where it was factual, quantitative, and analytical. Created to be read by individuals at home or in libraries, CEJ also offered a different “reading” experience. Gilmartin has demonstrated that many radical periodicals were intended to be read aloud in public spaces as a means of promoting class solidarity and revolutionary activity.51

Gilmartin’s phrase “democratically structured public sphere” raises the question of how CEJ relates to Habermas’ important concept. In the 1971 Theory and Practice, Habermas specifically connected what he called the “doctrine of the public sphere of politics” to “the economists and sociologists who belong to the tradition of Scottish moral philosophy” and praised their work in making “the mediating function of public opinion a constitutive part of the theory of civil society itself.” For them, Habermas wrote,

the “natural history of civil society” is conceived as the law-governed progress of mankind’s civilization – “from rudeness to civilized manners”; it embraces the
development toward a liberal society in the economic and the political sense. A political public sphere unfolds to the same degree as the natural laws of the market assert themselves, with the ascendancy of the private, autonomous exchange of commodities; this will lead to the equalization of social rank and to the extension of civil rights of equality. The evolutionary concept of society thus assures the theory of a prior and unconstrained correspondence with public opinion. As the theory knew that it was in harmony with the historical process, it did not have to instruct the citizens on how they could organize social progress.

We have seen that the Chamberses also perceived the marketplace as a democratizing force. One function of CEJ was to widen access to the public sphere, especially by "the bringing of fresh multitudes within the bright pale of knowledge, and the consequent increase in human happiness" (V:209 [Jan. 30, 1836]:1). This suggests a line of continuity between theories of evolution in nature, which were being discussed in Edinburgh and which Robert Chambers would treat in Vestiges, and the concepts of social progress of Scottish moral philosophy.

I am not suggesting that either of the brothers believed that the public sphere—defined as a realm where citizens with diverse and conflicting interests and opinions could come together amicably to resolve differences through rational debate—was fully open, especially in England. They themselves lived with state restrictions on political speech, and they had to pay oppressive taxes on paper. On January 31, 1835, CEJ reported that over the past three years the "heavy duty of 3d. per pound weight" of paper had "yielded a clear revenue to government of £6000" from the firm (IV:157:2). A CEJ essay on Galileo published on December 8, 1838, charged that since both individuals and societies "have neither the will nor the power to receive truths that are greatly inconsistent with previous impressions," the discoverers of new truths will face opposition and resistance. Almost certainly by Robert Chambers, the essay argued that since most people see the world through the lens "of prejudice or interest," they "remain blind. Public writers of the common class are greatly gifted with this power, and incalculable is the mischief which they do accordingly. With the general progress of the race, there will be a progress in conscientiousness, and the time may yet come when it will be held as infamous to treat a truth of nature dishonestly as to pick a pocket. But it will be long ere man reaches this point." For now "the attention of the enlightened [must] be directed to the detection of unconscientious philosophising, and to its exposure, as also to the promotion, by all possible means, of a conscientious mode of treating the truths of science" (VII:358:361–62). By publishing Vestiges anonymously, Robert Chambers in effect charged those who controlled speech were afraid to open the public arena for a full and free debate of ideas.
The editors’ decision to avoid religious controversy had the fortuitous effect of making the Journal a secular periodical. William recalled that he set out to produce CEJ for “persons of all shades of thinking, religious and secular.” Some members of the clergy were dismayed once such a periodical had become popular and pressured the Chamberses to “give it the character of ‘a religious publication.’” But they refused – resisting even sermons directed to them. The Chamberses “were called names. The era of this species of persecution . . . extended for nearly twenty years after the commencement of the work,” William wrote. Such attacks only strengthened the brothers’ resolve.

