(Chambers)

The Publisher.

On February 3rd 1832 Robert Chambers wrote to a friend; "My brother William has started a paper at a singularly low price, which must either sell in thousands or not at all. If it lies in your way to become agent for such a thing I wish you would undertake it, for I know no man who could do it more justice in Glasgow. James will write more particulars." James and Robert were to be found at 48 Hanover Street, still running their little business but now taking on the distribution of the new paper. It was to be printed initially by a Daniel LIzars who had done work for them before according to early account books.

An agreement had been drawn up on February 18th between the three brothers. The editorship and the "chief literary labour" was to be William's, "literary work in a less degree" undertaken by Robert, and James was to be business manager "on the understanding that more than £5 to be discussed between all three." It was to be entirely separate from Robert and James's business but they would sell and distribute it. Any money received would be deposited in the Bank of Scotland, and only William have the right to draw it, and even he could not withdraw more than £5 without discussion with the other two. Such modest plans and hopes shows how dubious they all considered the project, remembering their previous ventures in this field.

Their rather lukewarm anticipations for the **Edinburgh Journal** were justified. It was one of many, and in Edinburgh were two of the most successful in the country, the **Review** and **Blackwoods.** But William had been in the bookselling business for ten years, and he sensed a gap. The new literate, intensely anxious to learn but relatively poor, were looking for a magazine which would inform and amuse them, cheap enough to invest in regularly, sedate enough to introduce into their middle class homes, prompt and reliable in its delivery, uncontentious without being too bland, friendly and unpatronising.

Thirty thousand of them bought the first printing, another thousand had joined their readers by April. "In ten weeks...its success has been such as to astonish even the most sanguine persons" wrote William, who hadn't been very sanguine and was now astonished. He appointed a London agent, Mr W.B. Orr (not a wise choice it turned out) and advertised it in New York papers. It was helped on its way by the new inventions of stereotyping and steam printing, and its price was held down by its freedom from stamp duty; this was because of its commitment to be unpolitical and to stay within a certain format. On September 7th Robert became joint editor and the firm of W. & R. Chambers was launched. James died suddenly. Things might have been different if he had formed part of the enterprise; strains between the brothers might have been avoided, Robert's breakdown and removal to St Andrews not taken place, **Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation** might not have been written.

Its articles this first year were a pattern for all the years that followed; part of its success stemmed from the belief in the formula and insistence on sticking to it. Robert wrote some of his most delightful essays; "Removals", "Flitting Days" "General Invitations" and a supplement on the life of Scott. There

were serious pieces on Geology, health, slavery, emigration. Malthus, old burgh laws, Mr Babbage's machines, schools, capital punishment, Highland chiefs, Bentham, cricket, clever women, the seashore. There were beauty tips and advice on correct speech and a Ladies Column.

When he became joint editor, Robert wrote the leading articles and others on topical subjects, William was in charge of production, and this partnership continued through the years, though both of them were involved in the printing side of the venture when they took this over. Ten years later Robert confessed he had been under pressure from the first, but this did not show. In those ten years the pair of them launched out into various other ventures and became rich. To the readers of the **Journal** they became friends and confidents, and this, said Robert in a letter to his friend George Combe, was one of the reasons for their success; their style and views were those of old acquaintances, reliable, friendly, unchanging.

In fact their views did change noticeably, but the tone of the **Journal** remained as they had always wanted it; a family magazine for the middle classes, their own class they insisted, even when they earned a great deal of money and William bought an estate by the Tweed, and applied for a family crest, describing himself as gent and J.P. Their readers were unaware of the problems in their relationship, or the fact that Robert wanted to wind the enterprise up after its first twelve volumes. Year after year they gave soirees for their workforce in the printing house on the High Street, congratulating themselves and everyone present on the way things were going, even in the uncertain times. They handed out tea and coffee and thanks and good advice in an atmosphere of geniality that may have been slightly forced but showed them to have been sympathetic employers at a time when bad, avaricious ones were everywhere abundant.

These soirees were reported in the **Journal**, such as the one of 1843. Robert must have returned from St Andrews to attend it, his frame of mind unsettled as he suffered a mid-life crisis. Private letters show his great desire to wind up the firm and retire to Portobello to geologise; none of this was apparent to the eighty members of staff invited to "an entertainment on temperance principles" as William explained in his speech. This was the fifth soiree, a yearly exhibition of mutual backslapping, showing the basis on which the firm was founded, a reciprocal venture "on the broad principles of humanity" in which the editors would consider their workforce as partners and would resolve "to treat them on all occasions with a proper and considerate courtesy - to meet with them one evening in the year, round the same table, and there to interchange with them the language of affection and estimation."

He admitted that there were benefits to the firm from this. Good employers made good workmen and the business profited. "I do not believe there is one in this room who does not look upon us as his friend, or who would not put up with much personal inconvenience to serve us" he glowed, and indeed their reputation was such that a commissioner of the crown reported to parliament that theirs was a model of factory management. The commissioner was particularly pleased with their library of nine hundred volumes, sixty of which were taken out every week; with their school for younger boys; and with their Savings Bank. William then went on to describe the success of "one of the most arduous tasks in which we have ever been engaged, I mean "The Information for the People", a "curiosity in literature for more has been printed of it than of any other book of the kind, perhaps in the world." This was the first of their new range of educational pamphlets, and though not the most successful "I am told by a gentleman who has taken the trouble to calculate that if all the volumes of the work were bound up

and ranged in a line they would require a shelf five miles in length."

After fruit cake and lemonade and some songs and toasts to the guests, Robert got up to speak. Following the singing and toasting, he brought them all down to earth with a long diatribe on Savings Banks, and on the improvidence of most working men. Did he really feel that there were only "alleged defects" in the condition of the labouring classes in these hungry forties, that they could not expect higher wages since "the amount of the wages of each man depends on fixed laws of our mundane economy, as fixed apparently as those which regulate the movement of the planets." It was not in fact the regulator of the planets who fixed their wages, as he well knew, it was an Adam Smith attitude that supply and demand were the arbitrators in a self-regulating system that was somehow "natural." Law makers were landowners, landowners were investors and owners of mills, and into this cosy circle the working man could not intrude.

As Robert rightly pointed out, the labouring man had no capital and therefore no provision against illness or unemployment. He suffered greatly, which affronted "Divine benevolence" and was really his own fault. After all "I have in the course of my life been in the way of gaining as little as any working man" but in spite of this "I never knew what poverty was, I never found myself poor...Nor was this a painful way of life...narrow circumstances were not bitter..." Here Robert seemed to be suffering a lapse of memory. In his letters to Anne before they were married he revealed his sufferings, in a long letter to Hugh Miller, he described his "bitter painful childhood" as too harrowing to write about. Why this pretence?

Had he really forgotten or was he, in 1843, entirely in his "right mind"? He had come from St Andrews where he was in the middle of a book that was almost too dangerous to publish, and where he had gone to rest on the verge of a breakdown. He wanted to finish with the **Journal**, he was terribly tired, he felt his energies scattering in too many directions. He lectured to his printers and compositors on how they could save (as long as they did not marry) and thus emulate the "higher ranks" who in this as in other matters showed "superior management" in handling their affairs. He ended by making a statement that might have sounded hollow even to his happy workmen; "when I...find someone declaiming on the hardships of the working-classes the tendency of my mind is to treat is as something little better than mockery."

In his right mind or not, Robert and the **Journal** which was his mouthpiece for thirty years, took a constantly ambivalent attitude towards the terrible housing, child mortality, illiteracy, long working hours, sufferings of old age, starvation diet, in fact total neglect of three quarters of the population. While bringing to light all these things in its pages, the **Journal** both deplored and condoned. Somehow, by a process of "laissez faire" and Divine providence, things would improve. Given time, that Law of Nature would work for all men, though a nudge here and there did not come amiss. Robert never advocated land reform or universal suffrage. He was nervous of change that came too quickly, thus upsetting some elusive "balance" supposed to exist. State education, a gentle widening of the suffrage, a kinder poor law were about right.

It is fair to assume that his father's ruin, in which the whole family were dragged down, remained as an awful reminder of where improvidence could lead. Savings Banks became an obsessive source of interest and provided many articles. He followed his own advice, leaving xxx in his will in his various

accounts with them. He became a director of Scottish Equitable and never seems to have missed a meeting; his diary records him marrying a daughter in the morning and attending a board meeting in the afternoon.

In spite of this general ambivalence, the **Journal** from the first took its role of councillor seriously, and one of the most important areas on which William and Robert gave advice was health. They saw it as a duty to preach to their readers on diet, to warn them about "quack" doctors, to tell them how to feed, clothe and wean their infants, to give them advance warning of epidemics and pass on the glad tidings of new discoveries in pain relief. They did not presume to know all these things themselves, but got reliable advice from doctors they could trust, and from manuals written by these.

They meant well, but as they themselves frequently warned, epidemics would continue, children die in devastating droves, and the common killers dysentry and pneumonia stalk the land unchecked, until there was for everyone clean water to drink, a proper sewage system, a house reasonably dry and warm. A doctor put it bluntly: "if there was not a single physician, surgeon, apothecary, midwife, chemist, druggist on the face of the earth, there would be less sickness and less mortality than prevails."

For there was a fumbling for cures without a parallel understanding of causes. Underlying all concepts was an opinion, inherited from previous centuries, that a "miasma" or noxious cloud hung over the world. In 1568 it was described as "corrupcion or infection of the air or ane venemous qualitie and maist hurtful vapour," then thought of as God's malignant breath. In 1847 two eminent authorities were sure it was "a poison diffused...which acts with peculiar intensity on the alimentary canal." It was given a name, malaria.

Words were found to describe what was essentially invisible and intangible but deadly, a "disease mist" from the exhalations of two million open sewers, cesspools, graves and slaughter houses, which carried cholera, smallpox, typhus, measles and diptheria on its wings, like some ghastly gigantic bird; "exhalation from marshes and the pollens and odiferous dust from flowers." Doctors Arnott and Kay were assuring the public that dead vegetables and animal matter generated a poison that was lethal when inhaled. Another doctor claimed to have captured the essence of this miasma and injected it into animals, with immediately fatal results.

Marshy districts, camping armies, ships with putrid bilge water were particular sources of this "vitiated" air, which found its way into the blood stream and caused killing fevers. Any overcrowding and breathing out of constantly infected air was dangerous, so schools and hospitals were at risk. Arnott invented a type of ventilator to extract old infected air and send it up the chimney. It was popular but useless.

Other theories for the causes of infection were offered. M. Andre in France proposed "a mass of electric fluids" in the atmosphere whose changes of density caused disease though it was not clear at which stage of their fluctuation they were dangerous; some claimed to have noticed more electricity in the air before a cholera epidemic, others the reverse. Porous earth was another suggestion, though not many people were convinced; generally a cloudy gas given off by dirt or dead and infected bodies and then breathed and re-breathed by a great many people, was the considered culprit. Dr Andrew Combe, a friend of Robert's. was thought to have his end hastened by "effluvia from emigrants under his

cabin" they huddled in the hold of the ship in which he was travelling in search of a cure from his long-term tuberculosis. These noxious fumes were supposed to have caused the death of St Kildan babies, eight out of ten of whom died within days of birth; a strange conclusion about a windswept outcrop where any mist would soon be blasted to sea. The real culprit was found to be tetanus.

The great scourges were watched approaching on this malevolent miasma with a helplessness that made for a high degree of insecurity. Four years after the launching of the **Journal** ten thousand people died in a cholera epidemic, horrifically described in its pages. The poisonous bird flew over again in 1849 and mortality rates rose by fifty one per cent. The poor suffered most, which confirmed the ideas about overcrowding, there were so many of them huddled together breathing in and out air which became more "vitiated" in its concentration with every rebreath. Irish lungs were blamed for a lot of the poisonous fumes.

