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‘An overpowering “itch for writing” ’:
R. K. Philp, John Denman and the culture of self-improvement*

ABSTRACT

After a briefly prominent career in Chartism, Robert Kemp Philp (1819-82) became one of the most-widely published authors in Victorian Britain, promoting self-help and self-improvement through education. From a background in magazine journalism, he moved to producing serialised reference works which when completed were re-published in book form. This hybridisation of periodical journalism and the non-fiction book created a genre distinct from popular novels, non-fiction and magazines, yet one which was indebted to all three. The best-known, Enquire Within Upon Everything (1856) sold almost 1.3 million copies by 1900 and remained in print until 1973. However, Philp has not enjoyed an enduring reputation: almost all his work was published anonymously, while the consumption of popular non-fiction has been largely overlooked in histories of the printed word.

John Denman (fl. 1863-69) inhabited the shadier world of horse racing where he was a high-stakes gambler and promoted off-course betting after it was criminalised. The article establishes a profound connection between the apostle of self-improvement and the mercurial man of the Turf: Denman was Philp’s alias. Their careers are reconstructed and analysed. Social ambition and a desire for fame impelled Philp to be a profligate author; but both he and his alter ego claimed to systematise hitherto opaque, confusing and inaccessible fields of knowledge. Philp took significant risks legally, financially and with his family’s reputation and well-being. This contrasts sharply with the picture of domestic contentment Philp assiduously promoted as a writer, but ideals of self-improvement underpinned them both.

Suggested running heads

Recto The culture of self-improvement

Verso An overpowering ‘itch for writing’

This article is about two men, each of whom made a distinctive, even important, contribution to fields of increasing prominence in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Robert Kemp Philp (1819-82), a prominent Chartist, went on to become one of the most-widely published authors of the Victorian era. He energetically promoted some of its most proclaimed virtues: family values, self-help, temperance and thrift. His best-known book enjoyed unparalleled popularity: Enquire Within Upon Everything (1856) passed through ninety-seven editions by 1900, claiming 1,291,000 sales.[1] Its 125th and final edition appeared in 1973. Yet Philp has not enjoyed an enduring reputation: his fifty-six books were mostly published anonymously and even historians of Chartism pay him scant attention.

John Denman (fl. 1863-69) inhabited the shadier world of horse racing where his entrepreneurial flair briefly made him a powerful figure in the endurance of off-course betting in the years after it was criminalised. He was also a noted racehorse owner and gambler in his own right. Yet John Denman is even more obscure than R.K. Philp. However, there was a profound connection between the earnest Chartist and apostle of self-improvement, and the mercurial man of the Turf: they were one and the same person. This article reconstructs the careers of Philp and Denman. It analyses why each was influential; and in explaining why Philp developed so sharply contrasting an alter ego, considers what this might tell us about social aspiration in mid-Victorian Britain.

Philp's national prominence in Chartism culminated in 1842 in a ferocious argument with the movement's greatest but most controversial leader Feargus O'Connor.[2] Following this, in Dorothy Thompson's words, 'he disappeared from radical politics'.[3] This is not strictly true: he was briefly involved in several radical liberal initiatives but mostly he concentrated on producing self-improving literature aimed at the same constituency as the Chartists – literate workers and the lower middle classes. Born into a Cornish Unitarian family, Philp had trained as a printer. In

* I am grateful to Shirley Chase and the anonymous EHR readers to whom this article was originally sent for many helpful comments and suggestions.

[1] [R.K. Philp,] Enquire Within Upon Everything (97th edn, London, 1900), pp. i, v.

[2] R.G. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-54 (1854; 2nd edn, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1894), pp. 205, 209, 212-13, 402, 408; M. Chase, Chartism: A New History (Manchester, 2007), pp. 194-5, 229.

[3] D. Thompson, The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution (London, 1984), p. 269.

1837, a precocious eighteen year-old, he became a partner in a Bristol printer-publishers' business. Almost all the forty titles appearing under its imprint were religious or educational literature but Philp's energies were soon directed into Chartism and centred on Bath. He first appeared in the Chartist press in May 1839, alongside Bath's leading radical William Prowting Roberts, supporting a Chartist shopkeeper prosecuted for possessing firearms and displaying bullets labelled 'Pills for the Tories'.[4] Philp was himself prosecuted both for selling newspapers on the Sabbath and for seditious libel as a vendor of Western Vindicator, a newspaper suspected (correctly) of passing covert messages between Welsh and English Chartists before the Newport Rising.[5] He was found guilty but discharged on sureties and since *Vindicator's* editor Henry Vincent was soon behind bars (like Roberts), Philp's prominence among western England's Chartists grew. He was elected as Wiltshire's delegate to the 1840 Chartist Convention. He took a leading role in writing the constitution of the National Charter Association (NCA) and soon became one of its full-time salaried lecturers as well as elected to its Executive in a nationwide ballot.[6] He courted controversy as the first speaker to address an openly advertised Chartist meeting in Newport after the Rising, for which he was arrested, and in leading disruptions of public meetings organised by the Anti-Corn Law League and by Anglican clergy ('the formidable enemy of the people', Philp claimed).[7]

In 1841, with the recently liberated Henry Vincent, he launched National Vindicator, described by O'Connor's powerful Northern Star as its 'ablest fellow-worker in the cause of Chartism'.[8] When the NCA executive initiated Chartism's second National Petition, Philp became, in O'Connor's words, its 'superintendant'. Philp later claimed he wrote all its text, though others jointly credited Peter

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[4] Brighton Patriot, 14 Mar. 1839. R.B. Pugh, 'Chartism in Somerset and Wiltshire', in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies (London, 1959), pp. 184-5, 188, 193.

[5] Southern Star, 1, 22 Mar. 1840; N[orthern] S[tar], 4 Apr. 1840; O. Ashton, 'The Western Vindicator and early Chartism' in J. Allen and O. Ashton, Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press (London, 2005); Pugh, 'Chartism in Somerset', p. 194; The National Archives, HO27/62/62, July 1840.

[6] *Robert Kemp Philp's Vindication of his Political Conduct* (Bath [1842]) p. 18; NS, 25 July, 28 Nov., 12 Dec. 1840; 9 Jan., 10 Apr., 5 June, 7 Aug. 1841; English Chartist Circular, 30 [Aug. 1841], p. 117.

[7] Bristol Mercury, 31 Oct. 1840; NS, 26 Dec. 1840, 14 Apr. 1841, 15 May 1841.

[8] NS, 18 Sept. 1841.

McDouall, one of the movement's most unflinching advocates of civil disobedience.[9] The petition text certainly bears some of the hallmarks of Philp's later writing, its considerable length (almost 3,000 words) mitigated by sub-division into focussed, if somewhat randomly ordered, short paragraphs. These accumulated rhetorical weight rather than constructed an argument; but this was the fullest statement of Chartism's principles, wider-ranging and more-readable than the *People's Charter*.[10] Presented in May 1842 with 3,317,752 signatures attached, Philp's brain child remains the single largest pre-digital petition ever presented to Parliament.

Yet even before it was presented a fissure had opened between Chartists favouring an alignment with sympathetic middle-class reformers and those who believed Chartism's potency derived from the articulation of workers' grievances by them alone, with middle-class supporters in a strictly ancillary role. O'Connor, with his passionate oratory on behalf of blistered hands and unshorn chins, exemplified this stance. The so-called 'New Move', most-closely associated with William Lovett, epitomised the conciliators. Philp socialised with 'the governor', as he privately called O'Connor, also eulogising him in song ('Britons now by Feargus stand').[11] However he was a small businessman without direct experience of labouring life in Chartism's industrial heartlands; and his closest associates, Roberts and Vincent, had recently emerged from gaol more wary of confrontation than when they went in. On national platforms Philp supported O'Connor but locally he and Vincent were more conciliatory. Radical politics in Bath, a city without large-scale manufacturing, was fluid and its Chartists receptive to overtures from the largely middle-class National Complete Suffrage Union (NCSU), led by the Quaker and anti-slavery campaigner Joseph Sturge.[12]

The NCSU held its first meeting in Bath in March 1842: Philp and Vincent attended and responded positively. Philp emphatically endorsed the Charter but

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[9] NS, 28 May 1842, 2 Dec. 1848; *P[eople's] J[ournal]*, 2 Jan. 1846, 'Annals of Progress'.

[10] The National Petition of the Industrious Classes (Leeds, 1842); NS, 28 May 1842.

[11] NS, 25 Sept., 13 Nov. 1841; J. Watkins, *John Watkins to the People in Answer of Feargus O'Connor* (London, 1844), pp. 16-17.

[12] Pugh, 'Chartism in Somerset', pp. 174, 202; Vindication p. 5; NS, 26 Feb. 1842. T. Scriven, 'Activism and the everyday: the practices of radical working-class politics, 1830-42', University of Manchester D.Phil. thesis (2012), pp. 88-97, 129-33, 205-19; A. Tyrell, Joseph Sturge and the Moral Force Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain (Bromley, 1987), pp. 119-31.

welcomed Sturge's initiative since he was 'for going with any party for justice'. Others were less-sympathetic, notably *Northern Star's* reporter whose account emphasised criticisms of O'Connor's hostility to Sturge. Close to it the paper placed an editorial, 'The Humbug Trap', lamenting Philp and Vincent's stance.[13] This was the hinge on which Philp's career turned. Mirroring the so-called 'New Move', attitudes to Philp rapidly became a test of loyalty to O'Connor.[14] It says much for his status within Chartism that in June, at the end of a week when an assassination attempt had been made on the Queen, Northern Star devoted five-times more coverage to refuting Philp's arguments.[15] Supporting Sturge 'brought down upon R.K. Philp the anathema of O'Connor', one of his supporters later wrote, and his 'honesty as a Chartist was by that one act eternally damned'.[16] Critics concluded Philp 'had deserted from the straight-forward path of democracy'.[17]

Sales of National Vindicator slumped and the paper folded in April 1842, its partners mired in debt and acrimony.[18] Philp lost his place on the NCA executive and immediately issued a furious Vindication of his Political Conduct that left little scope for rapprochement with O'Connor.[19] At the stormy December 1842 conference that saw the NCSU decisively rejected, Philp was one of only two Chartists present who opposed O'Connor. Following the searing social tensions that surrounded what effectively had been a general strike in northern England that summer, antagonism to middle-class reformers had hardened; even William Lovett overcame his considerable antipathy to O'Connor to make common cause with him at this conference.[20] Philp's personal popularity crashed and in quick succession so too did his monthly Union Advocate (arguing 'the necessity for the union of the middle and working classes'),

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[13] Vindication, pp. 3-5; Pugh, 'Chartism in Somerset', pp. 202-3; NS, 12 Mar. 1842; National Association Gazette, 19 Mar. 1842.

[14] NS, 19 and 26 Mar., 2 Apr. and 7 May 1842; Vindication, pp. 27-8; Chase, Chartism, pp. 168-78.

[15] NS, 4 June 1842. For other examples of hostility to Philp over this issue see NS, 12-26 Mar., 11 June 1842, and 7 Jan. 1843.

[16] J. Jackson, The Demagogue Done Up: An Exposure of the Extreme Inconsistencies of Mr. Feargus O'Connor (Bradford, 1844), pp. 30-31.

