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Poverty and Social Control in Early Modern England: Exeter, 1558-1625.

Connie S. Evans

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POVERTY AND SOCIAL CONTROL
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND:
EXETER, 1558-1625

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Connie S. Evans

B.A., Louisiana State University, 1987

M.A., Louisiana State University, 1990

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To TDEK
with all my love

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ABSTRACT

Poverty has always been, and continues to be, one of the most pressing social problems, and one to which a number of solutions have been proposed through the ages. The present work is an examination of the problem and the responses to it in early modern England, and is set in the local context of the city of Exeter. Prior to the reign of Elizabeth I, the majority of poor law legislation was punitive in nature, rather than rehabilitative. That the nature of poor law legislation changed under Elizabeth was due to a number of factors, not least of which was a new attitude about the place of the poor in society. This attitude was shaped by changing religious and political realities, but it was also determined by adherence to traditional, time-honored views of charity to one's neighbor.

W. K. Jordan posits that philanthropy remained the primary response to the problem of poverty in the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, in some cases far outstripping the revenues provided in this regard by poor law legislation. This view has been challenged by numerous historians and it is the goal of this study to assess the validity of Jordan's assumptions about the extent of charity in alleviating the level of poverty in early modern England. An analysis of the problem of poverty, on a national level and within the city of Exeter, is followed by in-depth examinations of the resources devoted to the ease of the problem: the amounts derived from poor-law legislation, church aid, testamentary charity, and endowed bequests on behalf of the poor.

It is my contention, based on the evidence, that philanthropy did indeed play a dominant role in the fight against poverty despite the

passage of sweeping poor-law legislation, although not to the extent espoused by Jordan. This study thus contributes to the core of a coherent analysis about the less-privileged members of early modern English society.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, poverty and the relief of it have been one of the central concerns for all civilized societies. Though responses to the problem vary from time to time and place to place, no permanent solution acceptable to both those providing succour and those receiving it has ever been found. Current responses range from public doles to the "cradle to grave" welfare systems which have crippled the economic bases of the governments which provide them. The search has always been for a program that both relieves the poor and puts as little a burden as possible on the institutions or individuals who provide that relief. It has been the experience of history, however, that no such happy medium has ever truly existed. In consequence, societies have always and will continue to struggle to meet the burdens inherent in the care of the poorer members of society.

The current work is, in many respects, the narrative of one society's attempts to deal with the problem of poverty and is framed in both a national and a local context; on a national level, the government of early modern England and its attempts to regulate the care of poverty will be examined and, on a local level, the city of Exeter and its efforts in caring for their poor will be analyzed as well. This examination is set during the period between the accession of Elizabeth I--1558--and the death of her successor, James I, in 1625.

Why this society and why this time? First and foremost, the sixteenth century in England was a time of profound change in several fundamental areas. It was the century which saw the Reformation, a

religious upheaval which stripped adherence to the old Catholic faith and replaced it with Protestantism of a peculiarly English variety. It was a time in which economic forces wreaked havoc upon incomes and prices; coupled with a rising population, these forces contributed to the growth of a large pool of unemployed persons who were often forced to go on the road in search of work. In addition, with the increase in the practice of enclosure--the process in which farmlands were converted into grazing areas for animals, including commons areas which once helped to support entire villages--many small farmers were forced off their holdings and left without any economic maintenance; this process also contributed to the growth of indigent people wandering the countryside. Finally, periodic episodes of dearth and famine changed people's fortunes, since many livelihoods depended on the agricultural industry; lack of product could lead to lack of work, and, in some cases, to starvation. This overall decline in living standards during the Tudor and Stuart periods is the traditional argument espoused by such historians as R. H. Tawney to explain the rise in the numbers of the poor.¹ This view has been challenged by other historians who have argued that the economy was in a state of growth between 1540 and 1640, and who believe that living standards did not decline to the extent posited by Tawney.² Paul Slack, the leading historian of poverty in Tudor and Stuart England, asserts that the answer lies somewhere in between these two extremes, but argues

¹R. H. Tawney, The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912).

²See D. M. Palliser, The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors 1547-1603 (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983); Joan Thirsk, Economic Policy and Projects (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

that the more important point is whether changes in attitudes towards the poor came from the economic and social pressures of the sixteenth century, or whether they represented an evolution from older perspectives about poverty.³

That an increase in unemployment did occur, resulting in a concomitant rise in the number of poor, is undisputed, although, as we have seen, there is a debate about the extent of it. However the increase occurred, it was followed by a shift in Elizabethan attitudes towards the poor, a shift which eventually culminated in the passage of the great poor law statutes of 1597/98 (reissued 1601). Medieval thought about the poor was generally charitable, but medieval Englishmen did not have to deal with the pressures faced by their early modern counterparts. In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the government reacted punitively towards the wandering poor, seeing in them a threat to order and security; statutes regarding the poor during this period invariably referred to them as vagrants, and ordered harsh measures designed to keep their number down. It quickly became apparent that these laws did not address the root causes of the problem, and efforts were made, starting in 1536, to recognize the impotence of many of these individuals in their attempts to secure employment.

Between the 1530s and the 1590s, a gradual shift in attitudes towards the poor took place; charity returned, but it was qualified charity: the poor were classed as either "deserving" or "unworthy" of assistance, appellations which reflected early modern England's view that

³Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (London and New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 6.

these drifting poor represented a threat to order and, as such, had to be controlled. In order to control the poor, however, the government believed it was necessary to classify them to prevent "unworthy" poor from depriving the "deserving" poor of their just aid. Near the end of the century, the elites began to see the poor as an opportunity to be taken advantage of: setting the poor on work had been a feature of legislation since the 1570s statutes had ordered Houses of Corrections to be built throughout the country, institutions which were originally meant to provide the deserving unemployed poor with a place to obtain gainful employment that benefitted the local economy. By the end of our period, however, many of these houses were, pure and simple, jails which kept the poor at work which did not permit them to regain any sort of independence, but which did maintain order, the overriding concern of those in control of the government.

As we can see, poverty and the responses to it were of particular concern to the members of early modern English society, and it was a concern which manifested itself in all areas of life--politics, religion, economics, and society--and to recount its entire history during this period would be a task far beyond the scope of a work such as this. In any case, that lack has been admirably filled by the work of Slack.⁴ This study, therefore, is particularly concerned with the sources of aid to the poor, and is centered on the question of which source played the dominant role in the relief of the unfortunate: private philanthropy--in the form of bequests, benefactions and institutional foundations--or public assistance, which took the shape of poor rates and civic

⁴Slack, Poverty and Policy.

initiatives. It is the thesis of this work that private philanthropy, despite the passage of comprehensive poor laws, did indeed take the lead role in providing for the lesser members of early modern English society, at least through the end of the reign of James I.

The city of Exeter is uniquely suited to be the focus of this examination for several reasons; it was one of the three largest cities in early modern England, and functioned as a major port through which goods and people entered and exited the country. Since major urban areas had the most problems dealing with poverty and vagrancy, Exeter, as one of the three largest cities in England, provides an exemplary subject for the study of philanthropy in action, as many of its records (despite the blitz of World War II) have survived from the early modern period. Exeter maintained its medieval community structure into the early modern period, making it a worthwhile subject for an exploration of the topic of continuity versus change from the Middle Ages through the end of Jacobean rule in 1625. The city's government maintained close, if not interlocking, ties with the central government, and an analysis of this relationship will provide much information on the issue of court versus country. All of these factors allow not only for a study of philanthropy versus public effort in caring for the poor, but also allow us to make some broad generalizations about many areas of life in early modern England.

Following the work of Wallace MacCaffrey on Exeter⁵, this work also offers the opportunity to assess Exeter from standpoints which

⁵Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

distinguished it from many other early modern cities. In the first place, the city not only maintained its medieval communal organization through our period, but, in fact, Exeter's self-perpetuating oligarchic government managed to increase its independence from central direction. In addition, it was one of the few cities in early modern England which was a chartered borough; it was in fact referred to as the County of the City of Exeter in all official references from 1539 on. This gave the merchant oligarchy of the city extensive privileges in connection with monopolies of certain goods, monopolies which greatly contributed to the economic base of the city. The city was also unique in that it did not depend on any great lord, either lay or ecclesiastical, for its importance. As MacCaffrey notes, "Exeter varied from the usual English civic pattern simply in the uneventfulness of its civic history."⁶ Guilds did not assume the importance in Exeter that they did in other cities, nor were there any overt conflicts between the various social elements within the city. Its residents withstood the entreaties of the rebels who led the Prayer Book Rebellion in 1549, and were rewarded by the monarch for their loyalty. In short, the leaders of Exeter kept their own counsel, and made the choices that ensured their continued dominance in civic affairs. Pragmatism, rather than ideology, informed their decisions.

Within this context, then, we can set out the parameters of the problem at hand: establishing the ascendancy of private philanthropy over public assistance in providing for the poor. The starting point for this study is, of course, the pioneering work of W. K. Jordan, whose

⁶Ibid., 18.

Philanthropy in England 1480-1660 established the lines of debate on the question of private versus public aid to the poor.⁷ From 1480 to 1660, Jordan posited that "in no year prior to 1660 was more than 7 per cent of all the vast sums expended on the care of the poor derived from taxation."⁸ In addition, Jordan's figures revealed that the largest percentage of the sums given by private citizens for the relief of the poor came from the merchant class, and that giving by this class (and others) reached its apogee in the years between 1631 and 1640.

Jordan's findings immediately sparked controversy, chiefly because he failed to account for the effect of inflation on the money given for the relief of the poor and because of the relative paucity of donors in many of the areas and periods he examined. The leading challenge to Jordan was made by William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, who, after accounting for inflation and making other correctives to Jordan's work, found that benefactions not only did not rise during the period he considered, they in fact never exceeded the heights they had reached in 1510.⁹ This debate was taken up by subsequent historians, many of whom have argued that Bittle and Lane's approach is also flawed, and who have presented their own formulas for correcting Jordan's work.¹⁰ In this

⁷W. K. Jordan, Philanthropy in England 1480-1660 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959).

⁸Ibid., 140.

⁹William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, "Inflation and Philanthropy in England: A Reassessment of W. K. Jordan's Data," Economic History Review 2d ser., 29, no. 2 (1976): 206.

¹⁰See J. F. Hadwin, "Deflating Philanthropy," Economic History Review 2d ser., 31 (1978): 105-117; D. C. Coleman, "Philanthropy Deflated: A Comment," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 24, no. 2 (1978) 118-120; J. D. Gould, "Bittle and Lane on Charity: An Uncharitable Comment," Economic

work, we will suggest a method that correlates with recent population studies done by E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, who argue that there was only a 51 percent increase in the population between 1556 and 1626.¹¹

All of these issues are addressed in turn by this study, by first analyzing the problem and its parameters, establishing the context in which it will be examined, and finally, presenting the attempts of the church, the government and private citizens to alleviate poverty. In the second and third chapters, we examine who the poor were and what percentage of the population they represented and move on to a consideration of public perceptions of the poor and assess perception versus reality in the treatment of the poor by using popular literature and ballads of the day. A contemporary picture of the city of Exeter is drawn in chapter 4, based on the writings of John Hooker, the antiquarian city chamberlain. Chapters 5 and 6 concern the response of the government; chapter 5 traces the growth of national statute law, proclamations and privy council orders, while chapter 6 considers the impact of these central directives on the city of Exeter, and outlines the city's own initiatives in regards to its poor; a comparative analysis with the experience of other early modern English cities is also included. The death of monastic charity and its effects is discussed in chapter 7, and the practical effects of the Reformation in Exeter are considered; an analysis of the sermons of the day, along with a

History Review, 2d ser., 24, no. 2 (1978): 121-23. See also the response of William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, "A Reassessment Reiterated," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 24, no. 2 (1978): 124-28.

¹¹E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

dissection of biblical injunctions regarding the poor, both Catholic and Protestant, is offered as well. Chapters 8 and 9 center on an examination of private charity on the part of Exeter's citizens; chapter 8 introduces the evidence culled from wills, while chapter 9 details the endowed benefactions set up by the city's philanthropists. The conclusion presents the findings that have emerged from each of these discussions and draws inferences based on these findings.

It is clear from this introduction that the subject of poverty touches on many aspects of life, and it is one of the goals of this study to investigate the broader connections between these aspects as we search for an answer to our central question: who provided the most aid for the poor of early modern England? It is hoped that this study will suggest a plausible response.

CHAPTER 2

THE FACE OF POVERTY (1)

Hark, hark, the dogs do bark!
Beggars are coming to town.
Some in rags, some in jags,
And one in a velvet gown.¹

In early modern England, as now, public perceptions of poverty had a great deal to do with the extent of the charitable impulse directed towards relieving that condition. In our time, we are bombarded with television and print images of the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and these images are meant to--and do--spark our philanthropic proclivities. Generally speaking, however, most of us today do not deal with the poorer elements of our society on a daily basis; we do not routinely encounter the homeless and the hungry in the course of everyday routines, and thus we have little personal experience of what it means to be poor. The situation in early modern England was vastly different; as John Patten writes, "Poverty, like filth, was everywhere to be seen on the streets...."² Every town or city dweller of the day came face to face with poverty in the course of his or her daily activities, whether it be in the form of beggars on the street, indigent vagrants passing through town, or widows and orphans turned out of their homes through the death of a provider. This experience was bound to color the individual response to the problems caused by poverty, which in turn determined the response of society in general. Much of William Shakespeare's drama

¹Reginald Nettel, Sing a Song of England: A Social History of Traditional Song (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969), 98.

²John Patten, English Towns 1500-1700 (Folkestone: Dawson & Sons, Ltd., 1978), 35.

emphasizes the economic injustice suffered by the poor; time and time again, Shakespeare's drama highlights the downtrodden state of the poor in all spheres of life: "'Fortune, that arrant whore', as Lear's Fool says, 'Ne'er turns the key to th' poor' (Lear 2.2.227-8)."³ Relief, however, could be obtained: "Kate in The Taming of the Shrew is confident that 'beggars that come unto my father's door / Upon entreaty have present alms, / If not, elsewhere they meet with charity' (4.3.4-5)."⁴ If one of the most popular playwrights of the day pursued poverty as one of his themes, it is then not unnatural to assume that it was an important issue to early modern society in general.

That society's response can best be understood by developing, as near as it is possible to do so, an early modern perspective on the poorer segment of society, by answering such questions as: what types of people were included among the poor? what percentage of society did they comprise? These questions, among others, frame a discussion of the early modern poor, centered around the English experience as evidenced by Exeter and other localities.⁵

³William C. Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty in Shakespeare's Drama," Shakespeare Survey 44 (1992): 18.

⁴Ibid.

⁵For comparisons to the status of the poor on the continent during the early modern period, good general introductions are to be found in Robert Jutte, Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Thomas Riis, ed., Aspects of Poverty in Early Modern Europe (Florence: Le Monnier Press, 1981); important studies of individual countries and cities include Natalie Z. Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Brian Pullan, Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971); Cissie C. Fairchilds, Poverty and Charity in Aix-en-Provence 1640-1789 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Linda Martz, Poverty and Welfare in Hapsburg Spain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lee P. Wandel,

Types and Numbers of Poor

Types

Based on official reports submitted to Edward VI shortly before his death, William Harrison's Description of England provides one of the most reliable guides to ascertain the types of persons who comprised "the poor" in early modern England.⁶ Writing in the mid-1570s, Harrison combined the official reports with his own observations in order to provide a portrait of the poor during Elizabeth I's time. Harrison noted that there were three types of poor to be found in England during the early modern period: first, the impotent poor, which included children without fathers, those persons suffering from incurable disease or handicapped by blindness or other afflictions, and the elderly; second, people brought to poverty through no fault of their own, such as soldiers wounded in battle, or the senile; and third, what Harrison termed the "thriftless poor," the vagabonds, rogues and loose women, all of whom, according to Harrison, contributed to disorder within the realm.⁷

Looking more closely at these three groups, Harrison identified the first two divisions as the "true poor" and deserving of aid because "the Word doth bind us to make some daily provision" for them. The principal reason for seeing to this provision was to prevent the deserving poor from going out about the country, begging and creating problems for local authorities. Required by statute to remain in their own parish in order

Always Among Us: Images of the poor in Zwingli's Zurich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶William Harrison, Description of England, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

⁷Ibid., 180.

to receive aid, those poor who chose to wander the country were automatically consigned to the third sort, the "undeserving" poor, who were to be judged and treated harshly. Harrison conceded, however, that some persons fell into the third group through the fault of others who robbed them of "their commons, holds, and tenures" and reduced them to vagabondage.⁸

For the poor who voluntarily chose the lifestyle of the rogue and vagabond, Harrison offered no quarter. He further divided this type into two sorts, the first being "idle beggars" who took advantage of natural handicaps or malformations or created such physical conditions in order to elicit sympathy and alms while begging on the street. He noted that some created these conditions by applying "corrosives...to the more fleshy parts of their bodies ... to raise pitiful and odious sores [to] move the hearts of the goers by such places ... [who] thereupon bestow large almesse [alms] upon them."⁹

The second sort were those in good health but who pretended to grievous diseases or to have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own. They evoked charitable responses among the well-meaning populace, who thereby unwittingly cheated the "godly poor" for these "thieves and caterpillars."¹⁰ Harrison estimated this section of the poor to number about 10,000¹¹ and detailed a list compiled by Thomas

⁸Ibid., 181.

⁹Ibid., 182-83.

¹⁰Ibid., 183.

¹¹C. H. Firth and Walter Raleigh, eds., Oxford Historical and Literary Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), vol. 1, Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds, by Frank Aydelotte, 5. Aydelotte says that

Harman which breaks this section down into twenty-three types. Among the males are "priggers of prancers [horse thieves]," "abrams [feigned lunatics]," and "dummerers [sham deaf-mutes]." The women count in their number "bawdy baskets [female peddlers], "morts [prostitutes and thieves]," and "doxies [prostitutes who begin with uprightmen (thieving pimps)]." This section of the poor is a catch-all for all the types that Harrison disliked, including strolling players, palm readers, tinkers and "pretensed scholars." He also had harsh words for "bearwards," people who travelled the country with bears used in bear-baiting contests; Harrison noted that many of these people lost control of their animals, who then attacked and devoured children "whose parents never knew what [had] become of them."¹²

Anatole Feinberg follows Harrison's division of the poor into three sorts and shows how Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in fact echoes these divisions. Reinforcing the duty of Christians to care for the impotent poor, Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge, authors of A Looking Glass for London and England (1590), use the prophetic characters of Jonas and Oseas to "rebuke the citizens of Nineveh-London[:] 'Disdain of poor men, fatherless and sick, / Shall be rewarded with bitter plague.'"¹³ Conversely, many poor characters fake poverty and disability, as does J.

Harrison's figure is high off the mark, as were most estimates of the age on the size of the vagabond class, but the proliferation of estimates indicates "that in the eyes of contemporaries the vagrants were a large and important class."

¹²Harrison, Description of England, 185-86.

¹³Anatole Feinberg, "The Representation of the Poor in Elizabethan and Stuart Drama," Literature and History 12, no. 2 (Autumn 1986): 153.

Day's The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green.¹⁴ Edgar, in Shakespeare's King Lear, is disguised as Poor Tom, an outcast beggar who "is an incarnation of everything antithetical to the order of law represented in his initial identity as 'legitimate' son and heir." The term "Poor Tom" was understood by the Elizabethans to represent a lunatic beggar, an escapee or former resident of Bedlam Hospital; the character is a fraud and a counterfeiter, well-practiced in the art of self-mutilation, and one of those vagrants whom Harrison despised so much.¹⁵

As to the idle poor, these were, according to Feinberg, statistically the most popular characters in Elizabethan and Stuart drama.¹⁶ There were the riotous poor, such as Walter Calverly, in A Yorkshire Tragedy (1606). A gambler, bigamist and spendthrift, he becomes a deranged murderer when the rigors of his life catch up with him. A more appealing rioter is Jack, in The Old Wives Tale (1590), who is "'not worth a halfpenny, and drunk out every penny;...a marvelous fellow!...a poor man but very well beloved.'" ¹⁷

Vagabonds, some menacing and some not, are featured in many plays of the period. In The Three Ladies of London (1581), three beggars boast "'of all occupations under the sun, begging is the best.'" They "neither pay Church-money, subsidies, fifteens, scot nor lot.'" Bands of vagabonds figure prominently in several plays, among them John Fletcher's Beggars' Bush (1622); they refuse to be restored to traditional society

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty" 21.

¹⁶Feinberg, "Representation of the Poor," 153.

¹⁷Ibid., 155.

and, indeed, regard England as a "safer shelter" where vagabondage can be safely practiced.¹⁸ This portrayal makes clear the difficulty that local governments had in distinguishing and prosecuting vagabonds, who often presented themselves as deserving poor.

The more vicious elements of the poor--the rogues, the cony-catchers, and the cut-purses--abound in such works as Jonson's Bartholomew Fair (1614) and the anonymous A Merry Knack to Know a Knave (1592); Autolycus in The Winter's Tale is an unredeemed rogue.¹⁹

Jonson's Cynthia's Revels (1601) mixes the happy-go-lucky beggar vagabonds with the most vicious elements of the Elizabethan underworld, assigning them all to the fringes of society. This tendency by early modern dramatists to lump together all poor types led to the development of other types of poor: the "poor scholar," such as Laureo in Thomas Bekker's Patient Grissil (1600), the "lovable woman of poor descent" and the "decayed poet", all of whom are forced to begging by hardship.²⁰

Oddly enough, it is rare to find a play which reflects the attempts of the government and society to find remedies and provide aid to the poor--among the few are Thomas Dekker's The Honest Whore (1604), which details life inside Bridewell, the famous London house of correction; more often, the dramatists focus on punishment, persecution and harassment. Violence, torture and other cruelties (keeping in mind the fondness of early modern Englishmen, women and children for a good

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 156, 161.

²⁰Ibid., 156.

rousing execution) always found a more receptive audience than did the gentler forms of dealing with the poor, both deserving and otherwise.²¹

It is clear from Harrison's extended discussion of the third element of the poor that these are the people with whom government and society were most concerned. As outlined by Harrison earlier, a person's Christian duty demanded provision for the deserving poor, and this duty was an accepted part of one's daily life. Charity, therefore, was not misplaced when directed to those persons who deserved it. Harrison's division of the poor into "deserving" and otherwise was echoed by other writers of the day. Thomas Harman, the author of A Caveat for Common Cursitors, a pamphlet written in 1566 which was devoted to ridding the kingdom of "'all vagrants and sturdy vagabonds, as passeth through and by all parts of this famous isle, most idly and wickedly.'"²² The chief transgression of the vagrant, Harman believed, was his or her usurpation of the appearance of a truly indigent person; by pretending to be other than he/she was, the lines of distinction between the two types are blurred, leading to a breakdown in the natural hierarchical order.²³ The question of categorization of the poor is one which is central to current historiography on poverty.

Modern historians have given considerable attention to the poor of early modern England. The substantial interest in the field of poverty, dating from the early 1970s, focuses on the difficulty in

²¹Ibid.

²²Barry Taylor, Vagrant Writing: Social and Semiotic Disorders in the English Renaissance (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 1.

²³Ibid., 2.

assigning roles for this segment of society. Paul Slack argues that the poor themselves never segregated themselves into groups such as those outlined by Harrison; in fact, the poor "resisted these straitjackets" as attempts by the government to define them in order to control them.²⁴ With people moving in and out of poverty over the course of a lifetime, the majority of them would not regard dependence on charity or official assistance as permanent. Slack maintains, "It would therefore seem to be a mistake to think of 'the poor' as having distinct social attitudes. Social distinctions were imposed on them from above."²⁵ The poor never considered themselves as separate from society; rather, the people in authority looked to place them on the margins of the social hierarchy.

References to beggars and vagabonds are rife in Shakespeare's drama, and he was clearly aware of their political status within the realm. His treatment of beggars was always defined by emphasizing their marginal participation in society: the "'famished beggars, weary of their lives' (Richard III 5.6.59), of 'seely beggars / Who, sitting in the stocks, refuge their shame / That many have, and others must, set there' (Richard II 5.5.25-7). He knows their weak and feeble cries, 'puling, / like a beggar at Hallowmas' (Two Gentlemen 2.1.24), and he knows that they abandon their children, that one could 'with charitable hand / [Take] up a beggar's issue' at the city gates (Much Ado 4.1.133-4)."²⁶

²⁴Paul A. Slack, "The Reactions of the Poor to Poverty in England c. 1500-1700," in Aspects of Poverty in Early Modern Europe II, ed. Thomas Riis (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), 24.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty" 17.

As Richard Harvey writes, a definition of the poor "depended on where it was asked, when it was asked, and the purpose served by the definition."²⁷ He argues that a definition of the poor cannot be based on the number and type of poor persons receiving regular "pension" relief, since that number could include migrant laborers. Harvey emphatically does not place these "down on their luck" laborers in the vagrant class, although he indicates that definition of the poor can be illuminated by the study of this class. Perhaps one of the most succinct analyses in this regard is offered by Charles Wilson:

The collective title by which the least fortunate of the lower orders of society were known--'the Poor'--did not mean that they were all destitute. It meant that they had little or nothing to save them from destitution when times were bad or as they grew old: that a proportion of them was therefore always destitute, another proportion potentially destitute. These had to rely on charity or theft to keep alive. Their order and welfare formed far the largest and most frightening social problem that faced central and local government in any period.²⁸

Further clarification of this subject is provided by A. L. Beier, who categorizes the poor as two types: the "settled poor" and the "vagrant poor;" resident poor were entitled to aid, while vagrants were not. He notes that the settled poor most often lived in suburbs, forests, and rural wastelands.²⁹

²⁷Richard Harvey, "Recent Research on Poverty in Tudor-Stuart England: Review and Commentary," International Review of Social History 24, part 2 (1979): 237.

²⁸Charles Wilson, England's Apprenticeship 1603-1763 (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1984), 17.

²⁹A. L. Beier, The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Early Stuart England (London and New York: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1983), 5.

A subsequent study by Beier identifies five main characteristics of the vagrant class: 1) they were poor, with no regular income; 2) they were 'able-bodied' and fit to work; 3) they were unemployed and had no master; 4) they were rootless and wandering; and 5) they were lawless and a danger to society.³⁰ Under this definition, the migrant laborer who was temporarily out of work, but law-abiding, could not be classified as a vagrant.

Slack, one of the leading historians of early modern English poverty, uses a twentieth-century analogy that he argues holds true for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well. The poor "were broadly and simply the opposite numbers of the rich, who were an equally mixed bag." The relationship between the two defines the image of the poor, and Slack presents three clear views of this image: 1) they are seen as objects of charity by their "betters"; 2) they appear as a threat to an ordered society; and 3) they are "viewed as a potentially productive resource."³¹ He offers examples of each image: in the first case, "worthy widows and orphans;" in the second, "dangerous rogues;" and third, the "labouring poor." Over the Tudor and Stuart periods, Slack argues that each of these views took a turn in prominence; in consequence, each helped "to determine the perception and treatment of the poor as a whole."³²

³⁰A. L. Beier, Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640 (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1985), 4.

³¹Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 17.

³²Ibid., 18.

Slack's contention that both the rich and the poor consisted of a "mixed bag" of people is borne out by Keith Wrightson, who argues that the medieval concept of three estates--clergy, nobility, and commonalty (everybody else)--was changing in the early modern period to encompass a multitude of estates, degrees, and sorts.³³ He notes that such writers as Robert Crowley described twelve estates of men, one of which was women, while Geoffrey Fenton separated the population into nine different spheres.³⁴ Wrightson argues that the terms "estate" and "degree" were used interchangeably by Tudor and Stuart writers such as Roger Ascham and Robert Burton.³⁵ William Harrison, whose Description provided us with such a vivid portrait of the poor of England, held that there were four sorts of people in England, ranging from gentlemen, to citizens and burgesses, to yeomen, and lastly, to "'the fourth sort of people' who had 'neither voice nor authoritie in the common wealthe, but are to be ruled and not to rule other.'"³⁶ Wrightson maintains that "social flotation" was very apparent in the ranks of gentlemen, where gentility "was ultimately a matter of relative wealth and lifestyle."³⁷ He notes that contemporary writers reached different conclusions regarding variations within the estates, meaning that "relative status emerged from the

³³Keith Wrightson, "Estates, degrees and sorts: changing perceptions of society in Tudor and Stuart England," in Language, History and Class, ed. Penelope Corfield (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1991), 30-52.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶William Harrison, Description of England, quoted in Wrightson, "Estates, degrees and sorts" 34.

³⁷Wrightson, "Estates, degrees and sorts," 39-40.

interplay of a range of variables (of which wealth was the single most important) in a process of social assessment which was, and remained, largely informal."³⁸ One was assigned to the "better sort" or the "meaner sort" based on a perception of these variables, a perception that was constantly being modified in concert with the social and economic changes that characterized Tudor and Stuart England. The new categorizations of people emerging in the early modern period thus reflect the difficulty in assessing what it meant to be "poor."

From the foregoing discussion, we can ascertain that there were clear divisions among the early modern poor, but those divisions could be blurred depending on one's circumstances at the time of charitable consideration. For purposes of this study, however, the poor are considered as being divided into two groups: the deserving poor, which includes the laboring poor, and vagrants (or undeserving poor), since, as we will show, these were the two divisions imposed upon the poor by the government.

Numbers

Beier writes, "The numbers of settled poor varied according to time and place, generally ranging from a fifth to a third of the population."³⁹ Added to this percentage were the numbers of vagrants, which, as noted above in the discussion of Harrison, ranged from his figure of 10,000 to a high estimate of 200,000.⁴⁰ Further, during periods of famine, dearth, and economic hardship, these numbers might

³⁸Ibid., 44.

³⁹Beier, Problem of the Poor, 5.

⁴⁰Beier, Masterless Men, xix.

well double. As Harvey argues, these numbers probably do not "have any special utility in poverty research." He suggests that even the "absolute" numbers provided by historians of localities are not too valuable, except insofar as they are used on a comparative basis, preferably between parishes, regions, and even "between England and developing countries today."⁴¹ Therefore, it would be negligent to ignore the body of figures available for other villages and towns during the period. The need to include them is also underscored by Patten's contention that "this category [the poor] rarely made up less than twenty percent of a town's adult population, and that it could reach fifty percent."⁴² Beier repeats this assertion, noting that "50 to 60 per cent of the population were unable to support themselves."⁴³

Starting with Exeter, figures on the percentage of the poor throughout the period under consideration are sketchy, but Wallace MacCaffrey uses the Great Subsidy of 1524-25 as a basis for calculating the distribution of wealth in the city and states that the figures show an "upper class" consisting of 6 percent of the population and a further "middle class" of some 20 percent, all of whose incomes exceed £10. The rest he classifies as belonging to the lower classes, amounting to an astounding 74 percent, prompting him to write, "the lot of more than half the population was grinding poverty." The subsidy was assessed against those persons who had income or goods of one pound or more, but

⁴¹Harvey, "Recent Research on Poverty," 243.

⁴²Patten, English Towns 1500-1700, 190.

⁴³Beier, Problem of the Poor, 7.

MacCaffrey labels as poor anyone assessed at less than £5.⁴⁴ Accounts of the poor from 1563 to 1572 reveal assessments made to each parish in accordance with the poor-law statutes of 1536, 1552, and 1563, but these assessments were based on the wealth of the parish rather than on the need or number of the poor who lived there.⁴⁵ In the years 1564-1565, records show that 176 persons received poor relief (approximately 2.2 percent based on an estimated population of 8,000), but this number only comprises those persons who were receiving public assistance and does not reveal the total number of poor for this period, although it clearly cannot be near the 1524 figure of 74 percent.⁴⁶

W. B. Stephens goes even further than MacCaffrey in his estimates of impoverishment within the city by the mid-seventeenth century. Noting that the "1641 poll tax return ... provides a serviceable classification of the distribution of wealth at Exeter on the eve of the Civil War" he offers the following analysis: the return lists 5,604 persons (not including paupers and those under the age of sixteen); adding in Gregory King's estimate of an under-sixteen population of 40 percent, Stephens believes that Exeter's population in 1641, including the paupers, was "at

⁴⁴Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter, 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 249.

⁴⁵Ibid., 112; the statutes had provided for voluntary collection of alms in each parish by 1536, and the nomination of collectors was ordered in 1552 to oversee this collection; the city of Exeter, in 1560, regularized these statutes and by 1563, there was agreement between the churchwardens and the parishioners on the sums each parish was expected to contribute, thus the assessments. See chapters 5 and 6 for a fuller discussion of the statutes and their administration both nationally and in Exeter.

