

**“Warm Zeal and Cool Judgement”:
The Cheap Repository and English Charity, 1794-1800**

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Abstract: In 1794, English philanthropist Hannah More spearheaded a venture to produce short tracts promoting morality and religion among readers —the Cheap Repository. The predominant historiographical approach has been to examine the interaction of the Repository with the popular print marketplace. Historians such as Susan Pedersen emphasize that the tracts were intended to supplant subversive forms of popular literature, such as Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, chapbooks, and broadsides. They argue that the Cheap Repository was an attempt at “top-down” reformation; elite writers sought to suppress the turbulence and political participation of the poor. This paper takes an alternate approach. The tracts are *charitable* texts which addressed middling and gentry readers as much as (or even more than) they did the poor. The Repository did not isolate labouring people and their print culture as the sole threats to the stability of England, nor did it engage solely in “top-down” moralizing. This essay shows how the Repository lays blame on the charitable practices of state poor relief and rich beneficiaries —as well as the poor— for encouraging immorality and unrest. The Cheap Repository seeks to reform the meaning and practice of charity amongst all members of English society.

Key Terms: benevolence, charity, Cheap Repository, class/rank, deservingness, discernment, evangelicalism, frugality, material relief, Hannah More, Poor Law/parish relief, popular literature, radicalism, “top-down” reformation, workhouse

Note on the Cheap Repository Texts

Each Cheap Repository tract was printed multiple times, often under different titles. I cite the texts as they appear in their first penny pamphlet format and refer to them by their original titles. I employ the collected editions only to highlight later departures from or additions to the original texts, or when the first printed pamphlets are not available. As all the tracts are unsigned, determining the authors of particular tracts is difficult. Therefore, this paper refers to and lists the tracts by title, rather than by author. The quotations underneath the reproduced images are not original captions, but are excerpted from the text from which the image comes. I have modernized the long ‘s’ which appears in the tracts.

Introduction

Prosperity has made most of us careless. The thoughtless profusion of some of the rich could only be exceeded by the idleness, and bad management, of some of the poor. Let us now at last adopt that good old maxim, EVERY ONE MEND ONE.

—*The Way to Plenty; or, The Second Part of Tom White*, 1795, p. 34.

In 1794, Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, was horrified to learn of English colliers who had pawned their Bibles in order to purchase Thomas Paine’s radical attack on hierarchy and heredity, *The Rights of Man* (Robinson, 2004). This was only one episode of many which led Porteus and his fellow

elites to believe that England was tottering dangerously on the verge of anarchy and apostasy in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Not only were poor harvests, famine, heavy wartime taxes, and unemployment creating misery among the poor, but radicalism threatened the very stability of the state. Presses churned out hundreds of thousands of subversive tracts, while the mobbing of the king in 1795, naval mutinies in 1797, and rioting seemed awful premonitions of an English Revolution to rival that of France (Kidd, 1999; O’Gorman, 1997; Roberts, 2004).

In order to prevent such a horrifying event, Porteus turned to the evangelical writer and Sunday school philanthropist Hannah More (1745-1833). He proposed that she produce moral tracts which would compete with and, in due course, “supplant the corrupt and vicious little books and ballads which ha[d] been found highly mischievous to the Community” —by which he meant the lewd and irreverent chapbooks and broadsides of popular literature (*Cheap Repository for Moral*, 1795, p. 1). With the aid of her evangelical collaborators, More produced a series of tracts (known collectively as the Cheap Repository) whose entertaining plots, eye-catching woodcut illustrations, inexpensive price, and simple format and diction followed the chapbook model, albeit with a strong dose of morality (Pedersen, 1986; Stott, 2003).¹ In addition to the parables, hymns, and prayers of the “Sunday Readings,” there were criminal biographies, providential tales, ballads, non-fictional instructions and —most popular of all— short stories featuring eighteenth-century settings.

Two million Cheap Repository tracts were printed in the first year alone (1794), and over one hundred distinct tracts were produced between 1794 and 1797 (two or three tracts being released every month) (*The Cheap Repository for Moral*, 1795; Haywood, 2004). The Repository ceased publication in 1797 when More found the burden of writing too much to bear. However, the demand for tracts was hardly satiated. The original tracts were reprinted multiple times, even up until 1884, and dozens of spurious tracts surfaced in the wake of the Repository’s decline, including a series produced by John Marshall, the original publisher of the Cheap Repository, between 1797 and 1800 (which are considered in this essay) (Stott, 2003).

It is little wonder that scholars such as M.G. Jones dub More’s literature “Burke for Beginners” (Jones, 1952, p. 125). With titles including *The Riot; or, Half a Loaf Is Better than No Bread* (1795) and *The Shopkeeper Turned Sailor; or, The Folly of Going out of Our Element* (1796), the Cheap Repository is often typified as a knee-jerk reaction to the radical literature of the 1790s; evangelical writers sought to stifle working-class political participation. This argument has had a remarkably long run among historians, from G.H. Spinney writing in 1939, to E.P. Thompson in 1966, to Susan Pedersen in 1989. While the Cheap Repository writers undoubtedly sought to impose values of obedience, piety, contentment, and a Protestant work-ethic upon their readers, I argue that the Repository was not purely an attempt at “top-down” reformation, nor did it identify the mob and radical print as the sole threats to the stability of England.

The “top-down” argument neglects to consider that members of the middling and gentry classes were the primary consumers of the tracts. The very scarcity of documentary evidence describing working-class reactions to the texts hints that the Repository failed to make a significant impact in the popular marketplace. Indeed, the few extant records suggest that the poor were ambivalent or even

¹ As the tracts are unsigned, it is difficult to determine the identities of many of the authors. More was the most prolific writer, but Hannah’s sister Sally (Sarah) More, the poet William Mason, the abolitionists Henry Thornton and Zachary Macaulay, and the Reverend John Gilpin also contributed. Scholars have also advanced Patty (Martha) More, Elizabeth Bouverie, Hester Mulso Chapone, Selena Mills, Reverend John Venn —Rector at Clapham— and the abolitionist preacher John Newton and his wife as possible authors. Despite the number of contributors, the authors’ common evangelical background and Hannah More’s editing ensured an ideologically cohesive body of work (Blanch, 2009; Jones, 1952; Pedersen, 1986; Spinney, 1939).

hostile toward the tracts (Smith, 1984; Stott, 2003). But while evangelicals found it necessary to bribe common hawkers into carrying Repository stock, middling and gentry readers enthusiastically bought the tracts for use at home or in the schoolroom. Such was the demand from these affluent readers that expensive collected editions, printed on paper “of a superior kind for Gentry,” appeared (*The Cheap Repository for Moral*, 1795, p. 2).