[17] NS, 7 Sept. 1844.

[18] Scriven, 'Activism and the everyday', pp. 216-7.

[19] NS, 25 June 1842, 13 May 1848; Vindication.

[20] NS, 31 Dec. 1842, 7 and 14 Jan. 1843; Chase, Chartism, pp. 227-9.

the Temperance Post Magazine with which he replaced it, and the pro-NCSU British Statesman for which he worked.[21]

The personal consequences of these failures must have been considerable, for in August 1842 Philp had married Laura Willis, a Bath dressmaker.[22] He now joined Sentinel, a liberal paper so closely identified with the anti-Corn Laws agitation it closed within days of their repeal.[23] Philp then became assistant editor on the *People's* Journal, one of several 'magazines of popular progress' operating at the margins of Chartism and in which Lovett and the Quaker complete suffragists William and Mary Howitt were involved.[24] Philp also became a temperance lecturer, thereby remaining connected to the moral earnestness regularly encountered in Chartism. Philp, though, eschewed preaching or moralising, instead focussing on alcohol's impact on the human body: 'ignorant of physiology, man stumbles at every tread'. He also argued against the consumption of tobacco, snuff and meat.[25] At the 1846 World Temperance Convention in London, he met the anti-slavery campaigner William Lloyd Garrison and promptly offered to energise the British campaign for abolition. Three million signatures, 'an emanation from England's hearts', would be collected as Chartism's 1842 petition had been and constitute a remonstrance, paraded solemnly to Liverpool from whence it would be taken to America. This 'sublime idea', thought Garrison, would 'cause the heart of every abolitionist … to leap for joy and … carry dismay to that of every slaveholder and enemy to the coloured race'.[26] British anti-slavery, however, was not Chartism. British workers had never adopted abolition with the fervour they devoted to parliamentary reform. Indignation at the apparent hypocrisy of middle-class abolitionists who ignored abuses of liberty at home was widespread.

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[21] Union Advocate, 1 Nov. 1842 and see *Cleave's Penny Gazette*, 29 Oct. 1842; National Temperance Magazine, May 1844; British Statesman, 21 Jan. 1843.

[22] Marriage Certificate, 4 August 1842, West London Union Register Office,

[23] D. Evans, Funding the Ladder: The Passmore Edwards Legacy (London, 2011), pp. 19-20, 29.

[24] B.E. Maidment, 'Magazines of Popular Progress and the Artisans', Victorian Periodicals Review, xvii (1984), pp. 83-94.

[25] Liverpool Mercury, 26 Feb. 1847; Leeds Mercury, 20 Mar. 1847; British League, 1-8 (Mar.-Aug. 1847); PJ 1 Aug., 17 July, 21 Aug. 1847

[26] Proceedings of the World's Temperance Convention (London, 1846), pp. 131-6; PJ, 2 Jan., 27 Feb. and 24 Apr. 1847.

The prevalent concept of 'white slavery' among factory reformers (which Philp himself espoused) reinforced this ambiguity.[27]

British abolitionism was also riven between the Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1839 on Sturge's initiative, and the more-recent Garrisonian Anti-Slavery League which criticised its precursor for lacking militancy and, even, impeding American abolition by its equivocal policies.[28] Philp supported Sturge in domestic politics but on hearing Garrison speak 'felt the germ strike deep into my heart'.[29] However, most British abolitionists were cool. Lovett, who had earlier agreed to organise a British Garrisonian petition, took umbrage at Philp's sudden prominence. Philp claimed his project had 'everywhere been greeted by the friends of the slave, and that machinery will immediately be instituted for carrying the proposition into effect'. However nothing happened beyond a preliminary supporters' meeting. The remonstrance fell abruptly from public view, soon followed by the Anti-Slavery League itself.[30]

This would not be the only occasion that Philp's facility with words exceeded his capacity for organisational detail; but he faced a more-immediate problem due to an acrimonious dispute inside the *People's Journal* which eventually bankrupted its editor. Lovett and the Howitts withdrew, the latter to launch Howitt*'s Journal* which itself folded after eighteen months, bankrupting them.[31] It was an object lesson in the perils of the increasingly competitive periodical market but Philp emerged unscathed and in 1849 became founding editor of the Family Friend. Unlike Howitt*'s* or the *People's Journal*, its publisher was a well-established house with a hinterland of other publications: Houlston & Stoneman. Originally from Shropshire, the firm had moved to London in the 1820s, specialising in cheap devotional literature (it was a business partner of the Religious Tract Society).[32] Philp spearheaded Houlston's entry into the rapidly expanding market for advice literature, part of the success of which depended

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[27] R.K. Philp, White Slavery, reviewed in English Chartist Circular 59 (Mar. 1842), pp. 27-8.

[28] H. Temperley, British Antislavery, 1833-1870 (London, 1972), pp. 215-20.

[29] PJ, 27 Feb. 1847.

[30] PJ, 17 and 24 Apr., 5 June 1847.

[31] PJ, 29 May 1847; J. Wiener, William Lovett (Manchester, 1989), 113-4; C. R. Wooding, Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt (Lawrence, KS, 1952), pp. 127-9, 145.

[32] [British Library Department of Manuscripts, Papers and Correspondence of Houlston and Son,] Add. MS 45413, fol. 29. At various times the firm traded as Houlston & Son, Houlston & Stoneman and Houlston & Wright. For simplicity Houlston is here used throughout.

on an appeal to a generalised Christian sentiment rather than denominational certainties. His family background in Unitarianism alongside his Chartist experience suited him to the task. Family Friend would be 'in its tone, more chaste than some, but less austere than others … The information which we have to impart is mostly of a practical character. We have little to do with theories'. The title page was a montage of woodcuts: at its centre a father read to his family, beneath a mother read to a son; to each side a woman was depicted embroidering or painting; above them, Victoria's crown conveyed that the Family Friend was at the service of 'the rising and inquiring mind of the nation'.[33] It ranged widely, even wildly, over poetry, needlework, science ('Grandfather Whitehead's Lectures'), technology ('The Amateur's and Mechanic's Friend'), history ('Aunt Mary's Cabinet Pictures'), cookery, medical remedies and games. Issues of the *People's* Journal had included a supplement, 'Annals of Progress', and similarly each *Howitt's Journal* a record of 'General Interests and Popular Progress'. Philp adapted the idea with a supplement titled 'The Editor and his Friends'. Correspondents were urged to 'fraternise' with each other by answering readers' questions and urged to contribute recipes 'for the general good of our 'Family'. Editorial announcements were headed 'The Council of Friends'.[34]

'Notices to Correspondents' were a staple feature of family journals in the 1840s. Philp's innovatory gloss was to draw his readers both in and together, no longer monopolising replies (as did G.W.M. Reynolds conspicuously did in his Miscellany.)[35] He constructed the journal's readership almost as a social movement in itself, using terminology (conspicuously shared with Feargus O'Connor) that equated readers and family. Substituting 'smiles for tears', Family Friend also featured quizzes and puzzles. The result was a lighter confection than *Howitt's* or the *People's*, and considerably breezier than contemporary Chartist journals like Ernest Jones's Notes for the People. Yet it was not inconsistent with the precepts of Chartist pedagogy. As Lovett and his collaborator John Collins had argued: 'The first object to be achieved is to render the school-room a little world of love, of lively and

[33] Family Friend, i (July-Dec. 1849), title page and introduction to the collected volume.

[34] Family Friend, i (July-Dec. 1849), p. 4; iv (Jan.-June 1851), p. 31.

[35] A. Humpherys, 'G.W.M. Reynolds, popular literature and popular politics', Victorian Periodicals Review, 16 (1983), pp. 79-89; A. King, '*Reynolds's Miscellany*, 1846-1849: advertising networks and politics', in A. Humpherys and L. James, eds, G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics and the Press, (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 55-7.

interesting enjoyments'.[36] Specific political comment in the Family Friend was rare and likewise coverage of religious issues. Though 'a flow of religious feeling … will be found to pervade our work', Philp was critical of religious periodicals for being too 'exclusive in their character' and he carefully avoided controversy lest it jeopardise circulation. His subsequent reference works similarly shook-off the overtly religious tone that had underpinned many of their predecessors. He did, though, debunk superstition and 'witchery'. 'To believe in the efficacy of charms' he told one 'friend', and 'look for superior influences from ignorant and worthless old women, is to repudiate knowledge, contradict science, and give offence to the enlightenment of the Christian religion'.[37] The 'worthless old women' remark grates, but overall Philp made a calculated bid for female readers. He presented as enlightened and educated those women who contributed, or used, *Family Friend's* practical 'receipts', for treating chilblains, eye rinses and whooping cough, for example. This assumed readership contrasted to other periodical miscellanies at this time.[38] In 1851 slightly more than half of the respondents to its companion volume Family Pastime or Homes Made Happy, whose gender can be identified, were women.[39]

Philp also assumed his readership was working-class. Family Friend was devoid of discussion of domestic service or managing servants. The overall objective was a mass-circulation periodical whose readers would be sufficiently interested and thrifty to preserve the penny parts and have them bound at the year's end. 'It will be a poor economy to allow a useful work to remain unfinished and unemployed, because of the trouble and expense of binding a work which, once placed in a state of preservation, may really prove A FAMILY FRIEND unto future and present generations'.[40] In the absence of verifiable sales figures, it is difficult to calculate the

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[36] W. Lovett and J. Collins, Chartism: A New Organization of the People (London, 1840), p. 77 (original emphasis).

[37] Family Friend, iv (Jan.–June 1851), p. 1, 'The Editor and his friends'.

[38] A. King, The London Journal, 1845-83: Periodicals, Production and Gender (Aldershot, 2004), pp.176-88.

[39] 30 women, 28 men, 19 unknown: [R.K. Philp,] Solutions to Family Pastime, or Homes Made Happy (London, [1851]), p. 4.

[40] Family Friend, iv (Jan.–June 1851), p. iv.

circulation of Family Friend.[41] However editorial introductions to the completed volumes claimed 50,000 subscribers in 1849, rising to 75,000 in the six months to June 1850. Philp was now comfortably off: the 1851 Census located the 'editor of Family Friend &c', in Marylebone, along with his wife and two female servants.

Philp was not content to rest on the laurels of *Family Friend's* success. In December 1850 a companion volume, Family Pastime, or Homes Made Happy, was produced for the Christmas market, suitably bound in a decorated cloth binding. This was essentially a quiz and puzzle book, much of it contributed by *Family Friend's* readers. An answer book followed in February 1851. Philp was clearly set on an ambitious course. He had also ventured into the sheet music market and launched a new fortnightly for Houlston, the Family Tutor. Alongside it he also edited The Parlour Magazine of the Literature of All Ages, its issues printed inside the 1851 Exhibition building.[42] 1852 was similarly frenetic: Philp launched yet another serial, Home Companion, wrote Wonderful Things ('accurate and interesting descriptions of the Wonders of All Nations') and a two-act comedy – all while editing Family Friend, Family Tutor and a further Family Pastime.[43] Family Tutor had a rigorously didactic tone, contrasting with *Family Friend's* domestic cheerfulness: Houlston sold the former during 1853 and appointed a new editor to the latter, freeing Philp to initiate two more serials, Family Treasury and the *Shopkeeper's Guide*.[44] With its supportive coverage of the early closing movement and articles enjoining early rising, punctuality and self-discipline, *Shopkeeper's Guide* was clearly directed at shop workers rather than their employers. Family Treasury*'s* sub-title ('a work of reference

[41] See King, London Journal, pp. 82-7 for a detailed analysis of the complexity and meaning of circulation figures.