⁴⁶Ibid., 113.

least 9,000 but not more than 10,500."⁴⁷ He maintains that 84 percent of those persons listed on the poll tax could be termed as "poor" and that approximately 86 percent of the total population lived in poverty.⁴⁸ A more reliable (and the next available) figure comes from the poll tax of 1660, edited by W. G. Hoskins; although this tax list was compiled thirty-five years beyond the period considered in this study, it can give some idea of the extent of the poor population in Exeter. The total count for this tax was 6,845, but, following Gregory King once again, it has been estimated that 40 percent of the population of England and Wales during this period were under the age of sixteen years. Factoring in this percentage, the population for Exeter in 1660 was approximately 11,410. This figure includes 376 persons who were subsequently written off the roll as too poor to pay the tax, but it does not include those in receipt of alms. If that number is added in, the total population for Exeter in 1660 is estimated at approximately 12,000, meaning that some 966 persons (8.05 percent) were either too poor to pay the tax or were receiving public assistance, but this figure obviously does not include what are called the "laboring poor."⁴⁹

Again, this percentage of poor is significantly lower than those percentages found in the hearth tax returns for 1671-72 by Hoskins.

⁴⁷W. B. Stephens, Seventeenth-Century Exeter (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co. Ltd. for the University of Exeter, 1958), 40.

⁴⁸Ibid., 148; also, W. B. Stephens, Seventeenth-Century Exeter, quoted in Thorold J. Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom. The Extent of Poverty in Tudor and Early Stuart Towns: Some Kentish Evidence," Canadian Journal of History 20, no. 1 (April 1985): 3.

⁴⁹W. G. Hoskins, Exeter in the Seventeenth Century: Tax and Rate Assessments 1602-1699 (Torquay: The Devonshire Press Ltd. for the Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1957).

MacCaffrey notes that the figures posited by Hoskins roughly correspond to those of the 1524-25 subsidy; Hoskins concludes that "'70% of the population could be classed as poor, about 19% as relatively comfortable, 8 1/2% as prosperous and 2 1/2% as well-to-do.'" ⁵⁰ Obviously, the variance among all these numbers calls for review and revision, which is offered later in this chapter.

What of other towns and cities in this period? In Ipswich, a 1597 census revealed that, of a population of 5,000, 412 were indigent adults and children, or 8 percent of the total population. Additionally, of this 8 percent, only forty-eight people (11 percent) actually received relief.⁵¹ Paul Slack notes that this census did not include three of the twelve parishes of Ipswich and posits that 4 percent of the people in these missing parishes were receiving relief (though he does not reveal the basis for this figure); his total percentage of the poor based on Ipswich's population is 13 percent.⁵² If the 4 percent were added to Moore's figures, a total percentage of poor, based on her calculations, would be 12 percent. Moore notes that Slack's figures do not agree with hers, but she is unclear as to the base population figure he is using to calculate the percentage of poor.⁵³

For St. Mary's Parish in Warwick, a 1582 survey showed sixty-eight families "ready to decay into poverty" while another forty-two were being

⁵⁰W. G. Hoskins, (no source), quoted in MacCaffrey, Exeter, 249.

⁵¹Carol Moore, "Poor Relief in Elizabethan England: A New Look at Ipswich," Proceedings and Papers of the Georgia Association of Historians 3 (1986): 113.

⁵²Slack, Poverty and Policy, 74.

⁵³Moore, "Poor Relief in Elizabethan England," 119n.

given relief, a total of 110 families who could be considered poor, amounting to 29.5 percent of the population, though relief was being given to only 11.3 percent. Five years later, there were ninety-three families in receipt of relief out of approximately 398 households, for a percentage of 23.4.⁵⁴ Slack reduces the 1587 survey to mendicants only, thereby putting the number of poor at 12 percent.⁵⁵

Huddersfield, a community that was more than a village but less than a town, registered seven hundred poor in 1622; based on a population between 2,800 and 3,500, the poor amounted to between 20 and 25 percent of the population.⁵⁶ A 1635 count of two parishes in Salisbury showed 250 poor, which was 5 percent of the population, though Slack notes that the figure does not include the "labouring poor."⁵⁷ Worcester's 1577 census details only poor households, of which there were 321, resulting in 777 poor, 18 percent of the population.⁵⁸

The Norwich census of the poor of 1570 is probably the most famous of these statistical documents and is the most complete of its age, both in number and description of the poor. Of a total population of approximately 10,625, 2,359 were listed as poor, or 22 percent. According to Slack, only a quarter of this number were on relief, or 5 percent of the total. Slack also points out that the census does not

⁵⁴A. L. Beier, "The social problems of an Elizabethan country town: Warwick, 1580-90," in Country Towns in pre-industrial England, ed. Peter Clark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 58-60.

⁵⁵Slack, Poverty and Policy, 74.

⁵⁶Ibid., 75.

⁵⁷Ibid., 74.

⁵⁸Ibid., 73, 74.

include the foreign community of religious refugees from the continent living in Norwich at the time--an estimated 5,000 people.⁵⁹

What is to be made of these variant figures? How is it that one community seems to have almost 80 percent of its population as poor, while others have as little as 2 to 5 percent? Is it true that "Poverty not infrequently threatened to overwhelm English towns"?⁶⁰ The answer, Thorold Tronrud asserts, lies in misuse of figures and indicators; specifically, he challenges the "conviction that tax assessments are legitimate indicators of indigence and the belief that a definition of poverty based upon economic absolutes, such as levels of subsistence, is appropriate as a measure of real poverty."⁶¹

The problem, Tronrud argues, is that modern historians do not view poverty in the same way that the people of Tudor and early Stuart England did. Social inequality rather than destitution informed them of poverty, not the other way around. It is clear that over the course of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, the rich were getting richer and everyone else was getting poorer, and it was this polarization of wealth that "the poor" railed against. Calls for a re-distribution of economic resources followed, but this reaction is not, Tronrud states, indicative of a decrease in the actual standard of living.⁶²

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., English Towns in Transition 1500-1700 (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 121.

⁶¹Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 2.

⁶²Ibid., 2-3.

Hoskins used the lay subsidy of 1524 to determine wealth distribution and found that "'fully two-thirds of the urban population in the 1520's lived below or very near the poverty line,' by which he meant the level of subsistence" or the amount one had to earn in order to buy the things necessary to sustain life at minimal standards.⁶³ Subsequent historians have used the same calculations, among them John Pound, Wallace MacCaffrey, and W. B. Stephens. Tronrud notes that these historians assume that the 30 or 40 percent having less than 20s. worth of land, goods or wages, and who were not assessed in the subsidy, were destitute. These "nil" assessments are translated to mean, as Hoskins puts it, people "'without any recognizable means of subsistence'."⁶⁴ On top of this "desperately" poor group, Hoskins, Pound and MacCaffrey also throw in up to one-half of the taxable population as close enough to the poverty-line to be considered poor. Pound included those persons assessed at £2 or under as part of the poor in his analysis of the 1570 Norwich census, while MacCaffrey allows that £4 and under qualifies one as "poor."⁶⁵ All the subsidies we have analyzed begin assessments at £1 in income and goods, so we may assume that the government believed that such persons were not below the level of subsistence, although they might be on the edge of it. In point of fact, it is difficult to pinpoint what the level of subsistence was for the early modern period; as D. M.

⁶³W. G. Hoskins, Provincial England (London: Longman Group Limited, 1963), 83-84, quoted in Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 3.

⁶⁴W. G. Hoskins, Provincial England, 84, quoted in Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 4.

⁶⁵MacCaffrey, Exeter, 247-49, quoted in Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 4.

Palliser writes, "all that can be safely said is that thoughtful Elizabethans meant by 'the poor' those whose earnings or income were insufficient to support themselves or their families, and even more, those without work."⁶⁶ Christopher Dyer notes that "'standards of living' either today or in the past, cannot be measured exactly." By 1520, the contemporary belief was "that life could be sustained on 1/4d. per day, which was the cost of the loaf of bread...to maintain 'physiological and psychological health' a variety of foods was required...[plus] clothing and housing, which would probably come near to...1d per head per day...."⁶⁷ The assumption by the Great Subsidy in 1524/5 of 20s. as the level of subsistence echoes this finding.

Tronrud casts doubt on the Great Subsidy as an effective tool to ascertain wealth since, as he states, actual incomes were not reflected in the subsidy. Following Charles Phythian-Adams, he argues that the "normal income of an unskilled labourer in the 1520's would almost certainly have been in excess of the one to two pounds usually shown on the assessment for such persons," even assuming the lowest wage rate and a very short working year.⁶⁸ Extras, such as employer-provided meals, commons rights, and by-employments were not taken into account by the subsidy and did exist in many cases as wage supplements. For Coventry, Phythian-Adams notes how assessments on goods were severely undervalued

⁶⁶D. M. Palliser, The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors 1547-1603 (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983), 119-20.

⁶⁷Christopher Dyer, Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 274.

⁶⁸Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 4.

as well; 45.5 percent of those households with goods listed at two pounds or under and 73.3 percent of those listed at between three and five pounds had in-servants, which was "hardly an indicator of poverty."⁶⁹

The notion of destitution for those listed as having "nil" assessments is also false, Tronrud claims. Phythian-Adams found that a "substantial minority" of those persons in this category had in-servants or they had dwelling rents worth more than those of the poorest cottagers. Many of them were employed, as can be shown by the Norwich census; the "adult poor...were employed in a variety of occupations from labourers to metal-workers to professionals."⁷⁰

It is clear, Tronrud writes, that the "poor" were composed of many subtle levels; "it was a hierarchy of economic and social categories" lumped under a single term, which met the rest of the population at various times and stages at the "poverty line." But the subsistence definition of poverty is not objective, Tronrud argues, because "the line dividing poor from non-poor must mirror the values of the society under consideration;" therefore, it cannot be considered "universally applicable."⁷¹ Tronrud believes that it is the application of this concept in its absolute definition that has led Pound and Hoskins astray in their calculations.⁷²

⁶⁹Charles Phythian-Adams, Desolation of a City (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 132-34, quoted in Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 4-5.

⁷⁰Phythian-Adams, Desolation, 132, 241, quoted in Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 5.

⁷¹Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 5.

⁷²Ibid., 6.

The lists and censuses developed by local authorities for poor relief are, Tronrud states, the best quantitative sources for ascertaining poverty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He notes that Pound's calculation of the poor in Norwich in 1570 is a wider one based on tax assessments and not on the full census of the poor, thus overestimating his percentages of wealth distribution.⁷³

Tronrud uses the towns of New Romney and Faversham in Kent as examples for developing a true count of the number of poor within the parameters of the community's understanding of poverty. The local poor, he notes, "fell into two main groups: the impotent and the able-bodied." Both cities compiled lists of the poor and divided them into categories for the purpose of assigning relief.⁷⁴ In the end, New Romney shows a percentage of poor in 1596 ranging from 18.1 to 28.2, while a subsequent analysis of 1602 shows a substantial increase of poor people, with the percentage being between 30.5 and 37.7 (a reaction to the crises of the 1590s). Faversham, in 1595, revealed a percentage of poor somewhere between 29.1 and 35.5.⁷⁵ This range of poverty, between 20 and 35 percent (or one quarter to one third of the population), corresponds to statistics for Worcester, Huddersfield, Norwich and Salisbury (after extrapolating for all of its parishes, a total of 33 percent in 1635). Tronrud concludes that poverty, while a serious problem in Kent as elsewhere, was not an "overwhelming burden;" indeed, there is no proof

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., 8, 9; also, see Slack on the issue of social division, above.

⁷⁵Tronrud, "Dispelling the Gloom," 21.

that "'fully two-thirds' [of the population were] living at or very near the subsistence line."⁷⁶ Relativism, Tronrud states, is what defined poverty in Tudor-Stuart times: in other words, poverty was determined by one's relationship to others within the same society.⁷⁷ When early modern census takers established categories for the poor, they "had a clear conception of the relativeness of poverty;" it was poverty based not on levels of subsistence but on what poverty meant to the community of which the person was a part.⁷⁸

If we apply Tronrud's theories to the situation in Exeter, a substantially different picture from that presented by MacCaffrey and Hoskins emerges as to the percentage of poor within the city of Exeter during the period of our study. Going back to an earlier survey of Exeter's population, the Military Survey of 1522, we find that there were 1,363 entries on this list (far in excess of the 956 entries in the Great Subsidy of 1524/25), and it only excludes wives of householders, widowed mothers sharing living space with children, and, of course, children under the age of sixteen. What makes the Military Survey so valuable is that it includes those persons assessed at "nil," so we can make some calculations as to the percentage of poor in 1522. Of the 1,363 persons listed, 36 percent were put at "nil." This percentage is closely in line with the averages established for other areas.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷Ibid., 13.

⁷⁸Ibid., 14.

⁷⁹Specific information about the content of the subsidies under discussion is contained in Margery M. Rowe, ed., Tudor Exeter: Tax Assessments 1489-1595 including the Military Survey 1522 (Torquay: The

Margery Rowe notes that a comparison of the Military Survey with the Great Subsidy shows "a large floating population, probably composed of workers who frequently changed their employment," raising the possibility that the surveys and subsidies could not account for the economic position of the mass of the population. The Military Subsidy had a number of appeals launched against it, appeals designed to reduce the amount on which one might be assessed, though the notations regarding these are mostly illegible. It is interesting to note, however, that William Hurst, one of the richest merchants in the city, claimed "losses due to commercial disasters" to reduce his tax.⁸⁰ If appeals were set in motion by the richest persons in the city, it is possible to assume that the right of appeal percolated downwards through the entire population, with the result being that the Military Subsidy did not, in fact, present a true picture of the wealth in the city. Charles Wilson maintains that, in fact, "Elizabethan England was very lightly taxed. Rich men paid far less than some thought they should, poorer men paid nothing, and for this they had to thank the Queen's saving spirit."⁸¹

Taking this into account, and once again relying on Tronrud's theories, we can recalculate MacCaffrey's percentage of poor: those persons paying at the level of subsistence, set by the government at 20s. (£1), number 258, or 27 percent of the total payers in the Military Subsidy--956. Since this subsidy was made before the passage of the

Devonshire Press Ltd. for the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1977), xi, 7-33.

⁸⁰Rowe, Tudor Exeter, xiv.

⁸¹Wilson, England's Apprenticeship, 90.

statutes for the voluntary collection of alms for the poor, we have no reliable figures to ascertain the number of dependent poor in the community. If we look forward to the percentage of persons receiving assistance in the 1560s, which was approximately 176 persons or 2.2 percent of the population, we can back project that figure to 1524/25 to calculate a very rough estimate for the numbers of dependent poor at that time. Added together, the level of subsistence payers and the dependent poor did not amount to more than approximately 30 percent of the population, which, again, is in line with other established averages. It is only when we add in persons making more than 20s. but less than £4 (41.8 percent) that we arrive at MacCaffrey's estimation of 70 percent of the population as "poor." Following Tronrud, however, we can assume that those persons assessed above the level of subsistence, while certainly not even remotely "comfortable," equally cannot be described as "grindingly poor."

The poll tax of 1660 provides a much better picture of the economic situation of the populace than does the poll tax of 1641, which was used by Stephens to calculate that 84 percent of the population were "poor." The 1660 tax covered all persons regardless of gender above the age of sixteen, and provided that "every single person above the age of sixteen years was to pay 12d, and all other persons not otherwise rated and not receiving alms 6d."⁸² 6,845 persons were subject to the tax; taking into consideration the 40 percent of the population under sixteen, Hoskins estimates the population to have numbered 11,410; adding in the paupers of the city--some 600 in number--he concludes that the total population

⁸²Hoskins, Exeter in the Seventeenth Century, xv.

for Exeter in 1660 was "in the region of 12,000 people."⁸³ The dependent poor thus represent 5 percent of the population in 1660. The poll tax of 1660 can also be considered reliable in terms of population due to the stringent penalties assessed if a householder failed to supply a complete list of all persons over sixteen living in his or her house: failure to supply the list at all incurred a penalty of £5, while the omission of any person liable for the tax from such lists was fined at 10s. per omission.⁸⁴

A final contrast is provided by the Poor Rate of 1699; although it is nearly seventy-five years beyond our period, it does provide some illumination into the number and percentage of persons dependent for alms upon the city. Ratepayers were assessed on their property and their personal estate, but it is not clear what standards were applied in terms of inclusion for the rates; we can therefore make no conclusions about the wealth distribution in the city.⁸⁵ Hoskins holds that the population of Exeter at the end of the seventeenth century must have been just behind that of Birmingham, which, according to Ronald Hutton, numbered 15,032 in 1700.⁸⁶ Assuming a population of approximately 15,000 for 1699-1700, we can then assess a percentage of dependent poor, as the rate

⁸³Ibid., xvi; Hoskins notes that there is another estimate of the city's population in 1676 available at the William Salt Library at Stafford which sets the total at 13,000 (including almsmen and children). This estimate, Hoskins says, is in line with his posited figure of 12,000 for 1660.

⁸⁴Ibid., xv.

⁸⁵Ibid., xvii-xix; 87-122.

⁸⁶Ibid., ix.

records show that 528 persons received assistance in 1699; these persons represent 3.52 percent of the population.⁸⁷

From the available figures, we have seen that at no time did the percentage of dependent poor exceed 5 percent of the population; in 1524/5, those assessed at 20s. (the level of subsistence) represented 27 percent of the population. By 1641, the level of subsistence was set at an unknown figure between £3 and £5 per annum. As the 1641 poll tax included 3,320 persons classified as "less than five pounds," we have no way of knowing how many of them were above the level of subsistence or hovering on the edge of it. Stephens admits, however, that "the wages of [all] those included [in the poll tax] were, at the time of the tax, above the subsistence level." Not only does Stephens describe this number as "poor and near poor," he also includes another 123 individuals making at least £5 but less than £10 as "poor," resulting in a total percentage under this category of 84 percent.⁸⁸ We have already discussed the mistakes inherent in this type of analysis, but in the absence of an in-depth examination of the actual figures for 1641--as they were beyond the scope of this study--we can make no firm conclusions about the number of persons found at the subsistence level. We can dismiss the 3 percent of those persons making more than £5, as we have already established that the level of subsistence was somewhere below that amount. Of the remaining 81 percent, we can assume that a large proportion of that number had incomes above the level of subsistence, or no lower than three pounds. For previous subsidies, the percentage of

⁸⁷Ibid., 87-122.

⁸⁸Stephens, Seventeenth-Century Exeter, 40-41.

wage earners at the level of subsistence has been shown to be no more than 30 percent of the population, and there is no reason to suspect that it is substantially different, in terms of proportion, in 1641. Even allowing for underestimates, and including both the dependent and laboring poor, the percentage of those living in abject or uncomfortable poverty cannot have comprised more than 40 percent of the population. So we see that the Exeter of our period probably experienced ranges of poverty between 32 and 40 percent, a figure which correlates with the experiences of similar early modern English communities.

A final consideration: the polarization of wealth did not mean that living conditions had worsened for a larger percentage of the population; it only meant that the poorer members of a community had become less socially equal based on their goods and income. Also, as Paul Slack writes, it is not necessary to distinguish "between [the] background [of poverty] and crisis, but between *shallow* and *deep* poverty. Some people in poverty may be much more deprived than others; they may be starving while others simply lack fuel or clothes."⁸⁹ Though misery and want did exist (as will be documented in chapter 2), poverty should not be over-emphasized as a "crushing burden," since some of it can--and should be--imputed to pure social inequality. As this inequality grew over the course of the Tudor-Stuart period, the rich came increasingly under criticism, particularly as ostentatious lifestyles became the order of the day. As will be explored in the next chapter, in the black-letter broadside ballads of the day, the rich were shamed into charity, often through barely disguised threats of eternal damnation. It was believed

⁸⁹Slack, Poverty and Policy, 39.

(erroneously) that charity could redress "society's growing economic imbalance" and thus eradicate poverty.⁹⁰ We now turn to an examination of the actual life of the poor and their portrayal in popular literature of the day in order to determine why this belief was incorrect.

⁹⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE FACE OF POVERTY (II)

Any assessment of the problem of poverty must include an examination of the life led by the poor--how they worked, how they played, what clothes they wore, what houses they lived in--and whether their lives reflected prevailing popular perceptions; these perceptions are perhaps best ascertained from an analysis of contemporary literature and ballads. We can then evaluate the reality of the existence of the poor in light of public attitudes towards them.

The Life of the Poor

Much has been and will be written of the third type of poor outlined by Harrison, the rogues and vagabonds (see examples in chapter 2); therefore, this section will concentrate on the day-to-day life of the deserving poor (including the laboring poor). However, as we noted earlier, vagrants often appeared to be part of the deserving poor, and, as such, will be brought into this discussion from time to time.

There is little written evidence of the lifestyles of the poor, simply because most, if not all, were illiterate and did not leave behind them diaries or records as the upper classes did. As we have seen previously, the poor lived primarily in the town and city suburbs, farmlands, the forests, and the rural wastelands, when they were not wandering the roads in search of work (unlike the vagabonds, who wandered the countryside in order to avoid work).

The lifestyles of the wandering poor were much like those of the vagrants and rogues; a hand-to-mouth existence, sleeping out-of-doors for much of the time while enduring the elements. Since the passage of laws

that required the poor to apply for aid in their parish of residence, showing up in a parish other than the one a person was born in was fraught with danger; in an attempt to solve the poverty problem, parish officials drove out any unregistered poor, often whipping or branding them in the process.¹ Over the course of the period, many poor made their way to London, where overcrowding and lack of work made living that much worse. Honest poor were driven to begging and sometimes to outright crime in order to keep body and soul together; it is at this point that their lives meld with that of the vagrants and rogues.

Turning to the working poor, those persons who hovered at the level of subsistence, we need to attempt as complete a description of this segment of society as is possible. Such an attempt is fraught with difficulty, involving as it does myriad variations in lifestyle--urban or rural--occupation (if any), and economic context. We must also take into consideration the paucity of figures concerning these people. Those caveats aside, it is possible to construct a plausible recreation of the lives of the laboring poor.

First, we have already seen that the level of subsistence varied from time to time over the course of our period, extending from a low of 20s. (£1) to perhaps as much as £5. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield argue, however, that "the most important factor in determining the level of the standard of living in the short run was the price of food."² What

¹The record of prosecutions of unregistered vagrants is discussed in chapter 6 of this study.

²E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 312.

percentage of a laborer's budget went for food? E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins developed a composite commodity--a basket of consumables--made up of the items a typical household would consume or use on a daily basis, and posited the percentages each item represented in the laborer's budget.³ One of the major drawbacks to the Phelps Browns-Hopkins schematic is that their distribution of outlay is limited to three periods, none of which are to be found in the period of our study.

The first of these periods is 1453-60, one hundred years before Elizabeth's accession, so the evidence we glean from it must be tempered by this consideration. At any rate, their findings suggest that 80 percent of the budget went for food: farinaceous (grains); meat and fish; butter and cheese; and drink, including the cost of sugar. Fuel and light consumed another 7 1/2 percent, while textiles (clothing) were assigned no part of the budget. This estimate leaves 12 1/2 percent of the budget as discretionary, which, if one were living at the level of subsistence, is an unrealistic assumption. It also does not account for the costs of housing, which could be particularly high in towns and cities.

³E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables compared with Builders' Wage-rates," Economica, n.s., 23, no. 92 (November 1956): 296-97; see also the same authors for "Seven Centuries of Building Wages," Economica, n.s., 22, no. 87 (August 1955): 195-206; Phelps Brown and Hopkins base a number of their findings on the estimates provided in the following: James E. Thorold Rogers, A History of Agriculture and Prices in England, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887) and William Beveridge, Prices and Wages in England from the Twelfth to the Nineteenth Century, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1939).

Another surprising aspect of this estimate is the percentage weight given to the different foodstuffs: 20 percent is dedicated to the farinaceous products, while 35 percent goes to the purchase of meat and fish, and 23 percent is consumed by drink. The reality of life for the poor was the relative unavailability of meat except on very special occasions, while a meal featuring fish might occur more often, but still rarely except in coastal areas. The great bulk of the diet of the laboring poor would be based on grains, with less reliance on the more expensive wheat than on rye, barley, and oats.⁴ William Harrison pointed out in 1577, "As for wheaten bread, they eat it when they can reach unto the price of it. Contenting themselves in the meane time with bread made of otes and barlaie: a poore estate God wot!"⁵ Sir Hugh Platt's treatise Sundrie new and Artificiall remedies against Famine...written uppon thoccasion of this present Dearth in 1596 advised the poor on a bread substitute: "...boile your beanes, pease, beechmast, &c. in faire water...then you muste drie them...and make bread thereof."⁶ In addition to bread and bread substitutes, the poor subsisted on small amounts of milk, supplemented by other proteins such as an occasional egg, a rare slice of fat pork, and small servings of cheese and lard.⁷ Phelps Brown and Hopkins appear to be correct in their assumption that the poor did

⁴Phelps Brown and Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables," 296-97.

⁵William Harrison, Description of England, quoted in Robert Jutte, Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 72.

⁶Sir Hugh Platt, quoted in Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 73.

⁷Ibid.

spend at least 80 percent of their income on food, since one must have sustenance in order to survive; clothing and housing, though important, gave way before basic nourishment.⁸ Into the seventeenth century, however, Charles Wilson maintains that the proportion of national income spent on food and drink hovered around 50 percent, with between one-seventh and one-third of this amount spent on beer.⁹

Slack points out that poor law overseers in Ipswich in the 1590s and in Salisbury in the 1630s shared a common rule of thumb in their assumptions about the weekly cost of food: 8d to 1s. was considered sufficient for an adult, while 4d to 6d provided for a child's needs. Large increases in the price of food could wreak havoc with a poor family's budget, and it was at these times that cheaper types of bread and beer were relied upon for meals.¹⁰

For the poor, clothing was generally made of the fabrics easiest to obtain; in England, wool was obviously the choice of many, while leather was also popular since most people wore shoes. Linen could also be worn, and the very poor might be forced to rely on canvas materials. The poor normally made their own clothes, though some urban unfortunates could rely upon the generosity of others' cast-offs; we shall see later that a popular device for luring the poor to swell the ranks at funerals was to offer clothing in exchange for attendance. If one were a servant,

⁸Phelps Brown and Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables," 297.

⁹Charles Wilson, England's Apprenticeship 1603-1763 (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1984), 22.

¹⁰Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 80-81.

clothes often came as part of the wage. Most of the poor did not own more than a few pieces of clothing, and cherished what little they had, often bequeathing it to others upon death. The tramping poor, the beggars and the vagrants, carried all their belongings with them; cleanliness and care not being of paramount concern to such persons, they often presented a ragged, dirty appearance, hence their portrayal as such in contemporary literature. John Awdeley, the author of The Fraternity of Vagabonds (1561) described a number of these individuals, among them the "'Green Winchard' who 'when his hose is broken and hang out his shoes he will put them into his shoes again with a stick, but he will not amend them', and he expresses at the same time his disgust for such a 'slothful knave, that had liefer go like a beggar than cleanly'."¹¹

Housing, of course, represented a significant expenditure for the poor as well. Slack notes that there were many "gradations of comfort" in shelter for the poor; it ranged from sheds in tenements or openings in the town wall to the occupation of regular houses. Many of the poor rented rooms in others' houses, but more ambitious poor rented their own houses, and some aspired to buy property. Statistics for Norwich show that 8 percent of the poor were in fact owner-occupiers in 1570. For this reason, Slack maintains, "it would be inaccurate to paint a uniformly dismal picture of housing conditions in the poor neighborhoods of sixteenth-century towns."¹² While there was some overcrowding, there were usually no more than five people to a house when renting, and perhaps a smaller number when ownership was involved. Slack shows that

¹¹Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 80; see also 78-82.

¹²Slack, Poverty and Policy, 81-82.

the common rent in Norwich by the 1630s was fl per year for one room.¹³ During the sixteenth century, cottage and house rents ranged from 2s. to 3s. per year up to 6s. 8d.¹⁴ The homes of the poor were generally clustered in the back alleys and suburbs of the city or town, and were constructed, like their rural equivalents, out of thatched cob.¹⁵ Farm laborers usually lived in cottages consisting of three rooms or less, which were poorly furnished, as were urban dwellings. Most poor households normally contained a bedstead, a table, and one or two chairs; the poorest folk slept on a straw mattress on the floor.¹⁶ Rents in the countryside stayed generally in line with the rents being paid in urban areas, running the gamut between 1s. 6d per annum to 6s. 8d.¹⁷

Using the wills and inventories of the villagers of Terling, Keith Wrightson and David Levine show that, at least for the yeomen, husbandmen and upper craftsmen, housing improved significantly around the turn of the century. Most of them were of one story, and chimneys were common; consisting of a hall and a chamber; by the 1650s many also included a parlor. Bedding was considered quite valuable, and after 1550, other items appeared in the inventories such as cupboards and hutches, cooking

¹³Ibid., 82.

¹⁴W. G. Hoskins, The Age of Plunder: King Henry's England 1500-47 (London: Longman Group Limited, 1976), 114.

¹⁵D. M. Palliser, The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors 1547-1603 (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983), 207.

¹⁶L. A. Clarkson, The Pre-Industrial Economy in England 1500-1750 (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1971), 226.

¹⁷Hoskins, The Age of Plunder, 115.

pots and utensils, and the occasional silver spoon or brass candlestick.¹⁸

MacCaffrey maintains that the households of the poorer citizens of Exeter during our period generally mimicked the great merchants' houses, though with "fewer rooms, fewer luxuries but still modest comfort." An upper craftsman might have a hall, two sleeping chambers and a kitchen, besides his shop. Decorative cloths might be found on the walls, while cushions rested on the bench and the chairs. Lower down the social scale, a poor joiner might have one room, and "a mere scattering of furnishings, but even so there was the comfort of a feather bed and bolster, sheets, and coverlet." Like Norwich, however, there must have been a substantial number of poor who lived in back street hovels and rented rooms, though MacCaffrey points out that there are no inventories extant that describe such dwellings.¹⁹ Hoskins notes that rentals of city property in Exeter in the 1580s indicate that cottage rents were 4s. to 5s. a year.²⁰

How did the poor earn their food, clothing and housing? Starting again with Phelps Brown and Hopkins, who examined the wage rates for builders in southern England, both craftsmen and laborers, they found that, before the 1530s, the wages of craftsmen averaged around 6d per diem, with laborers' wages at 4d a day. Over the next thirty years, up

¹⁸Keith Wrightson and David Levine, "The Peasantry: Material Life and Rational Controls," in The Other Side of Western Civilization, ed. Peter M. Stearns, 3d ed., vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1984), 23-24.

¹⁹Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter, 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) 269-70.

²⁰Hoskins, The Age of Plunder, 114.

to 1560, wage rates doubled, (12d and 8d, respectively) but earnings, over the course of the sixteenth century, failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Wages did not begin to rise again until the 1630s; increasing by 50 percent by the 1660s, craftsmen were earning 18d per diem and laborers 12d.²¹ The conclusion of their findings for our period suggest a "Malthusian crisis" as their figures indicate that "the wages of urban building craftsmen between 1590 and 1610 had a purchasing power of only 43 per cent of their value in the later fifteenth century."²²

Wrigley and Schofield, however, suggest that the recurring famines during the period did not result in "lethal consequences on a grand scale." They cite as their examples the deficient harvest years of 1555/6 and 1586/7; real wages fell drastically during these years, but the death rate "either scarcely rose above trend...or was actually below average."²³ Certainly there were years in which the poor suffered greatly, but Palliser, anticipating Wrigley and Schofield, argues that the wage rates relied on by Phelps Brown and Hopkins and other economists are restrictive in terms of living standards for building craftsmen, and that their "published wage rates are not necessarily typical of urban wages."²⁴ Though some building craftsmen did better economically than

²¹Phelps Brown and Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables," 296-314; this study relies on the straight-forward discussions of their findings contained in Clarkson, Pre-Industrial Economy, 222-25, and Palliser, Age of Elizabeth, 157-160.

²²Palliser, Age of Elizabeth, 157.

²³Wrigley and Schofield, Population History, 325.