3. **CEJ and the Creation of an “Original Periodical Literature”**

William Chambers recognized that for new readers the cost and effort of reading must be repaid through an immediate return in pleasure. Other benefits, such as the acquisition of knowledge, would follow. There could be no hint of the didactic or the condescending. Therefore, unlike the Penny Magazine, CEJ included fiction. Its most popular features apparently came from Robert Chambers himself, particularly his deft, informal essays. Several times a month he considered compelling and not so compelling questions of manners, business conduct, and other amusing features of human nature. (These informal essays are quite apart from his expositions of scientific subjects and social problems.) To give examples from the first year, he wrote on such subjects as “Parties” (II:57 (March 2, 1833):33–34), “Losses in Families” (II: 58 (March 9, 1833): 41), and “Old Bachelors” (II:67 (May 11, 1833):113–114). The essay on “Husbands and Wives” is an example of how he could treat an important subject coolly and humorously. William would write that the magazine’s success, “the permanent hold on the public mind that the Journal fortunately obtained, was undoubtedly owing, in a very great degree, to the leading articles, consisting of essays, moral, familiar, and humorous, from the pen of my brother.”

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Chamberses’ editorial job was to strike the right balance between the different but complementary kinds of literary expression – fiction, poetry, humorous essays, probing social criticism, and travel reports – that readers expected. CEJ responded to the demand for instruction, publishing during the first year essays on such subjects as “Geology,” “French Manners,” “Cultivation of the Mind,” “Land of Burns,” “The French Revolution,” and “London.” Sketches of such figures as Humboldt, Galt, Linnaeus, Chaucer, and Caxton also appeared. Reflecting their confidence in the capacity of their readers, the editors refused to publish illustrations, even though illustrations contributed greatly to the success of the Penny. Electing not to include advertisements, the Chamberces bet the magazine on the power of the written word.
The editors avoided condescending to their readers – perhaps because they published essays on subjects that they themselves found stimulating, as in "Vestiges of Unrecorded Nations in America," an account of archeological excavations of vanished Native American tribes who had constructed an elaborate civilization on the Plains, evidently before the arrival of Columbus. The essay is based on American sources, including the North American Review and Silliman's Journal (8:381 (May 18, 1839): 129–30). Similarly, on April 4, 1840, CEJ published "Changes of Level in the Earth's Surface," which makes use of Lyell's Geology and Darwin's Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Countries Visited by the H.M.S. 'Beagle.' Whereas the "Vestiges" essay treated comparatively recent changes in cultures, this one described vast geologic change and speculated on the connection between geological change on the South American continent and the development of forms of life (IX: 427: 82–83). Without assuming a prior knowledge, CEJ still posed challenging questions on the meaning of the "vestiges" of past civilizations and of such vast geological changes as Lyell and Darwin had described.

While such features explored processes of change far from home, CEJ did not neglect the social changes affecting those living nearby. On March 23, 1839, it quoted extensively from a report prepared by Glasgow University Hospital on the “Condition of the Lower Classes in a Great City”:

The indigent condition of the lower classes, and the miserable dwellings into which they are huddled, oblige them to purchase their provisions and fuel in small quantities, sometimes on credit, and therefore at prices which would be deemed quite exorbitant by the wealthy inhabitants of this city. Hence their small pittance of wages becomes still less adequate to the supply of their reasonable wants. The indigence of the labouring classes in Glasgow is much greater than the rest of the community are aware of – a very small interval indeed separates them from complete destitution, which is immediately produced by the sickness of the head of the family, or his want of employment. It would be a melancholy and painful subject of statistical inquiry to endeavour to ascertain how many individuals in this great city, with all its masses of wealth, get up in the morning without knowing where they are to find a meal, and how many actually cannot obtain food without having recourse to begging or theft.

Describing the widespread abuse of alcohol as both a result of poverty and a contributing factor to it, the report recommended increasing taxes to limit its availability. But in an editorial, CEJ argued that merely raising the tax on alcohol will not eradicate the root cause, poverty. CEJ recommended nothing less than a far-reaching commitment to transform of the lives of the impoverished: “The true plan will consist of cultivating the minds and improving the physical condition of the people; unless this be
done on a scale only limited by the extent of the whole nation, habits of intemperance . . . will . . . continue to flourish" (8:373:71).