By typifying the Cheap Repository as a venture which seeks to transform popular literature by directly competing with chapbook culture, “top-down” arguments ignore contexts —other than the marketplace— which the Cheap Repository engaged. The majority of tracts did not compete side-by-side with Paine’s *Rights of Man* on bookstands but were bought in bulk by affluent benefactors and from thence distributed as *charitable gifts* in Sunday schools, hospitals, and prisons (*The Cheap Repository for Moral*, 1795; Kelly, 1987). Moreover, the venture itself relied upon charitable subscriptions to cover printing and distribution costs.

The publishing history of the Cheap Repository suggests that the tracts must be seen as *more* than working-class texts which were ingrained within the print marketplace; they are texts which reached a broad social audience and were intimately connected to charity. In its moral messages, too, the Cheap Repository addressed a broad swathe of society and charitable concerns. As the quote which heads this essay suggests, the Cheap Repository does not hold the dregs of society single-handedly responsible for immorality and vice: “most of us” are guilty. Although idle and wasteful, the poor are nonetheless victims of elites’ “thoughtless profusion.” By providing charitable relief indiscriminately and extravagantly, state institutions and the rich have failed to provide lasting benefits to the poor and have degraded — even endangered— the nation. Elites’ profuse charitable gifts have only provided the poor with the economic means to continue living their depraved lives. In this way, the Cheap Repository suggests that the condition of the poor is as much the fault of the rich as it is of the poor themselves. Only a complete overhaul of charitable practice can restore security; a regulated, frugal, and education-based charity will allow the poor to develop the requisite self-sufficiency and morality. Through their fictional creations, Hannah More and her collaborators undertook to redefine the meaning and practice of charity amongst all ranks of English society.

The history of the Cheap Repository and its publication suggests that the tracts addressed society’s elite as much as they did the poor. Yet, the narratives, dialogue, imagery, characters, and illustrations contained within the tracts themselves are likewise designed to effect moral change in all levels of society. Far from focusing solely on the immorality of the poor (as we would expect purely “top-down” tracts to do), the Cheap Repository also addresses issues of particular concern to elites. The following sections explore how the Cheap Repository texts apply the basic tenets of evangelical charity to three distinct components of late eighteenth-century society: state poor relief (the Poor Law), benefactors, and poor beneficiaries. I explain how the tracts critique the impersonal institution of the Poor Law and replace it with an intimate and discerning charity. In the following section, I argue that the Cheap Repository constructs a new ideal of the Good Samaritan. By reinterpreting Christ’s example, evangelicals deemed frugality, discernment, and activity the touchstones of the pious benefactor. And finally, the tracts disassemble the “moral economy of charity” held by the labouring classes, seeking to transform their expectations of cash handouts to expectations of advice. More significantly, however, the Repository replaces the benefactor’s duty to give with the beneficiary’s responsibility to deserve. However, before examining how charity is constructed in the Cheap Repository texts, I will briefly outline the ideological underpinnings of evangelical philanthropy. A broad introduction to evangelical doctrines will prove useful before exploring how these doctrines are adapted with greater specificity within the tracts themselves.

Evangelical Philanthropy

How many troubles and miseries are there in this land, which, if a few more of our independent ladies and gentlemen would be so good as to turn Christians (I mean zealous Christians!) would presently be relieved. What a great number of poor cottagers are there who drag on life both in wickedness and misery for the want of being overlooked, and instructed, and advised, and now and then assisted by their superiors who dwell near them?

—*Some New Thoughts for the New Year* (1796), p. 16

Evangelical benefactors of the 1790s emphasized three concepts: “warm zeal” or personal Christian motivation; “scientific” discrimination and frugality; and information-based charity (*On Carrying Religion*, 1796, p. 3). Evangelicals were members of the Church of England; however, they stressed a vital personal faith above strict adherence to church doctrine. In everything they did, evangelicals strove to emulate Christ. Charity was no exception. The doctrine of sanctification, “of living a life of social usefulness in imitation of the life of Christ” (Andrew, 1989, p. 166), necessitated a personal and active benefaction. Just as Christ entered the homes of the poor to preach the Word, so too did evangelicals undertake personal missions of mercy. A heartfelt drive to do good was imperative and the “cult of sensibility” encouraged profuse expressions of sympathy for the suffering. While evangelicals held to salvation by faith, good works offered proof of the sincerity of this faith (Roberts, 2004, p. 47).

The evangelicals’ emotional approach to charity co-existed (often uncomfortably) with “scientific” discrimination — “cool judgement” rooted in level-headed rationality rather than in sentimentality (*On Carrying Religion*, 1796, p. 3). Philanthropists argued that charity ought to be treated as a science and perfected through carefully controlled procedures. Potential beneficiaries were to be carefully examined and to be subject to discriminatory selection. Time, funds, and effort were not to be lavished on any subject who excited sympathy but carefully directed towards initiatives which had been tested and deemed effective. The benefactor was thus sure to obtain the greatest return for his or her investment. This emphasis on frugal investment is suggested in the title of the *Cheap Repository*.

Evangelicals embraced the most inexpensive form of charity: learning. Whereas material relief (such as cash handouts or the provision of food, housing, or clothing) only offered temporary relief for the body, education and advice had much more lasting benefits not only for the body, but also for the soul. Moral and religious education activated the innate reason of the poor, and the Christian principles obtained through education prevented the contravention of the laws of men or God. While a gift of food might assuage hunger for a day, occupational and practical instruction outfitted the poor to become self-sufficient over a lifetime. The most prominent of evangelical charities specialized in the provision of education; Sunday schools offered religious instruction, and the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor (S.B.C.P.) distributed pamphlets which provided tips for household economy. The *Cheap Repository*, too, promised the educational gift of moral, religious, and practical improvement.