²⁴Palliser, Age of Elizabeth, 157.

others, "it seems certain that the living standards of many building craftsmen fell nothing like as much as the Brown-Hopkins index suggests. Indeed the real income of many may have fallen little, if at all, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries."²⁵

Palliser offers the following caveats to Phelps Brown and Hopkins: first, he argues that the level of fifteenth-century wages was exceptionally high, just as those of 1600 were exceptionally low; they do not reflect the average wage. Second, with wages measured only in pence per day, there are no figures available for how many days during the year these people worked. Phelps Brown and Hopkins also did not take into account payments in kind, such as food and drink; as Palliser points out, "the statutory wages laid down under the act of 1563 all gave alternative maxima for wages with and without 'meat and drinke.'²⁶ In addition, no effective cost-of-living index has been devised. Further, real income should have been based on the earnings of families, rather than on individual wage-earners, since an increasing number of women and children were participating in the support of the family. Tim Wales points out that "all household members rather than the head alone were of necessity earners...The welfare of the poor household rested on the employment of as many of its members as possible."²⁷ Paul Slack agrees, saying that "In order to pay their way, poor families needed as many

²⁵Donald Woodward, "Wage Rates and Living Standards in Pre-Industrial England," Past and Present 91 (May 1981): 44.

²⁶Palliser, Age of Elizabeth, 158.

²⁷Tim Wales, "Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle: some evidence from seventeenth-century Norfolk," in Land, Kinship and Life Cycle, ed. Richard M. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 353.

sources of income as there were items of expenditure." The only way to insure survival, Slack believes, was for women and children to work "whenever they could," primarily in the textile trades, or doing housework.²⁸ Also, as we have previously pointed out, Phelps Brown and Hopkins' "basket of consumables" is unrealistic for a poor laboring family, since they would make adjustments to food stuffs in times of higher prices. Phelps Brown and Hopkins admit an overstatement of the builders' poverty, as they did not adjust for variations in price increases between food products. Finally, there was no acknowledgement that, for many of these builders, their wages only represented part of their total income. As Palliser notes, some had their own "self-sufficient holdings...[while others] often had smallholdings [sic] or at least common rights...Even urban craftsmen had their common lands on which they could keep a milk cow."²⁹ For all poor people, not just regular wage earners, there were ways of keeping body and soul together. "All the poor depended, in degrees varying according to the nature of the local economy and society, on a whole series of sources of income to support themselves--day labour, by-employments, and casual jobs, common rights, charitable doles, neighbourly and/or kin support, loans and begging."³⁰

The Statute of 1495 regulated hours of work, and its strictures were not amended until the industrial reform movements of the nineteenth century; they were certainly observed during the early modern period.

²⁸Slack, Poverty and Policy, 82-83.

²⁹Palliser, Age of Elizabeth, 159.

³⁰Wales, "Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle," 352.

The statute noted that "many artificers and laborers 'waste much part of their day and deserve not their wages, sometimes in late coming to work, early departing therefrom, long sitting at their breakfast, at their dinner, and their noon-meat,'" so regulation was needed to stop these practices.³¹ The act required that workers be at their employment from five in the morning until seven or eight in the evening from March 15 to September 15, with two hours allowed for meals and a short nap, depending on the time of year. During the other six months of the year, work was to commence at "the springing of the day" and continue until nightfall. In some areas, working hours were set from six in the morning until six in the evening for all months of the year. The statute further forbade masters to pay journeymen more than 12d a week, and required notice of termination of employment on both sides. The termination clause was tightened up in 1520, and other regulations were passed in London in 1538. Hoskins sees this regulation as a forerunner of industrial discipline, though at this time, the pace of work was slower, dependent as it was on manpower, not machine power. He emphasizes that, apart from the essentials of life, there was really nothing to buy with one's wages except for drink at the local alehouse where men spent much of their extra time: "...drink was the only consumer good that was widely available, and one that was relatively cheap. Alcoholism was almost certainly widely prevalent in Tudor and Stuart England."³²

³¹Hoskins, The Age of Plunder, 108.

³²Ibid., 108-109; see also the discussion of drinking in Peter Clark, The English Alehouse: a Social History 1200-1830 (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983), below.

The statute was intended to secure the maximum performance for days when work could be performed; weather was uncertain, and rain kept many trades from operating, such as builders. In general, work was irregular in length and permanence, and the extensive number of holidays also contributed to the uncertainty of employment. Hoskins posits that all these considerations make it quite possible that, on average, there were no more than three working days a week.³³

The recalculation of Phelps Brown and Hopkins' figures by Peter Bowden indicate that rural laborers did slightly better than their urban counterparts. Bowden examined the wage rates of agricultural workers at Oxford, Cambridge and Eton College for the period between 1450 and 1649; he found that the average day rate in 1450 was 4d; by 1559, it had increased to 6.33d per diem and had risen to 8.66d by the end of the century. It continued its upward spiral during the Jacobean period, climbing to 10d a day by 1629. In every decade between 1550 and 1620, the purchasing power of the agricultural laborers' wage rate exceeded that of the building craftsmen.³⁴

How are these generalizations about wage rates in early modern England reflected in the experiences of the localities? Wrightson and Levine note that the official wage estimates for an Essex laborer in 1599 showed that he was to earn 8d to 10d per day, without food and drink, with seasonal variations. By the 1610s, the official rate ranged from 8d to 16d per diem, again without food and drink, and was dependent on

³³Ibid., 110-11.

³⁴Peter Bowden, "Statistical Appendix," in The Agrarian History of England and Wales, ed. Joan M. Thirsk, vol. 4 1500-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 864-65.

the task involved, since harvest work paid higher wages. A comparison of per diem wages between the various trades showed collarmakers and tailors earning 10d to 14d, while carpenters received 12d to 16d. By 1661, laborers were to make 12d to 14d, as were tailors; coopers, sawyers, and collarmakers earned 14d to 16d, and carpenters got 16d to 20d. By the end of the century, common laborers, based on Terling churchwardens' accounts, were receiving at least one shilling a day for normal work. Using all these figures, Wrightson and Levine constructed a table that shows the annual income from various trades from 1599 to 1700. They assume a six-day work week, amounting to 312 working days a year, but note that the underemployment of labor during this period might render this assumption as overstated; however, one must also keep in mind the contributions made to family income by working wives and children, contributions which may equalize any overstatement of days worked. Their findings, in part, are as follows: in 1599, a laboring family's income, based on per diem wages of 9d, amounted to approximately £11 14s. for a year's work. By 1610, the same family, earning a 12d per day rate, might bring in £15 12s. per annum. The families of tailors and collarmakers made the same amount, while carpenters brought in 13d daily, resulting in an annual income of £16 18s. Wrightson and Levine note that these estimates are based on wages alone, and do not take into account family gardens, payments in kind, or reduced rate foodstuffs. Their incomes, the authors suggest, were "at a level slightly above that at which the overseers of the poor maintained the village paupers." It was therefore apparent that any serious challenge (i.e., bad harvests, illness,

unexpected expense) to the family's finances might force them into seeking aid, institutional or otherwise.³⁵

Slack, writing about Salisbury, notes that the workers earning the highest wages were weavers, who were paid 3s. a week, but there were very few of these. The average weekly wages in Salisbury were 1s. 2d, while Ipswich normally paid approximately 2s. For both towns, women and children earned 8d to 9d a week. For families, 9d per day was the average wage in Salisbury in 1635; Ipswich in the 1590s was slightly higher at 1s. 10d.³⁶ A list of the poor receiving alms in Salisbury in 1625 shows that 232 individuals were being relieved, but also notes that a number of these individuals were employed as well; twenty-five of the children in the list worked at jobs such as bonelacemaking, carding and spinning. The people who did work were earning, on average as a whole, a total of £3 15s. 3 1/2d. Slack points out that the wages of laborers and apprentices in Salisbury in 1625 were set at 10d per diem, with poor relief providing supplementary aid when required.³⁷

What was the situation in Devon and in Exeter? During the first part of the seventeenth century, Devon enjoyed an "efficient mixed husbandry which produced wool for the local cloth industry, fed the local population with beef, pork, beer, cider, biscuits, beans, and peas and had a surplus for export. 'I have been in all the Counties of England,'

³⁵Wrightson and Levine, "The Peasantry: Material Life and Rational Controls," 26-27.

³⁶Slack, Poverty and Policy, 81-83.

³⁷Paul Slack, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666," in Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700, eds. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 175.

[Oliver] Cromwell is reported to have said, 'and I think the husbandry of Devon the best.'³⁸ Wilson describes the industries of Devon by the seventeenth century as "buoyant and expansive." We will later discuss the industries of Devon and Exeter in detail,³⁹ but, in connection with wages, we can say here that Devon and Exeter benefitted from their location on the coast to receive what were called "New Draperies" from Spain and Ireland, materials that enabled them to move from the principal production of kersey cloth to that of serges and perpetuanas. As a result, Devon and Exeter did better economically in the 1620s than other areas of the country, producing a concomitant stability in wages.⁴⁰

While the textile industry and those associated with it seemed to do reasonably well in spite of the economic challenges of the Tudor-Stuart period, other workers in Exeter were struggling with these challenges. In his analysis of the four degrees of persons to be found in the city and its surrounding countryside, John Hooker noted that the fourth degree was composed of "daily laborers who do serve for wages."⁴¹ Evidence of the wages paid to these daily laborers is scarce, but can be guessed at by the amounts paid by the City to workmen for various tasks. For picking ivy from the city walls, common laborers were paid 5d a day

³⁸Wilson, England's Apprenticeship, 30.

³⁹See chapter 4.

⁴⁰Wilson, England's Apprenticeship, 77-78; see also D. C. Coleman, Industry in Tudor and Stuart England (Tiptree, Essex: The Anchor Press Ltd., 1975) for a fuller discussion of the textile industry in early modern England.

⁴¹William J. Blake, "Hooker's Synopsis Chorographical of Devonshire," Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association 47 (1915): 342; see chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of types of laborers, both city and rural.

in 1540, and those persons engaged in the demolition work at St. Nicholas Priory received 6d. Stone masons, in 1572, earned 11d to 12d per diem; by 1615, workmen were being paid as much as 1s. 2d daily, a rate which remained consistent into the 1630s. In a seventy-five year period, then, wages had more than doubled. Assuming a three hundred day work year, a laborer might earn as much as £15 per annum from 1615 on.⁴² W. B. Stephens has analyzed the daily wages paid at Exeter between 1620-7 for workers in the building trades, and his figures support MacCaffrey's findings for the same period. Master carpenters received 14d per diem (1s., 2d) while other carpenters earned 1s. The same amounts in the same proportions were paid to masons and tilers, master or otherwise, while common laborers averaged 1s. (12d) each a day. Stephens maintains that wage rates at Exeter "were generally above those in the countryside; on the other hand house rents were probably higher in the city" allowing for some equalization between the two areas. In any case, wages in the city of Exeter were higher than the averages proposed by Thorold Rogers, whose figures were featured prominently in the work of Phelps Brown and Hopkins.⁴³ The evidence of higher wages paid in the city of Exeter further erodes the "grinding poverty" thesis advanced by MacCaffrey, Hoskins and Stephens, and also indicates a concomitant reduction in the numbers of dependent, unemployed poor.

Our discussion on labor and wage rates centers around male heads of households, but beyond a minor allusion to the roles played by women

⁴²MacCaffrey, Exeter, 68, 266.

⁴³W. B. Stephens, Seventeenth-Century Exeter (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co., Ltd. for the University of Exeter, 1958), 148-50.

and children in earning monies to help support their families, we have not explored specific contributions to the labor market by women. The conclusions reached by Maryanne Kowaleski on women's work in fourteenth-century Exeter can provide some insight into their roles in the economy of the city, although we must keep in mind that her period of study is approximately 150 years prior to that of the current work.⁴⁴ We have already proven that women, of necessity, had to work to help support their families in the early modern period, and it is probably not stretching the connections too far if we argue for a continuity in work patterns for women from the late medieval period through to the early modern. Exeter was already established as an important market town in the county of Devon by the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and functioned as an administrative center for the southwest. Government was restricted to the wealthier men of the town then as in the early modern period, a group that represented, in both periods, only about one quarter of the total population. The manufactures such as cloth-making which characterized the city were well-established, though not as well-developed as they would become by the time of Elizabeth. All of these similarities indicate that Kowaleski's findings can be found applicable, in a limited sense, to the Exeter of our period since, as MacCaffrey points out, "the most important aspect of Exeter's history in the sixteenth century was the continuity of medieval custom."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Maryanne Kowaleski, "Women's Work in a Market Town: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century," in Women and Work in Pre-Industrial Europe, ed. Barbara J. Hanawalt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁴⁵MacCaffrey, Exeter, 281.

Kowaleski analyzed a number of sources for occupational information, and found that these records documented 435 cases of Exeter women engaged in work in order to secure wages or profit. With the population of Exeter amounting to approximately 3,000 in 1377, these women represented 14.5 percent of the total. Kowaleski breaks down the women's labor into five general occupational groups, and provides percentages against the total number of working women and descriptions of work performed in each of the groups. The first group, retailers and merchants, consisted of 99 women, or 23 percent of the female work force. These women were primarily petty retailers, with a few wealthy widows functioning as merchants after having taken over a husband's business. Food retailing was far and away the most popular form of trade, as it did not require one to have the freedom of the city and needed only small investments of time and money in order to turn a profit. Many of the smaller retailers, termed as "hucksters" and "regrators" did not enjoy a good social reputation, and were often regarded as more dishonest than their male counterparts.⁴⁶

The brewing and selling of ale was also popular with women, with the majority doing their own brewing and selling; only a few participated as sellers for others, but the percentage of women engaged in this trade was 34 percent. Kowaleski maintains that "women supervised much of Exeter's commercial brewing. In fact, there was only one professional male brewer in Exeter during this period."⁴⁷ As beer and ale were quite

⁴⁶Kowaleski, "Women's Work," 147-49.

⁴⁷Ibid., 151.

popular, most women who pursued this line of trade must have been able to make significant contributions to the family income.

A much smaller percentage of the women were considered artisans or craftspersons--12 percent. They generally confined themselves to clothmaking, leather working, or candle making, and most of them pursued other occupations to supplement their work in these crafts. The low percentage of women in this category may be explained by the restrictions inherent upon the practice of the crafts: freedom of the city was desirable, and a great deal of money and time were required in order to turn a profit. Most of the female artisans were engaged in the cloth industry, ranging from merchants who actually sold the cloth to weavers, tailors, hosiers, and dressmakers.⁴⁸

The largest number of women working in the city were employed as servants, representing 37 percent of the total of female labor. While some of the women hired out on a part-time basis as midwives, wet nurses, and healers, the vast majority were in domestic service. They usually contracted for service a year at a time, and room and board comprised the largest proportion of the remuneration offered for such service. As wages, if any, were quite low, turnover in domestic service was more than frequent. Court records were filled with complaints brought by employers against servants, generally for the breaking of a contract, but occasionally for theft and other dishonest activities. Servants responded to contractual suits with complaints of failure to pay or physical abuse by the employers. Some female servants, lured by the

⁴⁸Ibid., 151-53.

promise of higher "wages," turned to prostitution as an alternative to service.⁴⁹

Seventeen percent of the working women in Exeter during this period were identified as either prostitutes or brothel keepers, and they shared similar characteristics. All of the prostitutes could be said to have come from poor backgrounds, and all but 15 percent were single women; 20 percent of the women had no family in Exeter. Kowaleski relates the story of one Emma Northercote, whose story seems typical: Emma had no apparent family in the city and was fined yearly for prostitution. She worked as a domestic servant for one of the city oligarchs and seems to have found most of her clients among the priests of the city; one of the priests, John Gonlok, patronized her services for over four years.⁵⁰

Regardless of occupation, Kowaleski notes that the working women shared five characteristics: most rarely had formal training for their occupations, the majority of their positions were of relatively low status in a particular trade, their marital status defined the type and extent of work that they engaged in (with older widows and single women being more likely to work consistently and successfully), their work was of an intermittent nature, and they often worked in more than one trade.⁵¹ Other facts emerge from Kowaleski's analysis: 66 percent of women, as opposed to 48 percent of men were involved in court suits for debts concerning sales; 32 percent of the women were listed as creditors in these cases, while 51 percent of the men were designated as such.

⁴⁹Ibid., 153-54.

⁵⁰Ibid., 154.

⁵¹Ibid., 155-57.

These statistics show the wide disparity between men and women in receiving equity in sales disputes, as an examination of the results of the cases show that men were more likely to receive favorable verdicts, particularly if it was a woman who initiated the case.⁵² Finally, while a few widows of wealthy merchants might enjoy a successful business, the great majority of women engaged in work, though talented, usually had to settle for much less pay than men and much less stability of employment, meaning that many of them were included among the laboring poor. Also, since many women were defined in terms of their relationship to a man, female workers failed to organize themselves in such a way as to promote their value to their society; thus, their contributions were taken for granted.

This assessment of women's status in the work force leads us to a discussion of the domestic lives of the laboring poor. Christopher Hill, reviewing recent work on the issue of the family, notes that Lawrence Stone makes it clear that "neither kinship nor clientage had played anything like the same role among...[the] poor as they did among their betters."⁵³ As a result, the "'Open Lineage Family, 1450-1630,'" characterized by "arranged marriage, subordination of women, neglect and fostering out of children, harsh parental discipline, little affection, [and] no sense of domestic privacy..."⁵⁴ "...presumably did not exist among the bottom 80 percent of the population. Many features of the new

⁵²Ibid., 147, 149-51.

⁵³Christopher Hill, review of Sex, Marriage and the Family in England, by Lawrence Stone, in Economic History Review 31, no. 3 (1978): 457.

⁵⁴Ibid., 456.

family type 'never penetrated the poor at all until the nineteenth or even early twentieth centuries.'"⁵⁵ Why then, according to Hill, should one bother to trace developments or trends relating to "the family" in terms of the poor?

Hill acknowledges the lack of evidence for the lower part of the population, but maintains that there was a difference in marital practices among the classes long before 1500. He agrees with K. V. Thomas, Joan Thirsk, Paul Slack and others that the "growth of poverty and subsistence migration in the sixteenth century undermined the institution [of marriage] even further."⁵⁶ "Bundling" and "handfast marriages" were quite common for the poor, following old folk customs.⁵⁷ Hill concludes that Stone is wrong in assuming that there was no affection in relationships among the poor, whose marital customs were about survival as much as anything else.

Further, he questions Stone's assumption that the "abandonment of children in time of famine, or the use of child labour to augment family income, are evidence of lack of affection. The latest born might have to die so that the others could survive. Not many of us have had to make

⁵⁵Ibid., 457.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷"Bundling" and "handfast" marriages are those which mimicked older customs that had allowed unmarried couples to share a bed during courtship while fully clothed, or which represented a contract or covenant of betrothal or marriage. Evidently, these "marriages" were not legal in the eyes of the law, but sufficed for the poor, who often wanted to avoid the expenses incurred for legal marriages.

this choice," Hill writes, "but it must have faced many people in the 1590s and 1620s."⁵⁸

Subject to stresses and strains not felt by the upper classes, then, the poor were no less affectionate to each other than were their "betters;" they simply reacted to their economic situation in making the decisions they did concerning their families and kin. Indeed, there was a great tradition of the poor helping themselves; as Martin Dinges defines it, this tradition is "'the ability of individuals to endure a period of poverty distress beyond the short-term logic of the market economy without asking for assistance.'"⁵⁹ Robert Jutte notes the importance of social networks in the maintenance of independence for the poor; these networks are built on social contacts, and are generally established on "the principle of reciprocal exchange" based on four factors: social distance, physical distance, economic distance, and age distance.

Some examples provided by Jutte include the assistance provided by poor householders; the Norwich census of the poor in 1570 reveals that such persons took in other family members, lodgers, or servants in the hopes that they would contribute to the family income either in terms of rent or labor exchange.⁶⁰ Also, under the provisions of the great Poor

⁵⁸Hill, review of Sex, Marriage and the Family, 462.

⁵⁹Martin Dinges, "Self-help, assistance, and the poor in early modern France," Paper prepared for International Perspectives on Self-Help Conference (Lancaster, 2-4 July 1991), 3, quoted in Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 83; the discussion which follows relies primarily on information from Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 83-99.

⁶⁰Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 83-84; see also John Pound, ed., The Norwich Census of the Poor 1570 (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1971).

Law of 1601, "the children of every poor, old, blind, lame and impotent person...shall at their own charges relieve and maintain every such poor person."⁶¹ This did not mean that children had to take these family members into their own often-crowded households, but they were obligated to provide for them insofar as it was possible to do so. Family aid was limited to the immediate members of the family; collateral relatives such as uncles or nieces were usually refused aid, on the principle that their own families should take care of them. Godparents, who were often chosen from a group having higher status than the parents, also functioned as sources of temporary financial assistance.

Branching out from familial and kin relationships, one might look to neighbours and friends for relief, which ranged from care for an illness or helping a poor person apply for institutional support. Jutte notes that the "available evidence suggests that, for the labouring poor, their neighbours, rather than kin or outsiders, were the single most important source of help in times of family hardship."⁶² The Norwich census of the poor records one such relationship: Margaret Lamas, a fifty-six year old widow, described herself also as "a lame woman & worketh not but styllleth aqua vitae, & now lyv upon hyr fryndes, & hath dwelt here 16 yeris."⁶³ Co-workers, sympathetic to situations in which they often found themselves, could be helpful in terms of small loans and provisions. If none of these connections proved fruitful, the poor could turn to those persons with whom they shared a relationship based upon

⁶¹Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 88.

⁶²Ibid., 96.

⁶³Pound, Norwich Census, 29; Jutte, Poverty and Deviance, 95.

occupation or residence. Employers could advance pay in times of hardship, or could stand good for loans against future earnings; this type of aid ran across all occupational relationships: master-servant, craftsman-journeyman-apprentice, landowner-laborer. Guilds and confraternities, organizations based on participation in particular trades, not only provided care for their own elderly and indigent members, but contributed amounts to the support of local poor.

Folk traditions also provided succour to members of communities fallen on hard times. Judith M. Bennett illustrates one of those traditions with the sixteenth-century ballad concerning the poor minstrel of Tamworth, who, having been robbed of sixty pounds meant for the coffers of his creditors, looked about for "some honest means" by which to replace the money. Neighbors of the minstrel advised him to brew some ale, which they would then gather to drink, paying him for the pleasure. The minstrel was able to earn five pounds from this enterprise, which is recounted in the ballad:

My loving neighbours of the town of Tamworth
 where I dwell did liberally reward me, this is
 true that I you tell. Which kindness of them
 hath right well provided that among all my
 neighbours I am well beloved, for liberally with
 me their money did they spend, and those that
 came not themselves their money they did send.
 My neighbours did cause me to make a pot of ale,
 and I thank God of his goodness I had very good
 sale. For a bushel of malt I do put you out of
 doubt I had five pound of money or nigh
 thereabout.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Judith M. Bennett, "Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England," Past and Present 134 (February 1992): 19; this ballad shows that perception and reality could be one and the same.

This "help ale" was indicative of the poor of early modern England helping themselves rather than always looking to the "better sort" for relief when times were hard. These ales could be held for any number of causes--parochial support for churches, to provide a money stake for bridal couples, or to provide help to less fortunate neighbors. Ales were looked on as not only a chance to support worthy causes, but as events in which one could eat, drink, dance, see plays, participate in gaming, and enjoy conversations with other members of the community. The chief goal of an ale, however, was to contribute money to a cause of one sort or another. Bennett notes that attendance at ales was sometimes compulsory, and the recipients of the funds occasionally sponsored them in order to avoid expenditure of monies earmarked for other projects. Money was always given in anticipation of a return, usually food, drink, or entertainment of some kind.⁶⁵

The tradition of the ale is, Bennett writes, mysterious; she believes it to be Germanic in origin, containing aspects of Christian charitable entertaining combined with self-help customs developed by the peasantry. She has traced the occurrence of ales in all regions of England, but notes that the records of Exeter, among those of several other cities, "contain very few references to ales even in the Middle Ages," although these cities held annual guild dinners that served essentially the same purpose.⁶⁶ Bennett argues that it is not possible to contrast the ales' charitable significance alongside that of other

⁶⁵Ibid., 19-22.

⁶⁶Ibid., 34.

forms of aid to the poor, but she believes that "the actual sums generated by charity ales could clearly be substantial."⁶⁷

In many ways, these events promoted social cohesion in a way that other types of philanthropy could not, because they blurred the lines of division between givers and recipients, since giving was only one part (though admittedly an important one) of an ale. The act of being generous was celebrated and obscured at the same time, and as Bennett points out, it was "easiest to be benevolent when one's stomach is full and one's throat well lubricated."⁶⁸ We have already shown that the specter of poverty, while a reality for over a third of the population, hovered over another 50 percent of the population, so it was important for the mass of the population to participate in such events, because they never knew when they might be in need of such aid themselves. Bennett maintains that charity ales should not be romanticized, since they did exclude some portions of the population and were responsible for increased drunkenness and violence on some occasions. In the end, however, they proved that poor people "survived because they did not have to rely exclusively upon the institutions of the generous rich. They survived because they had charitable institutions of their own."⁶⁹

Besides ales, what forms did recreation of the poor take? Most people took advantage of other town-sponsored celebrations to obtain free or cheap food and drink, while others looked forward to market day as a break from their routine. Church attendance and observances also

⁶⁷Ibid., 37.

⁶⁸Ibid., 38.

⁶⁹Ibid., 41.

represented an outlet for the overburdened. In Exeter, a Midsummer muster involved processions of the citizens in their finery; fairs would occasionally visit the city, and bull and bear baitings were popular and regular events. There was even a "bull-ring man" whose job it was to oversee such baitings.⁷⁰ Moralistic judgments were passed on a bear baiting in 1581; Hooker records that the event took place on a Sunday, when, he thought, the populace would be better off in church than amusing themselves with "the vayne pastyme of bearebeating." Subsequent events seem to have vindicated Hooker, as a scaffold which had been constructed for viewing of the baiting collapsed, killing seven spectators.

A group of singers was maintained by the city for the amusement of the citizenry, whom they entertained on every week day. Strolling players of various companies passed through Exeter, and their performances seem to have been quite popular; some of the city's mayors, however, saw fit to exercise discretion over the plays presented, and from the 1620s onwards, plays were either forbidden altogether or companies were given money to leave the city without performing.⁷¹

But one of the most popular venues for the poor--and growing more so over the course of the seventeenth century--was the alehouse. Peter Clark writes, "Given what we know about the poverty of many tipplers and the shabbiness of their establishments, at least before the Civil War, it comes as no surprise that the great majority of alehouse customers

⁷⁰See chapter 4.

⁷¹Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter, 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 270-71; Commonplace Book of John Hooker, Chamberlain of the City of Exeter, Book 51, (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), fol. 361.

were recruited from the bottom half of the social order."⁷² Poor craftsmen and laborers were the basis of the clientele at the alehouses during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, with servants being one of the largest groups of drinkers. Early modern writers and moralists believed that the poor's reliance on drink lay at the base of their poverty: Thomas Dekker, in Worke for Armourours, notes that the poor's "'naturall inclination (like Drones) [is] to liue basely.'" The same theme is expounded by Henry Arthington, author of Provision for the Poor, now in Penurie (1597), who "gave several reasons why the poor 'crie hard for foode, and find small supply.' In particular, it was because they had not confessed their sins, of which...the second [was] 'that in the time of abundance, they haue beene great wasters in bibbing and bellycheare' (sig. A3)."⁷³

The "tramping poor," itinerant laborers in search of work, contributed substantially to the number at alehouses, while some establishments out and out catered to vagabonds and small rogue bands, who planned their crimes over a round of drinks and a good meal.⁷⁴

How could the poor afford to drink? Granted, ale was relatively cheap, but for people unable to purchase life's necessities on a regular basis, any price should have been too high. Clark argues that the alehouse provided an important source of aid to the poor, as "drink, food

⁷²P. Clark, English Alehouse, 123; see above for Wilson's discussion on the proportion of income spent on drink and Hoskins's comments on alcoholism in early modern England.

⁷³Sandra Clark, The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets, 1580-1640 (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 209, 210.

⁷⁴P. Clark, English Alehouse, 128-30.

and lodging could be obtained there on tick and money borrowed."⁷⁵ Defaulting was common, but the tipplers--owners of the alehouses--saw the extension of credit as a legitimate business risk. In many cases, drinkers would pawn their goods in exchange for drink or food, while others went to the tipplers to get loans based on security. Clark relates that "Goodwife Hobbes, one of a vagrant band that stopped at an alehouse near Henley in Oxfordshire, 'did leave her ring in pawn for their drink and victual for they had no money.'"⁷⁶ There is, however, no substantial evidence to suggest that alehouses in general engaged in the business of pawning and fencing in a major way, although certain houses must have had reputations for such things.

Finally, alehouses served as clearinghouses for the exchange of information for and among the travellers, the villagers and townsfolk--sort of a continuous market day. As Clark states, "By the early seventeenth century there are signs that the alehouse was starting to function as a regular contact point for the lower orders where people could meet or obtain news of each other's whereabouts."⁷⁷ The poor, as a result, were not completely without resources and relief from the daily grimness of their lives. From the evidence of prosecutions for most of the sixteenth century in Exeter, it appears that conduct in alehouses was not an overwhelming problem for the city, as only four cases of public drunkenness were brought before the Chamber between 1559 and 1588, and there were no prosecutions of alesellers during this period. This is not

⁷⁵Ibid., 137.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., 139.

to suggest that people drank less at Exeter than elsewhere, just that they were apparently more successful at evading arrest for violations connected with drinking.

The Poor in Literature and Song

Popular literature and song can be of immense use to the historian of the poor in the early modern period. While portrayals of particular groups of people (such as vagrants) in these media must be viewed carefully, one can discern from them certain traits and representations about these social groups. Elizabethan and early Jacobean drama, as well as the broadside black-letter ballads of the periods, are rich sources of information on the urban and rural underclass in early modern England.⁷⁸

Drama

Throughout the course of this chapter, we have shown how drama continues to reflect contemporary perceptions of the poor. For drama, one's thoughts are automatically drawn to the works of William Shakespeare, who was among the best known literary figures of the period. One imagines that Shakespeare's works would reflect his life and times--socially, politically, and economically. But E. W. Ives states that "to the historian, the remarkable thing--and a contrast to Shakespeare's sensitivity to the realities of politics and the Court--is the distance there seems to be between his plays and the socio-economic realities of Elizabethan and Jacobean England." He notes that Coriolanus, a "major

⁷⁸Material for this section was suggested by the following articles: Anatole Feinberg, "The Representation of the Poor in Elizabethan and Stuart Drama," Literature and History 12, no. 2 (Autumn 1986): 152-63, and Richard Harvey, "English Pre-Industrial Ballads on Poverty, 1500-1700," The Historian 45, no. 4 (August 1984): 539-61.

treatment of the lower classes...takes very much an establishment point of view, and it stands alone."⁷⁹ This is the only evidence Ives offers in defense of his statement, and his view is taken to task by William C. Carroll, who suggests "that Shakespeare's language not only reveals his sensitivity to the discourse of poverty in his day...[but in fact] his language...is his theme."⁸⁰

Carroll goes on to argue that, not only does Shakespeare acknowledge the poor with metaphor and allusion, but he also "creates a language at once individualized and typical which functions as a counter-discourse to what Ives would term the 'establishment point of view.'"⁸¹ Using as one example The First Part of the Contention (2 Henry VI), Carroll notes that Jack Cade's language in the play "perfectly embodies the mixture of political and sociological sources which went to create him," sometimes sounds "the violent note of class warfare," and pays tribute to the very real threat of people on the street rising against social injustice.⁸²

A good example of Shakespeare's sensitivity to the vernacular is the character of Autolycus from The Winter's Tale, a merry beggar-thief who, in the fourth act, changes places with a prince. Carroll notes that Autolycus's language is Shakespeare's version of "Pedlar's French" or "beggar's cant;" not just a literary construct, this was a language used

⁷⁹E. W. Ives, "Shakespeare and History: Divergencies and Agreements," Shakespeare Survey 38 (1985): 28.

⁸⁰William C. Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty in Shakespearian Drama," Shakespeare Survey 44 (1992): 17.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 18.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 19-20.

by Tudor-Stuart pedlars and vagabonds.⁸³ Beier notes: "It is doubtful whether Pedlar's French represented an alternative ideology. It [did provide] a means of communication, but its parameters were quite narrow."⁸⁴ Carroll concludes that, beyond the political themes evident in the language of the selected characters, "the most political aspect of it is that it exists at all." Further, Shakespeare clearly understands, possibly more than most, "the profound connection in the underclass between their politics and their language."⁸⁵

Derek Cohen appears to agree with Ives, maintaining that "the poor in Shakespeare's history plays receive short shrift. They tend to be violent, stupid, aggressive, vacillating, sycophantic, vicious, brutal and unkind" with no balancing of "contemporary virtues."⁸⁶ Cohen argues that Shakespeare's presentation of the poor underscores the need for the firm handling of them by the government. When the poor commit violence in Shakespeare's works, it is always without "political direction and determination" rendering it worthless in every instance.⁸⁷ Cohen asserts that Shakespeare in fact demonized the poor in his plays, along with Jews, blacks and women and, in the process, marginalized their role in society; thus, they are "unincorporable into the mainstream of power

⁸³Ibid., 22-24.