CEJ combined such essays on poverty with others offering specific remedies, as in "Rise of Manufactures in Little Towns," published on July 27, 1839. After citing a number of remote Scottish towns where enterprising individuals had established manufacturing plants, thereby bringing employment to those who otherwise would be dependent on public assistance, CEJ offered suggestions for would-be entrepreneurs. It affirmed the great principle, that, in all human affairs, the natural energies of the persons concerned are of still more consequence than the pecuniary means. With ingenuity, industry, and enterprise, something may be done, but without those, nothing; and that large sums may be unattended in their expenditure by such qualities, is only too clear. Possessing such qualities, some native might . . . be able to select some one of the many tasks of Industry, which might be found suitable to local circumstances, and capable of being carried on at a profit. (8:391:210)

Entrepreneurs themselves, the Chamberses stressed the importance of individual initiative in addressing social problems.

The largest portion of what appeared in CEJ was original, as Robert Chambers explained in a letter to the Spectator responding to charges that CEJ and other "cheap" weeklies stole most of their contents:

Our work does not "chiefly steal what it sells." Our Journal is almost entirely original; and should be so altogether, but for the desire frequently expressed by our readers that a few extracts should be given. Our other work, Information for the People, which contains the same quantity of matter as the Journal, at the same price, is every paragraph of it original; and the expense of the literary preparation of these works greatly exceeds . . . the cost per sheet of any existing periodical work under the Quarterly Reviews. It is thus proved that the public may be supplied with literature of nearly the first class, so far as remuneration can make it so, at the humble price which we exact for our publications.15

After only a year, on February 2, 1833, the editors claimed that they had created something new:

Every article has been presented as a distinct thing, speaking for itself, either as a body of information on a certain point, or as a picture of real or fictitious life; and, while periodical works in general are chiefly composed of what may be called a literature upon a literature – like commentators of the period of the revival of letters, with their huge tomes upon the classics – the Journal has aimed at giving an original and independent literature, with however humble pretensions to merit. In the whole range of our pages, there has hardly been a word about what Goldsmith
calls “Shakespeare, taste, and the musical glasses”; all has been plain, downright, substantial matter, generally based upon the broadest human interests, and depending for its effect solely upon its own merits. (II:53:1)  

There was little point in including book reviews in such a periodical, and since we can assume that CEJ supplied the bulk of the leisure reading for many families, diversity was imperative.  

Although enjoyment remained essential, CEJ also attempted to accomplish something morally significant. In 1836, the editors spoke of CEJ as “an engine of extraordinary efficacy in the operation of great moral and intellectual changes.” Pleased that circulation had grown particularly in England, where “the reading habits of the people have hitherto been much less conspicuous” than in Scotland, the editors offered a powerful critique both of the conservatives, who remained “convinced” that the diffusion of literacy “was likely to raise the people in an universal rebellion against their ordinary duties and customary mode of life,” and those “respectable and well-meaning persons” of such organizations as the (unnamed) SDUK, who have spent several years in the happy dream, that, by communicating information respecting various natural and artificial objects, and the more familiar departments of science, they were regenerating the race. . . . To an unconcerned party, it must appear incomprehensible that either good or evil should proceed from being acquainted with the silk manufacture or the height of the Rouen Cathedral. . . . The most successful result of knowledge of this kind is the production of the unadmired phenomenon called the Walking Encyclopedia, in whom all is material and nothing is labour.  