Tuberculosis, smallpox and typhus were always "in the air", the first killed fifty five thousand people a year, figures only vaguely accurate given the lack of post mortems amongst the poor. Sir James Clerke gave it as his opinion - a respected one since he was the Queen's physician - that consumption was caused by long confinement in ill-ventilated rooms. He produced tailors, milliners and printers, high on the list of victims, as proof. The disease often started with a cold, and so the **Journal** advised warm clothing for children. In 1847 a Dr Harrison was wondering why in Britain there was no suspicion that it might be "catching", and why clothing of victims was not burnt after they died as in Portugal, Spain and Italy. So unaware were the British of this possibility, that Dr Combe practised for many years with active tuberculosis which killed him at an early age. How many of his patients he infected as he coughed over them in his surgery is anybody's guess. Guessing was the best most people could do. In a letter to Robert, his wife expressed nervousness about the children going to St Andrews, since a "change of air" was dangerous to the young. Doctors however recommended air change for many complaints, salt sea air being particularly beneficial.

The **Journal** regularly produced statistics, furnished by commissions of enquiry and the office of the Registrar General, and according to these the causes of death in the 1840's were in order of severity, first epidemics such as typhus and cholera, then respiratory diseases, followed by asthma, convulsions and teething, hydrophobia, childbirth and syphillis. One fifth of children in towns died before their first year. Given that diagnosis was often guesswork, the figures cannot be very reliable.

The **Journal** was not enthusiastic about doctors. The French, it claimed, were much more broad-minded about medical science, "the engrossing pursuit of wealth" excluded the British from bothering, and the "storm of sectarian and party prejudice" that met any new discovery was depressing. Nevertheless the **Journal** could announce in capital letters, the only time they were used, that with Dr Simpson's use of ether as an anasthetic THE MEANS NOW UNDOUBTEDLY EXIST IN PERFECTION IN EXTINGUISHING PAIN IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES IS THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND NO LESS WHICH WE MUST MAKE TO OUR READERS. It was the best news of the century. A doctor who contributed articles on the fears and delusions of his patients, said the question he was often asked was which was the most painful part of amputation, surely it was when the saw went through the bone to the marrow?

Doctors had to make a living, but they did it at the expense of their patients, tainted it seemed with

the national complaint "the pure spirit of trade." They charged 3/6 for medicine that was worth 1d and which only lasted a few days, with the result that the dispensaries opened for the use of the really poor were being used, in desperation, by the middle classes; "they come to the infirmary in hackney coaches." The poor accepted all small complaints without seeking relief. Liquor for them and opium for their infants were the easers of life's endless ills. Gallons of laudanum were poured down the throats of infants when their mothers had to leave them to go to work, "one half of them quieted out of the world with Godfrey's Cordial, a mild form of opium."

Edinburgh's school of medicine was world famous, but there was still something haphazard about the training of doctors. Some. said an article of 1840, were qualified "to bleed and preserve" but not make up medicines, some vice versa. The **Journal** wanted to see a strict licensing system; there was a vast army of unlicensed or "quack" doctors around, handing out potions of doubtful value or positive danger. The government was not too bothered about this, since it got £49,000 a year in stamp duties on patent medicines.

The **Journal** was restrained from expressing itself as forcefully on the subject of "quacks" as **Jerrolds Magazine,** a more radical and acerbic publication. "We do not call them swindler, poisoner, murderous rogue" these so called doctors it declared, though the names fitted. The trouble was, their spurious skills were better rewarded. One article presumed to follow the career of one such quack. "I bribed penny-a-liners to report imaginary accidents to which I was summoned in the papers. I hired persons to ring and knock at my door and even occasionally to call me out of church - whereat my attendance was most exemplary - whenever I went to a party I was sure to recollect at an early hour that I had a professional engagement."

Thus preparing the ground , he found that the most lucrative patients "were weak, fanciful timid old women and corresponding characters of the opposite sex, feeble in body and still more feeble in mind, pampered to extreme sensitiveness unable to bear the least pain and frightened to death of the slightest symptom of disorder." These spoilt hypocondriacs thought of him as a "social luxury" like a cushion or sofa, a muff or a warming pan, and they were flattered that he was absorbed by their whims and caprices, their "paid sycophant" who they also had the full luxury of despising. He himself was well aware that most diseases were caused by an "infringement of nature" and there were only two reliable drugs, sulphur and quinine. Unabashed, he invented a pill, took out a patent for it, and advertised it with recommendations from imaginary patients.

The rich might have fanciful ailments, but there were plenty of very real ones. In the appalling slums there was scrofula, described as "red eyelids, spongy gums, diseased skin, sores, swollen glands" a perfect example of diet-deficiency. The industrial revolution was also producing work-related illnesses, which the **Journal** exposed, though it is doubtful if employers, without legal enforcement, took any notice. Girls in match factories working long hours in sulphorous fumes, suffered lung and throat troubles, and so did women employed making straw bonnets. Painters inhaled lead fumes, as of course did those who worked in factories that produced the paint. Masons rarely lived beyond forty because of the dust that got into their lungs.

In 1844 a visit to the thriving steel mills of Sheffield revealed a picture of distress which the **Journal** laid before its readers to ponder. Scissor grinders died between twenty six and thirty years, emaciated,

with bladder troubles and spitting blood. Needle, razor and pen-knife grinders could also look forward to an early and painful death, but the fork grinders were the most to be pitied. Fellow employees refused to work in the same room with them, and "sick clubs" would not admit them as members. A quarter of them died every five years. The proud trademark Made in Sheffield should have had, one feels, a skull and crossbones beside it.

Accidents in mills and factories accounted for much sickness and injury; even the Chambers' well run printing works had children handling dangerous, unguarded machines. A small boy was sucked into one of these, son of a poor widow, whose funeral the firm would pay for, and whose widowed mother they would give "a little present." Highest insurance premiums were paid by miners, colliers and railwaymen, though few could afford to take out insurance at all. Edwin Chadwick, another friend of Robert's, provided the **Journal** with on the spot reports concerning the railway boom. When he arrived at the scene of one of the tunnels, he found "demoralisation, crime and confusion", the men housed in "rude hovels", fourteen men to a hut. So far thirty two of them had been killed, and there were one hundred and forty cases of fractures, burns and lacerations but no doctors. They spent up to six years in this way, and since they were irregularly paid and forced to buy provisions from contractor's shops at inflated prices, they were little more than slaves. Most of them were Irish so their status almost sub-human.

Statistics about absenteeism showed miners to be off sick for fifteen weeks in the year, stone masons eleven weeks, labourers and weavers ten weeks, without pay of course. Domestic servants showed up best in these tables, but on the other hand scored badly when it came to mental breakdown.

Mental illness though common - one in five hundred people suffered some form of breakdown - was as little understood. Lists were drawn up; students, military men, clergymen, servants and women between the ages of thirty and forty were the main casualties, though it was not so easy to find the factor that linked these diverse groups. Only the students seemed to fit the one fact that everyone agreed on, that overwork "taxed" the brain to breaking point. It could start in childhood, with pressure on a young mind to compete. The damage was irreversible.

Phrenology which had a certain vogue at this time, thought of the brain as a physical organ like any other, and liable to wear out or become damaged with over-use. George Combe, the leading spokesman in Scotland, was called on by Queen Victoria to advise on the education of the Prince of Wales, and advise he did, at enormous length. He warned particularly against the "cerebral disease" that could follow hard and continuous study. Royal children like all others must have rest and recreation, fresh air, tea and aromatic baths. The **Journal** often weighed in against competition in schools, in the shape of prizes and medals; stressful at the least, in the long run dangerous.

There were plenty of examples of men whose minds gave way, temporarily or permanently under what appeared to be the strain of overwork; some like the poet Campbell who suffered all their lives a "draining debility" as the result of childhood pressures. Harriet Martineau told **Journal** readers that the "life of hard literary workers usually ends in paralysis with months or years of imbecility" and cited Scott and Southey. John Stuart Mill was another example, and Robert himself attributed his near-breakdown to pressure of work, and his final illness to driving himself too hard over one book. In that case, and in many of the others, false diagnosis based on ignorance, led to wrong treatment and unnecessary

suffering.

Other causes were sought for. Andrew Combe identified six genera, fifteen species and twenty seven varieties of "idiocy." He traced these to overfeeding in childhood, heredity, lack of exercise (as in retired officers and middleclass females), intense heat or cold, anxiety or misery, want, alcohol and domestic strife; a wide choice. Combe like his brother believed steadfastly in a natural law which applied to all living creatures. To keep this was to be mentally and physically healthy, to break it led to sickness and breakdown. Unfortunately, as he was only too aware "the vast body of the people shall for ever remain in a condition little superior to that of working animals" with little opportunity of following nature's gentle rhythms and enjoying fresh air, rest and recreation. Their lives of non stop grinding labour started at ten years old or earlier. The Times sighed over these little creatures, and regretted "that their brief spring is over" but was able to call to mind the ever-elastic Law of Nature and relieve its readers of guilt. "There is no one to blame for this" it soothed,"it is the result of Nature's simplest laws."

Opulence, idleness, overwork, heredity, drink: what else could cause the high incidence of insanity in its various varieties and species? Sir John Coxe in a paper that the **Journal** could not publish in its family pages, gave masturbation as a major cause. The practice, said this authority, "sucks the very life blood from its victims" and turns them into "moping idiots...living masses of corruption" and their children may inherit their insanity. The Unitarian Charles Bray thought early sex might affect the mind, though where either of them got their evidence is an open question.

A Dr Slaney looked round the country, and simply and accurately defined what made its inhabitants physically or mentally ill. "Too early employment, too long employment - too much fatigue - no time for relaxation - no time for mental improvement - no time for the care of health - exhaustion - intemperance - indifferent food - sickness - premature decay - large mortality - children in asylums herded together - servants with no friends, no followers,no visits to others- no mental or other society." For the richest country in Europe it was nothing much to be proud of.

The depressing picture had its brighter side however, because as the **Journal** noted, the care of the insane was improving; not a moment too soon, thirty years before patients in Morningside Asylum were lying on straw like pigs and were fed through the bars of their cages. Now Robert let his daughters attend parties there and dance with the inmates. Liberal bequests were leading to the building of a new type of asylum, where the emphasis was on kindness and understanding. The **Journal** described one of these, poor lunatics on the bottom floor, then the higher classes with their own servants and separate rooms, and at the top the middle class; as in prisons class was always a consideration, but all the inmates were cared for humanely and provided with games, concerts, visits to the theatre and general stimulation.

The really wealthy mad were now able to be placed in beautiful houses set in spacious grounds which was important, because it removed the stigma from insanity, and prevented victims being tucked out of sight, their condition left too long without treatment. Insanity was not a genteel affair, but doctors should be aware of its first symptoms, one of which was hypochondria. Querulous ladies with low vitality and obsessive worries about diet were sending out warning signals, though one doctor told his neurotic patient in desperation "You may eat anything but the poker or the bellows." The **Journal** disliked private asylums on the whole, it felt they should be run by committees and regularly inspected.

Sedatives such as henbane, opium and iron bark were approved of, bleeding, laxatives and warm baths relieved tensions, but the important thing was an atmosphere of kindness and understanding. Robert went out to a village, probably Peebles, and described how two "simple" old women were lying on filthy straw under planks leant against a wall. This was a Christian country, and here was how it treated its defenceless deluded. And here was Lord Brougham pronouncing "sickness is a thing which a prudent man should look to and provide against as part of the ills of life." "From the lips of a fortunate lawyer in the actual enjoyment of £14,000 a year, with a £5000 pension, this was rich," commented Robert, the **Journal**'s commitment to a non political stance forbidding stronger language about the Lord Chancellor.