The Poor Law

[H]ow many are there who shamefully run to the parish for relief, without any necessity...? These are people who either want *industry* in providing for their families — or *frugality*, in not making the best use of what they provide... Let them consider, how directly they break a scripture command, by *eating other men’s bread for nought*; and by *becoming chargeable* without necessity.

— *The Life of William Baker, with His Funeral Sermon*, 1795, pp. 15-16

Poor harvests and want in the 1790s led to the establishment of the most generous statutory relief system in Europe. English parishes offered various types of “outdoor relief” or non-institutional charity, including allowances-in-aid-of-wages (the basis of the “Speenhamland system”); payments to labourers with large families; and payments to seasonally unemployed agricultural labourers (Kidd, 1999). Although capable of relieving fewer applicants than outdoor relief, workhouses were also widespread. The influx of applicants in the 1790s was such that parishes could no longer uphold the discriminatory practices encoded within the Elizabethan Poor Law. The “workhouse test,” which had divided “deserving” from “undeserving” candidates for relief in the early seventeenth century, was suspended. Christie (1984) argues that the Poor Law in the late eighteenth century “contributed greatly to the degree of social peace in the country, and that without it elements of instability would have been far more formidable” (pp. 116, 113, 104, 99).

Evangelicals believed differently. Rather than relieving labouring people, workhouses and indiscriminate outdoor relief merely rewarded careless economy and cultivated idle (read: turbulent) working classes. Not only did the system impose heavy rates on those already struggling under wartime taxation, but its cash-based model fostered corruption and indifference toward the poor. The Cheap Repository highlights the downfalls of public relief and seeks to replace it with a personal and education-centred philanthropy in all but exceptional circumstances of disability, advanced age, or extreme *honourable* poverty.

If not the most far-reaching, the workhouse was nonetheless the most visually prominent element of parish relief in late-century England. As such, it is often the scapegoat of criticism in the Cheap Repository. In spite of their name, workhouses in the tracts are not places of industry. Indeed, they are quite the opposite —overrun with “pilfering idle children” (*The Apprentice Turned Master*, 1796, p. 12). One parish inmate “stand[s] at the [alms-house] door, where she passe[s] most of her time quarrelling with women as idle and dirty as herself” (*The Apprentice Turned Master*, 1796, p. 11). Evangelicals attacked parish relief for failing to distinguish between claimants who truly deserved relief and those who merely chose not to work. Such indiscriminate relief rewarded idleness and lack of foresight; as relief was virtually assured to all who applied, there were few incentives for the poor to work industriously or to save for unforeseen trials. Amy Talbot finds herself in the workhouse after having squandered the inheritance “which might... have afforded her a comfortable maintenance,” while Mrs. Betty is admitted after having “taken no care by frugality and prudence to avoid it” (*The Hubbub*, 1797, p. 4; *'Tis All for the Best*, 1797, p. 3). The illustration for *The Hubbub; or, The History of Farmer Russel the Hard-Hearted Overseer* (1797) depicts a large number of able-bodied alms-house beneficiaries who have little to do but to heckle the local overseer (Fig. 1). The tracts imply the question: if these beneficiaries are strong enough to brandish frying pans and ring warming pans, should they not be working?

The idle poor fostered by parish relief not only harmed the economy and the pockets of rate-payers, but threatened the very social fabric of England. Workhouses offered material relief which temporarily reduced want and the motivation to beg or steal but did not offer the moral, religious, or occupational instruction which equipped labouring people to lead self-sufficient lives over the long term. Moreover, in parish institutions, “all ages and tempers were met together” (*The History of Jonathan Griffin*, 1799, p. 8). Elite critics of parish relief decried the fact that, in these institutions, children resided beside depraved adults, women with men —a mixture inevitably resulting in the corruption of all. By removing the poor from the land and by making them entirely dependent on the

goodness of others, parish relief created a demoralized populace. Parish inmates in the tracts are degenerated beasts; they are dirty, “abject and base-minded,” “half-starved and half-naked,” and “languid wretches, with faces sodden, pale, and dropsical,” who desire nothing better than to have gin in their “clutches.” By contrast, an honest and hardworking individual “feels his own consequence, and is beholden only to his Heavenly Master: he wants no assistance, but... the use of his limbs” (*The Life of William Baker*, 1795, p. 18). Influenced by Malthus (1978), the Cheap Repository suggests that welfare encourages the propagation of a dangerously depraved underclass (pp. 67-68).

With unlimited idle time, an unawakened reason, no property, and little self-respect, parish recipients in the tracts have little to lose if they choose to riot. According to the tracts, the animal instincts which flourish in workhouses are dangerous. *The Hubbub* forcefully links parish relief to political unrest. The crowd which gathers outside the alms-house seems to have little compunction against openly attacking social superiors. Accepting relief is often depicted as akin to stealing (those who do so are “little better than thieves”) or even leads directly to crime (*The History of Jonathan Griffin*, 1799; *The Life of William Baker*, 1795). For example, Black Giles progresses from begging around the parish to stealing apples (*Black Giles... Widow Brown’s Apple-Tree*, 1796, p. 8).

Parish relief was a cash-based system. Not only did various types of outdoor relief take the form of cash pensions, but funds were raised through the compulsory taxation of parishioners. Moreover, it was quite common for an appointed overseer to pay an inferior to perform his duties. Critics of the Poor Law believed parish rates to be too exorbitant, especially as the extent of post-war poverty increased taxation. At the same time, they argued that such an enforced monetary system of relief fostered corruption, inhumanity, and ambivalence toward the poor. The Cheap Repository tracts often describe parish relief as corrupted. For instance, an appointed overseer of the poor offloads his duties onto an inferior man who is “in such low circumstances as to be under great temptation to be dishonest” and parish officers routinely shirk their duties in order to save money (*The History of Jonathan Griffin*, 1799, p. 13). Mr. Simpson, the farmer who “is ignorant and worse educated than his plowmen” and is thus hardly fit to be in a position of authority, evicts a man from the parish for refusing to work on the Sabbath (*’Tis All for the Best*, 1797, pp. 10-11). The Sunday school benefactress Mrs. Jones uncovers “a scheme to take a large family off the parish,” a man in a workhouse perishes from neglect, and a nurse hired by parish officers to care for infant charges succeeds only in starving them (*The History of Mr. Fantom*, 1797; *The Parish Nurse*, 1798; *The Sunday School*, 1797). Farmer Russel is worst of all. He refuses to replace the decayed thatch of the poor house, and melted snow soon pours onto an inmate’s bed, crippling her. He seizes the land of the poor for his own use and is accused of dragging a dying soldier into a neighbouring parish “in order to save [his own parish]... a trifling expence [*sic*]” (*The Hubbub*, 1797, pp. 7-8, 10, 11).