⁸⁴Beier, Masterless Men, 126, quoted in Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty," 24.

⁸⁵Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty," 24.

⁸⁶Derek Cohen, The Politics of Shakespeare (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1993), 55.

⁸⁷Ibid., 63.

politics. By definition they are 'wrong' or deformed, and incapable of being absorbed into the echelon of the dominant authority."⁸⁸

In contrast, Annabel Patterson writes that "Common opinion...has for a long time held that Shakespeare's attitude to the 'common' people (who were by far the majority of the population) ranged from tolerant amusement to contempt." This opinion, according to Patterson, is of nineteenth-century vintage; in reality, Shakespeare, "himself the son of a country glover, and whose livelihood depended on the huge and socially diverse audiences for the London public theater" would have been highly unlikely to have adopted such an attitude.⁸⁹ Patterson goes on to argue that Coriolanus, for example, far from taking the "establishment" point of view given it by Ives, is in fact "Shakespeare's mediation...on an alternative political system--the early Roman Republic--where the plebians, both through their tribunes and directly, did have a voice in government...." At a time when 95 percent of the population was excluded, by law and/or practice, from participation in the great affairs of state, Coriolanus stands as an almost "prophetic" view of a democratic time to come.⁹⁰

Literature also bears out the reality that concerns about witchcraft permeated the early modern consciousness.⁹¹ One of the best examples in early modern drama is The Witch of Edmonton by Thomas Dekker

⁸⁸Ibid., 65.

⁸⁹Annabel Patterson, Shakespeare and the Popular Voice (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 1.

⁹⁰Ibid., 3.

⁹¹See the discussion on the connection between witchcraft and poverty below.

(1570?-1641?) and two collaborators, first published in 1658.⁹² Though witches appear with some frequency in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama [e.g., Lyly's Endymion (1591), Shakespeare's Macbeth (1605-6) and Ben Jonson's The Masque of Queens (1609)], Dekker's play, based as it is on the 1621 case of Elizabeth Sawyer, who was hanged as a witch, is unique. Etta Onat argues that "In no other play do we find a witch that fits so well the popular English conception as does Mother Sawyer." Further, the play reflects, more clearly than others, that witchcraft was a serious topic for the thinkers of the Renaissance; additionally, the drama "is the only one which presents the tragic implications of the superstition."⁹³

The economic situation of the accused was but one part of the equation in witchcraft superstition; with the uncertain economic times so prevalent in the early modern period, a witch's chief offense was maleficium, which was defined as crime against her neighbor's goods and persons. On the theological side, the "diabolical pact" between a suspected witch and the Devil was the most harmful aspect of her calling.⁹⁴

Dekker and his collaborators go a long way towards making Elizabeth Sawyer a sympathetic character; she is a poor old woman "'deformed, and ignorant' who is physically and mentally persecuted by her neighbours." She is presented as a "scapegoat" and a victim of prejudice. When she

⁹²Etta Soiref Onat, The Witch of Edmonton: A Critical Edition (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980), 142.

⁹³Ibid., 25.

⁹⁴Ibid., 26.

in fact does make a pact with the devil, it is only as a last resort against a society which has cast her out.⁹⁵ Mother Sawyer also has a fiendish dog; all of the evidence against her (to a large extent, circumstantial) is borne out by the argument of Gamini Salgado:

"What we do find are lonely old women living on the edge of poverty, often reduced to begging from their neighbours who looked on them with suspicion and resentment...The fact that they were women is only to be expected because old women and childless widows were economically and socially the most vulnerable members of a small rural community. Often their only companions were a pet cat [or dog], a toad or a weasel...These were transformed in the imagination of their accusers into their 'familiar' or puckerels, lent them by the devil to do his evil business."⁹⁶

Sawyer's story is less of a tale of temptation by the devil than it is an indictment of a society which had failed to care for its less fortunate members, many of whom were women.

Also among those brought to poverty by agents outside their control is the poor ex-soldier or sailor, perhaps wounded, who finds expression in Jonson's character of Brainworm in Every Man in His Humour (1598); he disguises himself as a wounded veteran in order to elicit charity.⁹⁷ In Henry IV, Shakespeare has Falstaff follow the long-established tradition of involuntary impressment of various rogues and vagabonds into the monarch's military ranks, thereby keeping them off the highways and

⁹⁵Feinberg, "Representation of the Poor," 153.

⁹⁶Gamini Salgado, The Elizabethan Underworld (London: J. M. Dent, 1977), 87, quoted in Feinberg, "Representation of the Poor," 153-54.

⁹⁷Feinberg, "Representation of the Poor," 154.

byways; Falstaff refers to them as "'food for powder' for the wars."⁹⁸ Despite the impressment and the large numbers of deaths while in service, David Palliser notes that there were still many left, because "after every war, large numbers of discharged soldiers, often unpaid, unemployed...were a real problem;" this was particularly true in the 1540s and in the early 1590s, following the war against the Armada of Spain in 1588.⁹⁹ Many soldiers and sailors suffered from the diseases endemic in the field and on board crowded ships; once discharged, they swelled the ranks of paupers in need of assistance.

Over the course of the Elizabethan period, and even more so in the Stuart period, the poor become increasingly attractive figures. The life of the poor becomes idealized, an idea created by Erasmus in Colloquia familiaria (1518) in which he spoke of the poor as being "the only members of society who enjoy 'absolute freedom'." Erasmus even gives the poor something of a noble air: the character Irides in Colloquia claims "'I wouldn't trade this misery even for kings' wealth. For begging's the nearest thing to possessing a kingdom.'"¹⁰⁰ The depiction of the poor in Nature became a favorite theme of the dramatists as well. Things like life on the road and sleeping out of doors took on romantic qualities of a sort; works which follow this theme include Dekker's Witch of Edmonton and Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale. On the other hand, Shakespeare

⁹⁸Carroll, "Language, Politics, and Poverty," 18.

⁹⁹Palliser, Age of Elizabeth, 119.

¹⁰⁰Feinberg, "Representation of the Poor," 157, 162.

stayed true to the harshness of a life lived out of doors in King Lear.¹⁰¹

Overall, the writers of Elizabethan and early Jacobean drama made the character of the poor man (or woman) a "most attractive one, luring the spectator away from the conventional hostility [towards the poor]." ¹⁰² But the dramatists never strayed from portraying the poor as belonging to the marginalized part of society, no matter how happy or carefree the playwrights made them seem. Over the course of the period, drama drew increasingly moralizing portraits about the plight of the poor, thus raising the consciousness of the upper and middle classes for the less fortunate members of society.

Broadside Black-Letter Ballads

Along with drama, the broadside black-letter ballads are a rich source of information on attitudes towards the poor of early modern England. Richard Harvey writes, "John Selden (1584-1654), who began what was to become the splendid Pepys collection of ballads...once said, 'More solid things do not show the Complexion of the times so well as Ballads.'" ¹⁰³ Approximately three thousand of these ballads were officially licensed in London during the period 1550-1700, and between three to five times that many were sold without the license. Seldom accompanied by music (but carrying suggested titles of tunes which might be followed), the majority came with woodcut illustrations but usually without credit to an author. Boasting a wide range of subject matter--

¹⁰¹Ibid., 158.

¹⁰²Ibid., 157.

¹⁰³Harvey, "English Pre-Industrial Ballads," 541.

domestic life, history, crime, and politics among them--some survived through generations, while others made only a passing mark. One of the favorite topics for these ballads was a problem of great concern to a large proportion of society--poverty.¹⁰⁴

The ballads of the Tudor period reflect an overriding nostalgia for times past; still bewailing the fate of the dissolved monasteries, which had provided bread and clothes, the poor were now looking to individual benefactors to fill in the gap caused by the disappearance of monastic charity. Beyond this loss was the deprivation of common as well; former monastic lands were sold and the poor lost the right to graze animals, fish, hunt and gather firewood in the previously unenclosed lands. Therefore, with traditional forms of support eroded, private philanthropy moved to fill the void, but it was a slow, frustrating process, according to its recipients.

The following examples are typical of the period: Licensed August 1, 1586, The poor people's complaint: Bewailing the death of their famous benefactor, the worthy Earl of Bedford extols the virtues of the recently deceased Francis Russell, second Earl of Bedford (1527-1585), "'a person of such great hospitality that Queen Elizabeth was wont to say of him that *he made all the beggars.*"¹⁰⁵ Two stanzas of the ballad give an even clearer picture of the noble lord:

'He is our provider of money and corn;
'He was the best man that ever was born.'
For sick and sore folk, for halt and for lame,
His purse was a plaster, or salve, for the same.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 541.

¹⁰⁵Andrew Clark, ed., The Shirburn Ballads 1585-1616, vol. 62 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 255.

For who hath not seen in every street
 What flocks of poor people his honour should meet?
 He, mindful of mercy, then wailing their grief,
 With hands of compassion, did give them relief.¹⁰⁶

The ballad is tempered with a warning that "few good men there dwells on this land" and "none of God's chosen takes such things [charity to the poor] in hand."¹⁰⁷ But there is no indication that the poor are challenging the existing hierarchy of the time; in fact, though they chastise the rich lords who are not charitable, they note that it is God, and God alone, who will judge them:

Now let our rich stewards take heed how they live:
 For, though not in this world, account they must give.
 When god hath in justice their conscience appealing,
 Their judgement is 'Satan, take them for their
 dealing.'¹⁰⁸

The ballad ends with a supplication to God to preserve the life of Queen Elizabeth; though this is a convention of the day, it reinforces the idea of the queen's unchallenged hierarchical position as the head of a society in which all have an assigned place.

A second example mimics the first, in that it is also a lament for a worthy benefactor, Lord Hastings, Earl of Huntington. Published in 1596, The crie of the poor for the death of the right Honourable Earl of Huntington, is to be sung to the tune of the Earl of Bedford. Again, the lord's virtues are extolled:

To poor and to needy, to high and to low,
 Lord Hastings was friendly, all people doth know;
 His gates were still open the stranger to feed,
 And comfort the succours always in need.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 258, stanzas 18, 19.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 258, stanza 13; 257, stanza 15.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 258, stanza 21.

Then wail we, then weep we, then mourn
 we each one,
 The good Earl of Huntington from us is gone.¹⁰⁹

Again, the poor bemoan the fact that there are few like Lord Hastings: "Such landlords in England we seldom shall find."¹¹⁰ No hint of discontent is found in this ballad, either; the queen and the noble lords are praised, and the poor accept that whatever charity they receive comes from the hand of God and it is their lot to accept what they are given.

The theme that the uncharitable rich will be punished for their greed is found in a 1577 ballad entitled A true ballad of denying a poor man a loaf of bread which he paid for.¹¹¹ A poor man, disease-stricken, but with a wife and children to support, goes to a rich man's house to beg some bread, which the rich man refuses to give; he then leaves to go hunting. The beggar then asks the man's wife to sell him bread for three pence, which she does, but she warns him to avoid her husband, as he would take the bread away from the beggar. The two meet in the road, and the rich man accuses the beggar of stealing the bread, takes it away from him, and feeds it to his dogs.

Distraught, the beggar returns home to tell the story to his hungry children, and kills the two oldest rather than see them suffer, though the youngest manages to run away. The beggar then kills himself, and is discovered by his wife upon her return home with some food. An inquest

¹⁰⁹Joseph Lilly, ed., Black-Letter Ballads and Broadsides, 1559-1597 (London: Joseph Lilly, 1870), 228.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 229.

¹¹¹Peter J. Seng, Tudor Songs and Ballads from MS Cotton Vespasian A-25 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 117-22.

into the deaths is called, and the little girl testifies to the story her father had told her. The rich man was accused by the inquest; confronted, he swore and said, "If that I did this deed, I would the ground might open straight and swallow me with speed."¹¹² Immediately, the ground opened up and the rich man sank into it over the course of three days, at the end of which the earth closed over him and could not be dug up again.¹¹³

The moral of the story, based on scripture, was that those who sin by oppressing the poor are judged by God and punished. This story underscores again the charitable duty of Christians to provide for the poor and points out the punishment that awaits if that duty is not performed.

Disdain for the poor often produced guilt in the persons who withheld charity, and it was this guilt, Keith Thomas argues, that contributed to the rise in witchcraft accusations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The development of the Tudor poor laws in response to changing economic realities underscored, as nothing else did, the ambiguity of a householder's moral duties.¹¹⁴ Statute law now forbade the giving of alms at the door and on the street unless approved by the poor law overseers of the parish, but it also institutionalized, in the form of poor rates, the continuing necessity of neighbors being responsible for each other on a parochial basis. Thomas asserts,

¹¹²Ibid., 120, lines 130-32.

¹¹³Ibid., 117-22.

¹¹⁴Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Redwood Press Limited, 1971), 563.

however, that the Tudor poor laws functioned only intermittently, and "the loan of food and equipment to neighbours continued in many places to be essential for the routine maintenance of the elderly and infirm." He agrees with John Hales' statement that described "godly charity as the sinews which held the Commonwealth together."¹¹⁵

The two methods of aid, one old and traditional, the other new and legally mandated, produced conflict in householders; mandated by law to contribute to poor rates, and feeling that their charitable duties had been met, many turned "begging women brusquely from the door" but then suffered "torments of conscience after having done so."¹¹⁶ Folk beliefs dictated that a refusal of charity to one's poor neighbors was a breaking of the moral code, and that retaliation in the form of witchcraft was the punishment for having done so. "Witches, it was rightly said, could not harm those folk who were liberal to the poor and the most Christian preservative against witchcraft was to be charitable."¹¹⁷ Thomas goes on to argue that witchcraft beliefs underpinned early modern moral standards, and any deviation from them was tantamount to a breaking of the "natural order." Suffering remorse over having disrupted this order, the "uncharitable" sought "to divert attention from their own guilt by focusing on that of the witch."¹¹⁸ Thus, as economic conditions worsened over the last half of the sixteenth century, more statutes were passed that institutionalized charity, presumably taking it out of the

¹¹⁵Ibid., 564.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 566-67.

hands of individuals who, in turn, looked to ameliorate their increasing guilt. When they suffered misfortune, they relied on their folk beliefs in witchcraft to give them someone to blame: if they had recently refused charity to someone, it logically followed that their troubles must be caused by witchcraft on the part of the person who had been refused aid. The central tenet in witchcraft allegations of the period, Thomas contends, was maleficium, which was defined as crime against her neighbor's property and/or goods.¹¹⁹ He points out that "the judicial records reveal two essential facts about accused witches: they were poor, and they were usually women."¹²⁰ In every witchcraft prosecution, the accused was always someone who was inferior to the accuser in both social and economic status.

Alan Macfarlane agrees that poverty played a significant role in accusations of witchcraft being leveled at old, poor women. Childless widows and single women in reduced circumstances were often forced to beg; those who refused to aid them and later suffered misfortune were quick to accuse the rejected beggar of cursing them, thus bringing on a charge of witchcraft.¹²¹ For both Thomas and Macfarlane, then, the argument seems to be that those areas in which people were less charitable to their neighbors were the most likely to have numerous witchcraft accusations.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 456.

¹²⁰Ibid., 520.

¹²¹Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970), 150-51.

Janet Thompson, who has studied women's roles in seventeenth-century Devon, points out that this county deviates from Macfarlane and Thomas's "classic chronology for witchcraft,"--a chronology which holds that most witchcraft accusations (50 percent or more) occurred between 1558 and 1603--in that "only eight of the sixty-nine witchcraft cases which form the basis of [her] study occurred in the Elizabethan era." Only five more cases were noted for the Jacobean period.¹²² These figures are for the actual formal charge of witchcraft; if one includes "all types of cases in which an individual was called or labelled a witch ... only seventeen of ninety-one cases (nineteen per cent) are Elizabethan" while approximately ten more incidents were recorded during the Jacobean period.¹²³ Thompson goes on to show that the majority of witchcraft accusations did involve women; between 1527 and 1723, the accusations by gender in Devon amounted to 83 percent for women, 17 percent for men, with most of the men drawn in through association with an accused witch.¹²⁴

Thompson notes that the great majority of the women involved in these cases were elderly women who lived alone, and who were most probably widows. She offers as an example the case of the widow Stowe of Exeter, who had been accused in 1619 by no less than ten people of causing everything from "human illness, infirmity, and the death of one

¹²²Janet A. Thompson, Wives, Widows, Witches & Bitches: Women in Seventeenth-Century Devon (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1993), 101.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid., 108-109.

person, to killing chickens by witchcraft."¹²⁵ Another case in Exeter involved the widow Alice Martyn having the charge of witchcraft leveled at her by one Joan Sayer in 1565; Sayer suggested that Martyn had helped her to light a fire sixteen years previously and afterwards, Sayer had been unable to make butter or cheese, and her cows refused to give milk and subsequently died. Sayer was later forced to defend herself against charges of witchcraft through her use of charms "to catch the person who had bewitched her."¹²⁶

We have already shown that women comprised a large percentage of the impotent poor and thus, were more likely to beg for help from their neighbors. If we apply the thesis that witchcraft accusations occurred more frequently in areas where neighborly charity had broken down, it is apparent that the relative dearth of cases in Devon--and its county, seat, Exeter--provides some support for the belief that traditional forms of aid continued to be strong in that area during the period of our study.

Vagabond ballads flourished during the reign of James I and echoed the dramatists of the age in their presentation of the life of rogues who took advantage of the charitable nature of others. The cunning Northern Beggar (ca. 1620-1635), details the various tricks used by vagabonds to elicit aid; the beggar brags that he can change shape ("like Proteus"), sometimes playing a cripple or a blind man and often portraying a poor old soldier or sailor. At the end, he boasts:

¹²⁵Ibid., 111.

¹²⁶Todd Gray and John Draisey, eds., "Witchcraft in the Diocese of Exeter: Part III, St Thomas by Exeter (1561) and St Marychurch (1565)," Devon and Cornwall Notes & Queries 36, part 9 (Spring 1991): 305-306.

No tricks at all shall 'scape me,
 But I will, by my maunding,
 Get some relief
 To ease my grief
 When by the highway standing:
 'Tis better to be a Beggar,

And ask of kind good fellows,
 And honestly have
 What we do crave,
 Then steal and go to th' gallows.¹²⁷

The canting language of the vagabonds is featured in an early seventeenth-century ballad entitled The Beggar-boy of the North, which details the life of the beggar during the early modern period. The boy notes that his entire family begged--parents, grandparents, and all his kin--and he has been trained well in his craft. While miming handicaps, the boy's cry in the street is "'Good your worship, bestow one token!'"¹²⁸ In canting language, to "maund for loure, casum and pannum" is to "beg for money, cheese and bread."¹²⁹

As to his lifestyle, the boy claims that all land is at his disposal as he travels about; he has no debt, and his favorite pastime is "when I with my mates at the bouzing ken [alehouse] meet."¹³⁰ He frolics in the green meadows with his doxie [female prostitute] during the summer and holes up in a spacious barn with his fellows during the winter. This ballad is typical of the tendency by early modern writers to idealize the lifestyle of the vagabond beggar.

¹²⁷J. Woodfall Ebsworth, The Roxburghe Ballads (Hertford: Stephen Austin & Sons, 1895), 1:141.

¹²⁸Ibid., 3:324.

¹²⁹Ibid.; see the discussion on Shakespeare's use of the canting language above.

¹³⁰Ibid., 3:327; see also P. Clark's discussion of alehouses above.

If writers glamorized the vagabond lifestyle, they also did not hesitate to point out the inevitable end to a life of dissolution. In The stout Cripple of Cornwall (?1620-1640), a crafty beggar who is also a highwayman leads a very successful life of crime, but, in the end, winds up on the gallows.¹³¹ Practiced in the art of walking on stilts, he is able to leap over streams when he is being pursued, and is thus able to escape time and time again. The ballad details the "Cripple's" pursuit of the fine Lord Courtney, who is on his way to Exeter to make a purchase, carrying with him much silver and gold. The beggar and his band challenge Courtney and his men, who refuse to surrender without a fight. Courtney and his men (many of whom were killed in the fight) stand off the highwaymen, who are then forced to flee. The "Cripple" escapes and makes his way to Exeter; once there, his disguise is such that he is able to confront Lord Courtney in the town and beg for alms, which the gracious noble bestows. The smug beggar, with nine hundred pounds to his credit, vows to quit when he reaches the thousand pound mark, but in doing so, he is caught and brought before the Exeter Assizes. He is condemned and hanged forthwith, and all men are amazed that he turns out to be the highwayman sought for so long.¹³²

The attitude of the deserving poor towards their betters changes during the Jacobean period. Most notably, the ballads center around the exploits of individual poor people, rather than the amorphous mass of poor. The uncertain politics of the time have their influence as well on the poor's determination to survive despite all hardships. Ragged.

¹³¹Ibid., 2:531.

¹³²Ibid., 2:533-35.

and Torn, and True (ca. 1603-1649) emphasizes the scorn that honest poor men have for the rogues and vagabonds; though the narrator is in rags, he is true to his Christian morals:

While he that doth no man abuse
For the law needs not care a rush.
Then well fare the man that can say,
I pay every man his due:
Although I go poor in array,
*I'm ragged, and torn, and true.*¹³³

There is a stridency in the ballads of the Jacobean period against the greedy government, landlords and usurers that is lacking in the Elizabethan ballads. While the earlier poor accepted their lot generally without complaint, the later ballads reveal the beginnings of people falling out of step with their "betters." The Poor Man Pays for All (written ca. 1620, printed 1630) laments that "poor men still enforced are to pay more than they are able...For rich men will bear all the sway."¹³⁴ The ballad is full of aspersions against those persons who grind down the poor: "an usurer..in his fox-fur'd gown;" a "courtier swaggering;" "lawyers base;" and a "red-nose host."¹³⁵ The narrator concludes:

It is a proverb old and true--
That weakest go to th' wall;
Rich men can drink till th' sky look blue,
*But poor men pay for all.*¹³⁶

Jacobean ballads still showed the longing for old times, for the days of hospitality and charity, before the dissolution of the

¹³³Ibid., 2:412-13.

¹³⁴Ibid., 2:335.

¹³⁵Ibid., 2:335-37.

¹³⁶Ibid., 2:338.

monasteries and before the economic crises of their age. Time's Alteration (ca.1620s)¹³⁷ and Pity's Lamentation (1615/1616)¹³⁸ are indicative of this theme in Jacobean ballads; the former uses the device of an old cap to mourn the days gone by:

When this old cap was new,
'Tis since two hundred year;
No malice then we knew,
But all things plenty were:
All friendship now decays
(Believe me, this is true),
Which was not in those days
*When this old cap was new.*¹³⁹

The Lamentation is a direct indictment of the high food prices of the day (though other ballads contradict this notion by pointing out it is a lack of money to buy food), and declares that charity has declined at the same time as the wealthy have become more ostentatious in their lifestyles. The ballad even makes reference to a current scandal at court, the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, and seems to bewail the licentiousness of the king and court.¹⁴⁰

The presence of miracles and the devil also show up in the Jacobean ballads, giving evidence of a trust in God to provide. Though published in 1684, The Kentish Wonder or The Kentish Miracle is based on the stories of two poor widows, one from Canterbury (ca. 1608) and the other

¹³⁷Ibid., 2:581-86.

¹³⁸Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pepys Ballads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), vol. 1 1535-1625, nos. 1-45, 109-116.

¹³⁹Ebsworth, Roxburghe Ballads, 2:582.

¹⁴⁰Rollins, Pepys Ballads, 112-16; see the discussion of prices and wages in the early modern period, above.

from Copthall in Kent (ca. 1594).¹⁴¹ Through the grace of God, a poor widow from Kent, with seven children to feed, loses all her money through various calamities and is finally left with a six-penny burnt loaf of bread given her by a kind baker's boy. For seven weeks, the family ate off this loaf, but it was never seen to diminish in size, no matter how much was taken from it. All who had wronged the poor widow were punished, and the story ends with the moral that those who trust in God shall be provided for.¹⁴² The story has much of the Judeo-Christian tradition in it (the oil for the lamp; the story of the loaves and fishes), and extols the virtue of those who trust in God, while showing that the wicked will be punished.

The Poor Man in Essex (ca. 1620-30) is the tale of a poor man who goes into the forest to gather acorns for his starving family and there meets a man who offers him a purse of gold. It is, of course, the devil, who is only seeking to trick the man. On his return home, the purse is revealed to be full of wilted leaves; the man returns to the forest to seek the Devil once again, who taunts him and drives him mad. Deranged, he returns home to kill his loved ones, but is prevented from doing so by a neighbor, who ties him to his bed until the curse passes, and provides his wife and children with meat and drink.¹⁴³ Once again, the virtuous poor man has been saved from the temptation of the Devil by God, who is praised thus:

¹⁴¹Ebsworth, Roxburghe Ballads, 1:36-41.

¹⁴²Ibid., 1:36-38.

¹⁴³Ibid., 2:222-28.

From all temptations [then],
 Lord, bless both great and small;
 And let no man, O heavenly God,
 for want of succour fall:
 But put their special trust
 in God for evermore,
 Who will no doubt from misery,
 each faithful man restore.¹⁴⁴

These ballads, along with the witchcraft prosecutions of the age, show the continuing strength of folk beliefs in explaining the circumstances of one's position in life, as well as revealing the Jacobean preoccupation with the devil and witches; they also reinforce the belief that God will come to the aid of the poor if they trust in him.

Harvey argues (and rightly so) that the tone of the Tudor-Stuart ballads is highly moralistic and shows little evidence of concern with the larger world inhabited by the poor; the great events of their day--Reformation, revolutions, and civil war--are virtually ignored in favor of discussions about local and personal concerns.¹⁴⁵ Though the ballads suggest that private charity did decline over the course of the reigns of Elizabeth and James, due to the increase in the number of poor people created by the various economic crises, it is significant that there are no references in the ballads to the implementation of the poor laws passed under Elizabeth. Without putting too much emphasis on this omission, it is possible to conjecture that ad hoc charity, though in decline, played a more significant role in relieving the plight of the poor than the reforms engineered by the government.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 2:228.

¹⁴⁵Harvey, "English Pre-Industrial Ballads," 559.

Additionally, the ballad descriptions of the poor reinforce certain aspects of modern historical scholarship on the poor, such as the widening gulf between rich and poor, with the rich becoming more ostentatious and less likely to participate in charitable giving as the numbers of poor rose; they also evince continuing concern about the vagrants and beggars who plied the roads and streets of the kingdom in search of ill-gotten gains. Poverty is but one theme of these ballads, and in no case are they to be taken as straightforward assessments of the causes and statistics of the poverty problem in early modern England.¹⁴⁶ They can, however, serve as one part of the historical record--and a necessary one--to flesh out the parameters of the problem in concert with the other evidence provided in this chapter. Having established the scope of the problem, we can now turn to a consideration of the solutions proposed to control it, but we do so within the context of the city of Exeter.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 561.

CHAPTER 4

AN EARLY MODERN CITY AND ITS HISTORIAN

It is unusual when a city is fortunate enough to have a person capable of chronicling all aspects of its evolution; it is even more rare when such a person performs that job with diligent acumen continuously for over forty-five years. Such is the case, however, for the city of Exeter, county Devon, England, for the years 1555 to 1601, when the indefatigable antiquary John Vowell alias Hooker, served as the first Chamberlain of the city. The selection of Hooker for this position proved fortunate for Exeter in a number of ways, not the least of which was the preservation of Exeter's ancient records and historical documents. Not only did Hooker establish procedures for the care and protection of the city's records, he also took upon himself the task of writing a monumental work detailing the history of Exeter from ancient times through the sixteenth century, a history which is surely one of the most thorough descriptions of an early modern community in existence. This work provides information essential to the establishment of a context for the study of philanthropy in action.¹

¹Good general introductions to the study of towns in the early modern period include Peter Clark, ed., The Early Modern Town (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1976); Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., English Towns in Transition 1500-1700 (London: Oxford University Press, 1976); John Patten, English Towns 1500-1700 (Folkestone: Dawson & Sons, Ltd., 1978); Peter Clark, ed., Country Towns in pre-industrial England (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); specific comparative studies include J. W. F. Hill, Tudor and Stuart Lincoln (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Gervase Rosser, Medieval Westminster 1200-1540 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Marjorie K. McIntosh, A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Since Hooker's work is so vital to any discussion of Exeter, it is worthwhile to explore the life of the man himself. In many ways, Hooker embodied many traits of the early modern English man, a fact which is revealed quite clearly in the biographical sketch of himself that he provided in the Synopsis Chorographical of Devonshire.² This "discourse" covers many aspects of life in Devon and Cornwall, including retrospective accounts of what Hooker termed "Devonshire Worthies," those persons he considered as integral to the history of Exeter. Never bashful about tooting his own horn, Hooker numbered himself among them.

Hooker began his sketch with a reference to his familial relationship to the Exeter theologian, Richard Hooker, his nephew. He went on to explain that his ancestors were "gentlemen," and that he was orphaned around the age of ten years. He was subsequently brought up in Cornwall under the direction of a Dr. John Moreman, and went on to pursue civil law studies at Oxford. Like other young men of the period, Hooker then traveled abroad, where he continued the study of law at Cologne in Germany. Upon reaching Strasburg, he took up the study of divinity under the aegis of Professor Peter Martyr, "a Doctor and Reader of Divinity." After a sojourn at home, he travelled to France, and wanted to go on into Italy, Spain, and "other foreign nations" but was precluded from doing so by the wars then taking place in France. Fearing that he might be taken prisoner, he returned home; shortly afterwards, Hooker noted, he "was driven to take a wife and then all his desires and zeal to learning and knowledge therewith abated...." The joys of marital bliss

²John Hooker, *Synopsis Chorographical of Devonshire*, 1600, Harleian MSS 5827, British Museum Library Manuscript Collection, London, fols. 50-51.

notwithstanding, he then turned to the "seeking of antiquities," an interest which blossomed into full flower upon his appointment as Chamberlain of the city in 1555, an honor which came to him through magistrates "conceiving well of him."

The duties that this office entailed did not preclude Hooker's continued interest in a number of subjects; he "wrote sundry books" which included translations of some of the Epistles and one of the works of Erasmus. Hooker enumerated a number of civic publications for which he was responsible, including pamphlets on various aspects of the city government; he appears to be particularly proud of his compilation of the Statutes of Ireland, which was accompanied by an "order for keeping of a parliament in Ireland," although there is some evidence to indicate that Hooker did not have the compilation printed because he had to bear the costs of printing himself. A subsequent history of Ireland was produced and presented to Sir Walter Raleigh. Hooker evinced an interest in religious affairs as well, as indicated by the production of a catalog of the bishops of Exeter. He ends the biographical sketch by alluding to the present synopsis and mentions that he "is living 1599 [crossed out] 1600." Apparently, Hooker anticipated finishing the synopsis in 1599, but did not actually complete the work until 1600; the section on the Devonshire Worthies was thus of 1599 vintage.³

The sketch does not contain all that we know of Hooker; in his duties as Chamberlain, he was responsible for most, if not all, of the official recordkeeping of the city during his lifetime, and more than a few documents reveal other vignettes of his life and work. Also, early

³Ibid.

records of the city indicate the long-standing presence of the Hooker family in the counties of the West and within the city of Exeter. Hooker was apparently named for his grandfather, whose eldest son, Robert, was the younger John's father. The grandfather had been given freedom of the city in 1487, and was elected mayor in 1490. Robert was also mayor of the city in 1529, and his wife, Martha Tucker, came from another long-established Exeter family. The name Vowell, which Hooker sometimes used, was an acknowledgement of his descent from the Vowell family of Pembroke.⁴

That Hooker became involved in the politics of the city of Exeter was perhaps a foregone conclusion, given the history of his family. As he noted in his biographical sketch, he was given the education and the opportunities for travel afforded to gentlemen of the period, and this training prepared him quite well for the role he later played in the government of his native city. He was given the freedom of Exeter in 1552, and three years after was appointed chamberlain of the city, being the first person to hold that office. He was sent to Ireland on a mission in 1568 by Sir Peter Carew, and it was during this time that he compiled the Irish Statutes. Hooker went on to represent Exeter in the English parliaments of 1572 and 1586, which gave him a perspective on Exeter's role in national politics; this perspective, when combined with Hooker's penchant for the preservation of Exeter's antiquities and the

⁴John Vowell alias Hoker [sic], The Description of the Citie of Excester, 1583, eds. Walter J. Harte et al, 3 vols. (Exeter: The Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1947), 1:vii.

recording of its history, allowed for the development of a truly unique view of life in early modern England.⁵

Hooker might truly be called a "servant of the state" in that he took on a number of civic duties, including the position of coroner, judge in the Admiralty Court, and bailiff of Exe Island. He was the driving force behind the creation and subsequent administration of the Orphans' Court, an institution developed to protect the goods and properties of orphaned minors.⁶ Many governmental duties which did not fall under the aegis of any other city official often wound up being taken care of by Hooker, including such things as the giving of oaths and the granting of individual permits to supersede the city's building ordinances.⁷

Hooker continued to participate in literary ventures not related to his official duties; he edited the 1587 version of Holingshed's Chronicles (along with John Stow and others), and assisted John Foxe in the preparation of his Book of Martyrs. The recording of the city's history, however, remained his chief occupation, and he provided incredibly detailed accounts of events in which Exeter played a role during the sixteenth century, most notably the Prayer Book Rebellion in Cornwall in 1549, which involved a siege of Exeter.⁸

⁵Ibid., 1:viii; see also: P. W. Hasler, ed., The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1558-1603, 3 vols. (London: HMSO, 1981), 2:333-35.