Ill health, partly caused by ignorance, was underwritten by poverty; poverty alongside great wealth in a country leading Europe in its industrial revolution. "A set of curious chances" gave England a fifty year start; its physical position, the fortunate arrival of men like Arkwright and Stephenson and Watt to invent machinery and steam engines, God's favouritism according to Canon Buckland, in placing coal seams near water power, plenty of starving Irish to build railways so that the cotton goods and cutlery could be moved to the ports to carry them to an Empire acquired to provide such a market. God blighted potatos said some divines, to punish the Irish for being Catholics and thus forced them to emigrate and become slave labour in both England and the States, punishing and rewarding with one happy divine idea.

Emerson when he visited the country in 1847 was overwhelmed by its prosperity and good fortune; "these Britons have precisely the best commercial position in the whole planet" he enthused, "And to make these advantages avail, the river Thames must dig its spacious outlet to the sea from the heart of the kingdom." He quoted the occasion when James 1 threatened to remove his Court from the capital. The Lord Mayor, unworried by the prospect, simply hoped the king would leave them the Thames.

Emerson did note "the one drawback" in the happy scene, the darkness of the country's sky. "The night and day are too nearly of a colour. It strains the eyes to read and write. Add the coal smoke In the manufacturing towns the fine soot or **blacks** darken the sky, give white sheep the colour of black sheep, discolour human saliva, contaminate the air, poison many plants and corrode the monuments and buildings." What it did to the lungs and hearts of those who had to live and work in it, Emerson failed to ask.

He noticed a falling off as he travelled north. "In Scotland there is a rapid loss of all grandeur of mien and manners; a provincial eagerness and acuteness appear; the poverty of the country makes itself remarked, and a coarseness of manners;" this was the era of snap judgments by itinerant savants, though Emerson was more astute than most. He was certainly being blind to half the inhabitants of Great Britain when he wrote "They have a vigorous health and last well into middle and old age. The old men are as red as roses, and still handsome. A clear skin, a peach-bloom complexion and good teeth are found all over the island. They use a plentiful and nutritious diet." The life expectancy of Leeds was nineteen years at this time, children died in their thousands as a result of poor food, and there were few old men around to bloom like peaches or glow like red roses.

Robert showed Emerson round Edinburgh on his visit there, and was delighted with his company;

but obviously avoided the filthy closes of the Old Town. Nor did he show this benign philosopher articles in the **Journal**, many of them, in which the widening gap between rich and poor was discussed. The more the country boomed, the more beggars swarmed the streets, ragged children slept in doorways, "mudlarks" scavenged in sewers, prisons could not hold the offending poor who had to be shipped off to Van Damiens land or the States in their hundreds and thousands.

Less and less the **Journal** blamed the poor for their condition, freeing itself from the influence of Scott and the upper class Toryism he espoused, more and more it closed in on the real culprit, parish relief. Three months into publication it called this system "a mere mockery of the wants of the poor." Edinburgh was bad enough; Ruskin in 1857 called it an "open sewer" and likened its Old Town to Gomorrah. Unlike Emerson he explored this area, for the city had been cruelly divided into the haves and the will never haves, crossing the bridges one entered quite soon a different world. Ruskin found one of its tenements housing two hundred and twenty people. "In my father's house are many mansions. Verily that appears to be also the case in some of his Scotch Evangelical servants houses" he observed caustically.

Edinburgh was a city of lawyers, doctors, professors, publishers, a cultural and administrative centre. Glasgow was now the second city of the empire, its wealth based on the new industries and its busy port. In 1840 the **Journal** published a paper read at the meeting of the British Association there by one of its medical officers, Dr Cowan. He described this rich and thriving place as resembling "the sweeping calamities of eastern colonies", ravaged by typhus from which approximately 1800 people died each year. As for its poor law, "The Scottish system has but one feature - that of giving as little as possible to as few poor as possible."

In a first article the **Journal** took up the theme. There were only two workhouses in the country and this largely because "Popular doctrine is that systematic relief leads to improvidence and early marriage." This had been disproved in Denmark, Holland and Prussia where it had become obvious that a decent standard of living was in fact the most effectual check on early marriage; the prospect of stability made couples wait until they reached it. The **Journal** was ashamed to tell its readers that no city in Holland, Belgium, Germany or France had so many beggar children as Edinburgh, Glasgow or Dublin. They printed a pamphlet from **Blackwoods**, written by Dr Alison. He wanted a uniform assessment for every pauper, and this to be "sufficient" instead of "at present a kind of mockery." It should not be tied to "moral requirements" as was present parish relief, "expecting all kind of virtues from human beings when they are unfortunate and only then."

This comforting conviction that the poor were to blame for their condition, that they were idle, immoral and dissipated, was reflected in the terms used to describe them; the "lapsed masses" the "sunken portion" the "home heathen." Though given little practical help they were bombarded by Bible women, the Salvation Army and other missions. The charismatic divine Dr Chalmers doled out erratic charity but was against systematic state relief. Alison described him as "a popular preacher attracting a congregation of ladies and gentlemen." These ladies from the under-occupied middle classes got a "kind of frisson" said the **Journal**, when they visited the wretched in their hovels. Many of them unmarried, they "oppress the needy with tedious and impossible advice on infant management and restricting the size of their families." Elegant young women cruised the streets with subscription lists in their muffs, collecting money not only for local poor but for Blackfoot Indians and slave children in Carolina. Lady

Bountifuls abounded, thus giving the impression that something positive was being done.

Much of the blame was laid on the Irish of course. Certainly they were flocking over in their thousands, but many thousands were also being imported by millowners in order to keep wages down. For whatever reason they were there, prepared to work for practically nothing and sleep in cellars like (and with) rats and fill the country with disease and with their pestilential priests and then expect "relief" from their hard-pressed hosts. The **Journal** largely left this political hot potato alone, but did believe in shuffling them on, along with evicted Highlanders, to build the railroads of America. There they lived in shanties, one of which was bought by Henry David Thoreau and carried away in a cart to build his cabin by Walden Pond. The family walked off with their possessions in bits of cloth. Another time Thoreau ran for shelter to a disused hut in the woods, to find it sheltering an Irish family; hardly sheltering since the rain poured through the roof. The father dug a farmer's land with a spade, and as the rain dripped through holes onto their heads, had to submit to a lecture by Thoreau on how much better off they would be if they followed his example and worked less, thus needing less food.

The **Journal** for many years extolled emigration as the solution to over-population, and the fact that women and children were taking a large proportion of the manufacturing jobs; they were cheaper and their nimble hands and resigned temperaments made them a more tractable workforce. As printers and publishers, the Chambers found it hard to reconcile their more liberal views on working practices with a fiercely competitive business. They wrote articles about profit sharing schemes in France, but did not introduce these into their own business. In 1849, the year that William bought a mansion on the Tweed with forty bedrooms for £29,000, the **Journal** was lecturing smugly: "It is not higher wages nor more unwearying employment that our artizans need... not franchise or charter ... simply the use you make of the 15/- or 30/- you earn each week."

Strikes they deplored from the start as useless and dangerous. A harsh article of 1838 condemned labour forces that demanded higher wages than "circumstances will permit" and pronounced "the worst enemy of the poor is the combined conspirator." This drew an angry letter from one of their readers. The article "has surprised not only me but the whole of my fellow workmen" he wrote. Masters might combine for the purpose of reducing the rate of wages, so men could combine to resist their reduction. The Chambers had claimed that they would move their printing works to the banks of the Tweed if they could, where they would pay half the wages they were at present. "The reduction of wages to half of what you at present pay to your workmen might prove beneficial to you and similar heartless beings" wrote their disgusted reader, those who were "retaining millions of hard working human beings on half bread all their lives." The fact that they kept this, one of hundreds of letters they received every week, showed they did not dismiss it as rubbish from that most dangerous of perverts, a Radical. Yet they continued that year to support employers, who they said benefited those masses who slaved for them. Five hundred thousand people a year were supported by cotton they pointed out; more accurately kept from starvation while their kindly employers became enormously rich.

Two years later the **Journal** printed an article from **Blackwoods** showing that agricultural labourers now earned as much as 2/- a week, so were comparatively well off. It was a pity that the people of the Isle of Lewis did not have "the intelligence, dexterity, industry and economy" to be like them the article lamented. They lived in huts with their cattle, huts "indescribably filthy" and with holes in the roof for chimneys, thatched with potato stalks. The women were industrious but "they worked like brutes"

which demeaned their labour. Fortunately there were other voices to speak up for crofters; Hugh Miller for example. "You are said to be lazy. For our own part, what we chiefly wonder at is your great industry." he wrote of a people from whom he himself had sprung.

The **Journal**, with Robert as its chief contributor, was constantly advising its readers to provide against illness or unemployment by investing in Savings Banks or Friendly Societies, sensible enough, obvious even, if there was anything to spare. The very poor were illiterate and could not receive this good advice, but even "mechanics" clerks and shop assistants found it hard to support families and save. Charles Bray in his **"Philosophy of Necessity**" made a careful examination of the expenses of an "average" working class family of four in England.

They bought coals, candles, soap, oatmeal, milk (watered with bread for children) flour, potatoes, sugar (mixed with warm water) tea or coffee, bacon, bullocks liver, and clothes; all this out of 14/- a week. A slightly better off family added beer twice a week, butter, bread, rice, a benefit club and medicine. There was nothing for books, church, mechanics institute, postage, trips into the country, education, a doctor. This was Birmingham in 1839. Bray noted that there was much talk of Savings Banks but only female servants, schoolmasters, clergymen, small farmers, guards and drivers of carriages could afford to invest in them. Scotland was a poorer country, and as the **Journal** commented, workers were often suspicious that employers would cut their wages if they thought they had surplus to invest in Savings Banks. As in colonial ventures, cotton and tea plantations, the aim of employers was to keep the labour force wretchedly dependent. Bray was a friend of Robert's, but a true socialist rather than a cautious liberal.

Through the years 1832 to 1849 the **Journal** in fact gave out conflicting signals. It was shocked and disgusted at the way so many people were slaving, sickening, losing their children becoming crippled and unemployable, and so little was being done about it, and yet cautious about remedies, apart from more relief. In 1840 Robert visited Peebles, and wrote an article about what he found in this relatively comfortable rural town. He did not name it, but its position and its population of two thousand inhabitants point to it being his own birthplace. He found there two or three clergymen, a doctor, a few lawyers; he did not expect to find many paupers but discovered forty two drawing from the Kirk Session poor fund, a sum of £3.6.3 between them.

One imbecile old woman was lodged with a family who received a generous 4/- a week for her keep, but an insane female who stayed with her mother and sister only got 2/6. Two old women who managed to sell a little coal got 2/6 between them and an aged shopkeeper with a bedridden wife 2/-. A widow with four children who produced a baby had her allowance reduced from 3/- to 2/- as a punishment. Another widow whose daughter had a "bad character" was also deprived of her allowance, though the **Journal** noted that old parents were seldom supported by their children, the only ones that helped were children of "shame."

These were at the bottom of the pile, but there were five hundred very poor households. It was a system of "protracted starvation"; they lived on porridge and potatos and sometimes a little tea, which was looked on as a drug; prosperous families gave their old tea leaves. The old, who especially needed comforts, suffered chronic and unrelieved conditions such as ulcers and palsy. This in a parish whose annual produce brought in £22,540. From this sum the heritor gave as his voluntary contribution to the

poor £222. The argument, "as hollow as it is heartless" that relief led to dependance and an increase of paupers "would reflect burning disgrace upon those who announce it if it were not that they are utterly blind to its real character" Robert raged, and continued the assault in a first article. Why should the poor have nothing but the bare necessities? Why should they not "indulge in some of those comforts which the rich enjoy in abundance?"