The Cheap Repository also underlines the failure of parish relief to cultivate Christian enthusiasm. The tracts present the Poor Law as a sad excuse for charity, lacklustre and lethargic. This lack of enthusiasm is illustrated by the incidence of uneducated characters (often farmers) becoming de-facto parish officers when gentry superiors refuse to perform the job themselves. Evangelicals believed that the involuntary demands of parish rates and officer appointments destroyed the “warm zeal” —the *voluntary compulsion* to do good— which was a vital component of Christian charity (*On Carrying Religion*, 1796; M.J.D. Roberts, 2004). William Peterson bemoans the lack of dedication to parish work:

Not that I mean to say it is right for them, when they are chosen church-warden or overseer to shift the burden from their own shoulders... because a Christian

should never mind his own trouble when he has an opportunity of being useful to his fellow creatures. (*The History of Jonathan Griffin*, 1799, p. 13)

A reforming impulse could exist only when money was not a consideration. Indeed, many well-off characters are entirely drained of charitable feeling due to constant demands on their purses. When approached for a charitable contribution, Farmer Hoskins explodes with: “well, madam, what is it now? Flannel or French? or weavers, or a new church, or large bread, or cheap rice?” (*The Sunday School*, 1797, p. 10). Several times the tracts remind working-class readers not to be offended if they are refused relief “since the kind hearts of the wealthy are often imposed upon” by undeserving claimants (*The History of Tom White*, 1795, p. 15; *The Hubbub*, 1797, p. 6; *The Two Soldiers*, 1795, p. 13). Exhausted and disillusioned by an inefficient and ineffective system of parish relief, beneficiaries are left bereft of reforming zeal. The Cheap Repository critiques local authorities for abandoning their flocks to dissipation and riot.

The critiques of the Poor Law in the Cheap Repository mirror those emerging in wider society. In 1786, Joseph Townsend initiated a fierce pamphlet debate with his scathing criticism of parish relief in his *Dissertation on the Poor Laws*. Wood (1791) promises houses of industry as a substitute for the parish relief which merely supports “undeserving, artful cheats” in idleness (p. 6). An S.B.C.P. tract proposes to reduce parish taxation to one-tenth of its current rates by establishing the poor in self-sufficiency on their own plots. The author of the tract, Thomas Bernard, argues that independent labour and property ownership, rather than relief, provide psychological fulfillment: “[i]n his cottage, [a poor man] has his family around him, he has something he can call his own... and is the master of his own actions. *Domestic connections, property, hope, liberty...* exist not in a workhouse” (Bernard, 1797, p.7). The Philanthropic Society, too, argues that parish relief destroys social ties and encourages crime by removing beneficiaries’ stake in society (e.g. property and labour):

no mutual tie connects [a charitable benefactor and a beneficiary], the one is not held by interest, nor the other bound by gratitude... no affection holds the beggar to the public who supports him; alms and plunder are alternate and indifferent to him... The nuisances, pests, and disturbers of society, are found almost exclusively among those who enjoy its gratuitous benefits. (*Plan and Particulars*, 1792, p. 13)

The idle and ungrateful beggars populating the pages of the Cheap Repository are representative of the social breakdown which evangelicals and Poor Law critics alike took to be the result of the Poor Law’s ambivalence.

In order to right the wrongs of parish relief, the Cheap Repository sought to radically redefine the meaning and practice of public charity. It did this in two ways. Firstly, it argued that poverty is a natural condition which should be made tolerable through education, but never entirely alleviated. Secondly, it sought to make the Poor Law more discriminating and to attach a social stigma to the workhouse.

Ironically, the ideal evangelical charity was no charity at all. In a perfect world, the poor would be so very industrious and frugal that parish intervention would be entirely unnecessary. Both evangelicals and their Cheap Repository argued that education in economy and self-sufficiency would negate the need for material relief. After having been taught how to avoid distress, the working classes could manage for themselves.

Furthermore, More's contemporaries suggested that poverty was not necessarily a condition which demanded rectification. Throughout the tracts, poverty is presented as a God-given condition which should not be altered. For example, *A Hymn of Praise for the Abundant Harvest of 1796* (1796) presents scarcity as a divine chastisement for war and "domestic hate" (pp. 4-5). The struggle with the fluctuations of the market was merely part of the broader Christian struggle "of temptation, trial and exemplary suffering." As Kidd (1999) argues:

Since the individual was responsible for his own salvation, the sustenance of the labourer merely because of his poverty was in contravention of the laws of God. To remove this unthinking paternalism [of the parish] would be to restore the natural order and to foster self-denial, spiritual growth and moral virtue. (p. 22)

The goal of evangelical charity was not to *abolish* suffering (the fallen nature of the earth made this impossible) but to inure the poor to hardship.

The most fulfilled and upstanding characters, such as the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, the Lancashire Collier Girl, and the Happy Waterman, are those who steadfastly refuse all public relief (*Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts*, 1798; *The Lancashire Collier Girl*, 1795; *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, 1795). William Baker, for example, "bred up a large family, without receiving a single farthing from the parish" (*The Life of William Baker*, 1795, p. 20). Furthermore, benefactors in the texts contribute to schemes for supporting the poor in their own homes, rather than in the poorhouse. They fund schooling, allow their inferiors to purchase things at cheaper rates during scarcity, provide loans to keep families in business, arrange employment or apprenticeship, or pay doctors to treat the sick in their own homes (*The Apprentice Turned Master*, 1796; *Cheap Repository Shorter Tracts*, 1798; *The Good Parish Priest*, 1799; *The History of Fanny Mills*, 1799; *The Honest Publican*, 1798; *The Life of William Baker*, 1795; *Sweep Soot O!*, 1799). As late-century evangelicals attempted to replace cash handouts with saving banks and friendly societies, so too did the Cheap Repository privilege self-sufficiency.²