[42] 'The Mountain Rill' and 'The Waves' (1850), 'The Gathering of the Nations' and 'The Ocean Flower Gleaner' (1851); Parlour Magazine of the Literature of All Nations (London, 1851).

[43] [R.K. Philp,] Wonderful Things, first series, nos 1-14 (1852); The Times 1 Oct. 1852 (review of Philp's play, The Successful Candidate). For the Home Companion see [British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, LOAN 96,] RLF/1/1810/6, letter from Houlston, 3 Nov. 1869.

[44] 'The Tutor and His Pupils', Family Tutor, v, 1 (Jan. 1853), appendix p. 1; Family Tutor, vi (Dec. 1853), Preface.

upon every matter essential to the health, entertainment, instruction, and economical management of the household') indicated an assumed female readership.[45]

Because his publisher required him to work anonymously, nothing beyond Philp's gender was revealed to readers. Each member of this fictive family could therefore construct its head in whatever image they preferred, with spin-offs published as the work of 'the editor of the Family Friend'. This facilitated a further fiction, namely that he was responsible for producing all content not contributed by readers. This would have been impossible even for a writer of Philp's extreme facility. When the *People's Journal* folded, its printer and publisher John Bennett and his wife Mary were taken on by Houlston. Both wrote extensively for Philp's serials: she was 'Aunt Mary' of the Family Friend, and John succeeded Philp as its editor in July 1853.[46] Houlston finally relaxed its insistence on authorial anonymity in the Family Treasury: though title pages only credited 'the late editor of "The Family Friend"', the first issue was accompanied by a portrait signed 'Believe me, Your friend, R. K. Philp'.[47]

The once ultra-radical Chartist was edging toward fame as well as fortune. At a dinner one evening in the Reform Club, his demeanour convinced another guest that Philp was actually a member of this leading haunt of the liberal-Whig elite.[48] He was not, but it was possibly from a member that Philp obtained financial backing for an ambitious proposal to help him break free from Houlston: a journal to rival Punch. Named after the Greek philosopher and cynical observer of manners, Diogenes was launched in January 1853 with Philp as its editor. Its format and production values mirrored those of Punch, but it was less-relentlessly middle-class and metropolitan in outlook.[49] 'Is not "Diogenes" good?', John Bright wrote gushingly to the former chairman of the Anti-Corn Law League.[50] Politically Diogenes was located at the intersection of Chartism and radical liberalism. It was resolute for retrenchment and

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[45] [R.K. Philp,] *The Shopkeeper's Guide* (London, 1853); Family Treasury (London, 1853-4), title page.

[46] RLF 1/1875/38, Houlston letter, 9 May 1893.

[47] Bound volume of Family Treasury, i and ii (July 1853-May 1854), frontispiece.

[48] Watts Phillips to his sister, 27 Oct. 1852, quoted in E.W. Phillips, Watts Phillips: Artist and Playwright (London, 1891), p. 170. I am grateful to Simon Blundell, Librarian of the Reform Club, for confirming that Watts Phillips was mistaken.

[49] [J.F. Wilson], A Few Personal Recollections by an Old Printer (London, 1896), pp. 79-85.

[50] Manchester Archives, George Wilson Papers, M20/22, John Bright to George Wilson, 3 Jan. 1855.

reform (especially of parliament, Sabbath observance and taxes on knowledge). Bright was admired, Richard Cobden dismissed, Lord John Russell mercilessly lampooned. It was Russophobic, robustly critical of the conduct of the Crimean War and effusive in its admiration of the private soldier. Working men, though not their trades unions, were held up as the victims of government indifference and corruption. Its treatment of the plight of 'white slavery – the slavery of the needle' locked onto a well-established discourse recently reinvigorated by the novelist and Chartist leader Ernest Jones, though *Diogenes'* cartoons laced it with additional anti-Semitism.[51] Diogenes also tilted against Sturge and the Peace Movement and middle-class reformers 'who cry the Negro up, and grind white Women down'.[52]

Journalistically Diogenes was a success. Financially it was a disaster. It was devised for a popular radical readership, many of whom were likely to be both suspicious of something that looked much like Punch and unable to afford it. A claimed 50,000 circulation was almost certainly spurious. Its printer estimated its accumulated losses at 'about £5,000'.[53] Philp spent heavily on contributors but the journal was inadequately marketed. As late as February 1855 it still lacked an agent in Manchester, prompting John Bright to intervene on behalf of an unnamed 'friend of ours who is interested in the success of the paper'. Though a large proportion of its capital had been 'provided by an unseen hand', Diogenes bankrupted Philp.[54] Proceedings began in May 1854 and revealed he was personally insolvent to the extent of £1,209.[55] The journal limped on until August 1855, also dogged by a libel prosecution brought by an Anglican clergyman Philp had dubbed a 'clerical burglar'.[56] Meanwhile Laura Philp gave birth to the couple's only child, named

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[51] 'The Fates; or, the Slopsellers' Shears!', Diogenes, 15 (9 Apr. 1853), 'The White Slaves of England', and 'White Slavery – the Slavery of the Needle', Diogenes, 17 and 18 (23 and 30 Apr. 1853). For Jones see M. Taylor, Ernest Jones, Chartism, and the Romance of Politics, 1819-69 (Oxford, 2003).

[52] Diogenes, 8 (19 Feb. 1853), 17 (23 Apr. 1853).

[53] Light from the Lantern of Diogenes (London, [1854]), preface; A Few Personal Recollections, p. 84.

[54] Manchester Archives, George Wilson Papers, M20/22, John Bright to George Wilson, 1 Feb. 1855; Wilson, A Few Personal Recollections, p. 79. To whom Bright and Wilson referred is unclear; it may have been Frederick Scheer, the city merchant, Anti-Corn Law League activist and anonymous author of the satirical Letters of Diogenes, to Sir Robert Peel, Bart (London, 1841).

[55] A Few Personal Recollections, p. 80; London Gazette 26 May 1854; John Bull, 27 May 1854; Bradford Observer, 28 Sept. 1854; RLF 1/1810/10, Philp's application, 3 Dec. 1872.

[56] Bradford Observer, 23 Nov. 1854.

Robert Prowting Philp after his father's old Chartist comrade. Seeking to stabilise his finances, Philp tempered his enthusiasm for working-class self-help with the hasty publication of The Practical Housewife and Family Medical Guide (1855) which included explicit guidance on employing servants. He also agreed ambitious plans with Houlston for future publications; but he was in no position to negotiate the terms. Each was published anonymously for a flat fee, the million-plus seller Enquire Within (1856) being the first, for which Philp was paid £50.[57] 'I never had means to produce books, & keep the copyrights', he later lamented. 'I have been compelled from time to time to sell them at prices which barely remunerated me for my labour'.[58]

The first number of Enquire Within appeared in January 1856, and at monthly intervals thereafter, alongside two similarly structured serials, The Reason Why ('a careful collection of many hundreds of reasons for things which, though generally believed, are imperfectly understood') and The Interview. A fourth, Notices to Correspondents, revived the conceit developed in Family Friend of an editor heading a family of correspondents. Philp rounded off 1856 with a book for the Christmas market, Philosophy and Mirth. Mary Bennett assisted him in compiling these, though not Philp's pseudo-autobiographical novella How a Penny Became a Thousand Pounds, a mordantly ironic title given his personal finances. In it Philp anticipated by almost two decades Samuel Smiles' apotheosis of 'that little piece of copper, a solitary penny'. Reading Philp's pages of invented dialogue and earnest warnings against 'the neglect of little things' and unnecessary 'spending of pennies', it is hard to conceive that Smiles was not influenced by the earlier author.[59]

The year 1857 was no easier. Philp's frenetic scramble to restore his fortunes continued with The Housewife's Reason Why and the first instalments of the encyclopaedic Corner Cupboard.[60] Unfortunately these publications were followed by an injunction brought by the publisher Jarrolds against Houlston alleging The

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[57] Add. MS 45413, fol. 73, 26 Sept. 1855 – Philp's signed receipt for £50 'for a Book of Illustrated and Poetical Enquiries'.

[58] RLF 1/1810/2, Philp's application, 2 Nov. 1869. See also RLF 1/1810/2, letter from Houlston, 3 Nov. 1869, listing eight of their titles and explaining that 'owing to certain publishing reasons Mr Philp's name does not appear on any'.

[59] S. Smiles, Thrift (London, 1885), pp. 161,163.

[60] [R.K. Philp,] The Corner Cupboard: A Family Repository (London, 1857-58); [R. K. Philp,] The Housewife's Reason Why (London, 1857).

Reason Why was a piracy. Mining other periodicals for copy, often without acknowledgement, was a standard procedure in contemporary journalism. To a considerable extent contemporary weekly miscellanies depended upon it.[61] But a different ethic applied to book authorship and Philp had substantially infringed upon it. At least he benefited from having surrendered copyright and his authorial anonymity, for it meant that he could not be named as a defendant. Jarrolds' case was that both *Reason Why's* question-and-answer format and its specific treatment of a range of topics were taken without acknowledgment from E.C. Brewer's Guide to the Scientific Knowledge of Things Familiar, which it had published in 1848. The judge found Philp an unconvincing witness who 'had not fairly admitted' he knew Brewer's work: his claim not to have copied him 'was manifestly untrue'. No intention to deceive could be imputed to Houlston, the judge stated, but the company was left to meet all Jarrolds' costs and subsequent claim for damages, and instructed to destroy remaining copies.[62] Among Houlston's papers, its defence counsel's statement of account is carefully preserved, the archive's most substantial item in terms both of physical bulk and the financial outlay enumerated.[63]

Relations with Houlston cannot have been cordial but Philp was contractually obliged to continue feeding them books. A 'new edition' of Reason Why was rushed out, conspicuously shorter than the first and bolstered with an extensive bibliography and emollient acknowledgment of 'our obligations to the men of science and letters who have aided us in our labours'.[64] The Reason Why concept was then turned to good account in seventeen further niche titles published 1859-60.[65] Philp's other major project at this time was the serial History of Progress in Great Britain, from which several constituent parts were re-issued as free-standing works in their own

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[61] King, London Journal, pp. 58-63.

[62] The Times, 10 July 1857; The House of Jarrolds, 1823-1923 (established 1870): A Brief History (Norwich, 1924), p. 41.

[63] Add. MS 45413, fols 75-80.

[64] [R.K. Philp,] *The Reason Why … General Science* (new edn, London, [1857]), pp. v-vi.