Robert was shocked and angry, but the **Journal** continued to moralise on the need for harder work and later marriage. Malthus was a nice man Robert noted in his Memo book, but he was quite wrong to say that population pressure was threatening the world's resources. There were infinite acres lying about the colonies and elsewhere; what else were these places for but to absorb Europe's surpluses? The able bodied unemployed should emigrate, and the **Journal** was generous with advice as to where to go and what to take. President Franklin complained about all the criminals and destitutes landing in his country; how would it be if the States exported their redundant rattlesnakes in return?

Ambivalent as they sometimes were about who was to blame for the widening gap between rich and poor, the Chambers had no hesitation in linking poverty and crime. Robert was initially drawn to phrenology, and believed that criminal tendencies were inherited, within the heads of children from birth, and so punishment was inappropriate. Offenders were helpless deviants, needing to be cured rather then condemned. Prison, especially of the very young, aggravated the condition. The type of reformatories that were appearing on the continent were a better solution, though there was the problem still of what to do with the young people at the end of their education.

The filthy slums being exposed by Alison, Chadwick and others were the breeding grounds for "vice and misery" but the vicious sentences imposed on young offenders, including transportation to slavery, were having no effect at all. In one article the **Journal** ran through for its readers the present system of criminal justice for minors. In general Scotland's legal apparatus was applauded in its pages, but in this particular the whole thing was top heavy and cruelly inappropriate.

"There is a sort of routine that is gone through" when children offended. "They are first of all punished several times by imprisonment under the sentences of the magistrate and judges of the police court, then they are indicted and tried in the sheriff court and ultimately they are indicted and tried in the high court of judiciary. It is no unusual sight to see on a Monday in that court three or four of the supreme judges and jury, the Lord Advocate or Solicitor General and so many depute advocates, engaged in trying two or three young urchins for stealing a few empty bottles or the like, for it matters not what the crime is, they are now in the court of last resort."

The process was of course enormously expensive. "Precognition by the Procurator Fiscal, sent to crown agent for his perusal, the case is sent to the crown lawyers, an indictment is then prepared by one of these gentlemen, it is printed and executed, a jury is summoned consisting of special jurors and common jurors to the number of sixty five taken from city, town of Leith and counties of Edinburgh Linlithgow and Haddington...many of them travelling a great distance at great inconvenience and at considerable expense all for the purpose of taking part in the trial." The cost of each trial was estimated at £200, four times what was considered adequate to keep a family for a year.

Since prisons were in short supply, transportation was the resort of many judges, and the **Journal,**

though not condemning the system, was sharply critical of the conditions under which men, women and children were sent off unprotected in overcrowded ships. Five thousand of them left every year for "a form of slavery", mostly to Australia where the condemned often worked in shackles, absolutely at the mercy of their employers. The many ways in which they could be abused can be imagined. The **Journal** wanted three months in a penitentiary on arrival, then work under government supervision, then they should be provided with a "ticket of leave" to find their own employment, with a system of marks which would eventually lead to their freedom. The colonies were desperate for labour, at least for some years.

Their original enthusiasm for emigration as the solution to Britain's problems of overcrowding dimmed a little. By 1845 they were sending out warnings. The trouble started on board, when the skipper and his associates preyed on their passengers, and continued on arrival where "land jobbers" were waiting to waylay and rob them. The **Journal** advised that one settler went ahead to buy land (about 150 acres per family) cleared and sowed five acres and planted potatos, built a house, and then brought out the family. Such prudent counselling did not apply to the Irish and Highlanders a year later, when the potato famine made it necessary to send them "to new fields of enterprise" in their thousands.

The **Journal** quoted Sidney Smith on the subject. "The weaver in his Spittalfields garret...bathes his parched soul in visions of prairie flowers...the starving peasant whose very cottage is his master's, who has what he can never own, who poaches by stealth to keep famine from his door, whose overloaded day cannot save his hard earned sleep from the nightmare of the workhouse, and would become desperate, a lunatic or a broken man, but for the hope that he may one day plant his foot on his own American freehold, plough his own land, pursue the chase without a license...and see certain independence before him and his children." The cruel game laws were a constant cause of concern to all liberals, and to be free of them might well have been the dream of the rural poor. Yet the bitter sweet songs of separation and homesickness, especially of the close knit communities of the Highlands and Islands, show at what cost freedom was won.

The **Journal** did not go into the underlying causes of poverty amongst plenty; its duty was to expose the facts and suggest remedies. It appeared the same year, 1832, as the Reform Bill widened suffrage, but the right to vote still depended on ownership of property. The cautious liberalism the Chambers themselves espoused was reflected in its pages; slow but steady progress they insisted was the way forward. For one thing. it was pointless to allow men (they never even considered women) the right to put others into parliament when they themselves were ignorant, often illiterate.

Jerrolds Magazine could be more explicit and angry. In an article entitled "The Town Poor of Scotland" it described the situation there as "harrowing" in 1845. It had only just come to light in a report of a commission of enquiry. Six of the commissioners who were Scottish claimed that the poor were well taken care of, the English commissioner refused to sign the report. In Scotland it seemed "it is held as an axiom that to provide for the poor is to demoralise them, to afford sustenance to keep them alive will of necessity ruin their characters. Legal assessments it is argued tend to generate in the lower class a spirit of servile dependance and give encouragement to idleness and vice. In accordance with this assumption the destitute in Scotland have not as with us any **right** to relief... the only public fund to which the poor can look for relief is that derived from charitable bequests, voluntary gifts by heritors and collections made on Sundays at the church doors."

How generous were parisioners towards their poor was shown in the relatively prosperous parish of St Cuthberts in Edinburgh. In 1842 in a parish where 14,961 people were well off enough to pay rates, £117.17.4 was raised at three church doors, an average of 9d a week for each pauper. If there was a soup kitchen available, the poor had these meagre pensions reduced in an amount equal to the bowls of soup. "In Scotland" the article concluded in an apt summing up, "there is no provision for the poor as such, they are only taken under management when entirely helpless either from extreme youth or extreme age, and allowed just enough to starve upon." How many starved nobody knew, since there were no coroner's inquests. The poor only had two alternatives, either to lie down and die or to turn thief.

Before any real changes could be made in the social structure of the country, the whole country but Scotland in particular, there must be drastic rethinking on the subject of education. John Knox's Book of Discipline on which the Scottish school system was still based, was hopelessly out of date. The **Journal** apologised for the number of times the subject appeared in its pages, and pointed out that there was a real revolution going on across Europe and in the States, on teaching methods and on the necessity of giving every child the same right to schooling. No longer would heritor and cleric enjoy a cosy conspiracy to appoint and dismiss schoolmasters according to their whims and beliefs. As in Holland and the States, education must be secular, national and universal.

Scotland had for too long rested on its laurels, now dusty and drooping. The **Journal** directed its readers attention to the work of Pestalozzi and Horace Mann, both approaching the subject in radically refreshing ways. Pestalozzi believed in stimulation, pleasure, a free uncramped environment in which children could use their natural powers of intuition and expression. No more rote learning, no more rods and canes. He gathered homeless children off the streets to show that love and encouragement, and an entirely new approach to teaching, could be as effective with them as with the more privileged.

One of his scholars desribed him: "very ugly, ran about the room as though he was wild, without a coat, and without a neck cloth, his long shirt sleeves hanging down over his arms and hands." Nevertheless his successes attracted teachers from all over Europe and America, and his system became the basis for the common schools of Germany. These schools were visited by Horace Mann from Massachusets who was delighted with the way the teacher did not sit down in front of his class with his rod at the ready, but ,moved about among his pupils, "animating, encouraging, sympathising", drawing on the board and encouraging the children to join in. There was no need for the punishments that made a misery of Scottish schoolrooms. "The stripes, scolding, privations, prisonings, disgracings" visited on children, both at school and at home, were a national disgrace said Robert in a first article.

Horace Mann had set up a system of secular education which was described in detail in the **Journal** in 1849. Underlying it was the accepted right of every child to attend school and to this was attached the duty of every town to maintain schools of different grades according to their populations. These were funded by local taxes; parents provided books and stationery if they were able, the district schoolhouses and equipment, the town salaries and fuel. Overarching would be state provision. Teachers were paid £300 - £400 a year, nearly ten times the pittance they received in Scotland.

In an article of 1847 the **Journal** enthused about "The Educational Institute of Scotland" a

combination of teachers, emulating a similar "College of Preceptors" in London. These societies or unions guaranteed that their members would be properly qualified, would "eliminate the Pestalozzis from the Sqeerses". No longer would any failure, cripple, decayed tradesman, necessitous widow, pensioned off army failure be able to set up as a schoolmaster or mistress. The **Journal** thoroughly approved, and thought the government should institute a Board iof Examiners to certify the qualifications of every teacher. There were as many "quacks" in this vital area as there were in medicine. Thus would the status of the profession be raised, and children be saved from the sadistic caprices of men like Russell; Burns's black Jack, who had previously taught in the school at Cromarty attended by Hugh Miller.

On one occasion his pupils had to rescue one of their fellows from his murderous assault; according to Miller a former pupil who met him in later life fainted dead away at the sight. There were many other testimonies of the time to the cruel excesses of Scottish schoolrooms; from the Combes, from Chalmers, from Alexander Somerville among others. Such brutality if it did not stunt set an example used in later life in a brutalised population. It was not such a novel idea. Montaigne, quoted in the **Journal**, had written "Youth should be allured to instruction, not driven to it. Away with this force, this violence."

Scottish parish schoolrooms were bad enough, but in 1847 the **Journal** printed an article by a Mrs Nicolson describing one in Ireland. It was in Connemara and "may I never see the like again" she wrote, "in one corner was a pile of potatos kept from rolling down by stones on which the ragged bare footed children were seated: in another corner was a pile of cart wheels which were used for the same purpose; and in the middle of the room was a circular hole made in the ground for the turf fire: not a window, chair or bench could be seen: pupils with scarcely a book looked more like children who had sheltered themselves there in a fright to escape a mad criminal or the tomahawk of some yelling savage..." This was part of the Britain claiming to be Great.

There were private schools for both boys and girls, obviously varying in quality, but all unsupervised. The **Journa**l allowed another woman contributor to describe one of these, possibly one she herself attended. There were lessons for an hour and a half before breakfast and then the girls were kept kneeling on a cold floor listening to prayers for a further fifteen minutes. The Bible was taught as a lesson, and there was "the dullness and gloom of Sundays...and the unfortunate practice of meeting children at every turn with no lighter arguments than the day of judgement..." A system of espionage, of spying and reporting and opening letters, taught the girls to be deceitful, and as for the teaching "lessons appear to be learned in be said, and said to be speedily forgotten." It was no wonder that the girls emerged with "a solemn listlessness" which made them neither good citizens nor happy people.

Parish schools were pretty deplorable, but for the children of the destitute in the towns, roaming the streets in rags and sleeping in doorways, thieving and begging and being transported, there was hardly any provision. Just occasionally, as in Aberdeen, there was an attic where a handful of such children were gathered together, and the **Journal** reported on it with approval. Here the urchins sat round on the floor teasing hair for mattresses, picking oakum, making nets, getting a little instruction, and in the afternoon allowed to garden. They were given porridge and milk for breakfast, a hunk of bread and a tin of barley broth for lunch. In Liverpool the Ragged School was held in a building without windows or heating, but was also recommended as a model of its kind. A committee of ladies decided which children should enjoy the benefits of these schools, and those who were employed in factories were

turned away. If they were made too attractive parents would prefer Ragged Schools to mills and mines for their little ones.