The Cheap Repository reserves parish relief for those who are labelled "deserving" through sickness, disability, old age, or an abundance of young children. The pious labourer William Peterson only enters the workhouse after enduring a ridiculous number of trials. Sickness "reduce[s] him to a skeleton," then his wife falls ill, his children nearly starve, a fire destroys his cottage and possessions, and his wife dies. And it does not end there. Peterson explains how, nearly blind, he:

supported myself for years by making cabbage nets... but a stroke of the palsy in my right hand quite disabled me. My son indeed, the only child I have left, would fain have taken me to live with him; but he has a wife and six children, and, God knows, they fare but badly as it is. (*The History of Jonathan Griffin*, 1799, pp. 7-8, 11-12)

The message is clear. Parish relief should only be for those who truly have no viable means of support. Even then, the poor house is not for rest. Inmates are to labour, like good Mrs. Apsley, who mends stays and quilts petticoats in her spare time, or Mrs. Simpson, who, upon entering the alms-house, declares that her "cares are at an end, but not [her] duties" (*The Hubbub*, 1797, p. 7; *'Tis All for the Best*, 1797, p.

² Evangelicals increasingly promoted 'self-supporting' charitable ventures. Labouring people regularly contributed to saving banks, friendly societies, and benefit clubs in return for financial or material support in the event of personal hardship. Dispensaries provided medicine to contributors, friendly societies offered financial assistance to the temporarily unemployed and covered funeral expenses, while women's benefit societies lent out childbirth linens (Andrew, 1989, p. 201).

13). Decades before the Poor Law Act of 1834 officially encoded policies of discrimination (“less eligibility”) and forced labour, and Dickensian workhouses were designed to make their inmates prefer the outside world, evangelicals and the Cheap Repository pushed to reduce the availability of parish relief.

Benefactor

The Miser and the Sensual Find
 How each misused the gifts assigned;
 While he who spends and gives,
 To the true end of living lives;
 'Tis self-denying moderation
 Gains the GREAT FATHER'S approbation.
 — *The Plum-Cakes; or, the Father and His Three Sons*, 1797, p. 8

Scholars such as Susan Pedersen (1986) argue that the tracts attack “popular culture” (pp. 107-108). However, the Cheap Repository’s decidedly unflattering portrait of state relief indicates that evangelicals were just as prepared to blame official institutions for post-war turbulence and to bend even the most long-standing and widespread charitable institution to the evangelical will. The Cheap Repository is replete with bad benefactors. There are “Miser[s]” like the aptly named Lady Blithe, who never lifts a finger for the poor, and the “over-frugal” Squire, who will help Mrs. Jones with any of her plans —so long “as it cost[s] him nothing” (*The Cottage Cook*, 1797, p. 4; *The Deceitfulness of Pleasure*, 1799). Then there are “Sensuals” like Sir John, who lavishes gifts upon his dependents but never questions whether he truly benefits them (*The Cottage Cook*, 1797, p. 4). Worst of all, however, are radicals like Mr. Fantom, the New-Fashioned Philosopher, who dreams up plans for aiding labouring people but succeeds only in alienating those whom he would theoretically help (*The History of Mr. Fantom*, 1797).

The Poor Law was not the sole institution in late eighteenth-century England which evangelicals attacked for encouraging social unrest. By offering indiscriminate material relief or by neglecting their paternal duties, benefactors also fuelled disaffection. This section illustrates how the Cheap Repository condemns the miserliness, open-handed largesse, and innovation of benefactors. I argue that the tracts reform the practice of giving by manipulating Christian doctrine. Frugality, discernment, and advice replace largesse as touchstones of the Good Samaritan.

Misers are the most benign type of wayward benefactor; their worst effects are sulky dependents. Indeed, the tracts suggest it is better to give nothing than to give indiscriminately and extravagantly. By offering material relief, Sensuals encourage idleness and immorality. Sir John has all the requisite humanity of the Christian but misapplies it. For example, he provides his tenants with beer because the “poor fellows... work hard,” but neglects to consider “that while the man is *enjoying himself*... his wife and children are ragged and starving” (*The Cottage Cook*, 1797, p. 10). He puts no thought into charity, as he “subscribe[s] with equal readiness to a cricket match or a charity school” (*The Cottage Cook*, p. 4), and he favours inactive subscriptions to personal interaction with his beneficiaries. Furthermore, his charity does nothing to address morality or religion. Indeed, his benevolence encourages moral license. He “take[s] it for granted that the poor are to be indulged with bellringing and bonfires, and to be made drunk at Christmas” (*The Cottage Cook*, p. 4). Sir John’s entertainments are hardly harmless fun. For elite readers, Sir John’s charity must have carried suggestions of riot.

Elsewhere in the tracts, indiscriminate giving merely supports idleness and unrest. Both the Giles children and Madge Blarney, “the Gipsy Girl,” progress from begging handouts to outright stealing (*Black Giles... Widow Brown’s Apple-Tree*, 1796; *Madge Blarney*, 1798). Far from forging ties between a benefactor and beneficiary, material relief secures only ingratitude:

the gentleman... threw down a shilling, which the lad picked up, with very little gratitude in his countenance, but with no small conceit, at his own quickness and cleverness in seizing hold of it; after which, he grew as proud as could be of having got possession of the piece of money, not considering at all that it was a mere present, and that he had not given the gentleman a single match for it out of his basket. (*The Beggarly Boy*, 1798, pp. 5-6)

According to the tracts, the poor cannot distinguish cash handouts from the profits of stealing. Indiscriminate charity does not instill in the poor a respect for property but teaches that rewards can be had with deception — not industry.

Evangelicals were also highly critical of innovation purely for the sake of innovation. Thomas Bernard (1798), for example, condemned past philanthropic projects which were based upon conjecture: “the good effects... have been limited and uncertain: the project having originated not in [the poor], but in the projector; —not in fact, but in speculation” (p.xiii). The Cheap Repository characters similarly voice their concerns respecting the “new whim-wham[s]... foolish inventions, and new-fangled devices” of charitable ventures “which do more harm than good” (*The Sunday School*, 1797, p. 10). Mr. Fantom is a telling example of the pitfalls of such charitable day-dreaming. Seeking fame, he spends his days concocting elaborate (but ultimately untenable) plans for liberating the poor from poverty. In spite of his assertion that he will “make all mankind good and happy,” he cannot even secure the happiness of one and fails to help those who are right in front of him (*The History of Mr. Fantom*, 1797, pp. 2, 8). He refuses to help Mr. Trueman release an old friend from debtor’s prison. Furthermore, Fantom’s footman —following his master’s profligate example— soon turns to stealing and commits murder. Fantom even refuses to forgive his ex-servant when William is in his condemned cell (*The History of Mr. Fantom*). Expansive schemes were not only uneconomical but inhumane. They were not propelled by the “warm zeal” of Christian sympathy, but from selfish motives.