Instead, the editors claimed that they had attempted to present information in its largest context, so that their readers would learn to make fundamental intellectual connections. The goal was to help the reader appreciate “both the existence and bearing of things, when they are properly brought under his view” and so be able to position himself “in a relation to nature, to his Creator, and his fellow beings. . . . By failing . . . to act upon this more liberal view of the constitution of the human mind, it appears to us that many able and zealous labourers in the task of enlightening the people, have laboured nearly in vain.” Reflecting its moral purpose, CEJ claimed that it treated “the affairs and economy of ordinary existence” with “a view to lessening the miseries and improving the happiness of our fellow-beings. . . . In short, while the motto of others has been that ‘Knowledge is Power,’ we have borne the legend with a difference, implying that knowledge only is power, when it is brought to bear directly upon the interests of mortals, and is accompanied by the exercise of the moral
sentiments” (V:209 (Jan. 1836): 1–2). Even while creating a periodical that was religiously neutral, the Chambereses still conceived their work in moral terms.

Robert Chambers himself produced a significant portion of the magazine’s contents. Sondra Miley Cooney has written that “Files of the Journal for 1834, 1835, and 1837, marked in Robert’s hand, provide a record of the extent and nature of writing. Of the 164 ‘familiar sketches and moral essays’ in these three volumes he wrote all of 117 essays and part of 44 others. In addition he wrote 76 articles and at least 15 biographies, 4 tales, and 3 poems.” Although William invented CEJ, it was Robert who both as editor and writer actually created CEJ as an original magazine. Writing to George Combe, he explained that

Every periodical work of miscellaneous literature, in order to succeed, requires at least one constant writer to give it a strong and abiding character. . . . Without this, a mere assemblage of papers drawn up by various writers, tells poorly on the public mind. When a periodical has such a presiding spirit, it may be said to form a friendship with every one of its readers. . . . Now this is an advantage which the Journal always had.

Those editorial “friendships” contributed to Robert’s transformation.

4. The Development Principle at Work in CEJ: Readers and Editors

A theme that emerged with increasing power in CEJ is a central theme that would be central to Vestiges: development and growth. The magazine’s reports on its growing circulation and the expansion of the Chambers firm seemed to fit naturally into a context that included descriptions of such technological innovations as the telegraph, the latest ideas on harnessing electro-mechanical power, ways of burning coal without pollution, and agricultural improvements based on the chemistry of Justus Liebig. It reported extensively on measures in public health that brought improvements in the quality and length of life, and published articles on expansion in the natural world and the interconnections of all living things that would lead to Vestiges.

Evidence of “progress” and transformation begins with the editors themselves, who on January 31, 1835, confessed that: “At the time when the Journal was commenced, our experience in literature was comparatively slight, and our studies had referred to a limited and in many respects useless range of knowledge.” However,

with the progress of the work, we conceive ourselves to have acquired increased powers of both instruction and entertainment, with views, almost new to us, of the
unskilled as we yet may be in many departments of knowledge, we find ourselves to be constantly advancing from less to greater things, and at the same time receiving a deeper and deeper sense of the importance of using these to the advantage of our fellow-creatures. (IV: 157:1)

But it was not just the editors who had thus grown. The essay introducing the fifth volume claimed that their readers too were achieving dramatic intellectual growth, permitting the production of a far more complex and probing magazine, its contents advancing . . . by slow but steady movements, from simpler to more profound speculations, according as we thought that the bulk of our readers would be prepared to follow us, till it would now perhaps require, for the appreciation of any number of the Journal, an intellect of twice the amount of cultivation which was at first required. . . . We cannot doubt that the minds of the generality of our readers have, from whatever cause, made an advance in the period of our labours and are now in a condition considerably different from that in which they were a few years ago. Much of this result, we are convinced, must be owing to the enlarged view which we adopted respecting the constitution of the human mind, and the means required for giving all its faculties a harmonious training and cultivation. (V: 209 (Jan. 30, 1836):1)

Readers may well have associated the phrase “the constitution of the human mind” with Combe’s The Constitution of Man and Its Relation to External Objects (1828). Reflecting the friendship between Robert Chambers and Combe and their shared belief in the transformative power of education, in 1834 CEJ printed a series of five lectures by Combe on the imperative need to make available education to all, men and women, workers, and professionals.