⁶For a fuller discussion of the Orphans Court, see Charles Carlton, The Court of Orphans (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974).

⁷Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:viii.

⁸Ibid., 1:viii.

The account of this rebellion is included in Hooker's major work, The Description of the Citie of Excester (1583), one of the most thorough and detailed chronicles extant of an early modern city. He wrote the Description in his later years, and it appears that his motive in writing it was not only to preserve all the information available to him about Exeter, but also to make sure that his role in both the preservation and the affairs of the city was noted for posterity as well. Hooker's official role gave him unprecedented access to the city's existing records, while also affording him the opportunity to record contemporary history as it related to governmental actions. As we will see, Hooker took the fullest advantage of his position in both respects.⁹

In his introduction to the Description, Hooker noted that when he became chamberlain, he felt himself "called to an office before not known in this Citie of Excester." Because the office was a new creation, Hooker had no idea what his duties and responsibilities were, so he was careful not to leave anything undone which might possibly come under the aegis of his office. He joined forces with the town clerk, Richard Hert, who, he says, instructed him in all the things pertaining to his position. One of his primary duties was to attend the meetings of the City Council, where he was, in his words, a "Diligent traveller [worker]" who provided not only advice to the Mayor and his Council, but who also acted as the secretary of the meetings, writing down all the Acts of the Council and taking care of all the correspondence issuing from the Council.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., 1:1-7.

¹⁰Ibid., 1:1.

Another important duty he took upon himself was the review and ordering of all the city records prior to and including his period. He noted that this job had not been done before and he set himself to do it immediately after his appointment in 1555, placing all of the records in the Treasury for protection. But the holdings had become disordered through what Hooker termed as "means and casualties and by reason of my absence in other affairs," so he had to review and reform the records yet again; he was still dissatisfied with the results. He then embarked on a third mission to order the records once and for all:

I have perused and reviewed [the records] in the best order I can and caused places to be appointed and presses to be made with keys and locks and with a book wherein I have registered every writing and rolls of such evidences as then remained all which now I have caused to be locked up in safety without further spoil and the keys to remain in your [Mayor and Council] own custody.¹¹

Hooker goes on to explain that he was a moving force behind the repairs done to the building where the Mayor and the Council carried out their business, as it had been "rude disordered."

He received instruction from the town clerk, Mr. Hert, as to the matters of law concerning his office, such as the keeping of courts, Sessions, witness examination, preparation of indictments and related matters. He noted that he became quite expert at all this--recalling his training in law--thus pleasing his mentor. But he was not, he stated, neglectful of his other duties in the meantime and kept up with all matters touching Exeter, both in London and abroad.¹²

¹¹Ibid., 1:2.

¹²Ibid., 1:2.

His major occupation as chamberlain, however, was his association with the treasurer of the city to deal with "all things and at all times which did appertain to the City and his office," i.e., the city's lands and buildings, the construction of the city canal in the 1560s, and the provision to the city of corn, powder, shot and "whatsoever in any sort did belong to the city." He further assisted the treasurer [a.k.a, the receiver] by helping to draw up his accounts and enter them on parchment rolls, audit them properly and finally to see that they were stored in an appropriate place. He went on to say that these accounts had previously been written in Latin, but that he had written the current accounts in English so that the mayor and the council would be able to read and understand them better.¹³

Hooker was then chosen to be the city's bailiff of Exe Island, which had come to Exeter as a reward in 1549 for its loyalty to the government during the Prayer Book Rebellion; the island had originally belonged to the estate of William Courtenay, who had been attainted for treason in 1504. Hooker noted that he took especial care of the "broken" banks of the River Wear and the mills upon it, "which were then out of all order."¹⁴

He had trees planted in ranks about the city and established places where laundresses could wash and dry their clothes. He also ordered some

¹³Ibid., 1:2-3; see also G. R. Elton, England under the Tudors, 3d ed. (London: Routledge Press, 1991). Elton argues that, although humanist education was still the norm during the Elizabethan period, scholarship began to decline later in the century, and some gentlemen received no training in the classical languages. Hooker is acknowledged to have been one of the few Exeter officials with a university degree.

¹⁴Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:3.

planting in the woods and byways about the city, with all the work done from an aesthetic and pragmatic point of view, as he believed that profits would eventually be realized from his efforts.¹⁵

In 1568, Hooker was sent in the role of solicitor by Sir Peter Carew to look after the Carew estates in Ireland, where he remained for three years. He gained a great deal of respect during his tenure there, and was even elected a member of parliament from a town in Galway in 1568. But, being Hooker, he longed to return home to his city business, which he was afraid had been neglected in his absence. He appears to have been relieved when the reins of secretarial power were once more firmly in his hands. He credited his election as Exeter's member of Parliament in 1571 to his performance of the chamberlain's duties, and noted that he spent much of his time in Parliament on "studies of matters for the Commonwealth of this City."¹⁶ It was during this period that Hooker produced a prodigious number of pamphlets and books outlining his view of the state of the Commonwealth.¹⁷

¹⁵Other works which illustrate the process of urban government and administration for other localities include the following: W. B. Willcox, Gloucestershire: a Study in Local Government 1590-1640 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); A. Hassell Smith, County and Court: Government and Politics in Norfolk 1558-1603 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); Diarmaid MacCulloch, Suffolk under the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); D. M. Palliser, Tudor York (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); F. F. Foster, The Politics of Stability: a Portrait of the Rulers of Elizabethan London (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

¹⁶For a fuller discussion of Hooker's role in Parliament, see the following: T. E. Hartley, ed., Proceedings in the Parliament of Elizabeth I, 1558-1581 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), 1:243-58; G. R. Elton, The Parliament of England 1559-1581 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); J. E. Neale, The Elizabethan House of Commons (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949).

¹⁷Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:3-4.

Hooker then turned to his reasons for producing the Description:

I after my long travels and drawing into years and bearing the burden of sundry infirmities which age bringeth with itself and feeling in myself many defects as well in the faculties of the mind as in the powers of the body in both which I find myself unwieldy and imperfect to do the good that I would for my Commonwealth for my sight waxes dim, my hearing very thick, my speech imperfect and my memory very feeble....¹⁸

Plainly put, Hooker was old, tired and ill, and was beginning to feel--rightly so, as it turned out--that his usefulness to the city was shortly to come to an end. In light of that conviction, he thought it best to set down--in condensed form--"all my former studies containing chiefly the whole state government and order of this your city and Commonwealth into one book or ledger." Hooker intended the Description to be a compilation of the facts of which one must be cognizant in order to be a good citizen of Exeter, particularly as they pertained to personal estates and one's place within the social order. As we will see, his work accomplishes this task quite admirably.¹⁹

Hooker pointed out that he was careful to include small details of life among the bigger issues which concerned the city, and he advised readers to consult the index for specifics. As he put it, he had "left nothing undone which I thought worthy the writing and meet for your own knowledge and necessary for your posterity."²⁰

The balance of the introduction betrays a side of Hooker which is less than flattering: he inveighed against certain persons who, despite

¹⁸Ibid., 1:4.

¹⁹Ibid., 1:4.

²⁰Ibid., 1:15.

all his good services to the city (including, but not limited to, his study at night and letters sent while on vacation), "most unkindly and against all humanity have traduced and most bitterly charged me with sundry crimes and false reports" primarily based on the benefits--monetary and otherwise--which Hooker was thought to have received from the city in exchange for his services. Hooker denounced these critics (whom he did not name nor elaborate upon) as people who "slander and backbite their betters" and noted that it would be preferable for them to imitate the virtues of gentlemen such as Hooker. He assumed that their intent was to break down his good relationship with the city, but believed that the mayor and council were too well aware of his contributions to take these attacks seriously.²¹

To make sure no one missed the point, he went on to list all the compensation he had received from the city, but qualifies the list by noting that it contains all the information he could remember. On his initial appointment as chamberlain, he received a stipend of £4 a year, supplemented a few years later by a livery allowance which brought his compensation to £5 12s. Added to this was a £1 2s. payment derived from St. Nicholas's fee, paid out of the estates of the former Benedictine Priory which had been suppressed under Henry VIII, for a total salary of £6 14s. This amount was all he was granted until he became Bailiff of Exe Island, except for what he terms "petty fees" which were never beneficial to him. His income as bailiff was one hundred marks (£66 13s. 4d), plus an additional £40, amounting to a payment of £109 per annum. The addition of this last compensation seems to have been the bone of

²¹Ibid., 1:5-6.

contention between Hooker and his critics. Though his income was quite substantial compared to his contemporaries, one must remember the extensive services--often rendered over and above official requirements--that Hooker provided in return for this money. Hooker was quick to point out that he never took a gift, reward, or loan from the Mayor and the Council, and considered the portion he received from the office of bailiff to be "a small reward and a slender recompense and consideration to one of my calling and quality who have spent my time and my money in their service." Hooker warned the Mayor and Council that if his successors were not independently wealthy, they would not be able to do the job properly and the "service left undone to your grievance and hindrance." He does acknowledge the gratitude extended to him by the Mayor and Council for his past services and, despite the calumnies heaped upon him, encouraged others to "plunge themselves into like painful services" in order to receive the gratitude of the city (making it plain that this was all one was likely to receive).²²

Hooker noted that he had done all this work out of the love he bore for the Commonwealth, the mayor, and the council and presented the Description as a representation of that love and thus dedicates it to the Mayor and Council. He advised them that this record would correct their lack of knowledge of the city's history and would prevent them from being "carried in Ignorance thereof as your predecessors have been heretofore." He signed off the work by assuring the mayor and council of his best

²²Ibid., 1:6.

wishes for a prosperous government and continual success in their affairs.²³

What are we to make of this man who figured so largely in the fabric of Exeter during the sixteenth century? It is a given that Hooker was a man of great knowledge and the possessor of many talents, as evidenced by his services to the city as an administrator, an accountant, a jurist, and a politician. But he went beyond his official capacities by acting as the city's historian on both a local and national level, and he is largely responsible for the preservation of Exeter's antiquities. The sheer volume of the work accomplished by Hooker indicates that much of it was done purely for his own satisfaction and not in hopes of any compensation; he simply believed that it was a citizen's duty to exert himself on behalf of his city, even if gratitude and payment were not forthcoming. Hooker appears to be a true citizen-statesman who was glad to have dedicated his life in service to his city and country. He made it clear, however, that this service should be rendered by those best fitted to do so, gentlemen like himself and preferably independently wealthy. By his earlier reference to his critics as those who slander their "betters," Hooker leaves no doubt that he considers himself to be one of the chosen few who should, rightfully, be in control of the government by virtue of their education, wealth, and social standing. According to G. R. Elton, the redistribution of the great monastic holdings in the aftermath of the Dissolution allowed certain members of any given community to have more power relative to other members of the community and they exercised this power in a dominant fashion, most

²³Ibid., 1:7.

notably in the political and economic spheres.²⁴ Hooker was thus echoing the prevailing view of the time.

Hooker did not long survive the production of the Description. The exact date of death was not recorded, but according to the Act Book of the Chamber, he was dead by September of 1601: on September 15, the Chamber "elected in the stead of John Hooker, Chamberlain, deceased, William Tickell to be Chamberlain of the said City."²⁵ For someone of his stature, it is stranger still to find that there is no record of his burial in any of Exeter's parish registers. It is most likely that he was buried either at the church in St. Mary Major parish (where he lived for most of his life) or at the cathedral church of St. Peter. In any case, no monument or marker indicates his place of burial.²⁶ The obscurity which surrounded the end of his life continues on to his will, which was assumed for a number of years to have been probated in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on November 2, 1601. Consisting of only four lines, the will leaves everything to a brother, Peter; there is no mention of any other relative in the will, nor is there any provision for the poor.²⁷ Research by city historians disputes the will as belonging

²⁴Elton, England under the Tudors, 258-59.

²⁵Act Books of the City of Exeter, vols. II-VIII, 1508-1640, (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), II:fol. 142b.

²⁶Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:x; John Prince, Danmonii Orientales Illustres or The Worthies of Devon (London: Rees and Curtis, 1810), 506, argues that Hooker is indeed buried in the Cathedral, "as appeared from a ring with his seal of arms not long since digg'd out of his grave," though Prince does note that there is no marker for the grave itself. There is no indication of the disposition of this ring.

²⁷Probate Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 1558-1625, (Public Record Office, London), probate 11/98, quire 77, fol. 288.

to the former chamberlain, and assigns it to his son, also named John, who is said to have died in November of 1601.²⁸ The brevity of the will is explained by this attribution, but the argument is weakened by the date of death of the son; if he died in November, it is clear that his will could not have been probated by the second of that month. Though it is more than likely that the elder Hooker's will was among those destroyed during the blitz, the confusion over his testament only contributes to the paucity of knowledge about his personal life. We do know that he was married twice: first to Martha Toker, by whom he had three sons (two of whom were named John) and two daughters; and second, to Anastryce Bridgeman, who gave him seven sons and five daughters. One of the sons from his second marriage was also named John, and it is this son to whom the Canterbury will has been assigned, since one of his brothers was named Peter.²⁹ In light of the economic burden of this huge family, one can only be amazed at the amount and diversity of the work Hooker managed to accomplish on the public stage, a great deal of which was unremunerated.

A large part of that work concerned Hooker's city, Exeter. Located in the southwestern county of Devon, Exeter is among a small number of cities in England which have survived from the time of its Roman foundations; it also exhibits much evidence of its Saxon occupancy as well. The county name itself means "country of valleys" because there

²⁸History of Parliament, 2:335.

²⁹Sidney Lee, ed., Dictionary of National Biography (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1891), 27:287-89.

are a great many hills in the area.³⁰ Exeter, the county seat, is "placed in a very lofty position facing west." It sits on the banks of the river Exe, from which it draws its name, a name bestowed upon the city in the year 932 by King Adelstone; the original name of the river was Exeterra. The name also has a Saxon derivation as "cestre" meant a town, a fort or a castle. By Elizabethan times the city had assumed a certain roundness of shape, encompassing about a mile and half in circumference. Due to its position on a small hill, the not infrequent rain kept the streets relatively clean, and water, in the form of springs and wells, was quite plentiful; brought into the city by means of canals or lead pipes, its main outlets were two conduits, one near the churchyard of the Cathedral and one in the middle of the city.³¹

The city contained the ruins of an ancient castle named Rougemont, which took its name from the red hill upon which it was built. Constructed by the Romans as a defensive structure, it was still an imposing edifice overlooking the city during Hooker's time; he noted that it might even be possible to render it impregnable once again. The river Exe springs from a point about twenty-four miles outside the city in the area of Exmoor, and flows out to the sea eight miles distant at Exmouth. Hooker notes that it had many tributaries, and was "well stored" with many delicious fish that provided an abundance of food to the city and the county. Goods of all kinds were transported to the city's Watergate, whose canal had been restored in 1564; Hooker pointed out that vessels of fifteen or sixteen tons were brought up to the city and discharged at

³⁰Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:26.

³¹Ibid., 1:29-31.

the wharf located at the Watergate.³² But imports, whether foreign or domestic, were not as necessary to the maintenance of Exeter and its surrounding county as they would be to other areas of the country. As Hooker wrote, most other parts of England could not compare their indigenous yield to that of Exeter and its county: grains were plentifully grown, and there were many cattle to be found in the area; cloth manufacture, especially that of wool, was prodigious; the production rate of tin and other metals was impressive, and the commodities of the sea, i.e., fish, were abundant for both local provision and for purposes of trade.³³

The city was well populated; in 1558, between six and nine thousand people resided in the city and by 1601, the number had risen to around ten thousand.³⁴ Most of its early inhabitants were engaged in the clothmaking industries which exported much of the fine broadcloth they produced to Spain and other "south countries." In the second half of the sixteenth century, however, the main residents of the city were merchants, purveyors of woollen cloth, and other artificers; the merchants represented the greatest proportion of the population both in number and in wealth, with merchant families numbering about two hundred out of a total of two thousand families in 1558. In general, Exeter had "become

³²Ibid., 1:31-33.

³³William Blake, "Hooker's Synopsis Chorographical of Devonshire," Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association 47 (1915): 338.

³⁴For population statistics on Exeter, see: W. G. Hoskins, "The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter," in The Early Modern Town, ed. Peter Clark (London: Longman Group Limited, 1976), 148-67, 149; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 196.

to be a populace and a great multitude of such as do fear and serve God in true religion and according to his Love. And everyone leading a civil life do travail for their living according to his calling in all mutual love and society."³⁵ Hooker was very prejudiced in favor his fellow Devonians, noting that they were strong, of "good stature," and were all inclined to be honest and virtuous. Further, they were much given to wisdom and learning which they then applied to good effect in the politics of the city and commonwealth.³⁶

Joan Thirsk notes that Exeter was a market town which grew into a provincial center, based primarily on its proximity to an easily navigable body of water. Roads into the town were of average quality, and the markets themselves were spread out in the city to prevent congestion, thereby providing ease of negotiation and transport. It has already been noted that the area inside the city walls was relatively small, so it would not have been difficult to find one's way about, even if one were unfamiliar with the town's layout. Besides its cloth industry, Exeter did significant business in both cattle and corn.³⁷

By Hooker's definition, the people consisted of four degrees: the first was that of nobleman and gentleman; the second, merchant; the third, yeoman, and the fourth, laborer. He considered the first degree to consist of people such as "knights and esquires and all such who by

³⁵W. G. Hoskins, "The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter," in The Early Modern Town, ed. Peter Clark (London: Longman Group Limited, 1976), 149; Blake, "Hooker's Synopsis Chorographical," 337.

³⁶Blake, "Hooker's Synopsis Chorographical," 339.

³⁷Joan Thirsk, ed., The Agrarian History of England and Wales, vol. 4 1500-1640, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 479-91.

birth are descended of ancient and noble parents and such as for their virtues and good deserts be by the prince and sovereign advanced to nobility."³⁸ Hooker waxed lyrical about their many wonderful characteristics (keeping in mind that he numbered himself amongst them), noting that many were "friendly to their neighbors and liberal to the poor and needy...."³⁹ He was pleased to report that they were not subject to the same foibles and excesses which had destroyed so many other noble houses in other countries and civilizations.

The merchants he characterizes primarily as seekers of wealth, who are willing to adventure on the sea and elsewhere in order to obtain profit. He notes (almost scornfully) that they employ their wealth "in purchasing of land and by little and little they do creep and seek to be gentlemen," although some fail in this task because they are too given to the pursuit of wealth to aspire to the virtues necessary for ennoblement.⁴⁰ They were, W. G. Hoskins notes, a group which was "small, compact and closely interrelated by marriage" which nevertheless managed to dominate the political, economic and social life of the town. In 1558, for example, all but one member of the Council of Twenty-Four were merchants, a pattern which would repeat itself throughout the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods.⁴¹

Most merchants pooled their resources with others to provision cargo ships, but they conducted their trade with foreign countries

³⁸Blake, "Hooker's Synopsis Chorographical," 339.

³⁹Ibid., 340.

⁴⁰Ibid., 340-41.

⁴¹Hoskins, "Merchants of Exeter," 148-49.

through their individual shops, often carrying large inventories of goods of varying value and description. On the personal side, merchants often had large families and dwelt in houses consisting, on average, of ten to fifteen rooms. Most of them, at least by the beginning of the seventeenth century, were Protestants, and they generally led private lives, apart from those of their number who succeeded to places on the Council of Twenty-Four and elective office. Except for the larger businesses, most merchant firms did not survive the death of their founders, and the estates left behind (which averaged about £1,913) were distributed among family members, or, more rarely, reinvested in the business which would be carried on by a son. Many merchants made some provision for the poor in their wills, and a great number made substantial bequests, as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.⁴²

The yeoman class consisted of "farmers, husbandmen and freeholders," who are, for the most part, "not much inferior unto the gentlemen who be their lords."⁴³ In many ways, Hooker argues, the yeoman emulates the good qualities of the noblemen, and gives himself to the attainment of the most profit from his land, in whatever form it is held; in fact, many do so well that their landlords are "many times beholden" to them.⁴⁴ As their profits increase, numerous yeomen engage in usury and other pursuits that see them "climbing up daily to the degrees of a gentleman and do bring up their children accordingly."⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid., 153-65.

⁴³Blake, "Hooker's Synopsis Chorographical," 341.

⁴⁴Ibid., 341.

⁴⁵Ibid., 342.

The fourth degree Hooker described were the "daily laborers who do serve for wages," and they were either artificers who lived in the city or those persons who worked in the country. Hooker noted that there were two kinds of laborers in the country: the first was the spader, a laborer who worked in the tin mines, and the other was a day laborer employed as a servant or as a husbandman. The former, Hooker wrote, generally lived a miserable life: he wore coarse clothing, endured a "slender" diet consisting of hard cheese and bread, and his common drink was water, which he was often forced to drink out of his spade or shovel. Since a great deal of his life was spent in the pits and caves underneath the ground, Hooker noted that this laborer's life was often in great danger due to the possibility of cave-ins. A life of greater ease and delicacy was the lot of the laborer who is a servant or who performs tasks related to husbandry. Although their labor was hard, Hooker pointed out that many of them had some leisure time to train their bodies in such a way as to make their tasks easier. He noted that these laborers were the "most inferior in degree" but were still free men and were not held in bond.⁴⁶

It was the first three degrees of persons who control the government. Its organization was relatively simple, although election procedures were quite complicated. Though Exeter was initially under the control of four bailiffs, known in Hooker's time as stewards, in the aftermath of the Norman conquest, a senate composed of thirty-six persons had been constituted.⁴⁷ In 1485, under Henry VII, an ordinance was

⁴⁶Ibid., 342.

⁴⁷Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:39.

issued to clear up the confusion over the election of the city's officers. Henry's ordinance stated that a mayor, four bailiffs, a twenty-four person common council and four sergeants were to be the officers of the city. The twenty-four were named in a schedule annexed to the ordinance, and Henry decreed that they were not to be removed from office "except it be for poverty, Disease, great age or other cause reasonable" to be determined by a majority of the council itself. City officials were elected out of the council's membership but maintained their places within the council itself while holding their elected positions.⁴⁸

Elections for the city officers were held on the Monday before the feast of St. Michael the Archangel. The town clerk wrote the names of each of the twenty-four council members on a piece of paper in four rows, leaving spaces between each of the names. Then each member of the council went alone before the clerk and the recorder (to prevent influence by others) and by voice vote gave the names of two men to stand for mayor, one to stand for receiver (who was also a steward), three to serve as stewards, and three to serve as sergeants. The recorder and the clerk then tallied up the votes, and wrote the names of the men receiving the most votes on a fresh piece of paper; the first paper was then ceremoniously burnt. The mayor and the Twenty-Four then descended to the Guildhall, and the franchised men of the city were allowed into the chamber. At that time, the recorder informed them of the two men receiving the most votes to stand for mayor, and asked for a voice vote for one or the other to become mayor for the following year. If there

⁴⁸Ibid., 3:790-92.

was doubt as to the selection, the current mayor cast the final vote. The recorder then read the names of the other officers as previously selected by the council members, and the names were entered in the Court Book and proclamation was made that they were to come on the next Monday following to take their oaths of office. The election itself was a time of celebration, with music played and fruit tossed to the crowds in the street. The old mayor and the council then dined together, after which event the new mayor was escorted home.⁴⁹

Convening on the next Monday, the new officers were installed amid great pomp and circumstance. All the records and accounts of the previous year were presented and verified before the swearing-in, which was held in the Guildhall. The new mayor was sworn in and presented with the city's keys, seals and the "black roll," a parchment document containing an account of certain old customs and other things important to the city. The town clerk subsequently swore in all the other officers and everyone took their places according to custom. The new mayor then chose one of the stewards to be his lieutenant and selected the fourth sergeant. The mayor and the Twenty-Four took their seats in the Council Chamber to choose the junior officers of the city, including the aldermen, the sheriff, the poor wardens, the constables, the porters, and the wardens of the Exebridge. Upon selection, only the sheriff was sworn in immediately, while the others made their oaths on the following Monday. The council was then dismissed and the new mayor and the

⁴⁹Ibid., 3:793-97.

Twenty-Four dined together, with the new receiver taking charge of the keys of the Council Chamber.⁵⁰

The business of the mayor and the council was pursued in two places: the first was the Guildhall, where all the officers of the city and certain counsellors sat together every Monday to hear any matters brought by a citizen; this was also the time and place for the hearing of all criminal matters, as well as for any matters touching the governance of the city. The second meeting place was the Council Chamber, where the mayor and the council met to discuss the lands, revenues, profits and all other things which pertained to the continued maintenance of the city and its safety. At these meetings, the town clerk and the chamberlain recorded all the things that were discussed and agreed upon in the Act Books of the Chamber. The mayor had "a little bell and a mallet before him" that he used to call people into the chamber, and to keep order in the assembly.⁵¹

The duties which were incumbent upon each major office varied, but it was the mayor who, as the chief officer of the city, bore the greatest burden of governance. His first duty, Hooker noted, was as a minister of God to serve according to His laws, and he was to act as a model of virtue for the people he governed; only then could the commonwealth flourish. He had to be well-versed in the law, and was held responsible for the properties of the city under his management. As a judge, he was expected to render justice fairly without respect to social position or wealth, and was to make his decisions with the customs of the city in

⁵⁰Ibid., 3:797-800.

⁵¹Ibid., 3:800-801.

mind as well as the laws pertaining to each case. No one was to be elected as mayor without having first served in one of the other offices, such as steward or receiver, and he was expected to be a person of some wealth so that the office would not be an economic burden upon him, nor would he be as susceptible to corruption and bribery. There were limitations on the mayor's power, most particularly in the area of justice: he could not sit in judgment in any case without the presence of two stewards for civil matters, and the recorder and other justices for criminal matters. All of his proclamations had to be made in public, and he was expected to make a yearly walk around the city to see that all was in order and to show himself to the people; he also had to visit the market and make sure that all the prices were reasonable. Among his myriad duties were several concerned with the maintenance of the poor within the city: the almshouses were to be visited yearly, and the collectors of the poor rates had to make a report on their accounts to him once a year. The mayor could not leave the city without the permission of the monarch or for some other special emergency, because his presence was needed on a continual basis; as Hooker wrote, "without him nothing can be determined in Common Council, neither can they make any assembly of the twenty-four without his authority and commandment."⁵²

Stewards were also to be religious, and to dispense justice, both in concert with the mayor and alone, "truly and uprightly." They were charged with having particular care of the orphans of the city, and, like the mayor, had to see to the continuance of fair practice in the marketplace. They were the chief officers of the Courts of Provost, and

⁵²Ibid., 3:801-806.

had also to sit with the Mayor at his court. One of their more obscure duties was to "see the candlelight to be put into every man's door in the dark winter night."⁵³

The receiver was an officer who wore several hats: he was the principal steward, functioned as the chief treasurer of the city, and was a member of the council of Twenty-Four. Among his responsibilities was the collection of all rents and payments due to the city of whatever form; at year's end, these monies were to be accounted for to the city's auditors. The same procedures were incumbent upon the payments he made on behalf of the city. He held the keys of the council chamber, and was in charge of seeing that all records were safely stored. As Hooker noted, however, this was a task that was not taken seriously until the advent of the chamberlain.⁵⁴

The sergeants were primarily responsible for making arrests and delivering summons, and for seeing that all warrants, including those condemning prisoners to death, were carried out. This was obviously a position which was subject to a great deal of corruption, because one of their instructions was that they were to "take no bribes nor rewards for doing of their offices other than their ordinary fees." During the term of their office, they were enjoined from serving in any spiritual court, perhaps due to the nature of their duties. The sergeants were not above the performance of more menial assignments: they were charged "to keep the Guildhall and the place of the courts clean...."⁵⁵

⁵³Ibid., 3:807-808.

⁵⁴Ibid., 3:809-810.

⁵⁵Ibid., 3:810-11.

The office of alderman was "inquisitive rather than judicial" because these officers were only to search out misdemeanors committed within their jurisdictions and report on them; they could not, on their own authority, "reform nor punish by corporal punishment...without the consent and allowance of the mayor or superior governor." The alderman was essentially a peace officer who discovered these misdemeanors through the use of a bi-annual court wherein city wardens were to appear and make report on transgressions within their districts. His other duties ranged from the important task of seeing that no other officers took bribes to the distasteful job of overseeing the removal of dunghills that were found in the city.⁵⁶

Hooker lavished great praise on the office of chamberlain, which is not surprising in light of his appointment as the first person to that position; he noted that the chamberlain's "charge is great" and that the person holding the office "must be wise and learned and of great modesty and sobriety." Functioning as one of the chief advisors to the mayor and the council, the chamberlain was responsible for "instruct[ing] every officer what his office is and what he ought to do." Keeping in mind Hooker's preoccupation with the preservation of the city's antiquities, he listed the obligation of keeping the records and evidences of the city in safety as one of his chief duties.⁵⁷ In February of 1561, Queen Elizabeth I issued a charter establishing the Orphans' Court, ordering that the chamberlain was to "have...the custody and government of all and

⁵⁶Ibid., 3:812-13.

⁵⁷Ibid., 3:814-15.

singular orphans of any citizens whatsoever" in Exeter.⁵⁸ This was a responsibility which Hooker took quite seriously, and he explained that the Chamberlain was "to take the special charge and care of the orphans and to receive all their goods into his hands to see the same to be converted to their use." Under Hooker's aegis, then, the newly created office of Chamberlain acquired a great deal of importance within the city.⁵⁹

Hooker worked in concert with the town clerk, who was to "register, set down and record" all things done in both the civil and criminal courts, as well as chronicling the policies established by the magistracy or the council, and "anything else which concerns the Commonwealth." He was also a key player in the election process each year.⁶⁰

There were a number of other minor offices that were appointed by the mayor in concert with the council, among them the constables, the scavengers, the watchmen, and the porters of the city. One of the most intriguing of these minor offices was the bullring man, who had "to be present when any bull or bear is to be beaten" at baitings, and was to inform the mayor in advance of all such events. He was also "to suffer no pigs to range the streets but he must impound them."⁶¹ The most important officer in matters of the unfortunate of the city was the Warden of the Magdalen, the hospital for persons suffering from leprosy.

⁵⁸Ibid., 2:424-39; see chapter 6 for a full discussion of the Exeter Orphans' Court.

⁵⁹Ibid., 3:815.

⁶⁰Ibid., 3:815-17.

⁶¹Ibid., 3:821-22.

He oversaw the good governance of the house, and was to make sure that each person residing within it received their weekly stipend, along with all other necessities. The duties incumbent upon the warden of the Magdalen were extended to "every other warden [of] any almshouse."⁶² The brevity of instruction for this office, and its generalized admonitions, shows that Exeter, while concerned with the sick and poor of the city, spent considerably less time in consideration of their governance than they did on other matters.

The common council of the city, sometimes referred to as the Twenty-Four or the Commonalty, were, before the ordinance enacted by Henry VII, men of great power and influence in Exeter, having the right to determine which causes were to be tried in both the civil and criminal courts without the advice of the mayor or any other official. Henry's ordinance severely curtailed the power of the Council, and, as noted earlier, made the mayor a permanent member of the Council without whom nothing could be accomplished.⁶³

The residents of Exeter who were given the freedom of the city were of three degrees, and were those allowed to vote on the election of the Mayor. Hooker defined a citizen as one whom "the Magistrate does accept, receive and admit unto the liberties and franchises of the city and who thereupon is sworn and does take his oath to obey, observe and to keep the same...."⁶⁴ The first type of citizen was that man who was indigenous to the area, having been born and dwelling there for his

⁶²Ibid., 3:822.