[65] Reason Why titles advertised in the end papers of Philp's Dictionary of Daily Wants, vol. 3 (London, 1860) were Ancient History; Astronomical; Biblical; Botanical and Horticultural; Chemical; Denominational; Domestic Science; English History; Entomological; French History; *Gardener's and Farmer's*; General Science; Geological; Grammatical; Historical; *Housewife's*; Medical and Sanitary; and Natural History.

right.[66] Again, subsequent work by Smiles (his Lives of the Engineers, 1861-2) resonates with the approach and style that Philp took. Philp's other publications, though, adhered to the format he had made so much his own: three more serials, *That's It* and dictionaries of Useful Knowledge and Daily Wants.[67]

None of the titles with which Philp was associated between 1858 and 1860 were sufficient to stave off a second bankruptcy in 1860.[68] Yet according to the 1861 Census Laura and Robert ('Author Histy & Science'), now joined by her sister, were still able to keep a servant, an essential indicator of 'polite' social status. No less puzzling, the publication of titles for which he was responsible dropped dramatically between 1861 and 1864 and ceased completely in 1865 and 1867-9.[69]

Robert Kemp Philp had not inherited wealth; nor was Houlston suddenly rewarding its biggest-selling writer. The author of a recent homily Life Doubled by the Economy of Time (1858) had himself embarked on a double life. Using the pseudonym John Denman, Philp turned to the Turf. Horse racing was undergoing a rapid transition from elite to popular leisure pursuit. The number of racing horses more than doubled between 1837 and 1869, while the railways reduced the costs of transporting them (and their followers) to race meetings. Between 1848 and 1870 the number of courses holding two-day and longer meetings increased from 56 to 82. Simultaneously the electric telegraph and cheap newspapers were transforming the communication of results. As recently as 1857 there had been only one racing newspaper: by 1865 there were three.[70] Mass-participation in off-course cash betting

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[66] [R.K. Philp,] History of Progress in Great Britain, two vols (London, 1858-9). Spin offs included The Progress of Agriculture (1858) and The Progress of Carriages, Roads, and Water Conveyances (1858).

[67] [R.K. Philp,] *That's It; or, Plain Teaching* (London, 1859-60); [R. K. Philp,] Dictionary of Useful Knowledge (London, 1858-62); [R.K. Philp,] Dictionary of Daily Wants (London, 1858-60).

[68] London Gazette, 20 July 1860; The Times, 14 Nov. 1860.

[69] [R.K. Philp,] The Dictionary of Medical & Surgical Knowledge (London, 1862-64); [R. K. Philp,] The Reason Why; Physical Geography and Geology (London, 1863).

[70] C. Chinn, Better Betting with a Decent Feller: A Social History of Bookmaking (revised edn, London, 2004); D.C. Itzkowitz, 'Victorian Bookmakers and their Customers', Victorian Studies, xxxii (1988), 6-30; M. Macintire, 'Odds, Intelligence, and Prophecies: Racing News in the Penny Press, 1855–1914', Victorian Periodicals Review, xli (2008), pp. 352-373; A. Mason, 'Sporting News, 1860-1914', in M. Harris and A. Lee, eds, The Press in English Society (Cranbury, NJ, 1986), pp. 168-86; W. Vamplew, The Turf: A Social and Economic History of Horse Racing (London, 1976).

was a recent phenomenon: shops for this purpose were rendered illegal in 1853, but the act was 'for about twenty years practically a dead letter'.[71] One consequence of this was the emergence of turf commission agents who charged clients a fee to place bets on their behalf with on-course bookmakers. Such agents might also lay high-stakes on behalf of those (typically owners, trainers and others acting on privileged information) who preferred to remain anonymous, discretion being a necessary ingredient of any betting 'coup' and for placing large wagers without shortening the odds. Because credit betting remained legal the line between turf accountant and commission agent was hazy, and remained so until the end of the 1860s and a court ruling that commission agents were bookmakers.

High stakes wagers were also no longer the preserve of aristocratic gamblers. Two of Victorian Britain's most successful bookmakers, each bequeathing six-figure fortunes, were from working-class families. Both had started out as commission agents: former carpenter William 'The Leviathan' Davies, and the deliciously named Fred Swindell, originally an engine-cleaner. Consistent success in bookmaking required high-level numerical skills and increasingly literacy, as the sporting press democratised racing while turning it into ostensibly an intellectual pursuit.[72] Philp felt very much at home: 'I procured the racing results for ten successive years; worked night and day at statistical tables showing the results of backing first, second, or third favourites, at level, increasing, or doubling stakes, upon the sequence principle, and otherwise'.[73]

John Denman's career as a commission agent began in 1863. He was initially cautious, relying on word-of-mouth recommendations; but in 1864 Denman began advertising his services as both commission agent and 'Turf Adviser', providing subscribers with confidential intelligence from racing stables. 'Being himself a Backer … he will send only those things he thinks good enough to stake his own money on'.[74] Denman was initially peripatetic, his advertisements listing the post offices to which correspondence should be sent as he moved round the country's

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[71] D. Dixon, From Prohibition to Regulation: Bookmaking, Anti-Gambling and the Law (Oxford, 1991), p. 41, quoting evidence to the 1901-2 Select Committee on Betting.

[72] Chinn, Better Betting, pp 61-5; Itzkowitz, 'Victorian Bookmakers', pp. 12, 16-18, 27; Vamplew, The Turf, p. 217; Macintire, 'Odds, Intelligence, and Prophecies', p. 356.

[73] Sporting Times, 25 Feb. 1877.

[74] Sporting Life, 6 Jan. 1864.

racecourses; but in 1865 he established a London office. Philp had reinvented himself completely, even to the extent of petitioning for his own bankruptcy in June 1865. Such was the care with which Denman's business was conducted no newspaper connected him to Philp; and the Turf's elite institutions, Tattersall's Rooms and the Jockey Club, cannot have known his history of bankruptcy when granting him membership.[75] In 1866, perhaps to redeem a final obligation to Houlston, the still anonymous author of Enquire Within put out two new books, though conceivably the publisher commissioned another author to compile them.[76] Meanwhile his alter ego breezed into print with *Denman's Turf Telegraphic Guide* along with frequent advertisements in sporting papers that grew ever larger, eye-catching and replete with testimonials. 'Mr Denman is a gentleman of very high attainment and education, and has made Turf transactions such a thorough study'.[77]

Denman rose rapidly. He bought himself a racehorse in June 1867 and at least nine others by Christmas. Turf advice was re-packaged as Denman's 'celebrated combination system', confining bets to win-or-lose stakes on mounts ridden by the most-successful light-weight jockeys, identified through his meticulous analysis. His 'jockey confederacy' achieved some notable coups including a rumoured £10,000 on the 1867 Derby. News coverage of Denman's betting successes, bloodstock purchases and 'capacious chequebook' became extensive.[78] Sporting Life*'s* Christmas issue caricatured 'Combination Denman': 'The plan that I've discovered is as wonderful as safe; / Investors need no longer now with losses fume and chafe.[79]

In 1868 Denman's 'Exchange and Hedging Agency' transferred to the prestigious address of 14, Piccadilly. The annual turn-over of the business had apparently reached £250,000. His yearling Defender was touted for the 1869 Derby and several papers reported Denman taking a bet of £300 against a £25,000 payout if

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[75] *Perry's Bankrupt and Insolvent Gazette* (London, 1865), p. 470; Standard, 20 Mar. 1871, cutting in RLF/1/1810/10, 3 Dec. 1872.

[76] [R.K. Philp,] Consult Me to Know How to Cook (London, 1866); [R.K. Philp,] Handy Book of Shopkeeping (London, 1866).

[77] *Denman's Turf Telegraphic Guide* reviewed in *Bell's Life*, 19 Jan. 1867; advertisements for Denman's agency appeared in every 1868 issue of Sporting Life.

[78] E.g. Sportsman, 29 June, 23 Nov. 1867; *Bell's Life*, 29 June 1867; Sporting Life, 25 May and 6 July 1867; Sheffield Independent, 27 May 1867; Shields Daily Gazette, 17 June 1867; Morning Post, 22 June, 10 July 1867; Manchester Courier, 23 July 1867; London Daily News, 29 Aug. 1867.

[79] Sporting Life, 24 Dec. 1867.

it lost. Others reported him 'in his usual placid way' backing Blue Gown to loose the 1868 Derby with £200 at odds of 25 to 1.[80] Bloodstock purchases continued, including a colt from the Duke of Beaufort for 600 guineas. A solitary Irish newspaper voiced a hunch that Denman was the 'nom d'écurie of a well-known literary man'. None pursued the hint, even when Denman became embroiled in a libel action brought by a solicitor who had attempted to blackmail him by threatening to expose the Piccadilly premises as a betting office.[81] The business was abruptly transferred to a new address but otherwise Denman's operations continued as before.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that there is no such a thing as a racing certainty. As a commission agent Denman found it increasingly hard to obtain longer odds offered to other gamblers, while owners and trainers began to manipulate races by putting little-known riders on their best horses and 'crack' jockeys on 'cattle'. Subscriptions to the system declined but Denman persisted betting his personal wealth, 'believing in the soundness of his pet scheme'. Simultaneously he was exposed to prodigious long-odds pay-outs. In particular Blue Gown, the horse Denman heavily backed to fail, proved to be one of the best colts of its generation, winning both the 1868 Derby and Ascot Gold Cup. Meanwhile the Theatre Royal, Holborn, announced a forthcoming new play *John Denman's Debt*. The 'real' Denman was suddenly missing key race meetings and pleading for time to pay winning wagers.[82]

Most grievous of all, in a rare signed editorial James Smith, the *Sportsman's* proprietor, denounced Denman for failing to honour bets. Denman had unwisely published a pamphlet defending himself and asking for donations towards his debts. Smith was coruscating about his 'wordy and dull conglomeration of garbled facts, unfounded charges, and namby-pamby sentimentality', hinting Denman led a double life:

> Mr Denman's chief desire has been for the possession of pen and ink, and unfortunately his friends – supposing that he has any left – have not barred

[80] Sportsman, 30 Jan. 1868; Birmingham Daily Gazette, 6 Feb 1868; Sheffield Independent, 6 Mar. 1868.

[81] Wexford Independent, 21 Mar. 1868; Sportsman, 2 May 1868.

[82] Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 11 May 1868; Morning Post, 29 July 1868; Birmingham Journal, 1 Aug. 1868; *Bell's Life*, 18 July 1868; Sporting Times, 22 Aug. 1868.

> the use of them. Seized with an overpowering 'itch for writing' which not unfrequently afflicts people of more conceit than judgment, he has rushed into print, and the result is that, in the opinion of all right-thinking men, if anything were wanted to complete his fall, he has himself supplied it … thirsting to display to an appreciative world his engineering science … following the fashion of most deaf people, he absolutely roars in small caps, and italics.[83]

To survive, Denman started selling his stable, mostly at substantial loss. Yet he still advertised a scaled-down commission business, published another horseracing work (Four Systems of Turf Speculation) and advertised a new weekly paper, the Commissioner. It promptly failed. Unabashed Denman countered the on-going libel action with one of his own for perjury and conspiracy. Denman's business limped through to Derby Day 1869 when advertising abruptly ceased. He had held onto the last of his thoroughbreds, the Derby contender Defender, until the New Year and apparently invested the sale proceeds in its success. It finished twelfth.[84]
Denman was dead and Robert Kemp Philp a broken man. Only the Gaming Act's stipulation that gambling debts could not be recovered at law kept him from bankruptcy a fourth time. It would later emerge that Laura Philp had visited the author of *John Denman's Debt*, 'and on her knees implored him not to use her husband's name'. He agreed and the play opened as Blow by Blow, its chief protagonist's name also changed.[85] Some material consolation arrived in November 1869 in an award of £40 from the Royal Literary Fund. In his application Philp described himself as a printer and author, solely responsible for supporting his wife, son, widowed mother and unmarried sister. 'I have not published anything for five years past', Philp wrote in his application, 'having quite exhausted my mental capacities' and become 'greatly discouraged at the loss of my properties' – the copyrights he had been 'compelled

[83] Sportsman, 18 Aug. 1868. Titled An Explanation, the pamphlet was privately published and seems not to have survived.