Perhaps it was that advance to new levels of intellectual complexity that was responsible for leaving at least some potential readers behind. So W. E. Hickson, looking back at the magazine’s early years, would claim in testifying on June 20, 1851, before a Select Committee of Parliament, where he criticized the Chamberses for having “generally overshot the comprehension of their readers, or they have not sufficiently entered into subjects adapted for their sympathy.” Chambers’s primary readership, he asserted, was “chiefly among small shopkeepers, not among those dependent upon weekly wages; not certainly among any portion of the working class earning less than 16 s. a week. In the manufacturing districts, amongst the factory operatives, there is a very large section of the community called working classes, whose wages are from 40s to 50s a week.” As I have mentioned, in 1840 the Chamberses anticipated just such criticism, arguing that no periodical could reach the many who were in fact functionally
illiterate. Much as the Chamberses might wish to reach into the ranks of the working classes, they saw that it would be impossible so long as the state refused to make provision for basic literacy and workers had neither the time nor the funds even for such comparatively inexpensive periodicals as CEJ.

It is significant, however, that Hickson, a reformer and editor of the Westminster Review from 1840–1851, identified himself as a reader of the periodical. So too were a number of writers for the radical, unstamped papers, who, as Adrian Desmond has written, “culled their science from freethinkers’ miscellanies, plebian journals (Chambers’s was a favorite), phrenological literature, and popular astronomies and geologies.”

An example of the use of information from publications of the Chambers firm by radicals is a series of articles on the theme “The Theory of Regular Gradation” published by William Chilton in the early 1840s in the Oracle. Edward Royle argued that Chilton’s articles, which offered a tentative theory of transmutation, “showed a familiarity with most of the readily available writings on the subject, concerning both the discoveries of the nineteenth century and the theories of the eighteenth: Buckland, Lyell, Cuvier, and Lamarck are among the names quoted, though he seems mainly to have met their ideas at second hand in Chambers’s Information.”

I suspect as well that in such articles as those on poverty in Glasgow and others documenting the incidence of poverty, CEJ brought explosive information to a wide circle of readers, including radical editors and writers. For instance, on September 3, 1842, CEJ began an extensive four-part series on “Sanatory Conditions of the Poor” based on Edwin Chadwick’s report to the Poor Law Commissioners. If CEJ did not itself succeed in reaching as many working class readers as initially the editors had hoped to reach, it nevertheless served as a valuable source for working class journalists. Its own agenda was to reform, not overthrow, the economic system. It looked to the people to provide the energy and initiative for the economic growth to support an increase in wages.

5. Responsible Capitalism: W. & R. Chambers and the Problem of Poverty

During CEJ’s early years, the Chamberses published essays at the beginning of each volume documenting their progress, thereby encouraging readers to identify with the magazine, the Chambers firm, and its gospel of literacy. For instance, in the essay which began the third volume, the Chamberses referred to an article in Tait’s for January 1834 giving typical circulation figures of the various magazines currently being sold in an unnamed Scottish town. Where the well-established quarterlies and monthlies sold in the single digits (with the exception of Blackwood’s, which sold
14 copies), CEJ is listed as selling 700 copies each week; Information for the People, 225 copies; and the Historical Newspaper, 175. Using these numbers, the Chamberses claimed that through CEJ alone they had "increased [the periodical reading matter] sixteen-fold" sold in that town (III:105 (Feb. 1, 1834):1-2). These reports encouraged readers to think of their magazine as a progressive force within the larger society.