The need for the **Journal** to take up all these issues; crime, poverty, education, disease; was as they explained, because it was the only way to get anything done. Over the last fifty years there had been great advances in the treatment of the poor and insane, and punishments were less harsh. Sanitation was improving, infants were being better managed, slavery was abolished, cruel sports like cock fighting were outlawed, public hangings and the vicious flogging of servicemen were under srutiny. Yet none of these reforms had been put forward by statesmen. "How curious to be hereafter told by the historian, that the great steps in civilisation which marked the second quarter of the nineteenth century were in no repect promoted but actually retarded by ministers of the crown, by all learned bodies so-called, as well as by nearly every individual who by his wealth, rank or station might have been reasonably expected to aid." The Walter Scotts and Charles Dickenses for example.

Robert enlarged on this retrospective historical appraisal of the century in an article suggested to him he said by Leigh Hunt. From the twenty second century he dreamt of the nineteenth and of its quaint beliefs. For instance the army and navy were then still glamorised, "though there was scarcely any life more devoid of all that can interest an intelligent and generous mind." Nor was war condemned; "two nations would be seen maintaining great armies and navies...each fearing that if he were unarmed the other might fall upon him" and it did not occur to anyone to condemn an activity "that tended to the cutting of throats, or because it was inconsistent with Christian brotherly love."

Education was for the higher classes, and "it was thought sufficient to learn one or two dead languages." The rod and scourge used in the schoolroom were "a curious illustration of the barbarism of that age" and the custom of grading children according to ability "led to that selfishness which rendered the society of the nineteenth century a scene of continual mutual grinding, sharping and strife." From his present twenty second century he was pleased to note "the very idea of crime is now happily unknown: criminals are considered mental cases" but in the nineteenth "a fearful system of terror was kept up...imprisonment, banishment and death...it was no uncommon thing to see a man or woman put to death in a public place with legal officers and clergymen attending...while vast multitudes of the humbler classes gloated over the butchery" On public executions **Jerrolds Magazine** was even more bitterly scornful. Why not hold them on Salisbury Plains, it asked, with cheap railway excursions on hanging days? The whole disgusting spectacle should end, become a thing of the past like the bonfires that burnt witches: "for the hangman thrown out of work, why small retiring allowances have been given to worse public servants."

The **Journal** aired its views in a series of Fireside Chats,in which two characters, Tory and Whig, discussed the topics of the day. Gil the Whig, talking of orphanages, considered these cheerless institutions quite unsuitable for the young, they should be growing up in homelike surroundings: elsewhere such family groupings in France were visited and extolled. As for almshouses, "I would prefer sheltering them from this indignity. Instead of cramming a lot of old men and women into a big house or into a row of small edifices called almshouses, I would give each poor person an allowance of so much per annum to go and live where he liked. His pittance might be of consequence in providing a decent home in the house of a brother or sister...or he might select a cheap place of residence, visit his friends in the country occasionally, or perhaps eke out his income by some trifling employment," advice

not followed up for half a century.

In 1846, after a blessed thirty years of peace, the two talked of war and its aftermath. "We get nothing out of it but misery" Gil thought, "50,000 men are kept blowing away gunpowder into the atmosphere for a whole year" who could be more profitably employed. "It is pretty clear that war is an engine of national impoverishment." Well they would not be missed these men would they demanded Stook the Tory. "The army is recruited from the least useful and respectable portion of the community, a kind of riddance of badly behaved young men." Neither of them added the quaint conclusion that on this useless dross did the country depend to be saved from its enemies, and, at a time of expanding empire, to clear out of the way inhabitants of countries which might be useful to the British.

The nature of crime and the appropriateness of punishment they disagreed about violently. Everybody knew, said Stook, that capital punishment acted as a deterrent. Gil was scathing. "That is a mere assertion. I ask you for a proof of fact and you answer by telling me that is something that everybody knows. That is no reasoning at all." Statistics proved that crimes had increased the more vicious the sentences imposed. "The spectacle of executions has on the whole a demoralising effect. It satisfies only mean and despicable feelings and never intimidates from crime nor stimulates to virtue." In fact executions were the scene of frequent robberies in the crowd. "The public should not be accustomed to see a dog strangled let alone a human being."

Needless to say **Jerrolds Magazine** took up the actual depravity of the spectacle more vividly, describing young women "running along looking at the bushes and the grass and talking of the blood and the death struggle - just as if they were looking and talking of the monkeys at the zoological gardens." One such lady "took three garden pots from a basket and then her husband dropping upon his knees turned up the earth with a large clasp knife and when he'd filled the pots dug up two or three daisy roots and set them, his wife smiling and looking as happy all the while as if she'd got a new gown." Daisies set in turf from an execution ground were apparently coveted decorations in suburban drawing rooms.

By their next fireside Gil and Stook discussed more calmly a less important topic, the building of statues and the granting of medals. Gil was critical. Why should Charles 11 and George 1V "two selfish sensualists" be preserved for posterity in prominent places? It seemed you could only "serve" your country and deserve a statue or medal if you were a king or in the armed forces. The educator, divine, man of letters, scientist apparently was performing no service. In this, as in all the subjects thw two talked of by their homely fireside, the Chambers were employing a way of raising political issues in a non-political way. It was a common device of the time; notably employed by Carlyle in his "Sartor Resartus" when the so called author was a German professor invented for the occasion.

The **Journal** dealt with all the big issues- poverty, crime, sickness, education, but they also took up the cudgels on behalf of under represented and misused sections of the population like shop assistants and governesses and poor girls employed as unpaid drudges and poor men trying to struggle through days of virtual unemployment. In a first article of 1847 Robert described the day of one of these "supernumeries." He was surprised to see a man in the street filling his hat with stones from a heap nearby, and passers by, watching this weird performance, giving him a few pence. It turned out that they thought he had taken on a bet and were generously helping him to win it.

Robert, intrigued, (and possibly with notebook at the ready) got into conversation with the stone-lifter, and asked him how he spent his day. Perhaps he thought this "gentleman" would reward him; at anyrate the man stopped what he was doing and gave an account of his daily employments. He went out as the breakfast stalls were being set up in the street, with their snowy table cloths, smoking coffee urns and huge slices of bread and butter, He could not afford any of this until he had collected some rags, bits of glass and metal and any other rubbish from housemaids in establishments nearby, which he was able to sell to wholesale dealers for sufficient to buy breakfast.

His next port of call was to an area where he knew horses were being hired, so that he could make a few more pence holding them as riders mounted and dismounted. In the afternoon, as the street filled with shoppers, he earned his dinner money by picking up things they dropped; a dinner of soup, meat and bread on days when the population was careless or jostled. In winter he might be able to help gardeners whose land was frozen and who were carrying rescued cabbages round the streets. Carriages could be run after with playbills in any weather, but fog was a bonus and he could go out and help people across roads. An execution was another fairly common windfall; the large crowds gathering for it were willing to give him something for shouting out "the history of the affair" as they passed. This he would have picked up in a tavern or from a cheap press sheet, and could without difficulty embroider upon.

Even those who were lucky enough to have work needed the **Journal** to expose the conditions in which they spent their long days. Shop assistants, particularly in drapers' establishments, were on their feet from 7 a.m. until 8 or 9 p.m., later in the summer, sometimes not released until after midnight. They stood thus in stuffy rooms lighted with gas burners which gave off unpleasant fumes, forbidden to sit down even to eat, watched by a "spy" in the back of the shop. If they failed to sell they were first reprimanded then dismissed. This gave them a bad name for dishonesty, since they were always having to tell lies about their wares. There were twenty thousand draper's assistants in London, and more waiting in the wings.

One young man wrote a piece for the **Journal**; he worked for a music publisher and his article was a self congratulatory description of how anyone can manage on 30/- a week, work uncomplainingly for thirteen hours a day, and put up with the fact that his employer does not pay him till 9 p.m. on a Saturday, too late to go to market for his next weeks provisions. He did not buy much; his diet was a threepenny brown loaf, eaten with coffee for breakfast, with an apple for dinner, with water or tea for supper. He lived in a room five stories up, and was able to save for classes in singing, Greek and German; a type the Chambers would like to set up as a example of sensible thrift and enterprise. Much like themselves as young men in fact; they often alluded to their humble beginnings.

George Combe in his best selling **"Constitution of Man**" had written with passion, repeatedly, that "the first change needed for the improvement of the working classes is a limitation of the hours of labour" but in a country with over abundant population resources, this
had to be enforced by law, a long drawn out bitterly contested business.

The Chambers were always concerned for those they considered to be exploited. In 1846 they described the working conditions in bakeries. The boys were boarded, six in a room with two beds, the ceiling so low they could not stand up. They rose at 3 a.m. and worked till 6 p.m. and were paid

partly in kind; a cunning device copied on plantations to keep labourers at heel. They could not marry of course. The **Journal** thought all bakeries should take Carrs factory at Carlisle as a model. There the lucky workforce only toiled for eleven hours a day, were paid a generous 3/- to 5/- a week and were given free biscuits.

They were admirers of Robert Owen and his New Lanark mills where a relatively benign system prevailed, though children were still exploited. Exploitation was the name of the nineteenth century game, regretted and condemned by the Chambers, but for the moment unavoidable. Patience was needed as Robert told his employees at soirees and in the **Journal**, little by little things were improving; though he admitted that in Adam Smith's world of specialisation "If a man spends his life in making the heads of pins it is quite impossible that he can preserve himself as a full and complete man." Half or quarter men must have thronged the streets of Great Britain at the height of her fame and glory.

Robert was a friend of Harriet Martineau, a single woman who had overcome both that disablity and deafness to live a full and influential life, but he knew the hardships women endured if they were without financial support from husbands or fathers. Gentility prevented them from working with their hands, their only recourse was to become governesses or companions, where they were notoriously slighted. The problems often began for them when they became, like Becky Sharp, "half boarders" in private schools. Here they were in a sort of no mans land, not unlike that of Anglo Indians, despised by both communities; they were neither servants nor pupils, and ill treated by both, lonely and overworked. Albert Russel Wallace was such a pupil/teacher to help pay his fees, and described it as "a time of very real mental anguish" which he dreamt of for twenty years. He had to wear black calico "sleeves" to save his clothes, thus proclaiming his status.

In 1847 the **Journal** looked at what was being done for governesses when they grew old or ill. Committees of ladies raised money to give them temporary relief if they were in trouble, and annuities if elderly, barely sufficient but better than starvation. There was a home, 66 Harley Street, to which they could retire if they had 15/- a week; many of them did not. It had a book in the hall where they wrote down their qualifications which must have been a shaming business for most of them. Bedrooms were shared with screens to divide them. When the Chambers visited one bed was occupied by a girl with tuberculosis. The women, they noted, were worn, weak and bad tempered which was not surprising considering this dreary end to unrewarding lives. The **Journal** wanted to see a college built where they could earn diplomas and be respected and rewarded for their skills.

They printed a piece called Single Women, written by one of these, which claimed that in England three out of five women would not marry, and would suffer various forms of degradation as a result; they would be "shamed" at balls, and would read endless novels "which impress that happiness can only be found in love and marriage." On the contrary, claimed this articulate spinster, "Marriage is a sad lottery and at the best is a state full of cares...freedom and independance ought not to be lightly parted with." Freedom could only be achieved with money in the bank however. The brother of Mary Ann Evans was worried when she appeared to be making the wrong sort of friends and jeopardising her marriage chances, for who would then support his sister George Eliott for life?