⁶³Ibid., 3:813-14.

⁶⁴Ibid., 3:788.

lifetime, as possessor and inheritor of "soil and freehold" within the city. This man was subject to be "called to such office within the city as he shall be thought meet for," showing the importance the city placed upon service by its citizens. An ancient tradition of granting each son of such a person freedom of the city upon the father's death was limited by Hooker's time to the eldest son or next heir of the citizen in question, who must also be resident within the city.⁶⁵

The second category of citizenship was that bestowed upon apprentices who, having been certified as "truely and justly" serving out their apprenticeship term of seven years to a free citizen of Exeter, were "accepted and received into the liberties of the city without payment of any fine or redemption saving the ordinary fees of the Court."⁶⁶

The final designation of citizen was that accorded to a man termed as "stranger" who was granted the freedom by the magistracy "either by redemption and fine or for some other consideration." This classification included artificers who came to the city to ply their trade; they were to be charged at least twenty shillings for the privilege of citizenship granted through redemption. Merchants and other tradespeople paid fines set at the discretion of the magistracy. Hooker noted, however, that "once admitted unto the freedom there is no difference" between them "for all be alike freemen and enjoy one and the same freedom."⁶⁷ Anyone not admitted to the freedom of the city was

⁶⁵Ibid., 3:788.

⁶⁶Ibid., 3:788.

⁶⁷Ibid., 3:788-89.

adjudged to be a "foreigner" who had to pay a yearly fine to continue "trafficking within the city" and was to be subject to all strictures passed by the city concerning foreigners.⁶⁸

The business of the city was thus strictly regulated and, according to Hooker, "the whole city according to their arts and occupations be all reduced into several companies" or guilds. The oversight of business provided by these guilds made things a lot easier for the mayor and the Twenty-Four as they were "not troubled" by having to deal with issues concerning commercial pursuits. The guilds functioned as part of the civic community in its ceremonies and rituals; they did not provide capital to start one in trade, though membership could make it easier to obtain start-up loans. Their most important duty during the early modern period was the strict regulation of persons entering a particular trade; the guilds thus controlled not only the amount of labor dedicated to a certain craft, but imposed quality standards and set wages for its members. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the power of the guilds declined with the rise of textile industry in rural areas, and the overlapping of certain crafts (i.e., baking and brewing) broke down distinctions between the guilds. In some towns and cities, however, the influence of the guilds remained intact into the seventeenth century, which is evidenced by the creation of most of Exeter's guilds during the reign of Elizabeth I.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Ibid., 3:789; woomen were not admitted as "citizens" under any of these three categories, since they took their position in connection with their male head of household, i.e., father or husband.

⁶⁹D. C. Coleman, Industry in Tudor and Stuart England (Tiptree, Essex: The Anchor Press Ltd., 1975), 19-22.

The city had eleven of these guilds, of which the most ancient was the Merchant Tailors' Company, which had been involved in a great dispute with the city during the reign of Edward IV, who had to mediate between the parties to effect a resolution. This company seems to have been much given to squabbling over its rights, as it engaged in complaints against the Merchant Adventurers Company, which was the wealthiest within the city. It appears that the Tailors Company petitioned Queen Elizabeth to dissolve the Adventurers' company, but backed down and accepted a compromise drawn up by the Queen and her council. Most of the other companies were chartered during the reign of Elizabeth, including the Brewers, Butchers, Bakers, and Haberdashers. One of the older companies, that of the Tuckers and Weavers, was active in charitable ventures, as were the Merchant Adventurers.⁷⁰

While government and business were certainly the chief occupations of the citizens of Exeter, another, equally important component of their lives was the spiritual one. We have seen that adherence to religion and the laws of God figured largely in the constitution of the city's government, both on an institutional level and on a personal one, in that city officials were admonished to be righteous in the ways of the Lord. Thus, if government and business were the warp of the fabric of the city, then the church was certainly the woof--an inextricable weave that defined Exeter in both overt and subtle ways. It is important, then, to examine its institutional place within the city.

Hooker wrote that there were few parish churches in Exeter until after Innocent III, but by 1222 there were nineteen churches within the

⁷⁰Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:824-28.

city and its suburbs. He noted that this number was at once capable of sustaining

...sufficient and competent livings to maintain a massing sacrificer for such was the blind devotion of the people in that Romish [Catholic] religion but the same now being abolished and the gospel preached the livelihoods are so small as not sufficient for the most part to maintain a poor clerk or scholar and by reason thereof the most part of them do lie void and vacant without incumbent.⁷¹

By Hooker's time, then, many of the parish churches established under the auspices of the Catholic Church could not, once converted to Protestantism, provide as many outlets for the faithful. The chief glory of the city, however, was the Cathedral Church of St. Peter, founded in the year 932 by King Athelstan. For the next four hundred years, the foundation he established was added to and expanded, so that it reached its apogee in the mid-fourteenth century. From its earliest years, the Cathedral was endowed with various revenues, lands and other gifts which allowed its expansion, commodities which were bestowed by "kings, princes, prelates, bishops and sundry others."⁷² Hooker betrayed his lack of architectural knowledge by commenting that, by its completion, "it is so uniformly and decently compact and builded as though it had been done at one instant," but even a cursory examination of the present-day church reveals the inaccuracy of this statement. It is not credible

⁷¹Ibid., 1:35; see also Robert Whiting, The Blind Devotion of the People (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Christopher Haigh, ed., The Reign of Elizabeth I (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985). A more recent exposition of this transition is Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England ca. 1400 -ca. 1580 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁷²Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:38.

that architects would have been able to maintain a cohesive integrity over the course of four hundred years of construction.⁷³ The ancient foundation had encompassed a Benedictine monastery that was converted to the Lady Chapel, while the Dean's House was fashioned from an almshouse for women sponsored by the religious order of the Kalendarii.⁷⁴ In 1235, a Dean and Chapter of twenty-four prebendaries (canons and other officers) was established; a Chanter with a sub-dean was appointed in 1284. These offices, along with that of the Treasurer, constituted the principal governance of the church, which was separate from the civil government of the city.⁷⁵ The bishop, appointed by the monarch, was placed in authority over this religious community, and Hooker pointed out that it was the bishops who were primarily responsible for the success or failure of that community. He noted that "these bishops did grow and increase for many years into great wealth, rents and revenues and governed the church very laudably,"⁷⁶ but of late, "...the more part [of these revenues] thereof has been consumed and exhausted by a wasteful bishop" whom Hooker did not name, although his target was most certainly William Bradbridge, who served as bishop of Exeter from 1570 to 1578, but who spent most of his time "in the country at Newton Ferrys."⁷⁷

⁷³An in-depth discussion of the building of the Cathedral is contained in John Britton, The History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of Exeter (London: M. A. Nattali, 1826).

⁷⁴Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:97.

⁷⁵Ibid., 1:100-101.

⁷⁶Ibid., 1:238.

⁷⁷Ibid., 1:38, 2:237; for additional information on the Elizabethan and Jacobean bishops, see George Oliver, The Lives of the Bishops of Exeter (Exeter: P. A. Hannaford, 1861).

In any event, the church was incorporated with the Dean and the Chapter, allowing for a charter that confirmed their revenues and other holdings, but primarily stating that the church had "certain liberties, privileges, immunities and fees...and thereby in some part they are freed and exempted from the liberties and jurisdiction of the city."⁷⁸ With their independence established, the church was expanded to include the company of the Vicars Choral, consisting of twenty-four members, but with separate revenues, and its own accountability. Each of the components of the church--the bishop, the dean and chapter, the Vicars Choral--had holdings in other parts of the country which were held solely by one of the individual segments, and answered only to their particular jurisdiction.⁷⁹ Among the community were also included young scholars called secondaries, and a number of children described as choristers.⁸⁰

Hooker summarized the money values involved in the bishopric alone, and also for the church holdings in totality: for the bishopric, the value was £2,638 16s. 1d; the total value of the church holdings was £5,575 7s. 7d.⁸¹ Even in modern terms, these are not inconsiderable sums; for the sixteenth century, they are much more than impressive, and reveal that the Anglican church, though not to be compared with its pre-Reformation Catholic counterpart in the size of its revenues, still commanded a large slice of the economic pie in Exeter.

⁷⁸Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:239.

⁷⁹Ibid., 1:269.

⁸⁰Ibid., 1:239.

⁸¹Ibid., 1:241, 243.

This, then, is the city of Exeter--its physical layout, its resources, imports and exports; its people within their social hierarchy; its institutions of government, business and the Church. We see that it is, in many respects, an inbred community, particularly in terms of its elected officials, which thought of itself as particularly self-reliant in many things. Though the city was open to immigration, this was a privilege that was strictly guarded and regulated. The population conformed, for the most part, to the accepted social strictures of the time, in that a small self-perpetuating minority dictated the decisions that the rest of the citizens lived by, although the policies of citizenry were rather liberal and the guild system did permit the participation in city affairs of a large number of people.

The first part of this study has established the meaning and the parameters of the problem--poverty--and provided the outlines of the context used for analysis--the city of Exeter. In the following chapters, I will present an in-depth examination of the forms of aid offered in the alleviation of poverty in Exeter, which will reveal the predominance of philanthropy in addressing this problem.

CHAPTER 5

THE RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNMENT (I)

In early modern England, the problem of poverty and how to deal with its many ramifications was the subject of much debate within both the central government and the localities. In the early part of the sixteenth century, statutes touching poverty concentrated strictly on the maintenance of order, and did not address the issue of relief for the less fortunate members of society. Charity came at the hands of the Church and generous-minded individuals, none of whom were regulated or consistent in their responses; aid was dispensed solely at the discretion of the giver and could be withdrawn at whim. Thus, the poor were never able to rely on a steady source of succour, and had to find it wherever and whenever it was available. As aid itself was piecemeal, so too were the statute law and other ordinances which addressed the issues of vagrancy and the relief of the poor. It was not, as we shall see, until nearly the end of Elizabeth's reign that a comprehensive bill was passed that codified Tudor regulation of the poor. The failure of Tudor and early Stuart poor law was not, we argue, in its intent but in its enforcement on the basic parochial level, at least until the reign of Charles I.

In this chapter, we trace the growth of statute law, along with the royal proclamations and the acts of the Privy Council regarding Devon and Exeter that were meant to supplement it.

Statutes

In the Middle Ages, the overwhelming thrust of the government in the matters of vagrancy and poverty was punitive. Statutes against

vagrancy significantly pre-dated those dealing with help for the poor; for example, the Statute of Winchester, which dealt with vagrancy and crime, was passed in 1285, while the first bill directly concerning poverty did not become law until 1349, when the act of begging was regulated.¹ Indeed, with the exception of a statute in 1391² directing the Church to appropriate annual sums to care for the poor, all the laws passed up until 1547 were specifically designed to combat vagrancy, though several of them continued the earlier provisions of the Church collection of alms.³

The Church played a significant role under statute law in the acquisition and distribution of funds to the poor, a role which is clearly adumbrated by the fact of aid being gathered in and dispensed from parochial units. Whether it was easier to use an organizational system already in place, or whether the central government was indeed placing the burden of alms-collection upon the Church, the traditional fount of succour, we cannot determine. In any case, it was left to the preachers, vicars, curates and church wardens to see that the sums were collected and then passed to the poor, under the nominal supervision of

¹A. Luders, et al, eds. The Statutes of the Realm (London: Record Commission, 1810), I, 13 Ed. 1; 23 Ed. 3, c. 7.

²Statutes, II, 15 Rich 2, c. 6.

³See *ibid.*, I, 23 Ed. 3, c. 14; I, 23 Ed. 3, ch. 7; I, 34 Ed. 3, c. 10; II, 7 Rich. 2, c. 5 and 6; II, 12 Rich. 2, c. 7-10; II, Hen. 7, c. 2; II, 19 Hen. 7, c. 12; III, 3 Hen. 8, c. 9; III, 22 Hen. 8, c. 10 and 12; III, 27 Hen. 8, c. 25; III, 28 Hen. 8, c. 6; III, 31 Hen. 8, c. 7; III, 33 Hen. 8, c. 10 and 17; III, 37 Hen. 8, c. 23. For a full description of the 1536 law and Thomas Cromwell's role in its passage, see G. R. Elton, "An Early-Tudor Poor Law," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 6 (1953): 55-67 and also his Reform and Renewal: Thomas Cromwell and the Common Weal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

the corporate authorities. It was not until 1572 that the Church's role in poor law statute gave way to completely secular regulation.

The act of 1572 established new guidelines and repealed the statutes of Henry VIII and Edward VI regarding beggars and vagabonds in order to avoid confusion over the government's policy. Persons over the age of fourteen caught begging were to be committed to jail until the next available Quarter Sessions; if found guilty of the offense, such persons were "to be greviously whipped, and burnt through the gristle of the right ear with a hot iron of the compass of [about] an inch...." The only way to avoid such horrific treatment was for some "honest person" to take the offender into service, but it was required that the offender remain in service for at least a year, or be subject to the same punishment. A second offense meant a doubling of service to avoid punishment and being labeled as a felon, but a third violation meant a sentence of death without "allowance or benefit of clergy or sanctuary." The statute was very clear on what constituted a rogue, a vagabond or a sturdy beggar, so that there should not be confusion about the application of the law.⁴

As to the relief of the poor, the 1572 statute continued the provisions laid out in 1552 and 1563, directing that those in charge of hospitals were to "lodge or harbor any impotent or aged person or persons" to the extent they were directed to do so by their foundation. Justices of the Peace were charged with making an accounting of all poor and impotent persons within their jurisdictions, and with settling them in appropriate "habitations." To accomplish this task, the justices,

⁴Statutes, IV, 14 Eliz. 1, c. 5, 590-91.

acting in concert with other civil authorities, were to levy a weekly charge on each inhabitant of the areas under their control and to use these funds to relieve the poor people residing within their districts. An Overseer of the Poor was also to be appointed by the authorities in each area to serve a one-year term, and if any refused to accept such appointment, they were "to forfeit ten shillings for every such default." The poor were charged to accept settlement as directed by the civil authorities and if they refused, were to be "deemed rogues and vagabonds." Further, if they were not impaired physically, the poor had to engage in useful work as directed by the overseers; refusal meant a whipping or being stocked. The act laid out the duties of constables and collectors, and imposed fines on them in the event of their failure to perform their duties. Persons refusing to contribute to the poor rates were to be brought before the justices and could be committed to jail until they decided to comply with the law, although they could apply to Quarter Sessions for relief from taxation if they could prove it too burdensome.⁵

The central government was mindful that "inhabitants of diverse counties, cities and towns within this realm" might not be able to come up with all the monies needed to relieve the poor in their areas, so officials were permitted to seek funds in other places; for example, cities were directed to appeal to county authorities for aid in the event of shortfalls.⁶

⁵Ibid., 592-94, 596.

⁶Ibid., 595.

The 1572 statute was amended in 1576 to deal with bastard children and their parents, since bastardy was "an offense against God's law and man's law." Parents of such children were to be charged for their maintenance; refusal to pay such support resulted in committal to jail, there to remain until payment was rendered. The main thrust of the Act, however, was to set forth provisions for putting the poor to work; civil authorities were directed to gather "a competent store and stock of wool" and other materials that the poor would then fashion into wares to be sold and thus, contribute to their upkeep. Anyone refusing to work or found responsible for "spoiling the materials" was to be committed to a House of Correction. The statute provided for the erection of these Houses of Correction in each county of the country; taxation to build these houses was imposed on the county's residents, who were subject to a double rate in the event of failure to pay in the first instance. Strictures were laid down for the appointment of overseers for the houses and made them responsible for a regular accounting of residents and the sums dedicated to their maintenance from the civic coffers.⁷

It was in 1597/98 that the acts were passed that constituted the pinnacle of government efforts to deal with the poor, acts that came to be referred to simply as the "Elizabethan Poor Law." 39 Elizabeth 1, chapter 3, entitled "an act for the relief of the poor" directed that the justices of the peace appoint, every Easter, churchwardens and four overseers of the poor in every parish to set the poor on work, in particular the children of any persons not able to maintain them. To accomplish this task, the overseers were "to raise weekly or otherwise

⁷Ibid., IV, 18 Eliz. 1, c. 3, 611-12.

(by taxation of every inhabitant and every occupier of lands in the said parish in such competent sum and sums of money as they shall think fit) a convenient stock of...wool...." that the poor would use in this work; they could also put poor children out as apprentices to lighten the parish burden. The overseers were to meet once a month, and keep a strict accounting of all the monies assessed, received or not, and how such sums were spent on the relief of the poor; failure to do so could mean a prison sentence. Justices were permitted under this act to seek aid in other parishes for the support of those areas unable to meet their own needs; further, the coercive element of the law was strengthened as it became possible for the justices to seize the property or money of any person refusing to pay the tax in order to satisfy his obligation, with the surplus returned to the person in question. If these measures failed to produce the desired results, then recalcitrant taxpayers could be committed to prison until they paid, although appeals at Quarter Sessions to plead inability to pay could still be made.⁸

The justices were empowered to raise, using tax revenues, houses of correction or cottages for the poor on any waste or common lands within their jurisdiction, though it is clear that the Act intended for all citizens to take a hand in alleviating poverty whenever possible. For the first time, parents and children of impotent poor were charged to take care of their own (according to the rate laid down by the justices); a 20s. penalty was to be assessed on any persons failing to do so. Begging "by license or without" was forbidden and any caught at

⁸Ibid., IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 3, 896-97.

it were to be automatically declared "rogues," unless they were doing so in their home parish under the direction of the parish officials.⁹

Penalties and forfeitures assessed under the terms of this Act were to be applied to the use of the poor, and, for the first time, statutes laid down guidelines for rate assessment in each parish: justices were to "rate every parish to such a weekly sum of money as they shall think convenient, so as no parish be rated above the sum of six pence, nor under the sum of an half penny weekly to be paid...." Further, the sums proceeding from these rates were to be spent in certain ways: each county yearly was to send 20s. for the maintenance of the prisoners of the king's bench, and to dedicate certain portions of the rates for the upkeep of hospitals and almshouses. The act was particularly solicitous of soldiers and mariners who applied for relief, to ensure that they had sufficient sums to "travel homewards."¹⁰

The second act of 1597/98 repealed all former acts dealing with rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars and established new guidelines; justices of the peace were to make orders for the erection and maintenance of Houses of Correction for the "correction and punishment of offenders." Like earlier statutes, the act laid down a definition of rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars; included among them were "all persons calling themselves scholars going about begging" and any persons claiming to have knowledge of "palmistry or other like crafty science, or pretending that they can tell destinies, fortunes or such other like fantastical imaginations" or pretending to be "Egipcyans [Egyptians]."

⁹Ibid., 897-98.

¹⁰Ibid., 898.

A new category was added to the article on definition: "...all wandering persons and common laborers being persons able in body using loitering and refusing to work for such reasonable wages" as were available in their parish of residence. If work was to be had, then, one had to work or be labeled as a vagrant and face the consequences.¹¹

Any persons meeting the definition of the statute who were found begging were to be whipped and returned to their place of birth or last residence; failing that, they were to be committed to a house of correction. The whipping penalty is described in vivid terms: such persons shall be "stripped naked from the middle upwards and shall be openly whipped until his or her body be bloody" and was to carry a testimonial on their person attesting to their punishment under the terms of the Act, and the decision of the justices as to their disposition in regard to settlement. The government was equally determined that offenders who refused to "be reformed of their roguish kind of life" would not long enjoy residence in the country; reformation by jail or house of correction having failed, the justices were empowered to banish such rogues "out of this realm and all other the dominions thereof...and [they] shall be conveyed unto such parts beyond the seas as shall be at any time hereafter for that purpose assigned by the Privy Council...." Unauthorized return to the country automatically became a felony, and, as such, warranted a sentence of death upon capture. In practical terms, the provisions of this act could not be acted upon until the reign of

¹¹Ibid., IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 4, 899; for a near contemporary account of the duties of the justices of the peace see Theodore Barlow, The Justice of the Peace (London: Henry Lintot, 1745).

James I, when there were establishments "beyond the seas" where these criminals could be sent.¹²

In order to limit the problem within England and Wales, the Act forbade, on pain of a twenty-shilling penalty, anyone knowingly transporting vagabonds from Scotland, Ireland, or the Isle of Man into the kingdom; such vagabonds were to be whipped and transported back to the country of their origin. The statute also showed that care was taken to protect the health resorts of Bath and Buxton, as it prohibited the travel of "diseased or impotent poor persons" to these destinations, except by license.¹³

To encourage the charitable aspirations of her subjects, the queen also assented in 1597/98 to "an act for erecting of hospitals or abiding and working houses for the poor":

Her Majesty, graciously affecting the good success of so good and charitable works, and that without often suit unto her Majesty, and with as great ease and little charge as may be, is of her princely care and blessed disposition to and for the relief and comfort of maimed soldiers, mariners and other poor and impotent people, pleased...that it be enacted...that all and every persons seized of an estate in fee simple...at his or their wills and pleasures shall have full power...to erect, found and establish one or more hospitals, Maisons de Dieu, abiding places or Houses of Correction....¹⁴

Anyone founding such an establishment could incorporate and be availed of the right to appoint such poor persons to the institution as they

¹²Statutes, IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 4, 900; see IV, 7 Jac. 1, c. 4, 1159.

¹³*Ibid.*, IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 4, 900.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 5, 902.

pleased; further, they could use lands, goods and chattels to the value of £200 a year to support the foundation.

The government moved to protect further charitable donations in another 1597 act that was designed to prevent the misapplication of revenues proceeding from donated lands, leases, goods and chattels meant for charitable uses. It having come to the queen's attention that some of these monies "have been and are still like to be most unlawfully and uncharitably controverted to the ... gain of some few greedy and covetous persons, contrary to the true intent and meaning of the givers and disposers thereof" the statute directed that a commission be convened in each diocese, headed by the Bishop and secular authorities, to investigate "the nature and application of such revenues and make orders for their due application."¹⁵ This law did not apply to civic corporations or to private foundations which, it was assumed, had their own internal auditors and overseers to prevent such abuses.

Concern over vagabonds posing as soldiers or sailors in order to solicit charity was the focus of a subsequent act in 1597. It provided that persons caught in such impersonations were to be returned to their parish of birth or last residence to take up some "lawful trade" or be deemed felons under sentence of death. Additional provision was made for true soldiers and mariners who were travelling home; upon arrival, those who could not find work were to make application to the justice of the peace, who was then to provide the soldier or sailor with "honest labor"

¹⁵Ibid., IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 6, 903-904; see chapter 8 for an example of actions taken by such a commission in Exeter in 1622, when the civic corporation sued to recover the legacy of Nicholas Hurst.

or, in the alternative, with poor relief from taxation until work became available.¹⁶

The 1597/8 act was restated in 1601 legislation with all of its original provisions, and it is this incarnation of the Elizabethan Poor Law that remained the basis of poor relief in England until the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.¹⁷ 43 Eliz. 1, chapter 3 repealed the acts of 35 Eliz. 1, chapter 4 and 39 Eliz. 1, chapter 21 dealing with the relief of soldiers and mariners, since it had become clear to Parliament that "it is now found more needful then it was at the making of the said Acts, to provide relief and maintenance to soldiers and mariners...in respect the number of the said soldiers is so much the greater by how much her Majesty's just and honorable defensive wars are increased...."¹⁸ Though this Act was meant to aid those persons who had labored so admirably in her Majesty's military service, it also indicated that they were to be held to the same standards as others of the queen's subjects: any soldier or mariner taken for begging was to forfeit his pension and be deemed as a common rogue and vagabond and subject to the penalties inherent to that charge.¹⁹

Also in 1601, it became apparent that an earlier act (39 Eliz. 1, c. 6) to address financial abuses of lands, stocks, goods and other chattels left to charitable uses had not been successful in achieving its

¹⁶Ibid., IV, 39 Eliz. 1, c. 17, 915-16.

¹⁷Ibid., IV, 43 Eliz. 1, c. 2, 962-65; see discussion of 39 Eliz. 1, c. 3, above.

¹⁸Ibid., IV, 43 Eliz. 1, c. 3, 996-98.

¹⁹Ibid., 967.

goal; therefore, "an act to redress the misemployment of lands, goods and stocks of money heretofore given to charitable uses" was passed.²⁰ The Act noted that many of those donations "have not been employed according to the charitable intent of the givers and founders thereof, by reason of frauds, breaches of trust and negligence in those that should pay, deliver and employ the same..." and that the Lord Chancellor should issue commissions to bishops and four others in each diocese to inquire as to the disposition of these donations. If fraud was discovered, the commission was empowered to issue orders that would rectify the situation, both in terms of restitution and protection from future abuse.

Given the sweeping scope of the Elizabethan statutes, it is no surprise that very few laws regarding poverty and vagrancy were passed under the aegis of James I, and of those, several either continued or refined provisions of earlier Elizabethan directives. For example, 1 James 1, chapter 7, continues the statutes on vagrancy passed under Elizabeth, but also contains "an explanation" of that statute. Apparently, the previous statute (39 Eliz. 1, c. 17) did not take into account that incorrigible rogues who had been sent out of the realm might easily slip back in, since they did not carry any mark of their expulsion. To remedy this situation, the Act ordained

That such rogues...adjudged as...incorrigible or dangerous...be branded in the left shoulder with an hot burning iron of the breadth of an English shilling, with a great Roman R upon the iron, and the branding upon the shoulder to be so thoroughly burned and set on upon the skin and flesh, that the letter R be seen and remain for

²⁰Ibid., IV, 43 Eliz. 1, c. 4, 968-70.

a perpetual mark upon such rogue during his or her life....²¹

If caught, such persons were to be set upon hard labor; if released, the committal of a second offense would mean a felony penalty of death. The Act also indicated that it was every person's duty to apprehend rogues and vagrants and, in fact, made it costly not to do so: anyone having knowledge of a rogue or vagrant was authorized under the law to take these criminals into custody; failure to do so meant a penalty of ten shillings.

In the first year of his reign, however, James was forced to make provision for victims of the plague, which had struck London with severity, but it was not an attack limited solely to the capital of England; it was in fact widespread throughout the country. Thirty thousand deaths were attributed to the plague in London in 1603, and the dramatist Thomas Lodge, in his A Treatise of the Plague noted that

Where the infestation most rageth there poverty
raigneth among the commons, which having no
supplies to satisfy the greedy desire of those
that should attend them, are for the most part
left desolate and die without relief.²²

By 1604, the situation was exacerbated to such an extent that legislation was necessary to deal with the effects of the plague, and on July 3, 1604 "an act for the charitable relief and ordering of persons infected by the plague" was passed.²³ The Act forbade those persons infected to "go abroad" but made provisions through a tax rate to supply provisions to

²¹Ibid., IV, 1 Jac. 1, c. 7, 1024-25.

²²Thomas Lodge, A Treatise of the Plague, quoted in B. Kirkman Gray, A History of English Philanthropy (London: P. S. King and Son, 1905), 43.

²³Statutes, IV, 1 Jac. 1, c. 31.

them while they were immured due to disease. Other measures included a watch being instituted to keep infected persons from entering a town or city, and ordering that the streets be cleaned of "stinking rubbish." Though the Act appears charitably motivated on its face, it was, in fact, part of a larger effort to restore and maintain order in an emergency situation.²⁴

That the statutes previously passed concerning rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars had not been as effective as hoped was indicated by the passage of 7 James 1, chapter 4, entitled "an act for the due execution of diverse laws and statutes heretofore made against rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars and other lewd and idle persons." Among other issues, the act notes that

Whereas heretofore diverse good and necessary laws and statutes have been made and provided for the erection of Houses of Correction for the suppressing and punishing of rogues, vagabonds and other idle, vagrant and disorderly persons, which laws have not wrought so good effect as was expected, as well as for that the said Houses of Correction have not been built according as was intended, as also for that the said Statutes have not been duly and severely put in execution....²⁵

a remedy was being proposed that would insure that such Houses of Correction would be built forthwith. Previous statutes dealing with the establishment of such institutions had given justices of the peace the ability to levy a rate for their construction, but had not imposed strictures that obliged them to collect such rates. The current statute

²⁴B. Kirkman Gray, A History of English Philanthropy (London: P. S. King & Son, 1905), 43-45.

²⁵Statutes, IV, 7 Jac. 1, c. 4, 1159.

directed that Houses of Correction were to be built in every county "before the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel...in the year of our Lord God one thousand six hundred and eleven" or the justices responsible would face a penalty of five pounds for not having done so. Further, the statute made it clear that these institutions were to be used "to set the said rogues or such other idle persons on work" and, unlike the previous statutes, does not mention provision for setting the deserving poor at work.²⁶ As E. M. Leonard notes, "this [statute] probably marks the time when Houses of Correction ceased to be half workkhouses and became very much more like gaols."²⁷ There was no longer any pretense that work was done to better a person's station in life; it was done solely to benefit the city's coffers and relieve their burden of caring for the poor. Governors had to be appointed for each of the houses and were to see that the work done in these establishments produced an income sufficient to support the persons residing therein, as "vagabonds there shall not be chargeable to the County." The statute also directed that, at least twice a year, county officials were to make a search for all defined as rogues and commit them under the terms of this act to the Houses of Correction.²⁸

The problem of bastardy was also dealt with, as the law provided that "lewd women having bastards chargeable [upon the county]" were to be imprisoned. Further, any persons, male or female, who deserted their

²⁶Ibid., 1160.

²⁷E. M. Leonard, The Early History of English Poor Relief (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 137.

²⁸Statutes, IV, 7 Jac. 1, c. 4, 1160.

families to be cared for by the parish or county, were, when caught, to be deemed rogues and be sent to the appropriate House of Correction.²⁹ The language of this statute makes it abundantly clear that previous statutes, at least those concerned with the prosecution of rogues and vagabonds and the institutions that were to house them, had been neglected in execution, and it was not until the seventh year of James' reign that steps were taken to put some teeth into their administration.

Other statutes were indirectly related to the care of the poor in that they imposed fines for a variety of offenses and directed that such fines be dedicated to the care of the poor. Offenses in this regard ranged from alehouse keepers who encouraged persons to sit "tippling" and their customers who were taken up for drunkenness to being absent from church or the use of profane swearing.³⁰ Certain acts also cleared up various points relating to the major laws passed regarding the poor or the prosecution of rogues, by removing exemptions or emphasizing the continuance of earlier statutes. For example, 21 James 1, chapter 1, renewed and "continued forever" the license to individuals in connection with the erection of "abiding or working houses for the poor" that had been set forth by 39 Elizabeth 1, chapter 5.

The repetitiveness of the statutes passed in connection with the relief of the poor and the problems of vagrancy indicate that implementation, not intent, was at the core of the failure of the poor laws to accomplish the goals they set forth. Simply put, what works in

²⁹Ibid., 1161.

³⁰See Ibid., IV, 1 Jac. 1, c. 9, 27; 3 Jac. 1, c. 4; 4 Jac. 1, c. 5; 7 Jac. 1, c. 11; 21 Jac. 1, c. 7, 18, 20, 28.

theory does not necessarily translate to good practice, especially when execution of such laws was left in the hands of local officials having little central supervision to ensure compliance. The statutes, however, were but one part of the national government's attempt to alleviate poverty and eliminate vagrancy within the kingdom.

Proclamations

Paul Hughes and James Larkin define the royal proclamation as "a public ordinance issued by the King [Queen], in virtue of his [her] royal prerogative, with the advice of his [her] council, under the Great Seal, and by royal writ."³¹ This definition, according to Hughes and Larkin, means that the royal proclamation, as a legal crown document, carries "the full effects of law" and presents a "determined legislative intent on the part of the crown."³² From their analysis of these proclamations, Hughes and Larkin take exception to the traditional view espoused by Robert Steele and William S. Holdsworth that the proclamations were issued only to enforce statutes already in existence; Hughes and Larkin maintain that the proclamations "implement and supplement, rather than supplant, statutory law."³³ If their supposition is correct, it follows,

³¹Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., Tudor Royal Proclamations 3 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 1:xxiii.

³²*Ibid.*, 1:xxix, xxx.