[84] Sporting Life, 19 Aug. and 28 Nov. 1868, 6 Feb. 1869; The Times, 21 Aug. 1868, 27 May 1869; Sheffield Independent, 24 Aug, 1868; *Bell's Life*, 6 Feb. 1869.

[85] Popular Monthly (1895), p. 124.

from time to time to sell'.[86] Robert Kemp Philp was deluding others as efficiently as until recently he had deluded himself.

He immediately reverted to type and published The Best of Everything the following year. He had a new publisher and, with sales approaching 50,000 copies within five years, he remained solvent. However the market for the genre that had rewarded Houlston, if not Philp, so well was becoming saturated. Philp was competing both against his earlier self (British sales of Enquire Within alone reached half-a-million by the 1870s) and blatant imitations such as The Book You Want, Ten Thousand Wonderful Things and even a Welsh-language 'Everyone on Everything'.[87] Philp compiled six books in this vein in his post-Denman years, each with a different publisher, suggesting all concerned were chasing a crowded market.[88] Food: What to Buy and How to Cook It (1875) was the last publication he aimed at working-class readers. Philp now targeted a wealthier readership with a guide for parents on selecting a boarding school and a series of Railway Panoramic Guides to enliven long train journeys.[89] These, though, were newcomers in a well-established genre. His financial problems were compounded by the Piccadilly betting office affair. Although he had the satisfaction of seeing the blackmailing solicitor struck off, Philp had to drop his case because of the cost.[90] Furthermore, these court appearances were necessarily made under his real name, exposing Philp's lack of candour when

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[86] RLF 1/1810/2, Philp's application letter (2 Nov. 1869).

[87] [R.K. Philp,] Best of Everything, by the A*uthor of 'Enquire* W*ithin', 50*th thousand (London, 1874); [J. King,] The Book You Want: How to Cure Everything. How to Do Everything. Receipts for Everything (Halifax, [1875?]; E.F. King, Ten Thousand Wonderful Things: Comprising the Marvellous and Rare, Odd, Curious, Quaint, Eccentric and Extraordinary (London, [c. 1860]); [T. Thomas] Llyfr Pawb ar Bob-peth (Wrexham, 1877), for which see T.R. Chapman, 'The Turn of the Tide: Melancholy and Modernity in Mid-Victorian Wales', Welsh History Review xxvii (2015), 517.

[88] Take My Advice: A Book for Every Home (London, 1872); New Facts Upon All Subjects (London, 1874); *The Lady's Every*-Day Book; A Practical Guide (London, 1875); Food: What to Buy and How to Cook It (London, 1875); Domestic Medicine and Surgery (London, [1873?]); The Domestic World: A Practical Guide (London, 1878).

[89] R.K. Philp, Index Scholasticus. Sons and Daughters. A Guide to Parents in the Choice of Educational Institutions (London, 1872); R.K. Philp, The Railway Panoramic G*uide … inviting the* Attention of Passengers over the Main Line and Chief Branches of the Midland Railway (Derby, [1873?]). Philp produced seven other such guides.

[90] Observer, 5 Mar. 1871; Standard, 6, 13, 20 and 24 Mar., 25 Nov. 1871 and [R.K. Philp,] John Denman, printed broadside dated 1 Mar. 1872 in RLF/1/1810/10.

applying to the Royal Literary Fund. Three further applications, each more desperate than the last, were peremptorily refused.[91] To no avail Philp pleaded that he had written two pamphlets 'deprecating Betting, and other nefarious Turf practices' and had provided the MP Thomas Hughes with facts and arguments to support the latter's bill to suppress gambling'.[92] However he could provide no supporting evidence.

The Philps' situation was increasingly parlous. The 'servant' listed in the household of R.K. Philp ('Educational author') in the 1871 Census was actually Laura's sister and their house was shared with a bookbinder and his family. By 1881 the Philps were living in rented rooms in a Clerkenwell lodging house. Proposed new works came to nothing. In desperation Philp resurrected John Denman and wrote a series, grandiloquently titled 'The philosophy of systematic speculations' for Sporting Times. 'He has had more practical experience of the working of Systems than any man living', the paper declared with studied ambiguity.[93] He seems to have written nothing else for profit, but the itch to write persisted: in a wry echo of his Chartist career, Robert Kemp Philp's last publication appears to have been a poem, printed alongside an article by Marx in the journal of London's revolutionary German exiles, Freiheit.[94]

'One of the most industrious compilers who has ever written in the English language' died at his lodgings on 30 November 1882. Among the obituaries, only Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, plus two provincial papers, identified him as John Denman.[95]

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This article has so far explored three facets of Robert Kemp Philp's career: his political activism; his work as one of the nineteenth century's most successful authors (measured in contemporary reach and gross sales); and his place, in the guise of John Denman, among early non-elite participants at the highest tiers of horserace betting and ownership. We now turn to the culture of self-improvement, in the promotion of

[91] RLF/1/1810/10, Philp's application, 3 Dec. 1872; RLF/1/1810/18, Philp's application, 9 Mar. 1878; RLF/1/1810/24, Philp's application, 4 July 1882.

[92] RLF/1/1810/12, Philp to Blewitt, 2 Dec. 1872; RLF/1/1810/18, Philp letter, 9 Mar. 1878.

[93] Sporting Times, 8 Mar.-17 May 1879.

[94] R.K. Philp, 'Strikes', Freiheit, 24 Apr. 1881.

[95] Quotation from Academy, 23 Dec. 1882. Bell's Life, 9 Dec. 1882, Leicester Chronicle, 9 Dec. 1882 and Sheffield Independent, 7 Dec. 1882.

which he was a powerful figure. Both Philp and his alter ego Denman claimed to systematise hitherto opaque, confusing and inaccessible fields of knowledge. Like many Chartists, Philp directed his energies to self-improvement having become frustrated in his efforts to push Chartism along the lines he believed it should follow. However, the anonymity he was forced to adopt has meant that his eminence as an author of mass-circulation non-fiction has been obscured. His significance rested on more than just gross sales: a technically innovative author, he was particularly attentive to the needs and interests of female readers. This article now turns to how Philp conceptualised his readership and examines related issues of format, genre, style and the role of contemporary print technology in establishing his success. Finally, it draws together the various facets of Philp's public and private lives to assess his importance.

Chartism's objective had been to create citizens, not mere political subjects, while its multi-faceted educational activities extended beyond technical literacy to develop 'cultural literacy' too.[96] In his post-Chartist career Philp continued with this object of creating an informed and cultured citizenry. His books were not class-conciliatory in a demeaning sense, nor were they completely devoid of political bite: a consistent commitment to a culture of anti-clericalism (an important feature of Chartism) is apparent in his work. For example, a distaste for clerical dogma was apparent in The Biblical Reason Why and even the slender How a Penny Became a £1000 was studded with references to its author's nonconformist upbringing and the iniquities of 'Politics in England … a system which Sparta would have anathematised, and which future history will disguise'.[97]

Chartist sensibilities were also apparent in Philp's emphasis upon the family as a cohesive economic unit and socialising and educative force. His 1842 pamphlet White Slavery had mirrored O'Connor's rhetoric in attacking the employment of women outside the home: 'Ought not mothers to be at their homes, instructing the young mind in habits of mildness, of affection, of cleanliness, and imparting

[96] M. Sanders, 'From 'Technical' to 'Cultural' Literacy. Reading and Writing within the British Chartist Movement', in A-C. Edlund, T.G. Ashplant, A. Kuismin, eds, Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity (Umeå, 2016), pp. 285-300.

[97] [R.K. Philp,] The Biblical Reason Why (London, 1859), pp. vii, 33-4, 221; [R.K. Philp,] How a Penny Became a £1000 (London, 1856), pp.11 and 85.

knowledge fitting the youth for an upright and virtuous career in life?'[98] This envisioning of working-class domesticity, in which the woman was a worker rather than merely an ornament within the home, feature prominently in the promotion of the Chartist Land Plan; it also offered an ideological underpinning to the development of working-class home ownership – manifest in the freehold land and building societies that emerged alongside Chartism (and sometimes directly from it).[99] By codifying household management and cookery Philp also sought to elevate the status of the person responsible for them. This is not to present him as a proto-feminist. In The Practical Housewife (1860) he declined to be drawn on his personal view of female suffrage. However the world, he argued, would be better if women were 'more systematically educated to wield more properly the power they [already] do possess', and the *Housewife's Reason Why* held out the promise of 'Affording to the Manager of Household Affairs Intelligible Reasons for the Various Duties She Has to Perform'.[100] Philp wrote primarily for a working-class female readership, women who had no servants and therefore (especially if they also worked outside the home) needed to maximise their effectiveness as home makers while economising on the time spent doing so. A title like Philp's *Lady's Every*-Day Book suggested a socially exclusive readership, but the advice within it was attuned to working-class lives, for example that newspapers be used to interleave bedclothes to make beds warmer ('nothing can be cheaper, and nothing more efficient').[101] Deploying the domestic rhetoric of Chartism, Philp sought to reclaim women from 'artificial' labour outside the home in order to fulfil a 'natural' role as homemakers and mothers. 'Among your politics', he advised readers, 'forget not the politics of home – the good government of your own house; in your religion recollect the duty of the father and of the mother'.[102]

In aiming his publications at working-class households, Philp contrasts strongly with Samuel and Isabella Beeton. In her Book of Household Management, 'Domestic Servants' is almost the longest chapter; the management of servants also features

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[98] Philp, White Slavery, p. 27.

[99] M. Chase, The Chartists (London, 2015), pp. 50-5, 212-43; M. Chase, 'Out of radicalism: the mid-Victorian Freehold Land Movement', ante 106 (1991), pp. 319-45.

[100] [Philp,] Housewife's Reason Why, p. 2.

[101] *Lady's Every*-Day Book, p. 104.