The Cheap Repository is critical of benefactors who have sensibility but no sense and, equally, benefactors who have sense but no sensibility. The ideal benefactors are those who, like Mrs. Jones, combine “good sense, activity, and piety” (*The Sunday School*, 1797, p. 5). She need not give up her money but devotes her time to spreading good economy and religion. The evangelical doctrine of sanctification required one to perform good works in imitation of Christ. The Cheap Repository constructs a frugal and discriminating version of Christ as benefactor —an image which provided the ideal model for gentry and middle-class philanthropists of the late eighteenth century to follow.

Christ in the Cheap Repository is, first and foremost, discriminating. He cautiously considers the merits of potential beneficiaries and offers material relief only in exceptional circumstances where there is no possibility of self-sufficiency. He provides loaves and the fishes to his followers *only* because his mission requires the abandonment of labour: “this multitude being in the way of duty, were so far from being allowed to starve while ‘following Christ,’ that a miracle was wrought on their behalf” (*Hints to All Ranks*, 1795, p. 11). The image of the discerning Christ also appears in Thomas Bernard’s writings. He, too, claims that Christ gave food only in times of exceptional need: “[w]e do not read of any extraordinary, or gratuitous, supply of food; except in the wilderness, where there were no ordinary

means of human industry” (Bernard, 1802, p. 11). In *Hints to All Ranks of People* (1795), more than one half of a single page is composed of a footnote which implores the reader not to misunderstand the parable of the loaves and the fishes. The footnote suggests a discordance between Christ’s expansive generosity and evangelical discrimination. The writer of the tract reminds the reader that “[n]o miracles will be wrought for those, who merely on a religious pretence break off their proper and necessary work” (emphasis added, p. 11). It is hardly “miracles” of multiplying bread and fish which readers might mistakenly expect. Evangelical writers transform the biblical miracle of a mere five loaves feeding five thousand into the miracle of receiving material relief at all. Just as a miracle is rare, so too is the evangelical philanthropist’s material relief limited and exceptional.

Christ in the Cheap Repository is not only discriminating, but frugal. The parable of the loaves and the fishes emphasizes his divine frugality over his divine bounty. The tract underscores Christ’s injunction to “[g]ather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” —and includes this verse as a caption for the illustration (Fig. 2) (*Hints to All Ranks*, 1795, pp. 15, 19). Furthermore, the author argues that Christ demonstrates his economy by providing coarse brown bread and cheap fish, rather than costly white bread and meat.

The Cheap Repository also emphasizes the educational nature of Christ’s charity. Not only does Christ attend to the bodies of his followers but to their souls. He distributes loaves but, more importantly, also preaches to his followers. The example of Christ demanded an active concern for education, as opposed to material relief:

the best mode of showing charity to the poor is that which our Savior has set the example; I mean the uniting charitable help and religious instruction both together, for many a one may take from the same hand which has given him bread, a bible, or some religious book which may prove a far greater benefit than all the money which he may have received (*Hints to All Ranks*, 1795, p. 14)

Just as Christ ministered to his people in their homes, so too were eighteenth-century beneficiaries to look personally to amend the morals and religion of those surrounding them. Simply ministering to the poor is the most refined charity. The Christian allegory *Bear Ye One Another’s Burthens* (1796) presents a series of characters who travel along the Valley of Tears and aid each other to carry loads of poverty, oppression, and sickness. While material relief “might be of real use, [it] seemed, by galling the travellers, to add to the load.” By contrast, “so cheap a kindness as a mild word, or an affectionate look” works wonders (p. 5). The tract suggests that true Christian charity takes the form of encouragement, rather than relief. Indeed, by encouraging the poor to bear their burdens humbly and graciously, the benefactor serves them better than had he attempted to remove the burden. After all, a God-given burden (such as poverty) is not designed to be alleviated, but to be borne.

Thompson (1966) has argued that “the humanitarian tradition became warped beyond recognition” under the influence of More in the 1790s (p. 57). Utilitarian and Malthusian doctrines narrowed the scope of benevolence. Thompson is certainly correct in his suggestion that elite fears of radicalism influenced the expression of charity as much as did the depravity of the poor. However, the discriminating and personal charity which the Cheap Repository promotes was certainly not perceived by evangelicals as “warped” —as an alien and unfamiliar concept. Rather, they genuinely sought to reconstruct what they took to be a simple and pure biblical paternalism. The “Selfish System” of Malthusian-inspired charity co-existed with a revival of paternalist feelings. Mutual obligation and paternal ties of affection were fostered, albeit through ties of advice rather than cash (Perkin, 2002; D.

Roberts, 1979; Lawes, 2000). At the same time, by turning its reforming gaze towards elites, the Cheap Repository acknowledges commonality between rich and poor:

The traditional Christian discourse of the struggle of the individual sinner against the temptations of vice was... modified so that the whole of society, particularly the gentry, shared responsibility for helping the weak resist temptation. (Dodsworth, 2008, p. 602)

By re-interpreting the Christian example, the Cheap Repository tracts mediate (however awkwardly) between an ancient paternal ideal and Enlightenment values of scientific regulation and reason.

Beneficiary

What tho' I be low and mean
I'll engage the rich to love me,
While I'm modest, neat and clean,
And submit when they reprove me.

If I should be poor or sick,
I shall meet I hope with pity
Since I love to help the weak
Tho' they're neither fair nor witty.