³³*Ibid.*, 1:xxvi; see Robert Steele, A Bibliography of Royal Proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns and of Others Published on Authority, 1485-1714: With an Historical Essay on Their Origin and Use, Vol. 5, Bibliotheca Lindesiana (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) and William S. Holdsworth, History of English Law, 9 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1922-27). Later debate was framed by G. R. Elton, Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), who espoused the "despotic" nature of the Tudor proclamations; R. W. Heinze, The Proclamations of the Tudor Kings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) and F. A. Youngs, Jr., The

then, that the statutes are but one part of the governmental attempt to alleviate poverty and its attendant problems.

The earliest proclamation by Elizabeth I in this connection is part of one that announces certain injunctions for religion, issued on July 19, 1559. The queen noted that "because the goods of the church are called the goods of the poor, and at these days nothing is less seen than the the poor to be sustained with the same" any parsons, vicars or other beneficed men with incomes of twenty pounds or more were to dispense "the fortieth part of the fruits and revenues of their said benefice...among the poor people...."³⁴ The queen was thus making it clear that the Church was to maintain its traditional role in the relief of the poor, despite the passage of statutes intended to deal with the problem.

Subsequent to the enactment of laws concerning rogues and vagabonds in 1572, the queen issued a proclamation that lamented the proliferation of these persons within London and Westminster and various other counties in the realm, "the chief occasion whereof seemeth to be the want of the good execution of the good laws and statutes made for the punishment of such masterless men, idle and vagrant persons..." she directs that these laws and statutes are "to be duly put in execution."³⁵ The same proclamation was reissued on October 8, 1587, and on August 8, 1591 indicating that enforcement of the statutes was generally lacking.³⁶ We

Proclamations of the Tudor Queens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), took Elton to task on this argument.

³⁴Proclamations, II, no. 460, 117-32: 120.

³⁵Ibid., II, no. 622, December 14, 1576, 415-16.

³⁶Ibid., II, no. 692, October 8, 1587, 539; III, no. 736, August 8, 1591, 83.

are once again reminded that the passage of a law did not necessarily imply execution of that law.

In acknowledging the dearth of available grain in 1587, the queen assigned most of the blame to "the covetousness and uncharitable greediness of such as be great corn-masters and engrossers of corn using all the subtle means they can to work their own present unconscionable gain against the rules of charity" which she "utterly condemneth and earnestly desireth to remedy for the relief of the poorer sort." She thus ordered that grain be supplied to the markets at reasonable prices "whereby the poorer sort may be relieved." In the event that prices are not made reasonable, she warned that she would punish the offenders and, acting under her royal prerogative, would set the price on corn and other victuals to be sold to the poor.³⁷ This proclamation is evidence that poverty was induced not only by bad harvests, but could also, in part, be exacerbated by unscrupulous merchants taking advantage of an opportunity to gouge the poor. A subsequent proclamation in November, 1596 noted a "great dearth" and again blamed "the rich owners of corn [who] would keep their store from the common markets" for depriving the poor.³⁸ Five months earlier, the queen reminded local officials that orders had been published in 1595, entitled A New Charge given by the Queen's Commandment for stay of the Dearth of Grain, giving them the power to "reform" all such persons who engaged in artificial inflation of grain prices in order to gain an illegal profit from the misery of

³⁷Ibid., II, no. 686, January 2, 1587, 532-34.

³⁸Ibid., III, no. 784, November 2, 1596, 169-72.

others.³⁹ It was obviously a persistent problem: in August, 1598, a proclamation entitled "Enforcing former Statutes, Proclamations and Orders against Forestalling Grain" pointed out that

her most excellent majesty, like a most careful and gracious princess, looking into the causes of the high prices and dearth, and finding the same for the most part not so much to grow by the means of the unseasonableness and unfruitfulness of these years (wherein, God be thanked, this land hath hitherto been blessed with plenty, as much as any other country of the world besides) but rather through the wicked and unsatiable greediness of sundry bad-disposed persons who, preferring their own private gain above the public good...raise high prices....⁴⁰

It was a "manifest breach" of her previous orders which had allowed this situation to continue. She called upon all her local officials to make "straight execution" of all the laws, statutes and proclamations in this regard in order to correct the injustice. The language of the proclamation appears to indicate that dearth was due primarily to criminal gouging which was not sufficiently policed. In point of fact, however, the 1590s saw a succession of failed harvests, in 1594, 1595, 1596, and 1597, and it is apparent that it was lack of grain due to these failures that contributed the lion's share to the rise in the price of foodstuffs.⁴¹ R. B. Outhwaite notes that most contemporary observers were aware of the true reasons for the excessive cost of grain during these years of harvest failures, but he speculates that proclamations

³⁹Ibid., III, no. 781, July 31, 1596, 165-66.

⁴⁰Ibid., III, no. 795, August 23, 1598, 193-95.

⁴¹The classic study of famine induced by harvest failures and other causes is Andrew P. Appleby, Famine in Tudor and Stuart England (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978).

issued by the monarch usually "offered alternative explanations, embracing fundamental sin and economic avarice, looking to cast the blame elsewhere in order to justify their administrative interventions."⁴² It is interesting to note that mention of sin as a cause of harvest failure was always imputed to the people, and not to the monarch; Elizabeth and James were careful not to hint that divine judgment might be directed at them, as that would imply that the monarch was not ruling in accordance with God's will. If there is sin, therefore, it must have been committed by the people who are, after all, the ones who are doing the suffering and the dying.

In the aftermath of the military ventures of the late 1580s, large numbers of soldiers and mariners were wreaking havoc about the countryside and meeting in unlawful assembly. The queen issued a proclamation forbidding assembly and adjuring the soldiers and mariners to repair to the necessary places (i.e., ordinance offices) to collect any monies owing them and then to return home.⁴³ That the proclamation had no effect was apparent when Elizabeth placed vagrant soldiers and mariners under martial law by proclamation on November 13, 1589. She admonished local officials for their failure to execute her previous instructions, "being given to understand that, what through the remissness and negligence of the justices of the peace and other the inferior officers...there hath not followed that due execution of the

⁴²R. B. Outhwaite, Dearth, Public Policy and Social Disturbance in England, 1550-1800 (Cambridge: The Economic History Society, 1991), 12.

⁴³Proclamations, III, no. 715, August 24, 1589, 44-46.

proclamation lately made concerning such persons...."⁴⁴ Martial law was later extended "for the repressing of the great number of mighty and able vagrant persons now wandering abroad under pretense of begging as soldiers," directing local officials to apprehend, imprison and then to execute them according to the queen's laws.⁴⁵ The excess of such persons about the city occasioned the queen to note later that she "doth understand that notwithstanding her late proclamation" many of these persons continued to beg and behave "in disorderly manner." In order to separate the truly deserving from the "common beggars, rogues and able persons [who] do counterfeit the name of soldiers" Elizabeth ordered the Privy Council to examine all who claimed to be vagrant soldiers at the Old Bailey sessions hall, and to indict those found to be rogues or common vagrants.⁴⁶ Six years later, it was apparent that these efforts had achieved the desired results; the queen believed that the proliferation of vagabonds about the city of London and "in many parts of realm" was "for want of due execution...by the justices of the peace and other ministers" of the martial laws restraining such persons. She commanded officials "to have better regard than heretofore" of the vagrancy laws, which "she willeth to be duly observed upon pain of her indignation."⁴⁷ The last of Elizabeth's proclamations in connection with vagrancy and poverty came in January, 1600, when she once again reminded

⁴⁴Ibid., III, no. 716, November 13, 1589, 46-48.

⁴⁵Ibid., III, no. 740, November 5, 1591, 96-97.

⁴⁶Ibid., III, no. 745, February 28, 1592, 105-106.

⁴⁷Ibid., III, no. 796, September 9, 1598, 196-97.

her officials to enforce statutes against vagabonds; further, she added definitions on roguery meant to clear up confusion in previous laws.⁴⁸

When extraordinary deprivations occurred in various parts of the country, the queen was wont to call upon other counties and cities to aid in this distress. One example is a proclamation issued on October 2, 1595, authorizing collections for Cornwall, which had come under attack from the sea by "certain enemies [the Spanish]." Houses were burned, goods taken or destroyed, and the inhabitants rendered unable to maintain themselves in the aftermath of the attack. The queen thus directed the officials in the affected towns of Cornwall "to ask, gather, receive, and take" charitable donations from nearby counties and cities, one of which was the city of Exeter.⁴⁹

The proclamations of James I echo those of Elizabeth, particularly as they concern the statutes against rogues and vagabonds. One of his earliest proclamations, issued on September 17, 1603, uses language that came to sound quite familiar in Elizabeth's pronouncements on this subject: James reminded his subjects of the statute of 39 Elizabeth 1, chapter 4, which provided for the deportation of incorrigible rogues, and noted that it had not been duly executed "of late by the remissness, negligence, and connivancy of some Justices of the Peace, and other Officers in diverse parts of the Realm...." meaning rogues and vagabonds have "swarmed and abounded every where more frequently then in times past...." James warned the local officials that if they did not pursue their duties zealously, "they and every of them will answer the contrary

⁴⁸Ibid., III, no. 800, January 14, 1600, 204-209.

⁴⁹Ibid., III, no. 775, October 2, 1595, 151-53.

at their uttermost perils."⁵⁰ Notwithstanding this threat, it appears that the problem was not solved since James was forced to issue a subsequent proclamation in July of 1616 for the "punishing of Vagabonds, Rogues and idle persons." Lamenting the various robberies, felonies, pilferies and "other horrible crimes and offenses" which were occurring, the king made it clear that the blame rested chiefly upon the officials whose duty it was to arrest these persons, noting "the want of good execution of the Laws and Statutes made for the punishment of such masterless men, idle and vagrant persons." He directed that Provost Marshals be appointed in all affected areas to round up these criminals and send them on to Houses of Correction; if they could not be reformed, he authorized the marshals, acting under martial law, to execute them "upon the gallows."⁵¹

Like Elizabeth, James was convinced that the dearth of grain and other victuals was due to the engrossing of these foodstuffs "into [the] few hands" of persons who kept them from the market. In his proclamation of June, 1608, James ordered that all owners and farmers were "to furnish the Markets rateably and weekly with such quantities [of corn] as reasonably they may and ought to do...." He also imposed penalties on those persons found guilty of transporting grain to foreign ports. This proclamation was innovative in its directives to the gentry, whom James accused of residing in their London residences instead of the country in order to avoid keeping "hospitality in their countries...thereby leaving

⁵⁰James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes, eds., Stuart Royal Proclamations Vol. I, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), no. 27, September 17, 1603, 51-53.

⁵¹Ibid., no. 161, July 24, 1616, 360-62.

the relief of their poor neighbours...for food, as for good Rule...without charge of company." He ordered them to return to their houses "without delay" and forbade them to return to London or other corporate towns until "the time of this Dearth" ended. This order by James implies that the poor laws then in force were not sufficient to deal with the demands upon it, and that philanthropy was essential in order that want might be addressed in the realm.⁵²

In 1622, one month before the issuance of a proclamation "for relief of the poor, and remedying the high prices of corn" James promulgated a pronouncement entitled "A Proclamation commanding Noblemen, Knights and Gentlemen of quality, to repair to their Mansion houses in the Country, to attend their services, and keep hospitality, according to the ancient and laudable custom of England." Ostensibly, James was making sure that traditional philanthropy would be in operation throughout the country during a time of bad harvests, but Larkin and Hughes note that the Venetian ambassador felt that the order was made to keep the nobility from meeting together to discuss politics.⁵³ The subsequent proclamation for the relief of the poor includes the king's thanks to the nobility for returning to their country homes in "great numbers" but reminds those who have yet to do so that they should "expect the severity of His justice for their willful contempt." James was "persuaded that by this way of reviving the laudable and ancient housekeeping of this Realm, the poor, and such as are most pinched in times of scarcity and want, will be much relieved and comforted...." He

⁵²Ibid., no. 85, June 2, 1608, 186-88.

⁵³Ibid., no. 235, November 20, 1622, 561-62.

directed the local officials to enforce the existing statutes and proclamations against engrossers of corn and to see that the markets were supplied with "plenty of corn...at reasonable prices."⁵⁴

It is evident that, much like the statutes promulgated during the reigns of Elizabeth and James, proclamations were also repetitive in nature and ineffective in practice since they did not contain elements of central supervision; their relative failure, however, does not speak to the genesis of "despotism" in their usage. What we see again and again in the proclamations is the threat of the queen's "indignation" or the king's "severity" if their wishes are not carried out, but it is apparent that local officials did not fear reprisal if they failed to carry out their duties on a regular basis, since nearly all of the proclamations contain the same sort of threat and neglect of duty remains a central topic in many of them. Certainly, efforts were made by local officials in the immediate aftermath of the passage of statutes and the issuance of proclamations, but when pressures abated and circumstances eased, compliance often fell by the wayside until the next round of laws and pronouncements. So, while the proclamations may have had a despotic "bark" about them, there was little "bite" in them.

That conformity to central directives concerning poverty and vagrancy ever occurred, Leonard argues, was due in great part to the activity of the privy council, which escalated its efforts in the aftermath of the passage of the 1597 Poor Law.⁵⁵ We now turn to an

⁵⁴Ibid., no. 236, December 22, 1622, 563-65.

⁵⁵Leonard, Early History of Poor Relief, 142-43.

examination of the privy council actions in relation to Exeter and Devon in order to determine the validity of this argument.

Acts of the Privy Council

Geoffrey Elton maintains that "though the queen reigned, and though the queen may even have ruled, it was the privy council that governed" and, indeed, "the privy council concerned itself quite simply with everything that went on in England."⁵⁶ The issues with which it concerned itself were myriad and included questions of order and discipline within the kingdom and the ways in which local government complied with central government directives. The instructions to local governments often took the form of Books of Orders, which detailed regulations regarding the plague, dearth and, later, the poor laws; they would also be expanded to address other social issues as well in the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ For the most part, however, directives of the Privy Council were sent by letter to the officials most closely concerned, demanding that specific action be taken in regards to a certain issue or a certain individual.

Early Elizabethan communications with Exeter centered on the suppression of papistry; in May, 1578, an order was issued to the Bishop of Exeter that he form a commission to examine allegations that certain persons "diverse of them very evil and obstinately affected against the

⁵⁶G. R. Elton, England under the Tudors, 3d ed. (London: Routledge Press, 1991), 404-405, 406; see also M. B. Pulman, The Elizabethan Privy Council in the 1570s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); J. A. Guy, "The Privy Council: Revolution or Evolution?" in Revolution Reassessed, eds. C. Coleman and D. R. Starkey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 59-85.

⁵⁷Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 139-40.

present state of religion established in this realm" were in the fellowship of Exeter College, Oxford, from whence he was to expel them if the allegations were proven.⁵⁸ In November, 1580, a letter was sent to the Mayor of Exeter informing him that the Earl of Bedford had commended him to the queen and her council for "his diligence lately used in the apprehension of certain persons detected of Papistry, wherein he both well deserved the good opinion of both her Majesty and their Lordships."⁵⁹

It was not until the 1580s that directives begin to appear that concern poverty and vagrancy in Devon and Exeter. In 1588, the shire of Devon, along with five others, were asked to use their houses of correction in order to reduce vagrancy.⁶⁰ On May 2, 1589, a letter from the Star Chamber to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral at Exeter required them "to admit certain poor maimed soldiers into almsrooms" that were in the purview of the Cathedral.⁶¹ Maimed soldiers were also the subject of a letter sent to various cathedral churches (including that at Exeter) on December 16, 1590, ordering them to provide relief to "certain poor soldiers notoriously maimed in the wars, and having no substance of their own...." The letter lists "Thomas Watson -- maimed at sea" as eligible for relief at Exeter.⁶²

⁵⁸J. R. Dasent, et al, eds., Acts of the Privy Council, n.s., 1558-1625, Vols. 7-38 (London: HMSO, 1893), 7:221.

⁵⁹APC, 12:260-61.

⁶⁰Ibid., 16:146.

⁶¹Ibid., 17:151-52.

⁶²Ibid., 20:124-26.

The privy councillors also communicated with Exeter over disputes concerning payments to poor persons or the cheating of the same by unscrupulous businessmen. A letter of December 3, 1598, admonishes the Mayor of Exeter and requires him

to make present payment of the sum of £12 to one William Shewer, a poor man of that city, for certain cordage which was by him provided towards the furnishing of a ship set forth by that city in the last voyage of the Earl of Essex, that their lordships might be no further troubled with the poor man's complaint.⁶³

In May of 1601, the council sent a letter to the Bishop of Exeter, William Cotton, and others, notifying them that they had received a petition from "diverse poor men...informing us of very hard dealing by usury and other extreme courses used by one John Hamlyn of Exwick near unto the city of Exeter...tending to their utter impoverishment and undoing." The letter directed local officials to make an examination of John Hamlyn; if the allegations proved true, they were "to advise him to a more Christian and charitable consideration of these his neighbours."⁶⁴

County officials were advised to make provision for soldiers and others the council deemed worthy of relief; in 1591-92, the county had to provide for a poor, disabled soldier until an almsroom became available in Gloucester's cathedral church.⁶⁵ Unpaid pensions to soldiers were the subject of letters to the county in 1596-97, 1597-98, and 1600 which demanded that the county see to their immediate payment.⁶⁶

⁶³Ibid., 29:326.

⁶⁴Ibid., 31:379.

⁶⁵Ibid., 22:228.

⁶⁶Ibid., 26:513; 28:266; 30:348.

Two other instances of county relief being ordered for individuals are found in the years 1598 and 1601.⁶⁷

The only intimation found in the privy council acts that the statutes and proclamations against vagrancy and for the relief of the poor were not being enforced in Devon or Exeter comes late in our period (May 8, 1622), and lumps Devon in with eight other counties in the injunction. Having been informed of riots and "diverse tumultuous assemblies" in the western part of the realm, the councillors determined that they were due in part to lack of employment in the clothing industry, to the incitement of vagrant persons given to such practices, and finally to "the neglect of the laws for punishing vagabonds and relieving the poor [which] has bred such licentiousness as there is now cause of more than ordinary care and circumspection for preventing of mischiefs which may otherwise happen." The councillors warn the local officials, especially the constables and overseers, to keep their poor within their assigned parishes and set them at work or relieve them according to the statutes. Further, the council acknowledged that the cost of doing so might exceed parish coffers; in that event, officials were authorized to levy on the "abler inhabitants" additional taxation to make up any deficits. Appointment of a provost marshal (paid at the expense of the county) was also ordered so that idle and vagrant persons might be apprehended and brought to justice. The council then reiterated that they were apprised that "those laws both for relieving the poor and punishing of rogues are much neglected" and reminded local officials that

⁶⁷Ibid., 28:403; 32:418.

it was their duty to see them strictly executed.⁶⁸ Like the statutes and the proclamations, the orders of the privy council usually came in response to an emergency situation or a specific complaint; since they were more numerous than other national directives, their effectiveness in alleviating poverty and preventing vagrancy was somewhat more effective. We must keep in mind, however, that the acts of the privy council were national directives and, as was common with the statutes and proclamations, were only adhered to when local officials decided to do so; in the end, the acts of the privy council were subject to the same limitations which plagued other centrally ordered measures.

That there is relatively little in the acts of the privy council concerning Devon and Exeter specifically exhorting them to adhere to the statutes and proclamations for poor relief and the prosecution of vagrants can be taken two ways. First, that the city and county were holding their own when it came to the care of their poor and the central government did not have to exercise a great deal of supervision in this regard for Devon and Exeter. Second, as we have seen, many of the statutes and proclamations mention lack of enforcement for poor relief and vagrancy measures, and this lack may be reflected in the paucity of directives for the city and county. Indeed, the last privy council letter to Devon in our period concerns the want of enforcement at the local level. It is possible that both realities are true for Devon and Exeter; on many occasions, the city and county were able, through their own efforts, either government-authorized or through private philanthropy (which is our argument), to care for their poor and see to the

⁶⁸Ibid., 38:214-15.

prosecution of vagrants. It is also true that some situations may have required assistance from central authorities in order to accomplish these goals. It is interesting to note that the only directive from the privy council noting neglect of the statutes and proclamations in Devon specifically comes late in the period of our study--1622--thereby indicating that, under Elizabeth and for the most part of James' reign, Devon and Exeter were probably able to maintain control of the problem within their area. We have already seen that enforcement of the statutes and proclamations was neglected on a large scale under Elizabeth and James, so we must assume that Devon and Exeter could not have had a much different experience from the rest of the country. The difference, as we will argue, is that private philanthropy carried the burden of care for the poor in Exeter, supplemented by government-ordered rates, until circumstances resulted in a situation that could not be handled locally.

1622 was one of the dearth years for grain, and the burden on Exeter's residents may have been too much for them to cope with. It is worthwhile to note that the most famous Book of Orders dealing with these matters was not issued until January, 1631, a publication entitled Orders and Directions. As Paul Slack shows, this Book laid down directives for the care of the poor and the prosecution of vagrants; in addition, it prescribed precautions to be taken against the plague. All of these directives were set up along statutory guidelines but, as we have seen, it was one thing to issue orders and another to insure their execution. To this end, the Book provided for the creation of a commission of certain Privy Councillors who were to take an active role in seeing to the prosecution of the directives, attested to by reports from the

localities. Slack points out that over a thousand reports flowed in from all over the country in response to this Book in the 1630s, giving at least "a superficial impression both of purposeful direction from the centre and of considerable order in the localities." Indeed, the actions of the privy council in this regard show that it "sought to remedy the deficiencies in legislation and to invigorate local administration--to 'quicken' it, to use the expressive term often employed in 1630."⁶⁹ The important factor for our study concerns the time when this increased action occurred, which is the 1630s. That it occurred when it did lends credence to our argument that legislation did not begin to figure largely in the relief of the poor or the control of vagrancy at least until the reign of Charles I (1625-1649). As Slack notes, "historians of county government...have shown it [the Caroline Book of Orders] pushing local magistrates towards more efficient methods of poor relief and social welfare."⁷⁰ For the first time, a concerted effort was made to enforce existing statutes and proclamations on a large scale, thus changing the attitudes of the populace regarding traditional methods of care for the poor. This is not to say that philanthropy ceased, but it is at this point that it took a back seat to the sums generated by poor law rates and other government-sponsored initiatives, both nationally and locally, that were designed to alleviate this problem. All of this will underscore our argument that philanthropy remained the dominant form of relief to the poor during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. In the

⁶⁹Slack, Poverty and Policy, 140-41.

⁷⁰Paul Slack, "Books of Orders: The Making of English Social Policy," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th ser., 30 (1979): 1.

next chapter, we will look at the application of national directives in the city of Exeter, and analyze the city's own efforts to combat the problems of poverty and vagrancy.

CHAPTER 6

THE RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNMENT (II)

In the previous chapter, we analyzed the various statutes, proclamations, and acts of the privy council promulgated by the national government to respond to the problems of poverty and vagrancy. We now turn to a consideration of the application of those directives in the city of Exeter, and also offer an examination of the city's own initiatives in dealing with these problems.

The Experience in Exeter

Compliance with the Statutes

Exeter's officials, in common with those of other localities, bore the brunt of the execution of the national statutes and proclamations providing for the poor and for the prosecution of vagrants.. We have previously established that these laws and regulations were difficult to enforce without a consistent commitment from local governments to do so. An analysis of Exeter's response in this regard may shed some light on the efficacy of the statutes in controlling the problems associated with poverty.

Although alms did not become compulsory until 1563, Exeter was already making efforts to alleviate the distress of the poor in 1560; on April 14 of that year, the members of the Chamber issued "The Order for the Poor" wherein six men, including Robert Chaffe, Thomas Prestwood and Edward Lymett, were appointed to appear at the Guildhall every Monday in order to receive from each parish alms collector all monies due to the poor from collections taken in each parish and from all other sources,

keeping a record of the same.¹ On April 18, two beadles of the poor were appointed "to make continual search that none do beg at any man's door within this city...."² The statutes currently in force did not require the regulation of collection efforts, but the 1552 law had forbidden persons to sit about openly begging, so Exeter's beadles were no doubt meant to enforce this provision. During that week, other decisions were made as to the administration of the funds for the poor; twenty-two collectors of the poor were appointed, while eighteen men were given the task of distributing these funds. The city was divided into four administrative quarters, and the sums to be disbursed were as follows: East, 7s.; West, 7s. 1d; South, 10s. 7d; and the North, fl 9s. 8d. It is clear from this distribution pattern that the parishes in the northern quarter, which included St. Sidwell's, were those in greatest need.³

Much of what we know about the administration of the city's poor funds comes from Book 157, Account Book of the Poor, which covers the years 1563 to 1572. The beginning date for this book roughly coincides with the passage of the 1563 statute which made the payment of alms compulsory; evidently, Exeter was eager to have their records reflect their compliance with the law. In any event, the parishes of the city were once again divided into four quarters, but the assignments within those groupings were somewhat incongruous and illogical; taking as an

¹Act Books of the City of Exeter, vols. II-VIII (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), Act Book IV, fol. 22.

²Act Book IV, fol. 25.

³Ibid., fols. 22, 23; other amounts arising from such sources as fines were added to the contributed sums. See the discussion of extra-statutory city initiatives, below.

example the East quarter, we discover that it was composed of St. Sidwell's, lying outside the East gate of the city, St. David's, quite a distance outside the North gate, Holy Trinity, which lay just inside the South gate, and St. Martin's, located to the east of the city center and near the Cathedral. This awkward grouping must have meant a great deal of work for the officials assigned to the collection and distribution of its sums, as they would have had to make a nearly complete circuit of the city and the two parishes which lay outside it.

In any case, the rates set by the 1563 statute were to be made according to the abilities of a parish's residents, and were not based on the extent to which poverty existed in a particular parish. It is therefore not surprising to discover that the wealthiest parishes were assessed the highest rates, but also paid out the smallest sums. If we examine the rates paid in the years 1564-65, a wealthy parish such as St. Petrock paid in 10s. 11 1/2d a week, while poorer parishes such as St. Sidwell paid in 17d. The distribution of these funds in the same parishes reflects the disparity between the numbers of persons on relief located there; St. Petrock paid out only 1s. 8d, leaving a surplus of 9s. 3 1/2d, while St. Sidwell paid out 10s. 8d, amounting to a deficit of 9s. 3d. Since the parishes were grouped into quarters, the sums collected and distributed from all parishes within a particular quarter were placed in a common fund for distribution, although careful records were kept as to the monies involved for each parish. An analysis of the records reveals that nearly half of the nineteen parishes were receiving more in relief than they were paying in, which meant, in practice, that the

residents of wealthier parishes bore the brunt of poor relief for the less fortunate members of their community.⁴

The figures for 1563, when compared to those of later years, indicate that the city got off to a good start in collecting and distributing the rates, and, over the ten-year period covered by Book 157, both the numbers of poor and the amounts paid out increased, though not dramatically so. In 1563, the number of poor stood at 101, and the amount paid out was approximately £119; by 1564-65, those receiving poor relief numbered 176, and the sum of £140 was expended on their behalf. The increase between 1563 and 1564 can perhaps be accounted for by acknowledging the difficulties inherent in getting a new system off the ground. During the 1560s, the number of poor and the amounts paid for their relief remained fairly consistent, but by 1570, there was a substantial increase in both the number of poor and the sums that made provision for them. In 1570, payments in the wealthier parishes ranged between £2 to £4 weekly, with the largest single contribution being 9s. This contribution is much larger than the one recorded as being made by William Hurst in 1564-65 in the amount of 3s 4d. Book 157 records 291 persons receiving assistance in 1570, at an average between 4d and 8d apiece. Rates paid in the early 1570s could be as much as £4 2s. 1d weekly, resulting in a yearly payment to the poor of approximately £197.

⁴Book of the Accounts of the Poor, Book 157, (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), fols. 33-41; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 112-13.

A list of those not paying in 1570--some forty-six persons--was included as well.⁵

Objection to the imposition of rates and their haphazard application was the subject of a letter from Dr. Robert Vilvane to the mayor of Exeter on June 15, 1624: Dr. Vilvane notes that the mayor had requested payment of a rate by him in connection with his properties in the parish of St. John, and that the doctor had refused "because our Parish being oppressed with multitudes we conjoined two Rates together (our own and St. Sidwell's)...upon promise that we should be freed elsewhere." In his own case, Vilvane complained that he was paying rates in two other places in the "country" (presumably outside the city), and further, that he had taken it upon himself to support the purchase of armor and powder and fees for martial officers, along with voluntary contributions to the poor and to churches and "sundry other taxes." He mentions his debt to the city in the amount of £500, for which he paid interest, and despite all of these financial burdens, he did "freely give 12d weekly to two poor families here, which else would fall into penury." Having recounted all this, he considers that "there is little cause to hoist me so high to all payments, who (besides my house) have little here [in the city]." At the crux of his argument, he asserts, is "that a Rate to the Poor is no competent Rule ... both because it is uncertain ... and also unequal, because some are set up too high, and others too low, by

⁵Book 157, fols. 178-81; fols. 196-210; few records exist of the names of inmates of the hospitals, almshouses, recipients of the loan funds and other benefactions, so it is difficult to determine, with any degree of certainty, repetitiveness in terms of aid; for example, it is not possible to cross reference almshouse dwellers with beneficiaries of loan funds, so we cannot know if a particular person was receiving aid from more than one source.

fear or favour." He suggests that all should be "taxed proportionately according to his ability (for so it is in all other places)" and this should be done only after "a just account publicly rendered and registered [is presented] for the general satisfaction of the Commons." Apparently, the overseers of the poor had made a collection in a certain part of the city, and Vilvane notes that "many murmur at this day" about the collection, since it appeared that the overseers "did not disburse above half the Contribution." As a contributor to this sum, the doctor was upset, but "do profess myself in this but an Echo of the Multitude, which are much aggrrieved." Vilvane's highest opprobrium was reserved for certain individuals who, he felt, were taking advantage of the system to his and others' detriment:

The matter which sticketh most in my stomach is that Dr. Goche, who hath no charge of children and gaineth excessively both by his Places here, and practice above (a man mighty in Authority, high in dignity, rich in Revenue), confronting the City and daring you to do your worst, with haughty menaces. That he will try the power of your Charter and privilege of his person...Mr. Cary likewise payeth nothing to the Poor or else, pretending, perhaps, that he is rated in the Country, which is rightly my case....

The doctor went on to implore the mayor that he and others like him should be treated similarly, since he was willing to "follow their steps with alacrity ... [if not, it would be] an unsufferable scandal or eyesore to me and others, who are every way as free both in birth, body, mind and spirit as they or any other of higher quality." He begs the

mayor and the council that they "will deal indifferently and impartially with me and ... [show] no harder measure to me than to them...."⁶

The tone of Dr. Vilvane's letter suggests that the poor rates were enforced arbitrarily and that less able members of the community were taking up the burden for people who had the money or influence to get out of paying rates. His letter supports the validity of Stephens's assessment: the parochial system of rate imposition did not work and was not applied fairly, at least to 1625. Another proof that Vilvane was not trying to get out of his obligations is an indenture dated June 20, 1637, between Vilvane and the city of Exeter, in which the doctor deeded lands to provide for the support of the hospital of St. John (constructed after our period of study) and for the school adjoining it; the indenture was still operating in 1825. Vilvane was a concerned citizen who made provision for the poor of the city of his own volition, and who didn't object to paying his fair share of taxes; his generosity lends credence to his argument in 1622 that rates were being imposed arbitrarily by the city officials.⁷

Since we do not have comparative statistics for the remainder of our period, it is difficult to make conjectures about the growth or decline of the numbers of the poor or the increase or decrease of sums paid in by the city's residents for their relief. The next available record is the Poor Rate of 1699, which includes information on rates paid

⁶Stuart Moore, ed., A Calendar of the Records and Muniments belonging to the Corporation of the City of Exeter preserved in the record room of the Guildhall, 3 vols. (Exeter, 1870), 1:158, letter 270.