[102] How a Penny Became a £1000, p. 95.

prominently in Beeton's first chapter, 'The Mistress' with its oft-quoted opening sentence: 'As with the commander of an army, or the leader of any enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house'.[103] Philp's Practical Housewife, on the other hand, although conceding that servants might be employed by its reader, adopts a different military metaphor to speak of the home as 'the little fortress'. Onto the housewife (Philp did not use the term mistress), 'devolves the duty of keeping away the more subtle enemies that attack the dwellers of the citadel within: Disease, Uncleanliness, and Waste, are among the silent but stubborn forces which, unless they are fairly resisted at their first approach, destroy the … Domestic stronghold'.[104]

There's certainly a resonance with Beeton, but the vocabulary is subtly different, as is the concept of what home means. To the time-worn scourges of working-class homes, 'Disease, Uncleanliness, and Waste', Philp added Ignorance. He conceptualised his readers as themselves educators. In consequence, the tone adopted in his writing was collegial as well as conversational. Not for him the lofty pronouncement of the young Samuel Smiles: 'The savage female is scarcely more ignorant of the nature of her child than the civilized lady'.[105] Chartist literature emphasised the role of women as educators of their children, boys and girls, inculcating both basic learning and moral and political education. Philp aimed to place otherwise inaccessible material at his readers' disposal. Ultimately it is this that makes his anthologies such astonishing, sprawling works, and which ensured for the format (and to a significant extent Philp's original prose) more than a century's longevity. His voluminous output was tailored to the abilities and lifestyle of those with limited energy or time for reading. 'Nearly all women of the working-classes have a feeling that it is wrong to sit down with a book', the social investigator Florence Bell concluded after almost three decades of visiting workers' homes on Teesside.[106] Philp shrewdly judged the reading habits of such consumers. How a Penny Became a Thousand Pounds was 'not intended for the Rothschilds, the Barings, and the Capels', he wrote. 'My book is written for the Smiths, the Browns,

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[103] I. Beeton, The Book of Household Management (London, 1861), p. 1.

[104] [Philp,] Practical Housewife, p. vii.

[105] S. Smiles, Physical Education; or, the Nurture and Management of Children, Founded on the Study of their Nature and Constitution (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 9.

[106] Florence Bell, 'What people read', Independent Review 7 (1905), cited in J. Rose, The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes (London, 2001), p. 193.

the Joneses and the Robinsons, of the busy worlds of industry and trade. It is written for every man, and every woman'.[107]

Publishing affordable educational literature became a way of continuing Chartism by other means. This strategy Philp shared with the movement's most sensational novelist, G.W.M. Reynolds. Both he and Philp depended on serialisation to reach their largely shared audience (and Philp's co-author Mary Bennett herself also wrote cheap serial novels).[108] The wrappers of Reynolds' best-selling novel, Mysteries of London, carried advertisements for self-help medical works.[109] Alongside the melodramatic fiction for which it became renowned, *Reynolds's* Miscellany published 'Practical Receipts in every department of Science, Art, Farriery, Cookery', 'The anatomy and physiology of ourselves popularly considered', and occasional 'papers on popular science'.[110] 'You are the intelligent and enlightened by self-education (no thanks to the State!)', Reynolds told his readers. 'Is it not, then, a sin to withhold from you – or to attempt to withhold, any means of intellectual improvement which it may be in the power of the wealthy and great to afford?'[111]

Both Reynolds and Philp wrote for readers for whom the term 'book learning' was something of a misnomer, and whose reading was overwhelmingly within newspapers and magazines. The adoption of serial format not only spread the cost of purchasing printed material but made reading both more manageable and enticing for, as Maria Damkjær has recently observed. 'serialization drives and revives the consumer's impetus to read'.[112] However, serialisation of non-fiction has yet to receive the same level of scholarly scrutiny as it has for fiction.[113] It has even been

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[107] How a Penny Became a Thousand Pounds, p. 12.

[108] E. g. *Jane Shore; or, The Goldsmith's Wife*, the first instalment of which was presented gratis with *Reynolds's Miscellany*, 19 Mar., 1853, p. 128.

[109] G.W.M. Reynolds, The Mysteries of London, first series, part 20 (London, 1846), rear wrapper.

[110] *Reynolds's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 18 Sept. 1847, p. 304. By 1852 the paper had a weekly 'notes to correspondents' page titled 'Useful Receipts'. The feature was mainly presented as the work of Reynolds' wife, Susanna; see also her The Household Book of Practical Receipts (London, 1847).

[111] *Reynolds's Miscellany*, 30 Jan. 1847, pp. 199-200, 'Letters to the industrious classes'.

[112] M. Damkjær, Time, Domesticity and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Basingstoke, 2016), p. 145.

[113] S. Bennett, 'Revolutions in thought: serial publication and the mass market for reading', in J. Shattock and M. Woolf, eds, The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings (Leicester,

claimed that of evidence for it beyond novels and poetry there 'is almost none'.[114] Originally intended to reduce both production and purchase costs of high-value volumes, serialisation was extended to popular literature in the early nineteenth century. Typically sold by newsagents and 'number carriers', who canvassed homes and workplaces, serials enjoyed a market reach beyond that of conventional books. The period c. 1845-60 saw the emergence of a market for popular reading matter that grew disproportionately larger than the increase in literacy.[115] So great was popular demand, and so imperfect the means of meeting it, that even uncompleted part works were widely valued. London's street traders, for example, included specialist vendors of odd numbers.[116] One advantage of the random arrangement of the contents of Enquire Within was that individual numbers could stand alone as a pamphlet miscellany. Nonetheless, to alleviate the tendency of purchasers to desert over time, the wrappers of monthly issues of Philp's Dictionary of Daily Wants (1858-60) and the Dictionary of Useful Knowledge (1858-62) carried numbered vouchers. Readers who collected the whole year's worth and sent them to the publisher were then entered into the Art Union's 'Wheel of Fortune', a popular lottery with prizes amounting to £7,500.[117] Houlston subsequently introduced its own lottery with a larger number of smaller prizes. Purchases that might be difficult to justify within the

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1982); L. Brake, Print in Transition, 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 3-85; L. Erickson, The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialisation of Publishing, 1800-1850 (Baltimore, MD, 1996); L.K. Hughes and M. Lund, The Victorian Serial (Charlottesville, VA, 1991); D.J. Vann, Victorian Novels in Serial (New York, 1985).

[114] G. Law and R.L. Patten. 'The serial revolution', in D. McKitterick, ed., The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume VI, 1830-1914 (Cambridge, 2009), p. 151. For contrary views see, for example, M. Hancher, 'Gazing at "The Imperial Dictionary"', Book History, i (1998), pp. 156-81, Brake, Print in Transition, pp. 27-66, and M. Damkjær, Time, Domesticity and Print Culture, pp. 117-47.

[115] A. Weedon, Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916 (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 45-58; R.G. Hall, 'At the dawn of the information age: reading and the working classes in Ashton-under-Lyne, 1830-1850', in J.J. Connolly et al, Print Culture Histories beyond the Metropolis (Toronto, 2016), pp. 243-67.

[116] H. Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor: The Condition and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Cannot Work, and Will Not Work: Volume I. London Street Folk (London, 1864), pp. 313-14.

[117] J. Sperling, '"Art, Cheap and Good": The Art Union in England and the United States, 1840–60', in Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide, 1 (2002).

context of a hard-pressed family budget therefore carried the allure of a possible windfall.

Serialisation was a powerful tool in democratising reading, complementing Philp's profoundly political aim of placing learning at the service of a mass readership, while not intimidating the many whose hard-won literacy might otherwise have wilted before works that sometimes extended over 1,000 pages. Philp reflected and reinforced their largely autodidact sensibilities. He was not patronising, nor did he make the lazy assumption that his readers were without education or culture, or mired in poverty. In this his culinary writing contrasts sharply with other contemporary cookery books aimed at working-class readers.[118] The subtitle of Philp's *Housewife's* Reason Why of 1857 is indicative of his attitude, 'Affording to the Manager of *Household Affairs Intelligible Reasons for the various duties she has to perform'*. The authors cited included Brewster on optics, Liebig on chemistry and von Rumford on physics. Philp researched widely, so that the housewife 'may not only know that she should do a thing, but WHY she should do it, and knowing why, perform it all the more effectively'. Philp's success in reaching a specifically female readership is also evident in the profusion of later publications that traded-off his success. These included the weekly Enquire Within: Ladies Home Journal (1890-1923), and books such as *Every Woman's Enquire Within* (1927), Enquire Inside for Things You Want to Know (1929-30), *Aunt Kate's Enquire Here* (1933), and Elizabeth Craig's Enquire Within (1948).

Philp's achievement must also be located, however, in the longer-term context of self-improvement literature, extending back to the early eighteenth century. The judge in the Reason Why plagiarism case dismissed Jarrolds' claim that their author had originated 'the form adopted of question and answer', specifically citing as a precedent Evenings at Home, a popular work first published in the 1790s.[119] The catechistical format for secular educational material, though, had been popularised by Isaac Watts in his 1721 Art of Reading and Writing English. 'The Socratical way', Watts observed, 'leads the Learner into Knowledge of Truth as it were by his own

[118] For example A. Soyer, A Shilling Cookery for the People (London, 1846) and C.E. Francatelli, Plain Cookery for the Working Classes (London, 1861).

[119] The Times, 10 July 1857; J.A., and A.L. Barbauld, Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened, six vols (London, 1792-6).

Invention'.[120] However, the construction and voicing of Art of Reading and later imitators like Evenings at Home were shaped for an essentially juvenile readership. Non-religious self-improvement literature specifically for adult readers with limited formal education was a relative rarity before the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (1826-48 – SDUK) and its Penny Magazine (1832-46).[121] Many working-class readers detected a condescending tone in the Society's output, and its publications relied heavily on discrete subsidies and gratis distribution.[122] But the Penny Magazine*'s* miscellany format was genuinely innovative and was adopted by a plethora of commercial competitors, most notably Reynolds, the London Journal (of which Reynolds had been founding editor) and *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*.[123] Houlston aimed Family Friend at the same market. It did not enjoy the circulation (250,000) or longevity (1853-1932) of *Cassell's*, but Enquire Within and other several other Houlston-Philp productions did.

The Jarrolds case demonstrated how competitive the market for popular non-fiction had become. In the longer term the publisher, though as we have seen not its author, was unscathed by the prosecution. There were other losers, though: Philp's conversational style did not always lend itself to accuracy where factual content was concerned. For example, answering a question on the relative efficiency of iron and copper as lightning conductors, Brewer balanced detail and brevity: 'Q. Why is COPPER better than iron? A. 1st – Because it is a better conductor than iron, and therefore not so easily fused by lightning: and 2ndly – It is not so much injured by weather'. He then added details of the relative efficiency of metal conductors, concluding that copper was 'nearly 5 times better' than iron.[124] In the Reason Why Philp simplified but essentially copied Brewer: 'What is the best metal for a lightning conductor? Copper, the conducting power of which is five times greater than that of

[120] I. Watts, The improvement of the mind; or, a supplement to the art of logick (London, 1741), pp. 170-1.

[121] V. Gray, Charles Knight: Educator, Publisher, Writer (Aldershot, 2006).

[122] Parliamentary Papers, 1851 (558): Report from the Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps, qn 3248; P. Hollis, The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-class Radicalism of the 1830s (Oxford, 1970), pp. 20-1, 143-4.

[123] P.J. Anderson, '"Factory Girl, Apprentice and Clerk" – the readership of mass-market magazines, 1830-60', Victorian Periodicals Review 25 (1992), pp. 64-72.