Although prohibited from commenting explicitly on politics, CEJ through its marketplace success vindicated the democratic principle. In 1837 the editors boasted that

It is pleasant to find that many of those who at first denounced these modest disseminators of popular science and literature [periodicals such as CEJ. . . . are] entering on the same career, with expressions of extreme anxiety that the poor should be by the same means enlightened. In thus alluding to the establishment of the democracy of three-halfpence, beside the respectable middle classes of sixpence and a shilling, and the aristocracy of half-a-crown and six shillings, we may remind our readers that, besides the literary labours of the Editors, the Journal has, for some time, presented articles from writers who public approbation has stamped as first-class. . . . If, indeed, we could allow ourselves to indulge in a feeling of triumph on any point . . . it would be . . . in having led the way to show that the great body of the people, by combining to give sale to a publication meeting their pecuniary circumstances, could secure as much intellectual service as could formerly be obtained only at a price which placed the solacements of literature beyond their reach. (VI:261 (Jan. 28, 1837):8)

The Chambeses were not above tweaking conservative opponents, but the larger point remains valid: the marketplace success of CEJ and other low-cost periodicals vindicated the claims of the people for full participation in the national life.

It was not just just the marketplace success of W. & R. Chambers that affirmed egalitarian principles, but the conduct of Chambers firm as well. "It becomes those . . . who advocate any speculative doctrine, not to throw it to mankind as a barren theory, but to work it out in their own practice, as far as existing circumstances will permit," the editors wrote on July 13, 1839. The statement appears in the introduction to a reprinting of a newspaper report of the non-alcoholic reception, "Chambers's Soiree," that they had given in honor of their employees (8:389:199). Articles on the "soirees," which included verbatim reports of speeches made by the brothers, a spokesman for the employees, and prominent visitors, appeared from 1838 through 1843. At a time of labor violence, the Chambeses presented their firm as an island of prosperity and harmony in labor relations – and so a vindication of the progressive social policies advocated by their magazine. In presenting their firm as a model, they had to address
the underlying point of tension between the laissez faire principles of political economy in which they professed to believe and the dictates of public health and welfare, which demanded governmental intervention in an economy that, left to its own devices had produced poverty, illness, despair, and degradation. As Christopher Hamlin wrote in *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick*, “All who were concerned practically or philosophically with the condition of England—philanthropic evangelists, magistrates, poor law reformers—felt that tension and sought a viable middle ground,” one recent scholar remarked. Through the example of their own firm the Chamberes offered a new way: a system that relied on the initiative and enterprise of responsible capitalists, stressed self-reliance, but also provided the workers, through government initiatives, the assurance of a decent income even in hard times, as well as universal education and wholesome working and living conditions. In reporting on their “soirees,” they described the initiatives that they were taking on behalf of their workers. The events reinforced the Chamberes’ position as the owner-managers, individuals who had put their own capital at risk and who faced the challenge of succeeding in a highly competitive marketplace. There was no question of who was in charge or of shared ownership.

In 1840, William, taking note of “the most distressing animosities, if not the most violent strife,” in labor relations around the country, spoke of the harmony that prevailed at his firm, which operated on the principles that “benevolence was power” and that “benevolence was wealth, peace, and happiness.” Workers and owners, he claimed, were united in a larger social purpose: the pouring forth of “a stream of sound healthful instruction over the land” (IX: 445 (Aug. 8, 1840): 230–31). At the gathering on July 5, 1841, Robert Chambers asserted that if only the firm’s “principles of justice and benevolence” were emulated everywhere, then “the relation of employer and employed throughout the country would be one in which nothing but harmony and happiness would be known, while the general peace and harmony of the empire would be infinitely improved.” He also insisted on the obligation of manufacturers to provide for their employees healthful working conditions, citing the fact that they had installed a new ventilation system “by which pure air, fit to sustain health, is constantly to be had in every part” of their factory (X: 231–32).