— *Divine Songs... for the Use of Children*, 1795, p. 30

Elliott (2009) argues that evangelical charity was a “gift exchange, where one side, more wealthy and advantaged, gives a benefit that the other has an obligation to reciprocate” (p. 108). However, the gift-exchange system is by nature voluntary; reciprocity is expected but not always provided. As advice and education “were a ‘gift’ to the poor, not a contractual bargain, the recipients were not bound to respond as the donors hoped they would” —that is, with gratitude (Elliott, p. 108). The Cheap Repository tracts abound with instances in which the poor neglect to perform their part in the gift exchange. Jack deems his benefactor to be “cheap and shabby,” while John rails against the parish priest for refusing to provide him aid *in cash* (*The Good Parish Priest*, 1799, p. 6; *Jack Brown in Prison*, 1796, p. 5). Mothers adamantly refuse to send their children to Sunday school, and Tawny Rachel promptly pawns for gin the shoes which Mr. Wilson gives her son (*Black Giles... With Some Account of a Family*, 1796; *The History of Fanny Mills*, 1799; *The History of Hester Wilmot... Second Part*, 1797; *Sorrowful Sam*, 1795). Through these characters, the Cheap Repository voices objections to the “moral economy of charity” —the poor’s expectations that charity be material in nature, impersonal in its application and offered without conditions.

More and her fellow writers seek to redefine the expectations of the poor and to inure labouring people to the advice-based, personal, and discriminatory evangelical charity. The tracts present charity not as an unavoidable duty of the rich (a “natural debt” for their God-given wealth), but as a gift which may be withheld at will. In the Cheap Repository, the degree of charity offered is entirely dependent upon the degree to which the beneficiary both *deserves* and *can profit* from aid. In this final section, I examine how the Cheap Repository first presents the “moral economy of charity” and, secondly, redefines its boundaries.

Rebellious Cheap Repository characters are adamant that charity be material in nature. John Hobson rails against Mr. Dormer after the latter refuses to provide a cash handout and chooses instead to pay the Hobson family's nursing bills and rent. When Hobson's neighbour, Fisher, suggests that the Parson's investments are as worthy as cash-in-hand, Hobson objects:

Just the *same* thing indeed! No, truly, I think it as different a thing as a *nail* and a *hammer*. I should never think putting a boy to school, was half so good a thing as giving me the six-pence a week to get a dram would be. If the parson would do that now [i.e. provide cash]... I promise you I should think he did much more for me, than all his gifts to my wife, and all his long lectures to me put together have ever yet been. (*The Good Parish Priest*, 1799, p. 5)

For a poor character like Hobson, virtuous charity takes the form of simple gifts which provide temporary relief. He rejects entirely advice (the Parson's "long lectures") and aid which seek, in the long-term, to foster self-sufficiency. Hobson shares his opinion with Jack Brown: incarcerated in prison, Brown bemoans the fact that Mr. Stock has not "sent him a good sum of money to procure his liberty, or even a trifle to make merry with his companions" (Fig. 3). All he has received is the "empty comfort" of "dry advice" (*Jack Brown in Prison*, 1796, p. 5). Temporary relief is more valued than religious instruction.

Characters also bemoan the personal nature of charity. The supervisory presence of benefactors is deeply annoying. Hobson calls Mr. Dormer "*impertinent*, and *officious*, and... a *busy-body*... Why I never meet him, that he does not begin with his questions, and enquires about this, about that, and about the other" (*The Good Parish Priest*, 1799, p. 5). Not only this, but intervention denies the poor control over their finances, families, and leisure. Hobson's rampage against the Parson's charity is fuelled not only by the *type* of charity offered, but also by the *manner* in which it is given. By funding schooling and by providing funds to Hobson's wife, Dormer effectively removes all decision-making power from Hobson (*The Good Parish Priest*). Many parents resent their loss of discretionary power. Mrs. Williams begs Mr. Stock to give her cash rather than fund her son's schooling, "for nobody could do so well by [her son] as his own mother," while Mrs. Waters denies her children education and, by so doing, asserts her power over her offspring: "nobody shall hector them but myself" (*The Apprentice Turned Master*, 1796, p. 12; *Sorrowful Sam*, 1795, p. 11).

Evangelical charity not only threatens to override the powers of patriarchs and parents in poor families, but education actively fragments the working-class family. Education raises children above the moral and occupational standards of their parents. Mrs. Williams claims that education "makes a child despise his own mother because she [i]s poor" and "set[s] men, women, and children against their own flesh and blood" (*The Apprentice Turned Master*, 1796, p. 12). Mrs. Wilmot worries that her daughter's Sunday school education will make her too haughty to perform her chores about the house (*The History of Hester Wilmot... Second Part*, 1797). These parents reject the evangelical notion of a "gift" designed to strengthen the family unit as a social, moral, and economic unit. For Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Wilmot, the evangelicals' educational charity is no gift, but a curse.

Evangelical charity is not only perceived as an attack on the family and the family economy, but also on leisure. Hobson and Brown resent the replacement of alcohol by education and advice (*The Good Parish Priest*, 1799; *Jack Brown in Prison*, 1796). Furthermore, Sunday schools steal the single day allotted for entertainment and rest in a long working week. Mrs. Waters claims her children "don't love confinement, and they shan't go [to school] to be put upon;" the children "shall have their own way, for they are likely to have nothing else" (*Sorrowful Sam*, 1795, p. 11). Boys argue that schooling denies them

enjoyment by “shut[ting] them up with godly books, when they ought to be taking a little pleasure” (*Black Giles... Widow Brown’s Apple-Tree*, 1796, p. 7). The boys further argue that Sunday schools encourage crime by cooping them up. Once released from school, children expend their energy by stealing.

The Cheap Repository easily counters the objections of the poor. Those who receive material charity waste it on gin, serving only to aggravate underlying poverty. Education in household economy and subsidized purchases are *better* than cash, for they enable a poor family to save money over the long term. Furthermore, evangelical charity empowers the poor rather than usurps their control. Whereas material relief cultivates a demoralizing dependence on the goodness of others, education provides labouring people with the tools with which to manage independently. Rather than creating disobedient and lazy sons and daughters who have too great an opinion of themselves, religious education teaches children to be obedient and happy in their own place. Mothers who defend the leisure of their children do so at the cost of the eternal happiness of their charges. Keeping children from school may give them leisure, but it does not secure salvation as does a religious education.