[124] E.C. Brewer, Guide to the Scientific Knowledge of Things Familiar (Norwich, Jarrold, [1847]), p. 23.

iron'. However, the 'new edition' forced by the court action provided an answer close to meaningless: 'Why does copper form the best lightning conductor? Because it has been found that electricity passes over a copper surface more rapidly than over any other'.[125] Accuracy was heavily compromised but few purchasers probably noticed. In popular publishing, the premium was on intelligibility as much as accuracy. Socratic dialogue was most effective when it echoed the tone of readers' everyday conversations.

Philp followed both Brewer and the SDUK in shaking-off the overtly religious tone that underpinned so much popular self-improvement literature. Only in the running heads of The Reason Why did Philp deploy Biblical quotations, selected for their relevance to the subject matter below. Thus those reading about lightning were prompted to reflect on Psalm 97, 'His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw and trembled'. The inclusion of Biblical texts served to situate what, for many readers, would have been recondite material within a familiarising framework, and also to neutralise the reputation for religious controversy that clung to many popular scientific books, following the 1844 publication of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation.[126] Philp then adapted but secularised the formula for Enquire Within.

Gerard Genette has argued that 'paratexts' (liminal matter such as the dedication, preface and running heads) act almost as a go-between that mediates a book to its readers.[127] Yet even the most capricious running heads usually bear some relation to the text beneath. Such was the case in The Reason Why, but their highly distinctive usage in Enquire Within defies categorisation. Here each running head more-closely mirrors an epigraph (a quotation placed at the head of a text or chapter). 'The epigraph', according to Genette, 'in itself is a signal (intended as a sign) of culture, a password of intellectuality', that indicates the tenor of the writing that follows.[128] However, in the literature of self-improvement, epigrammatic statements acted to reassure readers rather than impress them. While the epigraphic running heads in Enquire had no relevance to the subject matter beneath, they helped the whole volume to cohere around the ideal of domestic efficiency and contentment: 'A

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[125] Reason Why ('tenth thousand', London, 1857), p. 113; Reason Why (new edn, London, 1857), p. 99.

[126] J.A. Secord, Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (Chicago, IL, 2003).

[127] Gerard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (Cambridge, 1997).

[128] Genette, Paratexts, pp. 144-60 (quotation from p. 160).

cracked plate will last as long as a sound one'; 'Economy is the easy chair of old age'; 'a bird's nest is a natural egg-cup'; 'Truth is the gem we all should dig for'; and on the final page, 'Take care of the pence, pounds will take care of themselves'.[129] As John Harrison observed in his pioneering history of adult education, such textual devices 'put the weight of tradition and common sense behind social values that were in reality peculiar to Victorianism'.[130] Martin Tupper's hugely popular Proverbial Philosophy was little more than a thematically organised collection of such mottoes.[131] And aphorisms pepper the best-known self-improvement text of all, Self Help (1859), their use being one of the tactics through which Samuel Smiles finally found a voice to engage his readers.

The accessibility of Philp's prose was enhanced by the physical composition of the printed page. Along with serial format, there were also stylistic similarities between Reynolds' sprawling novels and Philp's non-fiction compendia. Reynolds deployed short, even staccato paragraphs. These, along with near-constant use of dialogue, broke-up the density of the printed page and lightened the burden of reading. Written in a lightly didactic style that was informal and conversational, Philp's paragraphs were similarly short and often numbered. In Enquire Within, Philp sought to enumerate the contents, and further demystify them, in a preface inviting his readers to think of the book as a crowded city, peopled by potential friends:

> Behind each page some one lives to answer for the correctness of the information imparted, just as certainly as where, in the window of a dwelling, you see a paper directing you to "ENQUIRE WITHIN", some one is there to answer you. Old Dr KITCHENER lives at No. 45, Mrs HITCHING lives at No. 202 … Dr ERASMUS WILSON at No. 1594 … Mr BANTING at 1663 … a CHESS PLAYER at 57.[132]

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[129] [R.K. Philp] Enquire Within Upon Everything (London, 1856), pp. 4, 7, 85, 350, 352.

[130] J.F.C. Harrison, Learning and Living, 1790-1960 (London, 1961), p. 208.

[131] M.F. Tupper, Proverbial Philosophy: a book of thoughts and arguments (London, 1838). This work achieved its peak sales during the 1850s and early 1860s with a '17th thousand' printing in 1850 and the '200th thousand' in 1866.

[132] Enquire Within (1856), p. iv.

Formally tabulated, this prefatory matter became a major feature of Philp's compilations: a descriptive index at the front of the volume to make the ensuing pages easier to navigate. A pragmatic response to the circumstances of the works' compilation and publication, this innovation was widely imitated, notably in Mrs *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (likewise a serial when first issued).[133] Rendering potentially complex information into short, well-sign-posted paragraphs was especially important since (probably to minimise costs) Houlston's publications were sparsely illustrated and Enquire Within never illustrated at all.[134] The popularity of this stable of publications suggests that the transformation of popular print culture was not as dependent on illustration as is often supposed.[135] The anachronistic terminology of 'bite-size chunks' usefully emphasises the way in which these books gestured to what was still significantly an oral culture. They were not only conversational in style but 'chatty' in physical presentation: short numbered sections of never more than one paragraph, each an easily digested gobbet. Unlikely to be read cover-to-cover, these were books designed to be browsed, taken up and put down by readers (mothers especially) who were frequently distracted. Furthermore, Philp's readers were those most-likely to have acquired the ability to read only imperfectly, and therefore more comfortable with a text broken-up into short manageable gobbets and punctuated by eye-catching aphorisms to brighten the work of reading. Though prominence was given to the sources (both emphasising the quality of the work and avoiding further prosecution) the text was neither encumbered by direct references to those sources nor its pages littered with footnotes.

Serialisation, style and composition were not alone sufficient, however, to reach a mass readership. Pricing was paramount and here innovations in print technology came powerfully into play. The steam operated printing machine was 'a symbol of the intellectual character of the age', according to the SDUK publisher, Charles Knight.[136] Affordability was further facilitated by declining paper costs and

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[133] K. Hughes, The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs Beeton (London, 2005), p. 241.

[134] In 1832 the Penny Magazine claimed its annual expenditure on illustrations was £2,000; see King, London Journal, p. 91.

[135] P. Anderson, The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860 (Oxford, 1991).

[136] Quoted by Weedon, Victorian Publishing, p. 70.

stereotyping.[137] The latter was fundamental for publishing 'book editions' of works previously issued in instalments. Once completed, Philp's serials were promoted as gathering within one set of covers a whole 'library' of knowledge. Half a dozen or so well-chosen cheap books could make 'every home an institute', he had enthused in 1847.[138] A 'first edition' of Enquire Within comprised a combination of stereotyped sheets with only the final number printed from standing type.[139] The first appearance in completed book form was timed to capitalize on the Christmas market, an increasingly important element in publishers' promotional strategies from the 1840s.[140] Other recent technical innovations permitted the mass-production of decorated bindings: sand-grained cloth, a gold-tooled title on the spine and covers, with block relief decoration and an eye-catching central decorative motif also blocked in gold. These were integral to these volumes' appeal, each 'that beloved Victorian thing – a cheap luxury'.[141] 'Book editions' of Enquire Within and Reason Why sold for only 2s 6d, at time when new novels retailed for 10s 6d and even copyright reprints of popular novels were generally priced at six shillings.[142]

This hybridisation of periodical journalism and the non-fiction book created a genre that was distinct from popular novels, non-fiction and magazines. The sheer ubiquity of the resulting work was frequently attested by Victorian commentators. According to an assistant commissioner, reporting to the 1867-8 parliamentary enquiry into schools, the books most likely to be found in a Lancashire lower-middle

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[137] S. Eliot, 'Some trends in British book production, 1800-1819', in J.O. Jordan and R. L. Patten, eds, Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-century British Publishing and Reading Practices (Cambridge, 1995), p. 30; A. Fyfe, Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science in Victorian Britain. Chicago, 2004), pp. 54-5.

[138] PJ, 3 July 1847, 'Annals of Progress'.

[139] Observation based on Enquire Within (London, 1856). See also Weedon, Victorian Publishing, p. 75.

[140] S. Eliot, Patterns and Trends in British Publishing (London, 1994), pp. 32-4.

[141] J. Sutherland, 'Literature and the library in the nineteenth century', in A. Crawford, ed., The Meaning of the Library: A Cultural History (Princeton, NJ, 2015), p. 127; and for examples of Houlston bindings see E.M.B. King, Victorian Decorated Trade Bindings 1830-1880: A Descriptive Bibliography (London, 2003), pp. 232, 321, 356, 358, 368, 457 and 680.

[142] 'Pamphlet edition' [1856] of an odd number of Reason Why, British Library (shelf mark 8706.aaaa.38); R. Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900 (Chicago, 1963), p. 311.

class home were ‘yellow back’ novels, ‘one or two religious biographies’, Tupper’s Proverbial Philosophy, Cowper’s Poems (‘with gilt edges, dusted more often than opened’) and Enquire Within.[143] An Anglican charity, the East Devon Book Hawking Association, reported Enquire Within was one of the eight most-demanded titles during the decade 1859-68.[144] ‘Two generations ago’, the British Medical Journal recalled in 1937, Enquire Within was to be found in ‘most households’.[145] Philp’s titles became so riveted in the popular mind that Sylvia Townsend Warner casually introduced both Reason Why and Enquire Within into her 1926 novel Lolly Willowes.[146] The inventor of the World Wide Web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, has related that as a teenager he was fascinated by his grandparents’ copy of Enquire Within. Conceiving the Web as a similar portal on to all existing knowledge, Berners-Lee therefore named his pioneering prototype ENQUIRE and its interactive programme ENQUIRE WITHIN.[147]

Does the career of John Denman throw further light upon the cultural territory of self-improvement? At the risk of stating the obvious, Philp was personally ambitious and resented the enforced anonymity under which he had to write. There was palpable irony in his finally achieving nationwide attention only under a pseudonym. Furthermore that achievement depended on transgressing the barrier that demarcated the Turf from religious dissent, working-class autodidact culture and middle-class respectability, in all of which Philp had earlier moved with ease and apparently conviction. Yet Philp’s choice for his parallel life was less-paradoxical than it might appear. His publisher had, after all, used lotteries to help promote sales of his work. ‘Few activities other than gambling are so risky as writing for a living’, writes a historian of nineteenth-century Grub Street. ‘In a very real sense betting on

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[143] Parliamentary Papers, 1867-68 [3966-VIII] Schools Inquiry Commission. Vol. IX. General reports by assistant commissioners. Northern Counties, 828-9.

[144] The Cure for Souls and Atrophy of the Brain (Dartmouth, [1868]), p. 14.

[145] British Medical Journal, 6 Mar. 1937.

[146] S.T. Warner, Lolly Willowes (1926; London, 1993), pp. 112-13.