The next year William described some additional ways that the firm supported its workers. It had created a lending library of 900 volumes (with a circulation of some 60 books per-week among a census of approximately some 100 workers); a school for children; a Sunday evening school; and a savings bank. Established only a year ago, the savings bank already was a success; average deposits had passed two pounds, and workers were saving from “a single penny to two shillings” per week. At the gathering on
July 8, 1843, Robert Chambers delivered a speech summarizing his pamphlet on *Social Economics of the Industrious Orders*, in which he claimed that well-paid workers, by saving regularly, delaying marriage, and purchasing life insurance, could escape the vicissitudes of business cycles and provide family security (XII:597:197–99). At these events brothers pointed proudly to condition of their employees, who lived comfortably in decent housing and were responsible, productive citizens.

But they saw that outside their own firm and others like it, there were problems of such magnitude that government intervention was mandatory. On April 18, 1840, for instance, they devoted the lead editorial, “The Management of the Poor,” to *Observations on the Management of the Poor in Scotland and of Its Effects on Health in the Great Towns* by the important social thinker and physician, William Poultney Allison, Professor at the University of Edinburgh. In documenting the overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, disease, demoralization, alcoholism, and destitution among the urban poor, Allison argued that the state had a positive duty to relieve citizens from “this state of hopelessness and destitution”—without regard to the moral qualifications of the poor. What was required, *CEJ* wrote in summary, was nothing less than a uniform assessment sufficient to give relief to the whole of the poor, not only those who are sick or impotent, but those who from any cause are destitute, and this relief to be of sufficient amount [to meet] the wants to which it professedly is applied. . . . [Allison’s] views on this subject exactly meet those which we have oftener than once advocated in this journal. There are few things that have more forcibly impressed us throughout life than the unreasonableness of expecting all kinds of virtues from human beings when they are unfortunate, and only then. (IX: 429: 97–98)

Like Allison, the Chamberses argued that once assured of an adequate income and decent living conditions, members of the working classes would regulate their behavior in ways that would make the threat of Malthusianism overpopulation vanish. Christopher Hamlin has observed that Allison’s writings “mark the epitome of a medical critique of industrialism and capitalism the like of which did not reappear until the twentieth century. He went further than others in exploring the possibilities of a supportive social policy. . . . His critique was rooted . . . in eighteenth-century sentiment [and] in practical experience.”62 The same can be said for the Chamberses.

The Chamberses saw that the “supportive social policy” that they advocated had Scottish antecedents, both communitarian and capitalist. No doubt they were influenced by the Owenite fervor for worker’s rights and reform in Edinburgh during the 1820s, a movement in which George Mudie, pub-
lisher of the *Cornucopia*, played an active role. That fervour found expression in the nearby community at Orbiston, established in 1825. In a review of Chadwick's sanitary report (to which William had contributed by submitting analyses of the deplorable conditions in Edinburgh), CEJ pointed to the good health and morale of the workers at the Owenite community at New Lanark to illustrate their own point about the way members of the laboring classes respond when they have access to such necessities as decent housing and meaningful work. But in that same article they mentioned the work of such entrepreneurs as the remarkable Kirkman Finlay, proprietor of the mills at Citrine and Deanston, in similarly providing for his employees. Of Citrine, which employed some 1,000 persons, the Chamberses commented that "The village in which the working people live was built by the master, but many of the houses have subsequently been bought by the men with their savings." They quoted the remark of one visitor that the inhabitants "appear to be in the enjoyment of an unusual amount of comfort; they are well clad, live in neat houses, many of them [own] their own property, and look healthy and cheerful" (XI: 556: (Sept. 24, 1842): 285-86). Besides being "lord provost of Glasgow, the local M.P. and rector of the University," Finlay "sent Glasgow's first trading ship to India (1816) and also, much later (1834), started commerce between the Clyde and China. To such bold *entrepreneurs* the Industrial Revolution owed much." As Sondra Miley Cooney has written, when he became Lord Provost of Edinburgh in 1865, William Chambers led the way in developing and implementing the City Improvement Act for extensive urban improvements, particularly to remove sources of disease.