It was a time when social structures were shifting, and the nouveaux riche needed advice about how to behave in their new surroundings. The **Journal** supplied them with suitable menus for their dinner

parties, and lists of dos and donts for everyday life. Never ask the price of anything. Never use the words genteel or gentility. Never remark on the furniture in a hosts house, or anything else. Never comment on food. Dont say "How's your wife"; this is dreadfully familiar. Dont use foreign words or proverbs. Hang onto your hat for the length of a visit. Ignore anything you break; "toss aside the fragments as common rubbish." even if it is a prized heirloom; the presumption being that there were plenty more where it came from.

Railways were the great innovation of the century, and although the **Journal** frowned on the corruption and intrigue that accompanied investment, and the appalling conditions involved in their construction, it had to acknowledge the huge advantages of railway travel. Physically the comfort of train travel was infinitely superior to that of coaches, where less wealthy passengers had to put up with rudeness and blackmail in order to be seated at all, even though they they usually ended up on the roof. However it had to admit to accidents of "alarming frequency" owing to fairly basic inadequacies, such as the fact that the engineers were often illiterate and could not read the instructions on installations, train drivers were unqualified and there was no communication between them and guards, and night signals were too dim to be seen.

Passengers, understandably, were nervous. On his first journey one such passenger "has selected the middle carriage for safety and now if possible he secures the middle seat in that, for if he has a fat fellow passenger on each side and another in front he feels somwhat reassured and commences some ingenious mental calculation as to what extent his fat later friends may act as cushions should the train go off the rails, or how far the elasticity of his portly...stomach might consitute an effectual buffer for his head." A fellow traveller did not help by recounting a crash he had been in, and warning that they were now approaching a dangerous curve. Trains carried both Robert and the **Journal** with safety, helping the business as it expanded over the country.

The **Journal** introduced its readers to some of the city's characters. One of these was the small time solicitor, carrying on his trade in obscure public houses or in the jail where his favourite debtor clients were to be located. Debtors were confined for thirty days prior to trial, and there, or in their homes, Bob Shillinglaw visited them. "He would breakfast in one house upon a cessio bonorum, dine in another upon a charge of horning, and have a roaring night debauch in a third on the strength of a writ of ejectment. He also liked to have a client or two at Musselborough for it was pleasant to take a walk thither on a summer Saturday." In the Tolbooth " he was so full of instances of men who had never done any good till they had proved bankrupt one would have supposed from his discourse that there was something in the air of jail positively favourable to prosperity." This was not quite a victim, but he was glad of a meal with a client, lived with his mother, and when she died "Bob's shirt became almost as yellow as his faded nankeens."

Then there was that scourge of the publisher, particularly Robert Chambers with his reputation for courtesy; the hopeful contributor. "The appearance of his small pinched manuscripts, the humming sound of his meaningless verse, and the bad breath he offered along with it - the very <u>feel</u> of the finger which he anchored himself to my unfortunate body by a certain buttonhole - remain imperishable in my memory." Presumably this was a memory of someone dead or departed or Robert would not have exposed him in the **Journal**'s pages. He was not as dangerous as the man who came with pamphlets on how to improve Edinburgh; "To open up a new throughfare here, cut down a hill there, and throw

over a bridge to another place, were nothing to him. If he had had his will, scarcely one stone of the town would have been left upon another." Ironically William did have his will when he was later Provost, and pulled down a great many valuable old buildings in the interests of "improvement."

Sometimes the **Journal** let others speak of their lives. In 1849 it printed a piece by a girl caught up in the Indian Experience. She spent a happy childhood on an estate in the west Highlands, and then at sixteen went out to join her parents in Calcutta. "I received a fair share of attention as they took it forgranted that sooner or later I must make a good marriage...Great was their surprise on my calmly refusing Sir Herbert Silchester a fine looking man with a fine fortune." She was in love with a lieutenant. "My mother first fainted, then scolded, then passed me without speaking. My father neither lectured nor scolded...but quietly contrived to have the regiment ordered to a distant district where a fever soon carried my lover off. There seemed but one way out - namely to marry someone about to return home, so soon as I could summon resolution I accepted the proposals of Colonel Somerton, a man twenty six years my senior, because I was assured he was to return to England in the following spring." In fact he stayed in India another seven years and then died.

By then she had lost an infant son and the two daughters she sent home to school both died of scarlet fever there. At last, widowed and alone, she returned to the Highlands, to find things sadly changed. No longer did lasses trample the washing in tubs, singing the while, and then lay the linen on the grass to dry. Now " one laundry maid gets through the wash easily." Spinning wheels, porridge spurtles, cake rollers and mealtubs were cut up for firewood, box beds given to the poor. It was a sad story,but commonplace. Daughters were valuable assets to families in India, where vast sums of money were still being made to be "married into."

A character in his own family written of with nostalgic pleasure was Grandmama, though which one Robert did not say. He described her costume, for outdoors " a cloak trimmed with bear skin, with the addition in winter of a muff and tippett in the same frightful fur." feeling of seeing the fingers of the clock point to ten at night and we not in bed." Breakfast of coffee and muffins, the drinking tea in the parlour and the absence of lessons all united to make a visit to grandmama the happiest event of childhood." She remembered the 1745 rebellion, and how the rebels stole the chapel bell near her father's house to melt for bullets. Before the ball for George 111's coronation she and her friends had to stay propped up in bed all night to preserve their hair, which had taken two hours to dress. She wore a lot of rings "except after the recent death of any of her relatives when she took them off, that being her sign of deeper mourning than usual." Her favourite amusement was cleaning her silver, which she allowed the children to help with. Her education was limited to reading, writing, cooking and needlework, but she was obviously an independent and interesting woman.

There were many such opinionated, intelligent women, and the **Journal** published some of them. Camilla Toulmin for instance told its readers in 1845 "I think now as I thought then, the chase is an occupation only fit for savages and that the lover of it must be devoid of humanity." a sThis was a sentiment expressed about hunting even more forcefully in **Jerrolds Magazine:** "We somehow or other think it a duty incumbent upon us to worry and destroy every living creature who we choose to nickname vermin...the only thing next to not being created a fox which we are thankful to providence, is not being created a fox hunter." In the first issues of the **Journal** bullfighting was condemned as a sport of "excessive barbarity" which lowered a nation's character. This antipathy to blood sports did not

extend to shooting and fishing. Robert frequently resorted to Fingask Castle where his friends the Thrieplands entertained him on the moors.

The standard was exacting when it came to prose, but the **Journal** published some appalling poetry. Although from the first they had insisted that they did not want contributions from the public, they were in fact beseiged with offers and manuscripts, and particularly with poems. Robert described the terrible quality of most of the verse that penetrated into the office, and it is hard to imagine how bad it could have been, considering what they did feel was worth printing:

"The modest daisy on the hill
That drinks of morning dew its fill
And spreads its leaflets to the light
And then in quiet meek repose
Its crimson coronet doth close" was one such.

Since Walter Scott and Thomas Campbell were thought to be the poetic stars of the century, it is not surprising perhaps that such hackneyed, uninspired, humdrum rhymes should find their way into print, not only in the **Journal** but all over the place. Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron met their share of critical comment, but Scott and Campbell were set on pedestals and treated like mortals of a different kind to common humanity. People went to them as to shrines, and cherished every chance utterance as oracular. Robert visited Campbell in his later years, and was duly reverent; and this to a man who could write poems beginning:

Alone by the banks of the dark rolling Danube
Fair Adelaide hied when the battle was oer.."

and even more nauseatingly about very young girls; his preoccupation with these would raise eyebrows today, but nobody thought it out of line to write of one such:

"And through her frock I could descry
Her neck and shoulders symmetry."

For such effusions Cambell received a state funeral and a tomb in Westminster Abbey. Scott was rewarded with the most splendid memorial in the kindgdom after Prince Albert's, though the poetry that had stirred the hearts of Europe was justly written off by Emerson as "a rhymed traveller's guide to Scotland." But Emerson was unusual in thinking "the exceptional fact of the period is the genius of Wordsworth."

William and Robert soon earned the reputation as courteous editors who rejected tactfully and accepted promptly and generously. This was, especially so in Robert's case, because he knew what it was like to struggle for recognition and to wait anxiously for the good news that an article had been accepted. Both were especially considerate towards the many lady authors who saw them as a life line; the genteel with no other outlets but their pens to earn anonymously.

Mary Kingston expressed this pathetic urgency well. There had been a delay in replying to her; did

they want her story? "Sensible as I am of your liberality, I should not touch upon the subject but as you know my circumstances and that my family are supported by the exercise of my hands and brains and I am sure you will excuse my alluding to this always disagreeable and to me most painful topic." Grace Aquilar. also hanging on an answer, knew that "nothing but a great pressure of business in one so generally kind and considerate as yourself could have occasioned the delay." Elizabeth Mary Meredith sent two "trifles" and asked that if published only her intials should appear, which was the practice of the **Journal** anyway; she was fearful to be caught out in the business of making money; "a line from you as a great favour" would be waited for in the post, and these did in fact arrive for she was soon asking them to "allow me to thank you for your courteous, (more than courteous) acknowledgment of my letters...Your kind expressions went much beyond my hopes". When Julia Kavanagh had a piece returned she explained "It was written whilst I was suffering from an intolerable fit of ennui this may not have tended to improve it." but she resubmitted it with the hope that" the enclosed has been written in a happier frame of mind and may now satisfy."

"I trust I may construct your silence favourably" wrote one poor lady who had submitted a "tale", one of many with titles such as "The sister of Rembrandt." or "Eddystone Lighthouse and its Engineers." A certain Emma Lafanu begged to be relieved on the "anxiety of suspense by letting me know as soon as possible..." and when she had not heard a month later felt sure it must be "irregularity having occurred in the post." One reads with relief that three months afterwards she was sending a receipt. Many of these women became regular contributors, including Julia Kavanagh, whose advice in 1846 they must have been later sorry they did not take: that if they published novels they should, on the eve of its publication, get permission to put on their list "Jane Eyre", author unknown. Their openness about contributors caused Charles Mackay, a published author, to remark ruefully when his article was returned, "I thought I had reached the bourne from which no waste paper returns."

They were not short of ideas from all over the country, and the continent, and even Bengal. " Cottage architecture", "The peculiar customs of the Maltese" "The Hermitage of the Montmortery" "Musical Institute of the Blind in Paris" "Tapoo the Venetian Fisherman" were a few suggestions. A William Lang from the States sent his first "venture abroad" called "Saint Legers or the Shreds of Life" and William Gregory demanded that his translation of Baron Reichenbach's great work on "The Imponderables in their relation to the Vital Force" be advertised in their pages. C.J. Montagu from Calcutta sent fifteen tales which he intended to turn into three volumes "Notes of the Bulbul", "little barks on the worlds tempestous seas" which reached the harbour of the Chambers office in High Street, Edinburgh. Mr Montagu hoped to pay for his passage home to study at the bar out of his work. "From henceforth I shall regard you as my patrons" he assured the Chambers; one of innumerable petitioners whose pleas the brothers must have found hard to ignore. Offers arrived from very respectable sources too; Sir William Hooker wondering if they would like his son Joseph's letters from India, the widow of Dr Arnold of Rugby willing to sell her husbands sermons for boys.

Apart from desiring space in the **Journal**, many of their readers felt they had time to enter into correspondence about pet subjects of surely common interest. Thomas Titmarsh in 1850 knew they would want to share his conviction that the cuneiform script discovered by Professor Layard was nothing more than the imprint of partridge feet, "and how pointedly confirmed is the fact by the very marks of the Arrow discharged against them by some Nimrodian...we have merely to look where the arrow fell and then you see the imprints of the poor birds branching off to the right and plainly indicating

the death struggles..."