Rather than benefactors living up to the standards of working-class expectations, it is the poor who must work for charity in the Cheap Repository. The tracts argue that the poor must deserve aid in order to receive it. They must adopt standards of cleanliness, piety, and good management in order to become candidates. Charity is an exchange, and benefactors expect a return for their investment. As aid is offered in order to support the poor in their own homes, beneficiaries must demonstrate that the gift is instilling self-sufficiency. Cheap Repository benefactors often cease giving to those who continue in their depraved ways. The gentry refuse to give to the Giles family when they see the family’s decrepit cottage and the children who spend all day begging by the gate (*Black Giles... With Some Account of a Family*, 1796). Jem’s benefactress explains that she will not help him “if he would not work for his bread,” echoing another donor who declares her willingness to help only those “who are willing to help themselves” (*Betty Brown*, 1796, p. 13; *Sweep Soot O!*, 1799, p. 7). Mr. Britton gives half a crown to the industrious Mrs. Apsley, while he provides the immoral Amy Talbot “only a few halfpence... which he thought was more than such an idle and dirty woman deserved” (*The Hubbub*, 1797, p. 5). In other instances, benefactors refuse to give to those who patronise gin shops, or who refuse to go to school or church (*The Gin-Shop*, 1795; *The Way to Plenty*, 1795).

Ironically, those who receive the most attention from their social superiors are those who are *least* affected by want and immorality. They are those who, like Sarah Sanday, are most industrious:

she had, by unremitting diligence and œconomy, maintained herself and her child, with a credit that recommended her to the notice of every worthy person...she is ... so neat and respectable in her appearance, so honest, and pains-taking, that it is a duty to encourage her, and a pleasure to see her in the house. (*The Two Cousins*, 1798, pp. 3-4)

More and her fellow contributors redefine the obligations at the heart of the charitable gift. Roberts (1998) argues that in the late eighteenth century:

educated citizens came to accept the view that charity was not a duty performed as a result of holding resources on trust for communal benefit: it was an act of mercy performed as a result of morally refined sensitivity in the giver to the sight or knowledge of human suffering. Because the act of giving was now voluntary in

a moral as well as legal sense, it was reasonable for the donor to expect the recipient to conform to certain continuing standards of deservingness. (p. 70)

The Cheap Repository directly outlines these standards of deservingness. It rejects the “moral economy of charity” which necessitates little effort on the part of benefactors and replaces it with a set of moral compunctions for the poor to deserve the charity which they receive. While contributions are considered emphatically voluntary on the part of “gift”-givers, for beneficiaries, gratitude and deservingness are non-negotiable.

Conclusion

[H]e had found out that two things were necessary to the promoting of Religion among his friends; a warm zeal to be always on the watch for occasions, and a cool judgement to distinguish which was the right time and place to make use of them. To know *how* to do good is a great matter, but to know *when* to do it is no small one.

— *On Carrying Religion into the Common Business of Life*, 1796, p. 3

It is no easy task to discern whether the Cheap Repository truly grasped the occasion, igniting its benevolent plan at “the right time and place.” The tracts were met with a spectrum of responses, from outright hostility to apathy to enthusiasm. As noted in the introduction, the poor showed little interest in the tracts. Those who were considered the lowest of the low —prostitutes and sailors’ wives— were decidedly unimpressed by Cheap Repository wares when the evangelicals Selina Mills and Mary Thatcher came knocking (Stott, 2003).

However, there is much evidence that the charitable ideals endorsed by the Cheap Repository were dominant in nineteenth-century discourses on poverty, welfare, and relief. Societies such as the Religious Tract Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (1805) specialized in the distribution of similar didactic literature, testifying to the continued importance of textual advice to charity (Pickering, 1976; Stott, 2003). The New Poor Law of 1834 incorporated discrimination, while self-supporting charities flourished, and an evangelical style of charity was favoured in Victorian prostitute reclamation schemes. However, whether the Cheap Repository succeeded in its goal to reform charitable conduct among all classes in English society is the work of a future paper.

The image of the pitchfork-wielding, chapbook reading, and Sabbath-breaking Englishman is never far from the pages of the tracts. But to characterize the Cheap Repository as a simple attack on the popular literature and radical sympathies of the working classes is to fail to grasp the breadth of the evangelical reforming gaze. Historians have often revealed their dislike of Hannah More and her contemporaries, describing her as a hypocritical pedant intent only on the suppression of the masses (Thompson, 1966). Although every stereotype has a foundation in truth, the characterization is largely misleading. As demonstrated in this essay, the Cheap Repository writers heaped blame for the immorality and instability of England not only on the unwashed masses, but also upon the well-healed —their own peers, and indeed, their gentrified superiors. The Cheap Repository was conservative in its aim to strengthen hierarchy. In one respect, however, the tracts were more egalitarian than a one-sided attack. *Every* Englishman and Englishwoman has a responsibility to practice safe charity for the good of the whole.

Appendix- Figures



Fig. 1 "A number of men, women, and children, had formed a ring around one farmer Russel... whom no one loved, and every one feared; for his love of money had led him to be hard-hearted; and his power over the poor had made him indulge his natural insolence" (p. 3). The poor townspeople gather outside the almshouse to mock the hated overseer in the woodcut illustration to *The Hubbub; or, The History of Farmer Russel the Hard-Hearted Overseer* (1797). The image illustrates the downfalls of parish relief: corrupted overseers and idle poor (note the large numbers of unemployed able-bodied adults).



“Gather up the Fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

Fig. 2 “What a striking lesson of œconomy does our Savior give us by this precept” (p. 15). Christ oversees the distribution of the loaves and fishes to the five thousand in the woodcut illustration to *Hints to All Ranks of People, on the Occasion of the Scarcity of 1795* (1795). Both the text and the caption emphasize the frugality of Christ’s charity and the educational, as well as physical, nature of his gift.



Fig. 3 “If Mr. Stock had sent him a good sum of money to procure... a trifle to make merry with his wretched companions, Jack would have thought him a friend indeed.... Unfortunately, [Mr. Stock’s] letter came just as he [Jack] was going to sit down to one of those direful merry-makings which are often carried on with brutal riot within the doleful walls of a jail” (pp. 5-6). Jack and his companions have a riotous feast in prison in the woodcut illustration to *Jack Brown in Prison; or, The Pitcher Never Goes So Often to the Well But It Is Broke at Last...* (1796). Mr. Stock avoids contributing to social unrest by withholding monetary relief from the undeserving Jack.

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³ E.C.C.O. = *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (Gale); M.M.W. = *Making of the Modern World: The Goldsmiths'-Kress Library of Economic Literature 1480-1850* (Gale).

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