At the soiree held on June 6, 1841, William Chambers spoke of his belief that the "interests [of capital and labor] were identified; that if we [as owners] were successful in our enterprises, so would [our employees] be well employed; that if our business slackened or ceased, so must they cease to be employed, and impoverishment visit their hitherto comfortable firesides." So self-evident is the principle, that "our intelligent operatives required no persuasive eloquence to comprehend it" (XII: 597 (July 8, 1843): 197-98). Workers and owners shared something else: together, they were producing a product of the immense social value: an accessible literature for the people.

The depression of 1842, the worst in the century, had reduced "hundreds of families in industrial towns . . . to a diet of oatmeal porridge or potatoes and salt." But those who worked at the Chambers firm, William claimed, were fully employed and at their old wages. Further, he asserted that at a time when the high-priced book trade has been extremely depressed, and when printers were out of work in scores, we have never been what is called dull. When one standard
subject of labour was finished by the completion of the 'Information,' we began another, the 'Cyclopedia of English Literature' [inexpensive reprints] prepared by my brother. . . . We have never dismissed a hand. . . . Throughout the distresses of last winter, we kept every man in full employment, and at his ordinary wages; and not only so, but taken new persons into our employment. In the course of the year, we have enlarged the power of the establishment by various additions, and it is now more complete than at any previous period. (12: 597 (July 8, 1843): 198)

It would almost seem that the Chamberses had discovered a way to avoid the vicissitudes of business cycles, even while helping to educate the millions and providing well their own employees.

In 1832 William Chambers charged in CEJ that, despite the efforts of various groups, the "strongholds of ignorance" had not been breached. In 1844 much remained to be done, but the Chamberses had made major gains. Despite severe restrictions on speech, they addressed many of the hard questions of the time. They understood the essential role of literacy in social transformation and spread the "fiery cross of knowledge" far and wide.

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ENDNOTES

4. My principal source for this event as well as Chalmers’s social policy is Stewart J. Brown, Thomas Chalmers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982).
8. Richard D. Altick points out that as a result of certain contradictory statements of the Penny's editor, Charles Knight, there is "confusion" surrounding just how quickly the weekly reached the 200,000 figure. *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957), 393, note 16.


16. Quoted in Cooney, 37.

17. Layman, 175.


23. Cooney, 49, and R. Chambers in Layman, 96–97. Robert Chambers recalled that he and his brother were associated with a short-lived radical paper, *The Black Dwarf*, started by a John Denovan in 1819.


29. Hollis, 62.


32. Altick, 105.


35. Altick remarked that “With few noteworthy exceptions like Herschel and Dickens, contemporary social critics and reformers failed to understand, or at least to sympathize with, [the] imperative need for escape,” on the part of the newly urbanized working classes. “The great majority of the missionaries of reading who came bearing social soporifics put up by the church or by Brougham’s Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, simply could not countenance this motive.” English Common Reader, 96–97.


37. In Charles Darwin: The Man and His Influence, Peter J. Bowler remarks that CEJ promoted “the message that social progress was inevitable if only people were given the freedom to innovate. The key to success should be effort and initiative, not aristocratic privilege, and if individuals were given the freedom to exert themselves, society itself would reap the economic and technological benefits” (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 23.


44. Shapin, “Phrenological Knowledge and Social Structure,” pp. 231–32.


49. Memoir, p. 18.

50. Gilmartin, 103–104.


52. Memoir, p. 246.

53. Memoir, p. 239.

54. Memoir, p. 123.

55. Letter of 29 April 1833 in *The Spectator*, 4 April 1833, pp. 68 (May 18, 1833): 128. The subject is discussed in CEJ, (II: 68 (May 18, 1833): 128.

56. Cooney, pp. 63–64.


58. S.C. on Newspaper Stamps, P.P., 1851, xvii, 385, Q. 3251.


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