Mr Anderson was concerned from Inverness. "We expected this to be a great Tourist season in the Highlands but it has not turned out to be so and the class of Tourists seem not to be wealthy and respectable as it used to be. You must agitate the further alteration of our Entail Laws that we may have more land sold and more Sassanach Landlords domiciled in the Highlands." This was not a cause the **Journal** espoused, but they did publish on Swedish folklore and for once it was not appreciated. "I will never put my name to a manufactured flimsy run up ping done in the smallest time" its author wrote complaining of his small fee. He wanted £60 and a few free copies.

Cries for help were constant, both financial and otherwise; how many of them were answered is nowhere recorded. Many asked for work, for themselves or for friends and relations. ""Can you, will you endeavour to aid him and me in this distressing emergency?" pleaded a father for his destitute son. "He is or at least was a superior compositor." Another pleaded on behalf of a "distressed genius", bastard son of a poor man who has taken to drink but could be rescued by work; not on the face of it a useful addition to the staff but "think it a just tribute to your character at once to bring it before you." Gratitude was often expressed for the **Journal**'s help. Alexander Bethune, after a story was accepted, thanked them for the prospect he now had of eking out his small income, and his ability to build a wall round the grave of his recently expired paralytic mother.

William and Robert very soon became a mixture of Citizens Advice Bureau and agony uncle. They were asked for advice on cures for squinting, the origin of a large stone in Broughton, where to emigrate and what to take; one hopeful emigrant asked for them to come down to the quay to see him off. They were thanked from Durham in 1844 by a draper's assistant for an article in which they had urged the need for shorter working hours for his profession. As a result of it he and his fellows had joined to petition successfully for such shorter hours. They were now able to join mechanics institutes and literary societies and a news room was soon to be opened.

Because of the influence the **Journal** wielded, they were asked to advertise quack recipes, such as inhaling creosote vapour as a cure for consumption, plans to build working men's houses for £20 including a pigsty, the founding of various new types of schools, original uses for peat and much else. They were approached by these, the hopeful but not always practical, but also by the distinguished, notably Edwin Chadwick who sent them in 1842 the first copies of his sanitary report. He accompanied it with a long letter detailing the problems he had getting it through parliament. "Not one step of it has been made that has not been received grudgingly and unwillingly. All the materials I had at so much pains collected were thrown aside and notwithstanding the vote of the House of Lords it was determined that there would be no report." Chadwick was a hard man to stop, and he continued to clean up the country until his eighties, taking in his stride sewers, water closets, public baths, manure and the dreadful state of cemeteries. Sanitation was a subject close to the Chambers hearts as well, and in 1850 they published a pamphlet exclusively devoted to it, which they dedicated to Chadwick.

Thanking them he wrote "With such aid as yours public interest has been widely excited, but we have long and weary work before us." He had opposition from all sides, particularly the landed interests who were asked to contribute, through taxation, to large scale drainage schemes. Dickens was their spokesman, and headed a petition. The taxation he said "would fall most unjustly and oppressively on

your memorialists, whose manor houses, pleasure grounds arable lands and pasture grounds could neither directly nor indirectly derive any benefit whatever." an attitude that the **Times** described as "the selfishness of wealth." In this area, as in others such as education and the poor law, the **Journal** would seem to have gone beyond its remit as a non-political publication, but over the years scrutiny of such an influential and popular piece of journalism relaxed.

In the year that Chadwick sent them his report, 1842, Robert was on the verge of a breakdown, and there was discussion about both his role in the **Journal**, and whether to continue it at all. By that time there were other profitable outlets, almost too many; Tracts, Miscellanies, an Educational Course, cheap editions of books both for adults and children, encyclopoedias; the **Journal** was not the most popular of their publications, but it was the first, and it had a faithful readership, and in the end, with the assistance of editors and with Robert's recovery, it continued until 1956. Its success was largely owing to its refusal to shift from the principles on which it was founded; to be a family paper, sensible, moral, concerned, but also entertaining and stimulating.

For those who wanted even more detailed information, cheaply packaged but reliably researched, the firm was ready and eager to oblige. Once the **Journal** was established, in fact within a year, they began to produce a series of cheap pamphlets variously called Information, Miscellany, Tract or simply Paper, which appeared in weekly sheets and were then collected into volumes to form mini encyclopoedias. In fact the first of these, **Information for the People** which appeared in 1833, was described as "a poor man's cyclopoedia" when collected into two volumes priced 12/6. In spite of its many rivals and successors, a new edition in 1849 sold forty five thousand copies in America.

"For a still humbler class" were the **Tracts** of 1845, eighty thousand a year at three halfpence a sheet being "an unobtrusive friend and guide, a lively fireside companion" for two years to this humble audience. Twice monthly volumes of eight numbers were issued, priced one and six, thus building up a small library at many firesides where books were normally luxuries. The **Miscellany** of 1847 was for "a better class of tradesman", followed three years later by **Papers for the People** whose target was not divulged. Astutely and very profitably the Chambers saw exactly where the openings in the market were, and how much potential readers could afford. Many of them could not rise to the **Journal** which was aimed at "men in counting house, shop, workroom...the elite of the working community." By this time they had editorial assistance, starting with David Page with **Information**, a man they later trusted with their Education Course and with Robert's daring **"Vestiges of Creation"**, to their deep regret.

Although there was something patronising in their cool assessments of likely readers, the publications themselves were scrupulously researched and carefully and seriously presented, with no sloppiness or simplifications to insult however humble a class of reader. As in the **Journal**, all important subjects were discussed; education, sanitation, railways, Savings Banks, the colonies, the Highlands; mostly with discrimnation, though inevitably prejudices were reinforced; the Highlander for instance is "patient, docile, obedient and economical, but is generally conceived to be a little lazy and selfish. He has little or no enterprize...he is not prized in any civil profession" **Tracts** readers were told, and of African tribes "Stunted representatives of humanity who, under the name of Bushmen, roam in indescribable misery and degradation" was a standard evaluation of native peoples. The unfortunates of Australia belonged to "the lowest family of the human race" and were "ugly even to repusliveness" but no matter "these wild men will never be reclaimed, but will be driven deeper into the wilderness...until ultimately all will perish under the breath of English civilisation", a prediction unhappily accurate. The

poor by their firesides may have been comforted by learning of human beings so much lower down the ladder of creation.

Their working class readers, without libraries, were particuarly interested in the movement of Mechanics Institutes, and the **Papers** gave a detailed account of the inception and growth of these worthy institutions. At the beginning of the century the only place to find a book was in the pub, the only affordable amusements were provided by beer and tobacco, cock fighting, pigeon flying or boxing, but by 1823 there was "a general movement to educate the working class", fostered by Cobbett, Bentham and Wilkie and expressed in Scotland in the School of Arts of Edinburgh in 1821. Thirty years later, when the **Papers** were discussing them, there were four hundred Mechanics Institutes in the country, but sadly they were not always doing the job for which they were intended; being a meeting place and source of information to those who really needed it.

What had gone wrong? Often the buildings were isolated and hard to reach at the end of a working day. The lectures they provided; "Plaster and Wax Casting", "The Structure and History of the Articulated and Molluscous Classes of Animals", "The Poets of the Guelphic Era" were not immediately appealing, and an evening in the pub was considered preferable to attending them. Those who did attend were thought by their workmates as sycophants, only going in order to please their employers. Over the years evenings had degenerated into singsongs with "a few anecdotes being thrown in between" by way of a lecture. Those who gathered there were mostly professional classes, merchants, shopkeepers, clerks, warehousemen, and their interests more political rather than scientific, particularly in Scotland where the prediction of a Glasgow magistrate looked to be fulfilled; "Science and learning if universally diffused would speedily overturn the best constituted government on earth."

In spite of all these dangers and disappointments, Robert was sure "they will soon become one of the greatest modern agencies in improving and extending education among the people" if certain chamges were made in their running. One of the problems, and here he used capital letters showing how great he considered it, was WANT OF EDUCATION so that vast numbers were illiterate and the haphazard evening classes provided were useless. The institutes should own their buildings, and have day schools attached to them teaching systematically and regularly. They should be self supporting, though exactly how this would be achieved he did not say; presumably employers, such as themselves, would subsidise such a worthy cause. By this time their own Educational Course was providing books on every subject which could be consulted by both teachers and pupils.

The prospectus for the Educational Course appeared in 1835, three years into the **Journal**, and it mirrored the enthusiasm both William and Robert felt for a more scientific approach to teaching. As well as the usual classical subjects, it would provide books on Geology, Botany, Zoology., Metereology, Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, Geometry, Astronomy and Political Economy. It advertised these forthcoming works with the assurance that the course was "calculated as much as possible for the use of uninstructed persons of all kinds and in all circumstances;" like everything else they published it would be undertaken with the utmost care and seriousness, but the results would be accessible to the understanding and pockets of the working classes.

One of the authors, William Carpenter, a much respected physiologist, might have been surprised to have a letter telling him exactly what was expected. "We still would press upon you our wish that the

matter of this little book should be as free as possible from hesitating and dubious statements and that all should be as direct and as simply declaratry of ascertained truth as we can make it consistently with the actual condition of the science." The book should be suitable "for being announced by a teacher to a class as a series of statements, and for being read by a pupil in private, for this reason the personal pronoun should never appear in it." The cost should be kept in mind; it must be as cheap as possible. Dr Carpenter complied, but asked £30 for his trouble which Robert found excessive. However he turned to Carpenter when he was in trouble with '**Vestiges"** and athough he complained again at the cost of his assistance, he valued both the knowledge and the open-mindedness of this Unitarian scholar.

Remembering their own schooldays,and the dreary monotony of rote learning from boring texts, and inspired by visits to the continent and to Glasgow to watch the methods employed there by a certain Alex. D'Orsey, William and Robert approached this, their most inspired and important publishing venture, with missionary zeal. David Page oversaw the course, and it had two German editors, Dr Zumpt of Berlin, and Schmitz of Edinburgh High School; Germany was the most scholarly country in Europe and its professors much sought after. D'Orsey was getting a country wide reputation for his method of presentation, practice, performance; Charles Dickens made a point of seeing him when he went north. When they branched into material for infant schools the Chambers got their contributor Simpson to provide lesson plans, an entirely novel idea.

By 1849 sixty eight volumes had appeared, and were being used world wide, translated into Mahratta among other languages. Robert wrote three of them; "History of the English Language and Literature" in 1835 and **"History of the British Empire"** and **"Introduction to the Sciences"** in 1836. Other contributors were John Hill Burton, Leitch Ritchie and David Masson, men picked for their communicating skills as much as their scholarship. Burton's contribution on **Political Economy** was read by the great Japanese scholar Fukizawa on his visit to England in , translated into Japanese, and used as a basis for his own seminal studies, which became standard works and the foundation of Japanese economic thinking.

The correspondence with David Masson survives, and shows how the Chambers, and their editor David Page, recognised in a struggling twenty five year old journalist a future professor and eminent biographer. In 1848 " a kind offer of assistance" was made to Masson after the collapse of a magazine to which he had contributed five articles, unpaid for, "rather annoying to a poor literary fellow" who was permanently in need of money as he wrote to John Hill Burton. The Chambers interest in him came as a ray of sunlight, and continued to play on him until four years later when, with Robert's help again, he was appointed Professor of Englsh Language and Literature at London university.