[147] Berners-Lee, in conversation with Alan Yentob, BBC One ‘Imagine’, 5 Dec. 2006; T.J. Berners-Lee, The ENQUIRE System Short Description, issue 1.1 (Geneva, 1980), pp. 1, 4, accessed at https://www.w3.org/History/1980/Enquire/.

horse racing was very much like work', comments a historian of leisure.[148] And publishing itself in this period was also 'something of a gamble'.[149] Philp's publisher Houlston, hitherto a small provincial firm, established itself in London in the wake of a slew of publishers' bankruptcies during the 1825-6 depression.[150] Philp's partnership with Vincent in the National Vindicator was necessarily encumbered with debt in order to launch and sustain their venture in a highly competitive regional market.[151] Launching her Journal in 1849, Eliza Cook emphatically denied acting 'in a desperate or calculating mode of literary gambling'.[152] The Turf was therefore closer to the previous environment in which Philp had operated than it might seem. However, accounts of the partnership with Vincent suggest a greater insouciance concerning debt on Philp's part. 'He is an arrant villain', Vincent told a cousin and close friend, adding that, with the partnership insolvent and dissolved, Philp was reluctant to pay his half of the debts.[153]

Clearly Philp's personal failings were many. However a lack of appetite for hard work was not among them: systemising racing intelligence and results was a task to which he was intellectually and temperamentally suited. Denman 'was an industrious and ingenious man', Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle remarked.[154] In his Dictionary of Daily Wants, Philp claimed to have achieved 'for matters of Practical Utility in domestic affairs, what the great Linnaeus did for the Science of Botany', namely bringing 'thousands of useful items scattered in disorder through an unlimited number of Channels, into one Arrangement and System, by which they may be easily found and understood'.[155] This was a pathetic fallacy, especially when applied to the opaque culture of professional gambling, but Philp's consistent objective was to demystify knowledge by codifying it: 'Science, which was once understood to stand apart from common things', he had declared in 1857, 'has

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[148] N. Cross, The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street (Cambridge, 1985), p. 6. Itzkowitz, 'Victorian bookmakers', p. 27

[149] B. Warrington, 'The bankruptcy of William Pickering', Publishing History xxvii (1990), p. 21.

[150] Add MS 45413, fols 1-10. See also R. Alloway, 'Bankrupt Books? The aftermath of the 1825-1826 crash and the British book trade', Publishing History lxii (2007), 41-52.

[151] Scriven, 'Activism and the everyday', pp. 20-16.

[152] *Eliza Cook's Journal*, 5 May 1849, p. 1, 'A word to my readers'.

[153] Scriven, 'Activism and the everyday', p. 217, quoting Vincent to John Minikin, 30 May 1842.

[154] Bell's Life, 9 Dec. 1882.

[155] [Philp,] Dictionary of Daily Wants, p. iii.

taken quite a domestic turn'. A burgeoning predilection for 'analysis and rationalization' was evident in household writings no-less than any other sphere.[156] Denman's Turf career was built on the delusion that he had devised a scientifically rigorous system that, applied consistently, would always yield profits. Towards the end of his life Philp admitted that he believed he had 'discovered a sort of Eden, where bank-notes dropped like falling fruit, and where reward must come to those who spread the widest nets to catch them'. Yet while ruefully conceding that 'bookmakers had "systems" adverse to mine', he steadfastly refused to recognise the other causes of Denman's humiliation, instead blaming his clients for lacking the patience to adhere to his methods: 'I could systematise Turf probabilities, but I could bring my subscribers to no permanent systematic adhesion'.[157]

Self improvement could be a personal scramble as well as a social movement. Philp's marriage was unpropitious. According to his 1842 marriage certificate Robert was a shoemaker's son. Key aspects of the certificate were spurious. His dressmaker bride was designated 'full age' and therefore born no later than 1821; but at successive censuses her implied date of birth ranged from 1825 to 1831. Furthermore the 'Henry Philp' who witnessed their marriage cannot have been Robert's father, a Falmouth draper who had died in 1836. The marriage may help explain Philp's urgent quest for personal social standing. The Philps were an upwardly mobile family. Robert was named after his grandfather, a Unitarian minister who founded Spitalfields' London City Mission in 1834. His uncles included two other prominent Unitarian ministers, plus a Falmouth printer-publisher and author who transferred his business to London in 1846.[158] Robert's brother was an accomplished professional landscape painter and his cousin, Elizabeth Philp, a singer and composer.[159]

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[156] [Philp,] Housewife's Reason Why, p. iii; C. Lieffers, '"The present time is eminently scientific": the science of cookery in nineteenth-century Britain', Journal of Social History, cl (2012), pp. 936–959 (936).

[157] 'John Denman' [R.K. Philp,] 'Betting systematized', Sporting Times, 25 Feb. 1877.

[158] G.C. Boase and W.P. Courtenay, Bibliotheca Cornubiensis, vol. 2 (London, 1878), pp. 491-95, and vol. 3 (1882), p. 1313.

[159] Cornwall Artists Index (http://cornwallartists.org/cornwall-artists/james-george-philp); J.A. Sadie and R. Samuel, New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers (London, 1994), p.370; Boase and Courtenay, Bibliotheca Cornubiensis, vol. 2, p. 487.

By the time he married, Philp had already made a major contribution to Chartism, then at the peak of its fortunes; but his political influence was dwindling rapidly. The frenetic career as a writer that followed may plausibly be seen as attempting to achieve comparable prominence. An 'overpowering "itch for writing"' consistently featured across all the phases of Philp's career. He was a scribophile. Stephanie Newell uses this concept to denote 'the compulsive and public nature' of literary writing that permeated all aspects of Odeziaku (1881-1939), a Nigerian palm-oil trader and acclaimed poet, also known as John Mount Stewart Young but originally a petty fraudster from Manchester called John James Young.[160] Philp shared Young's compulsion to invent identities and like him was 'a liar, a scribophile, and a wearer of multiple masks'. The three things were closely interwoven. Whatever he wrote about, Philp assumed a guise of avuncular omniscience. He wrote with intemperate haste and was casual when acknowledging his sources. The judge in the 1857 piracy case declared that not only was Philp a plagiarist but had also sought to disguise the extent of his plagiarisms by the intercalation of material that rendered his 'answers scientifically wrong'.[161] He was temperamentally a gambler before he began a career on the Turf. He also had to lie about having been a bankrupt to secure admission to the elite circles of the Turf, and lie to obtain his Royal Literary Fund award. His mendacity having been exposed on making a second application, he lied again in his third, claiming that he had agitated to suppress betting.[162] His fourth and final application claimed John Bright would provide a supporting reference, but Bright did not.[163]

Philp's career also provides an insight into the precarious life chances of the lower-middle class, especially those who were self-employed rather than salaried. Historical understanding of social mobility tends to concentrate upon upward movement; but clearly mobility could also be downward and over a lifetime an individual might even move in both directions. Few who stayed out of the criminal courts, however, oscillated between the extremes quite as Robert Kemp Philp did. Once bankrupted in 1854 he may have decided he had little reputation left to

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[160] S. Newell, *The Forger's Tale: The Se*arch for Odeziaku (Athens, OH, 2006), pp. 18, 178. I thank my colleague Shane Doyle for drawing my attention to Odeziaku.

[161] RLF/1/1810/10, unsourced press cutting.

[162] RLF/1/1810/18, Philp's application, 9 Mar. 1878.

[163] RLF/1/1810/24, Philp's application, 4 July 1882.

jeopardise. Bankruptcy haunted Victorian Britain, as the frequency with which its spectre appears in the imaginative literature of the period attests.[164] Nineteenth-century tradesmen, especially retailers (and Philp was essentially a retailer of words) depended upon complex networks of credit and debt. The way in which they managed this aspect of their public persona defined their character. 'How a man uses money – makes it, saves it, and spends it – is perhaps one of the best tests of practical wisdom', wrote Samuel Smiles; and, he added sternly, 'if a man do not manage honestly to live within his own means he must necessarily be living dishonestly upon the means of somebody else'.[165] There are few studies of Victorian petit-bourgeois insolvency with which to make comparisons. However, in an illuminating investigation of the financial and personal lapses of a Wolverhampton businessman in the drinks trade, John Benson suggests that 'the middle class set particular store by material success and economic power', and were prepared even to overlook domestic violence more than they were commercial failure.[166]

However, Philp's relevance for our understanding of the nineteenth century does not rest on his financial recklessness any more than on his contribution to Chartism. He commands attention as an author and compiler of mass-circulation self-improvement works, a sub-genre of Victorian publishing that has been almost entirely overlooked. British labour history particularly, with its strongly marxisant inflection, is largely indifferent to the ideology of 'self-help' and self-improvement. 'Political economy', Eric Hobsbawm dismissed it, 'translated into a few simple dogmatic propositions by self-made journalist-publishers who hymned the virtues of capitalism'.[167] However, promoting self-help was 'not the preserve of Whigs and Tories'.[168] Apart from newspapers and the most-popular journal miscellanies, household and general knowledge compendia penetrated more homes in the second half of the nineteenth century than any other form of contemporary writing. Whether consumed in their original instalments or as bound volumes, works like Enquire

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[164] G.T. Houston, From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction (Cambridge, 2005); B. Weiss, The Hell of the English: Bankruptcy and the Victorian Novel (Cranbury, NJ, 1986).

[165] S. Smiles, Self-Help (new edn, London, 1873), pp. 290, 297.

[166] J. Benson, 'Drink, Death and Bankruptcy: Retailing and Respectability in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', Midland History, xxxii (2007), 128-140 (139-40).

[167] E.J. Hobsbawm, Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848 (London, 1973), p. 228.

[168] I. Dyck, William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture (Cambridge, 1992), p. 108.

Within nurtured uncertain readers, helped to consolidate literacy and particularly contributed to the development of a new market among women for non-fiction.

The consumption of popular non-fiction is a hiatus in book reception studies. The evidential base for the history of popular reading valorises those (especially keen) readers who left autobiographical accounts of their reading habits. By their very nature these 'attempt[ed] to construct a persona as a "serious" reader and "respectable" pursuer of knowledge' and therefore did not register 'the cheap literature of "improvement"'.[169] The 1830-1914 volume of the Cambridge History of the Book in Britain suggests the mid-nineteenth century working-class read 'improving texts' only in libraries, and that their book purchases were confined 'to picking up whenever possible penny bloods, convoluted and violent stories extended over many months'.[170] Jonathan Rose's seminal Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes is largely mute about non-fiction reading habits. It places greatest emphasis on the 'appropriation' of 'great books' by autodidacts, and its definition of non-canonical literature is confined to sensationalist novels read 'as an escapist narcotic'.[171] Reynolds, the most-popular author of this genre, outsold even Dickens in his day, but as Rose rightly remarks his novels lacked 'staying power'.[172] This, though, is precisely the quality that Philp's most successful works did have. His overpowering 'itch for writing' was driven by personal ambition, but Robert Kemp Philp shrewdly appraised the needs, aspirations and reading strategies of a popular readership, 'making the acquirement of knowledge a PLEASURE, not a TASK'.[173]

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[169] C. Ferguson, An Artisan Intellectual: James Carter and the Rise of Modern Britain, 1792-1853 (Baton Rouge, LA, 2015), p. 84; H. Rogers, '"Oh what beautiful books!" Captivated reading in an early Victorian prison', Victorian Studies, l (2015), p. 58.

[170] Law and Patten, 'The serial revolution', p. 152.

[171] Rose, Intellectual Life, pp. 7-8.

[172] ibid, p. 111.

[173] Advertisement for the Family Tutor in the rear end papers of Family Pastime, i (London, [1851]).