Masson wrote an ancient and a modern history for the educational course, and was ready to produce works on American literature, British emigration, Luther, Calvin and the Reformation in France, Loyola and the Jesuits, Dante His life and times; and with every offer came a plea for money. For his modern history he was paid £120, in installments as the chapters went to press, "Please send cheque payable on sight £15 plus price of paper" he wrote as he sent off the first installment. The work was in three volumes, book three covered the Feudal System, the Norman Conquest, the Crusades and Reformation which seems as modern as it became, and his need for instant cash continued to be voiced throughout the correspondence. He asked for a reference from Robert when he applied for the post at London university, and thirteen years later he moved on to Edinburgh where he held his chair for thirty

years, writing a monumental life of Milton and ending up as Historiographer Royal.

The educational course was the crowning achievement of Chambers the publishers. With it they instructed a generation, before the act of 1872 which brought the whole system under central control. William and Robert had commended this state system for many years, but they were none too pleased when in 1853 a National Board was going to publish school books. They wanted to keep this lucrative monopoly and William wanted a public meeting which would give the government a "strong remonstrance" on the subject. In this (unfulfilled) object, they showed both extraordinary confidence and selfish greed. They were thinking more of their own pockets than the universal need for educational material. Perhaps it was forgivable in a year of stress when their business concerns were in jeapardy from the "failure" of their agent Orr, and William was suffering dizzy fits and threatening to retire. They would have been cheered to see forward to a time when their manual of economics became the basis for the fastest growing economy in the world.

How much of all this enterprise was Robert's, and how far the opinions expressed in the **Journal**, the **Tracts, Miscellanies** and **Papers**
were his is impossible to say. His First Articles come closest to revealing his thoughts, though even here one must be cautious; he was wearing the hat of Philosopher and Friend, and his private memo books reveal a more caustic, bareheaded approach, especially to the church; he had to assume a reverential stance in a family paper. It is interesting that his growing absorption and final conviction over spiritualism is not discussed publicly. He was aware of the scorn likely to be poured on his head by the men of science he greatly respected, if he acknowledged more than a passing interest in such a flimsy world of charlatans and hysterical women. One or two men of stature agreed with him; Robert Owen and Wallace for example; but there were others who thought that it was a matter of serious consideration whether spiritualists should be labelled mad.

Though it is difficult, perhaps even dangerous, to read in the pages of the **Journal** the mind of its chief contributor, it seems clear that Robert's political views were reflected in its pages. At thirty he was still under the influence of Scott, regretting the passing of the old and "natural" order and unwilling to see changes. His friendship with George Combe and his liberal circle broadened his outlook, and the **Journal** began its campaign of pleading for better housing, schools, sewers, working hours, poor relief, justice, animal welfare, medical training. It became the spokesman for Chadwick and Bright and Harriet Martineau and reported on any continental scheme that seemed in advance of the British. It did not go deeply into the underlying causes of the general distress, or how to finance all the improvements it demanded; that the economy was thriving was self evident, and that it was the "selfishness of wealth" that needed to be addressed was equally plain.

In 1842 Robert's breakdown ended the first ten years of the **Journal**, and there was talk at the time of closing it down, but this crisis passed. Editorial assistance, Robert's recovery, his ten children and obvious need for funds, kept it going and it was during this period that the firm expanded in all the other directions that were so profitable. Until 1849 its concerns were much the same, but at that date a new and harder, less liberal, more reactionary note entered its pages. It began to repeat more often what it had previously called a mockery; the view that the poor had only themselves to blame, that after all the years of effort expended on them they were still an eyesore. Crime had increased, they married and bred too young, there were just too many of them in spite of all those empty spaces in the empire

created just for their occupation.

For instance it is a shock to read an article of July 1849 on crime and poverty. "A few years ago the national mind was all for tenderness, kinder treatment and reformation, severity was scouted as unChristian and inhuman" and what was the result? Comfortable prisons were no longer a punishment and so crime was on the increase; obviously sterner treatment was called for; flagellation for petty offences, and for juvenile criminals both flagellation and prison. Was this the same Chambers who had written the piece about the twenty second century where crime was considered an illness and treated as such?

And what about the friend of George Combe, passionately in favour of shorter working hours? The Factory Act of 1847 had reduced these hours to ten but "very many of the persons employed seem to have taken it forgranted that when trade revived as it has done they would be able to prevail on their employers to pay them twelve hours wages for ten hours work." In other words the wretchedly paid labour forces were to have their wages cut, and cease to complain about it. When this happened in Glasgow, and seven thousand went on strike for a restoration of their old rates, the **Journal** advised a relay system, with outsiders brought in to break the strike.

A kinder view on crime appeared later in the year; the alarming increase in juvenile offences showed up the country as being behind France in its legislation; there children under sixteen were not held responsible and not imprisoned. What were the causes of crime in Britain? The father died, and the mother remarried, providing a stepfather who turned out her children to sleep in cellars, homeless abandoned and starving. Or perhaps both parents died, and then there was no legal machinery for the young. "The iron hand of the law does not hold out the tip of its little finger to aid the orphan out of the gulf of ignorance and crime." Moreover two million pounds a year were spent on legal fees over these small micreants. Was this the same person who was a few months before advising flagellation and prison?

The only encouraging sign that Robert might not be involved in the **Journal**'s opinions at this point, was the fact that he was touring Scandinavia in the autumn of 1849. From there he reported their "strange" inheritance laws, which ensured that a married woman's property was fairly divided and reserved for her children if her husband died. This he felt was a deprivation of personal freedom, and such "interferences tend to stop people acquiring property." However he did admit that the country was prosperous with a large, comfortable middleclass.

In Sweden he was surprised by the relaxed attitude towards "fallen women." Forty two percent of births were illegitimate, but the children were not scorned and neglected, they were sent to be cared for in small family type schools. Their mothers were not stigmatised either, "we do not find among them that abandonment to drink, that fearfully rapid course of deprivation and that inevitable shortening of existence which is the dire consequence of the loss of female virtue in England." As the **Journal** had previously pointed out, the very best that girls in trouble could expect in Presbyterian Scotland was to be sent to work in a laundry, or be exported to the colonies as mates and drudges to unknown men.

Robert's notebooks reveal how he obtained many of the ideas for his articles; like all journalists he was always on the look out for a "story", and he wrote his pieces with a fluent ease which is apparent in

one that has been preserved; it has very few corrections. Indeed. given his vast output; histories and biographies and folklore and scientific articles on top of the firms publications, it would have been impossible for him to function if he had not written easily. William referred to him as a "retired scholar" but his diaries do not bear out this picture; he lived a full social life, gave time to his large family, travelled to Iceland, Scandinavia, the continent and America, and lectured frequently. His unusually good memory and need of little sleep made possible his output. Nothing he wrote was slipshod, he researched with scrupulous care, though he seems simply to have written his findings on scraps of paper. Before the days of footnotes he did not need to keep his referecnes anywhere but on spare sheets and in his head, but scholars who have followed in his footsteps have rarely been able to fault him, except in scientific areas where his knowledge was culled from then credited sources.

The firm of W. & R. Chambers was a publishing phenomenon, and one of the amazing things about it was how the brothers continued to run it smoothly and profitably through years of general uncertainty, when other magazines came and went, and the business world was frequently shaken by "crashes." Even when their agent Orr was bankrupted, owing them a considerable sum, they weathered the storm, and put their London office into the hands of their youngest brother David; hands that proved almost equally unsteady, but whose dealings they could supervise.

The year of Orr's "failure", 1853, was worrying all round. Robert described it as a "crisis" with a great deal more competition from other publications. William was having dizzy fits and decided his health too fragile to continue with all the burdens of the business, particularly as Robert had chosen this moment to take a house in London for a year. In April he wrote "The truth is that what with my evidently weakened health and my plan of residing much in the country I cannot possibly see my way to carrying on here rightly as a permanence, without you." He had threatened to pull out seven years earlier, and Robert had tentatively offered his friend Alexander Ireland the job in the firm. He would have been much happier to work with Ireland, but in fact William outlived them both, achieving an active eighty three. The general ignorance about symptoms led to all sorts of wrong decisions at this time.

Orr was asking for compensation for his dismissal, and the Chambers' solicitor urged them to be wary, considering "the enormous amount you have in Orr's hands and the necessity of keeping him up till you are clear." They extricated themselves with a loss of xxx and opened their own agency in London, under the control of their brother David, who became a partner. With the dissolution of the original partnership the firm's stock, buildings and debts were valued at £56,595, plus £3,500 profit for half a year. In spite of the competition and the upheavals they were doing very well. There was no need to be extravagant however; William asked for measurements of the windows in their new office, so that he could have frames and glass sent down from Edinburgh, thus making a small saving.

In spite of this year of minor crisis, every undertaking was a success, every editorial decision, jointly taken, proved justified. Yet the famous brothers, William and Robert Chambers, were drifting apart in their private lives, and rarely met except at the office.

A memorandum written on a sheet of loose paper in 1871 shows how arid had grown their relationship. William, at seventy one, jotted down his thoughts on the year. "This has been a trying year for me. The death of Robert and David (in March) my only surviving brothers, substantially lays the whole burden of the business on me...much less vexatious than the trouble with David's girls." David had left his affairs in a mess, and William was trying, unsuccessfully, to organise his three young

daughters. "I busied myself with writing the memoir of Robert his life not possessing much incident I infused into the memoir some reminiscences of my own early struggles."

No mention of sorrow or regret at Robert's passing, simply a fretful resentment at the extra work for himself; this is a sad ending to fifty years of working together and creating a publishing empire. His view of Robert's life as being without incident is curious, considering the travels, the many books including one which shook the whole country. Even after his death William kept quiet about **"Vestiges"**, whether out of embarrassment or simple disinterest is hard to say. He was busy at this time restoring St Giles, but interrupted in June 1872 by the "anguish" at losing a dog. "Our dear little Fanny died, I took her to be buried at Glenormiston. This little dog has for years been a solace to my existence. Her death leaves a painful blank. As in the case of Freddy her predecessor I am inconsolable. Surely God has given the dog to man to amuse and to cheer him and lighten his burdens. The loss of this humble companion now is correspondingly agonising." Childless, William and his wife got solace from several dogs, and a donkey; yet the constrast between his feelings on losing Fanny and and on losing his brother and partner of a lifetime is very revealing.

After William's death, Robert's eldest son Robert took over the company, and then his son Charles Edward Stuart, and a grandson Tony was the last editor, retiring in . In 1994 the business was bought out by Larousse of France, but is now back trading under its own name, in partnership with Harraps. Its excellence as a producer of dictionaries and encyclopoedias is generally acknowledged, but all the other work of its co-founder Robert Chambers largely forgotten; which is a pity because he was not only one of the most distinguished Scotsmen of the century, but an unrivalled reporter on middle class Edinburgh. He himself would like to have been remembered as a geologist, but his fire had so many irons in it that he could never get that one really hot. The man to whom he gave a start in the **Journal**, Hugh Miller, achieved much more in that chosen field, and wrote a glowing testimony of Robert Chambers, the publisher.

"There is perhaps no other writer of the present day who has done so much to encourage struggling talent as this gentleman...his criticizms invariably bear the stamp of a benevolent nature...his kindness does not stop with these cheering notices, for he finds time, in the course of a busy life, to write many a note of encouragement and advice to obscure men...and he pays for the quality of the work, not the fame of his authors." In the harsh, competitive world of nineteenth century journalism, such an editor was indeed rare. Has anyone ever written such a tactful rejection as the one Robert sent in November 1840?

"I very much regret that my brother has not joined me in thinking the enclosed contributions suitable. I return them very unwillingly, and would hope that you will not be discouraged from allowing us a sight of any other little effusions which you may produce in the intervals of your laborious profession. I remain with much esteem..." It is just possible that if Robert had spent less time writing kindly letters to all the unknowns who approached him, he would have succeeded in the scientific field which most attracted him. Given his benevolent nature he really had little choice in the matter.