⁷The Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities (Exeter: T. Besley, 1825), 14-90.

and the number of poor supported in each parish. This rate was taken under the aegis of a new system created in the 1690s when, as Hoskins notes, it became "obvious, not only in Exeter, that the relief of the poor could not be carried out on a parochial basis...."⁸ That the system was overhauled was tacit acknowledgement by the city that the old system of poor relief had not been efficient in caring for its poorer residents, not least of all because of the difficulty in enforcing rates on a parochial basis. In any event, a Corporation of the Poor was set up in the city in 1698, with complete control over poor relief in the city; in addition, a greatly-improved workhouse was built.⁹

The information contained in the Poor Rate of 1699 can provide us with some general outlines of the extent of the problem during our period, as it may reflect the same inequities between wealth and poverty in the various parishes as those which existed one hundred years previously. As in the 1560s, the parish with the largest number of poor was St. Sidwell's, with 126, followed closely by St. Mary Major with 99; the smallest number of poor was found again in St. Petrock's, St. Pancras, and All Hallows on Goldsmith Street (five, two and five, respectively). Not surprisingly, the greatest deficits were run up by the poorer parishes; St. Sidwell's residents paid in £1 13s. 10 1/2d, but poor relief there cost £7 13s. In 1699, twelve of the nineteen parishes were running a deficit, with St. Sidwell and St. Mary Major having the largest ones. Among the parishes making additional contributions to the

⁸W. B. Stephens, Seventeenth-Century Exeter (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co. Ltd. for the University of Exeter, 1958), xviii.

⁹Ibid.

less fortunate of other parishes were St. Stephen, St. Olave, St. Pancras, St. Martin, St. Kerrian, and St. Mary Arches, with total sums collected for this effort amounting to £5 18s. 10d a week. We have already noted that the number of poor stood at 291 in the 1570s; on the 1699 roll, 534 persons were being provided with relief, a near doubling. With an estimated population of 15,000 in 1700,¹⁰ the percentage of poor on relief in the city was thus 3.6 percent. Weekly rates brought in £23, 1s 6 1/2d; extra rates amounted to £5 18s. 10d. Poor relief paid out weekly was £40 1s 1/2d. Thus, the yearly sum taken from rates for the poor in 1699 was £1,508 19s. 6d; sums paid out totaled £2,082 14s. 2d, leaving a 38 percent deficit in the amount of £573 14s. 8d.¹¹

What does the information from 1699 tell us about our period? The deficit clearly shows that the poor rates, despite being collected under a new system, were not sufficient to meet the needs of Exeter's poor citizens. That independent charity still played such a large role in the alleviation of poverty in the city in 1699, even with an improved system of collection and distribution, lends credence to our argument for a much stronger role for private philanthropy in our period. As we will see in succeeding chapters, it indeed dominated relief efforts up to 1625.

One final consideration of the city's compliance with statutes and other central directives is in its treatment of the vagrancy problem. As we have seen earlier, the national government's attitude towards vagrants was punitive in the extreme, as they were considered an additional burden upon an already-overworked system of poor relief. In

¹⁰Ibid., ix.

¹¹Ibid., 87-122.

Exeter, the great bulk of activity in ridding the city of vagrants took place in the 1560s; indeed, there is no mention of the prosecution of vagrants in the act books from that decade until 1594, when it was noted that beggars were punished and expelled from the city. The next mention then comes in 1610, when the city officials voted to asked Parliament to pass an act "for keeping out lazy people."¹² In the 1560s, however, a number of vagrants were brought up on charges before the Chamber; some were whipped, but all were expelled. During that decade, the act books record some twenty-nine prosecutions for vagrancy, several of which were for second offenses. The city noted in 1559 that letters were being given to vagrants who had been whipped "for their runagate and vagrant life," certifying their punishment according to the statute passed in 1531. In addition to being whipped, some vagrants were impressed and banished. By 1566, the Chamber was discussing how to "dispose" of vagrants in the city.¹³ Some of the more interesting cases involved a husband and wife; prosecuted twice, in 1561 and 1562, were the Ruses (aptly named) who were labeled as "a slacker and a vagrant."¹⁴ Perhaps a more common story is the experience of one Alice Smythe, who was prosecuted by the Chamber in 1560, along with another vagrant assumed to be her husband. The story that Alice told the Chamber was one of woe; she had been wandering for over a year, and had made her way from her home in Wales to various places in the southwestern part of England, including Padstow in Cornwall, Barnstaple, and Tiverton and finally wound

¹²Act Book V, fol. 340; Act Book VI, fol. 393.

¹³Act Book IV, fols. 3, 300.

¹⁴Ibid., fols. 148, 197.

up in Exeter, where she was picked up. Alice had gotten employment as a spinner in Barnstaple, but had evidently lost her job and been forced back on the road. Like many others, she appeared to be more a victim of circumstance than a person who was deliberately flouting the vagrancy laws.¹⁵

The lapse in the records between the 1560s and the 1590s (when only one mention was made) may indicate that the city, like other areas of the country, had gotten slack in its prosecution of vagrants, a fact that was pointed up by the passage of 7 James 1, chapter 4, which, as we noted earlier, called attention to the failure of the localities to enforce the statutes relating to rogues and vagabonds.¹⁶ The paucity of vagrant prosecutions in the 1590s is particularly surprising, given that it was a decade in which suffering reached an apogee under Elizabeth, and we must assume that the numbers of vagrants increased exponentially during that time. That lack of prosecution was not an intentional failure is indicated by the form of a proclamation that Hooker notes was issued by the Mayor on a yearly basis; it included a warning to the city's residents that they were not to "harbor in his or their house or houses above...one night any stranger or strangers" who had not presented an account of themselves before the mayor and the council. In addition, it instructed

...all commen women and whores, strumpets and
such misliving persons [to] immediately and
forthwith upon this proclamation avoid and

¹⁵Ibid., fol. 16.

¹⁶A caveat about the inclusion of vagrant prosecutions in the Act Books is that they may have not been recorded, and may indeed have occurred.

depart out of this city and suburbs upon pain to be driven out in a cart with a ray hood [sic] or to be whipped or imprisoned or abide such further punishment as shall be thought good and expedient according to their deserts....

Also, it further advised that

...all bawds, bold beggars, vagabonds, runagates and such as name themselves travelling or upright men and also all rogues and such as live suspiciously and cannot give any good account of their honest living shall likewise depart forthwith out of this city and suburbs and never to return again upon pain to be imprisoned or punished as according to the statute of vagabonds.¹⁷

Given that this proclamation was issued by the mayor every year, it is a good indication that the problem was a recurring one; further, the annual repetition shows that the violators of these strictures did not appear to take them seriously, and this could only be the case if the enforcement of the laws in this regard were haphazard.

Regardless of the reasons behind the apparent failure to prosecute, there is some indication that the city, at least by 1610, was getting weary of dealing with the problem, as indicated by their petition to Parliament for an act to get the "lazy people" out of their city. We have shown, however, that it was not the passage of additional laws that was needed, but an adherence by the local officials to the ones which already existed.

City Initiatives

Poor rates only formed one part of the city's efforts to care for its less fortunate citizens. Extra collections were made during times

¹⁷John Vowell alias Hoker, The Description of the Citie of Excester, 3 vols., eds. Walter J. Harte et al (Exeter: The Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1947), 3:848.

of dearth and plague, and the city also made concerted efforts to sell grain at low prices to the poor during hard times. In addition, the collection and distribution of the rates for the poor consumed a great deal of the city's attention, and efforts were made at various points to streamline the administration of this enterprise, efforts which were no doubt indicative of the need for an eventual overhaul of the system which took place at the end of the seventeenth century.

At the beginning of our period, the council decided in 1560 that bread was no longer to be distributed at the Guildhall, but at various points within the city, no doubt to prevent the congregation of large numbers of poor people in front of the city's principal place of government.¹⁸ Also in that year, the council ordered that wood was to be sold to the poor at a lower price than the prevailing market price.¹⁹ The first decade of our study indicates that the city took pains to see that bread and meat were made available to the poor; a distribution of bread to the poor took place at Christmas, 1567. In addition, the city agreed in 1563 to distribute yearly £20 taken up in collection at the Cathedral during the four principal feasts of the year.²⁰ During the 1560s and '70s, administrative matters included the mayor being ordered to audit the accounts of the poor on a yearly basis, with the collector of the poor rates directed to make an account to the Chamber each

¹⁸Act Book II, fol. 190.

¹⁹Ibid., fols. 206, 227.

²⁰Act Book III, fols. 215, 106; see also David Underdown, Fire From Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 113-18, 120-24; Underdown notes that similar provisions for the poor of the town of Dorchester were made during times of want.

November (ten days after Hallowtide). Committees were appointed to inquire about the relief of the poor in 1560 and 1573; pre-dating the creation of the committee of 1573, the Chamber recommended the appointment of one person to be responsible for controlling all the income of the poor in the city, with this nomination most likely done in accordance with 14 Elizabeth 1, chapter 5; a subsequent action by the committee was to set a rate to be paid to the "sick poor" in 1575.²¹ In 1570, due to the plague, the council determined that if the poor fell sick, they were to be aided with a pro-rata levy.²² The council's notes took account of the statutes being passed to deal with the problems of the poor and vagrants; accordingly, the council passed a motion that all should be pro-rated according to their means in 1562, and decided that magistrates were to compel payments of rates, an early indication that some citizens were resistant to this enforced charity.²³ In addition to the beadles of the poor appointed in 1560, bookkeepers of the poor accounts were selected, and instructions issued to collectors of the poor rates in 1560 and 1561; the Chamber evinced some concern over haphazard collection by directing that poor rates were to be taken up in an orderly fashion.²⁴ The city officials also tried to help the honest poor who went elsewhere in search of work; in 1576, the mayor of Exeter issued a "letter of commendation" on behalf of George and Ede Sampford; George was

²¹Act Book III, fols. 136, 310, 383, 324, 362; Act Book IV, fol. 23; Robert Chaffe was appointed as head of this committee in 1573 (Act Book III, fol. 324).

²²Act Book III, fol. 245.

²³Act Book IV, fol. 206.

²⁴Ibid., fols. 25, 175, 24, 74, 105, 75.

referred to as a "Tooker..being without work" who, along with his wife, was "desirous to travel to some convenient place where they may have work for their better relief." The mayor of Exeter asked that officials in other areas let the Sampfords pass without "molestation or trouble" in order to seek work.²⁵

By the 1580s, it became clear that the number of poor was increasing, a fact noted by the Chamber in 1586.²⁶ Measures had been taken earlier in the decade to head off this increase, but had obviously not been as successful as the council had hoped. As early as 1580, the city officials were again ordering defaulting rate payers to be summoned, evidence that the Chamber was forced continually to crack down on people who refused to pay.²⁷ As the 1590s approached, the council was driven to take other measures to relieve distress in their city; care of "poor prisoners" was ordered in 1585, and in 1588 the officials directed that destitute children could be apprenticed until the age of 24.²⁸ The distribution of beef and charity bread to the poor at Christmas and Easter started to become a fixture in city records; beef worth £5 was given to the poor in 1588, 1591, 1593, 1594, 1596, and 1597, while bread for the poor was bought in 1589.²⁹

²⁵R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, eds., Tudor Economic Documents, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1924), III: 334; there is no explanation of what occupation a "tooker" might follow.

²⁶Act Book IV, fol. 505.

²⁷Act Book III, fol. 457.

²⁸Act Book IV, fol. 489; Act Book V, fol. 105.

²⁹Act Book V, fols. 27, 124, 206, 273, 301, 310, 343, 373, 407.

The strain told on the city officials as well; in 1588, the Chamber ordered the mayor not "to appoint any for charity" apart from the Council or a penalty would be assessed. In 1589, the Chamber issued a general directive that the mayor and justices were to "be informed of sick and incapable poor" within the city.³⁰ The decade of the 1590s proved to be one of the most challenging for the city in terms of provision for the poor; in 1591, the mayor was ordered to expend £50 on "the sickness of the poor," and in 1594, corn, wheat and rye were bought for their use; in addition, six pounds was given by the city to relieve their distress in 1595.³¹ By 1598, the council noted that "no beef was available for the poor" so corn was to be priced cheaply for them; this decision was obviously made by a committee that had been appointed that year to assist the mayor and justices on dealing with the poor.³²

Plague continued to exert a devastating effect upon the city, as shown by the response of the corporation in 1604; city officials were forced to respond to the pestilence by ordering extraordinary rates to be levied twice for St. Sidwell's and twice for the rest of the city.³³

³⁰Act Book V, fols. 88, 109.

³¹Ibid., fols. 183, 326, 353.

³²Ibid., fols. 423, 434.

³³Act Book VI, fols. 126, 133; plague had hit the city of Exeter intermittently from 1537 on, according to Paul Slack in The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985). Using probate records, Slack found that "serious outbreaks" of plague occurred in 1570, 1590-91, and 1625 in Exeter, when it "spread across the whole city, with devastating effect" although the strength of the epidemic varied within the city, hitting the poorest parishes the hardest (115). A full discussion of plague mortality is contained in Impact of Plague, 113-19. Slack also notes that compulsory rates to care for the poor infected by plague were instituted by the city in 1570 (205).

The Chamber continued to appoint committees to act on behalf of the poor, as they did in 1609; the councillors also personally decided which individuals were to receive aid, and moved to force financial responsibility of the indigent onto other parties whenever possible. In 1611, a father failed to pay for an illegitimate child, and suit was filed against him; for the time being, the father of the woman in question was ordered to "bear cost in law and bound for keep of [the] child." A number of widows were awarded help from the council, and in 1597, John Sampford, listed as "destitute," was ordered to have relief for nine years.³⁴ Money for the poor came from other means as well; sums collected for "unworthy women" were given to the poor in 1607, while money stolen by a thief that same year also went to their support, along with fines imposed on alesellers in 1623.³⁵ Exeter made efforts to help other towns in Devon during times of distress; aid was sent to Ottery St. Mary in 1604 when their citizens were suffering in "a time of pestilence." Loans to poor people in Trinity Parish were recorded in the city books in 1602, while "sufferers from fire" in St. Sidwell in 1612 were helped.³⁶

The Chamber continued its policy of lowering grain prices during times of famine or other disorder; in 1607, corn was ordered sold to the poor below market price, and in 1614, the act book recorded that the city was "to bear [the] loss on any corn sold to the poor."³⁷ More concern

³⁴Act Book V, fols. 357, 378, 448, 341; Act Book VI, fol. 72.

³⁵Act Book VI, fols. 301, 263; Act Book VII, fol. 535.

³⁶Act Book VI, fols. 152, 209; Act Book VII, fol. 32.

³⁷Act Book VI, fol. 300; Act Book VII, fol. 152.

for the prisoners incarcerated in the city's jails was shown in the early seventeenth century; the council ordered in 1615 that "the prisoners' pot [is] to be boiled twice weekly," meaning that hot food was to be made available to them twice a week; in 1618, it was noted that interest proceeding from poor funds was to be used "to keep [the] prisoners' pot boiling."³⁸

After 1614, the Chamber mandated that beef worth £6 be made available to the poor every Christmas; the act books bear witness that this gesture was made on every subsequent Christmas for the rest of our period.³⁹ Other irregular acts of charity were sponsored by city officials as well; in 1609, the Chamber spent £9 2s. for ten tons of coal for the use of the poor, along with "eighty dozen" of bread, while £6 in money was distributed to the less fortunate at Christmas, 1610. In 1623, "faggots of wood" were to be sold as a gift to the poor.⁴⁰ One of the city's ubiquitous committees was appointed in 1623 to examine the problem of setting poor children at work.⁴¹

That the problem was overwhelming the city's resources was made clear in a plaintive statement by the Chamber in 1625 that "the poor rate

³⁸Act Book VII, fols. 204, 320; apart from committals, little mention is made in the act books about the city's jails, although the entries indicate that there was some difficulty in making provision for the prisoners. As we will see in chapters 8 and 9, private benefactors left funds for the "poor prisoners" and others, such as Joan Tuckfield, provided burial shrouds and plots for deceased prisoners. The general picture which emerges is that conditions in the jails of Exeter must have been extremely grim.

³⁹Act Book VII, fols. 155, 206, 243, 285, 320, 354, 420, 470, 524a, 592.

⁴⁰Act Book VI, fols. 387, 388, 431; Act Book VII, fol. 524a.

⁴¹Act Book VII, fol. 538.

is not enough."⁴² The citizens of Exeter realized that more efficient methods to care for the city's poor had to be developed, but they wanted it to come under the aegis of the civic corporation.⁴³ Paul Slack has shown that the Book of Orders was resented on a fairly wide scale; while some of its provisions appealed to the ruling interests in the cities, local officials were suspicious of the supervisory aspects of the orders. Indeed, many saw the Book of Orders as just one more extension of the royal prerogative and an attempt to increase the power of the monarch. Most civic authorities and justices followed a "pick and choose" policy when it came to obeying the provisions of the Book; Slack notes that, in some of the reports submitted to the privy council, "several justices deliberately replied in the most general terms, telling the Council what it wanted to hear, that vagrants had been cleared from the roads and the poor relieved."⁴⁴ He goes on to point out that, despite the large number of reports sent in to the council after the issuance of the Book, they only amounted to "a tenth of the reports which ought in theory to have been submitted." Slack believes that local initiatives, including the increase of rates, picked up steam in the months before the December, 1630 issuance of the Book; this coincidence, he asserts, is what has led

⁴²Act Book VII, fol. 628.

⁴³Felicity Heal makes the argument in Hospitality in Early Modern England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 338, that the civic corporation of Exeter placed "little visible emphasis on feasting"--a key component of traditional hospitality. She follows MacCaffrey in his portrayal of the corporation as an oligarchy "who were normally confident in their control of their society" who did not need, or want, to solicit support from county or national worthies in order to maintain order in their city. Heal's argument lends credence to the theory that Exeter resisted direction from the center in dealing with its problems.

⁴⁴Slack, Poverty and Policy, 142.

some historians to assign more prominence to the efficacy of the Book of Orders than it deserves. Slack maintains that the local initiatives continued even without direction from the council, so, while the Book of Orders may have provided some stimulus to the efforts of local officials in caring for the poor, it certainly did not represent a "radical transformation" in this endeavor.⁴⁵ Since it appears that central directives were generally ineffective in addressing the problem of poverty at the local level, we must conclude that Exeter preferred to come up with their own solutions, as they did in the 1690s, when a new system of poor relief rate collection was instituted.

Administration of Almshouses and their Foundations

Patronage at the city's almshouses was a topic of discussion in the act books of the city from the beginning of our period. We show in chapter 9 how these almshouses were established from the charity of the city's citizens and others, but note that the administration of these refuges for the poor were, for the most part, left in the hands of the Chamber. A majority of almshouse business concerned the award of placements within these institutions; as indicated in chapter 9, the mayor and the council had the nomination of fifty-six places, while Wynard's almshouse was controlled by that family, and the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral possessed the remaining placements. The Chamber zealously guarded its right to the nominations it held, and in 1584, made it clear that it required a majority of the council to vote to award these places.⁴⁶ Indeed, up to the 1580s, most of the references to the

⁴⁵Ibid., 141-43.

⁴⁶Act Book IV, fol. 452.

almshouses in the act books are notations of placement awards, or promises of the same; in 1565, the Council assured Johanne Cobbins, a widow, that she would have the next available room at any of the city's almshouses. At the same meeting, the Council decreed that all occupants of these institutions had to attend daily prayer at the Cathedral, no doubt assuming that they needed spiritual guidance to bear their lot in life.⁴⁷ An entry in 1568 indicates that Nicholas Martin donated profits from land lying outside the East gate of the city for support of an almshouse.⁴⁸ In 1574, the Chamber appointed a collector of the rents dedicated to the support of the almshouses, a good indication that the city officials intended to make sure that all benefactions promised were honored and their burden not left on the city.⁴⁹

In the 1580s, the endowment of almshouses by John Haydon was the subject of much discussion by the council. Bookkeeping activities such as the receipt of sureties and the deposit of bonds in the city coffer, along with a mention of the first recipient of the funds, were offset by a notation in 1587 that "John Haydon of Ottery St. Mary [is] responsible for this charity," seemingly indicating that Haydon was offering some resistance to continuing his endowment. Shortly afterwards, the Chamber debated whether Mr. Haydon was "drawing back" from his gift, but apparently the problem was solved, since the next mention of the Haydon money came in 1588, when the council recorded that Haydon had given property to the Chamber in lieu of the payment of his endowment. That

⁴⁷Act Book III, fols. 172, 173.

⁴⁸Act Book III, fol. 214.

⁴⁹Act Book III, fol. 334.

the benefaction continued is evidenced by loans made from the Haydon funds in return for sureties in 1593, 1598, 1614, 1618, and 1622; in 1622, as well, a loan was denied to a non-freeman.⁵⁰

Though Hooker catalogued the rules for admittance to the city's almshouses set up by the mayor and the council according to the terms of the benefactors (see chapter 9), by the first part of the seventeenth century a committee was appointed to draw up rules for the almshouses; one of the major concerns was to keep inmates from making unauthorized marriages; an appointment to Palmer's almshouse in 1600 was "voided by reason of marriage." Inmates could also be dismissed from their place for "inappropriate conduct" as was done in 1604; unfortunately, the inmate in question refused the first summons to depart the almshouse, but then submitted quickly and promised to go.⁵¹

One of the almshouse foundations that received a lot of the city's attention was that established by former mayor William Hurst. The usual notation of appointments for places throughout the period covered by our study was accompanied by orders for repair in 1599, a debate over the admission of a man and his wife which resulted in the man being admitted, but his wife being turned away in 1603, and other inmates being allowed to marry "on terms" in 1611 and 1618, while a woman was deprived of her place when she "married without leave."⁵² Regulations for repayments of

⁵⁰Act Book IV, fols. 489, 492, 493, 514, 543, 557; Act Book V, fols. 46, 290, 421; Act Book VII, fols. 138, 311, 460.

⁵¹Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:867; Act Book V, fol. 519; Act Book VI, fols. 253, 264; 115, 116.

⁵²Act Book V, fol. 436; Act Book VI, fols. 93, 450; Act Book VII, fols. 322, 369.

loans were established in 1614, while in 1624, a curator for Hurst's was appointed.⁵³ Sir William Pole made suit to the city for the use of some of Hurst's money in 1618, 1619, and 1620, and the act books record that he gave security for the payment of Hurst's gift and a further £8 surety for the use of the money in 1619.⁵⁴

References to the city's other almshouses were generally of placements made; these include Palmer's, Ten Cells (a.k.a. Grendon's), Bonville's (a.k.a. Combrew, Rocks Lane), and the Exbridge almshouse. Apart from the Chamber's discussion of the Haydon endowment, there appears to be little concern over the receipt of funds to keep the almshouses going, indicating that the endowments established by the individuals analyzed in chapter 9 were sound and provided a much-needed part of the poor relief system in the city of Exeter. Payments to almshouse residents did come from the rates imposed by the city, but the maintenance of these institutions was covered by the original endowments, which obviously removed a significant part of the poor relief burden from the shoulders of the city.

The Maudlyn or Magdalen almshouse, which started out and continued as a hospital for lepers, and which gradually allowed the entrance of other poor persons, was also of substantial concern to the Chamber. The city acquired the direction of the hospital from the bishop in 1244, and from that point on, the council appointed a Warden of the Maudlyn to

⁵³Act Book VII, fols. 149, 583.

⁵⁴Act Book VII, fols. 322, 338, 385, 357.

oversee the daily activities of the hospital.⁵⁵ With an income by the 1580s of £18 6s. 7d from various endowments, the Maudlyn paid each of its residents 6d weekly, a sum which was raised to 8d in 1593; an additional £2 was granted to the chaplain for his services.⁵⁶ The first mention of the Maudlyn in our period was an instruction to the warden to make a yearly account of the Maudlyn's funds to the Chamber in 1559. Finances occupied a great deal of the Chamber's attention in regard to the Maudlyn; reminders of the yearly accounting were issued again in 1579, 1614, and 1618, and the warden was also enjoined not to pay wages if they were not earned.⁵⁷ The Chamber made sure that sums owing to the Maudlyn from benefactors were paid in, as when they inquired about lands supporting the institution in 1593, and insisted on the payment of balances due to the Maudlyn in 1622 and 1623. A collector of the funds for the Maudlyn was officially appointed in 1623.⁵⁸ In addition to keeping track of the hospital's endowments, the council kept watch on the warden's spending, instructing him not to disburse funds except when necessary in 1618, and calling him to account for a £1,000 investment in 1617.⁵⁹ Other matters included the appointment of a resident minister for the Maudlyn by the bishop in 1615; in 1598, the Chamber had decided

⁵⁵See chapter 9 for an in-depth discussion of these duties; the Wardens of the Maudlyn were always members of the council of Twenty-Tour, though the warden appointed in 1624-25 was Elizabeth Gupwill, the widow of a council member, John Gupwill.

⁵⁶Act Book V, fol. 291.

⁵⁷Act Book II, fol. 48; Act Book III, fol. 265; Act Book VII, fols. 320, 204, 121.

⁵⁸Act Book V, fol. 249; Act Book VII, fols. 470, 522, 526.

⁵⁹Act Book VII, fols. 316, 283.

that the minister should have his own house on the grounds of the hospital.⁶⁰ Provision was made for other officials of the hospital, as well; a retired proctor was given a pension in 1598, while the bailiff was given "certain perquisites" in 1623, having had his fee raised a penny a week four years earlier.⁶¹ There is no indication in the act books in regards to the Maudlyn, as for the almshouses, that the city had to expend its own monies upon their administration or support.

The building of the House of Correction, later called the Bridewell, or sometimes "the poor house," had been mandated by the statute of 18 Elizabeth 1, chapter 3, in 1576, and was meant for the employment and punishment of rogues and vagabonds and other unsettled poor people. It was, in other words, a workhouse; materials were to be purchased by the Chamber, the residents of the House of Correction would produce goods from these materials which would then, the city hoped, be sold for a profit that would eventually render the enterprise self-sustaining. Exeter's House of Correction was mooted in Chamber on August 20, 1577, and was up and running by the summer of 1579, as indicated by the council's appointment of a female overseer, collectors, managers and assistants in those years.⁶² The appointments had been preceded by a discussion on how best to put the prisoners to work, and the Chamber also set up the terms of a general collection to be taken for the House of Correction.⁶³ Building obviously continued into the next decade, as a

⁶⁰Act Book VII, fol. 182; Act Book V, fol. 426.

⁶¹Act Book V, fol. 426; Act Book VII, fols. 333, 526.

⁶²Act Book III, fols. 382, 414, 419.

⁶³Act Book III, fols. 405, 411.

memo of 1582 ordered that the House of Correction was "to be finished" and an overseer appointed; in the same memo, the Chamber appropriated money for this task. Even in 1591, the council was still dedicating fines on lands to the completion of the project.⁶⁴

The name Bridewell received its first mention in the act books in 1593, and it was noted that the workhouse was situated in Goldsmith Street in the heart of the city. A committee had been appointed to draw up rules for its governance in 1591, but not until 1593 were the rules finalized; a subsequent committee on rules met in 1598. A new and permanent governor was appointed in 1593, and it was decided that the Bridewell would be staked to the sum of £200; £100 was advanced immediately, and the rest came in annual increments of £11 each. Five pounds was allotted for maintenance yearly and the governor was given a salary of £2 10s.⁶⁵ From the tenor of the rules and the instructions to the governor in 1593, it became apparent that the House of Correction was meant not to be a workhouse but a place of punishment.

In the first decade of the seventeenth century, much activity concerning the Bridewell fills the city's act books. In one year alone--1606--a great many improvements were ordered for the institution. Several committees were appointed; one was meant to appraise the tools used at the Bridewell for work, while another one was set up to examine the Bridewell lease, which had been the subject of concern since 1598. Yet another committee set to work on revising the rules of the workhouse, and was charged with instituting reforms; the Chamber later called the

⁶⁴Act Book IV, fol. 583; Act Book V, fol. 187.

⁶⁵Act Book V, fols. 284, 270, 187, 268, 427.

governor of the Bridewell, Robert Sparkes, before it to confirm to him in person the new rules passed by the committee. To guarantee his good performance, sureties were instituted for the keeper of the House of Correction.⁶⁶ Conditions for the holding of prisoners in the Bridewell were examined in 1613, and repairs to the building were ordered in 1612 and 1613; "blocks for pounding on" were purchased in 1619, looms bought in 1622, leading to a valuation of the House's implements being made in 1622.⁶⁷

The rules for the Bridewell issued in 1613 were clear in their intention that all idle persons who refused to work were, upon committal to the institution, forced to work at such tasks as weaving, spinning and knitting. Anyone who did not have a visible means of support and was not provided for elsewhere was sent to the Bridewell, and this included all vagrants, drunks, "night-walkers" and other troublemakers. In exchange for their work, they had room and board provided, as well as sufficient clothing; anyone refusing to work was put in the stocks or treated to a "thin diet." The governor received 10d per head once the number of inmates rose over fifteen, and if any were sick for more than four days, he was to have another 4d. Children could also be committed to the Bridewell on recommendation from a master or parent that the child was "undutiful or incorrigible." In addition to the inmates of the Bridewell, the governor was also responsible for the employment of sixty persons within and without the House of Correction, and the payment of their wages. That the Bridewell did not measure up to expectations

⁶⁶Act Book VI, fols. 202-203, 210, 211, 214, 234, 222.

⁶⁷Act Book VII, fols. 80, 363, 66, 78, 450, 455.

despite mandated weekly and annual inspections is evidenced by the sums charged to various philanthropic funds to cover the cost of materials and other necessities to run it; for instance, Lawrence Attwill's fund was owed £1,153 by the city in 1638 for such charges. Despite the deficits incurred by the Bridewell, and the evident mismanagement, MacCaffrey asserts that it was successful in a limited sense in that it did give relief to adult poor and did train poor children in a craft.⁶⁸

Management of Legacies left to the City

As we see in chapter 9, the citizens of Exeter left an extensive set of legacies that not only included support for the almshouses of the city, but which also established revolving loan funds and annual bequests meant to aid the poor. In most cases, the administration of these legacies was left to the Chamber with little supervision from the benefactors or their representatives. We show in chapter 9 that there was a great deal of concern on the part of these benefactors that the mayor and the council would take proper care of their legacies, and the instruments which established the endowments contained extensive discussion of the safeguards necessary to keep the funds and bequests intact. This concern was not without merit; as early as the 1560s, the city borrowed from the funds donated by Joan Tuckfield, William Buckenham, and Parson Herne the sum of £345 to assist in the building of the city canal. By 1639, the act books were recording lists of debts owed by the city to these endowments, including £300 meant for the support of St. John's hospital, and a further £400 from the funds established by Walter

⁶⁸MacCaffrey, Exeter, 114-15; see also Miscellaneous Deeds 1721 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England) and Act Book VIII, fols. 153, 156.

Borough and Lawrence Attwill.⁶⁹ Though the Chamber was generally careful to see that the functions these sums supported were carried on, it is clear that they regarded them as an easy source for money when it was available no where else. In addition, the city did not pay interest on the amounts it borrowed from the coffers of the civic charities, thereby saving an additional expense. We see below that this habit was a substantial component of the Orphans' Court as well.

These endowments became a feature of the city's poor relief efforts in the 1570s, and the early references to them in the act books generally concern orders for their use and dispersal.⁷⁰ In 1598, the council ordered that all bonds of these charities were to be examined and properly enrolled.⁷¹ The extent to which the city became involved in the control and disposition of these funds is perhaps best shown by an examination of its actions in regards to the fund established by Lawrence Attwill. Attwill left funds in 1588 that the city was to invest in lands costing £600; the rents from these lands were to be used to buy materials so that the unemployed poor might be set to work, as evidenced by the Attwill contributions to the Bridewell. The deeds were brought in to the Chamber in 1589, and after some discussion about the settlement, the council appointed a committee to devise a scheme to use the gift. Instances of loans made from the Attwill fund are noted in the act books, with instructions in 1597, 1602 and 1603 that his money was to be "used

⁶⁹MacCaffrey, Exeter, 62, note 13.

⁷⁰Act Book III, fols. 429, 307; Act Book IV, fols. 490, 547, 550, 424.

⁷¹Act Book V, fol. 433.

to set the poor on work." By 1599, it was decided that the sums from this fund were to be laid out through the overseers of the poor in the various parishes. Some concern over the dispersal of the Attwill legacy was evinced when the Chamber appointed a committee "to care for Attwill's money" in 1609. That this action was necessary is indicated by an entry in the act books in 1619 ordering that Attwill's "account was to be made up;" in other words, deficiencies were such that the city had to move to replenish it. Along with other loan funds, Attwill's sometimes had difficulty in retrieving the money it advanced on security; for instance, the Chamber was forced to sue for "money overdue" in 1622.⁷²

That repayment was a continuing problem not just for Attwill's fund but for others as well is evidenced by references to borrowers failing to make good on loans made out of these funds; in 1599, the Chamber ordered defaulters to pay immediately, and to pay interest on the overtime they had the money in their possession. In the previous decade, a list of borrowers in default were presented to the Chamber, who ordered that they were to have no further loans.⁷³

Among the other endowments that concerned the Chamber during our period are those established by Joan Tuckfield, Joan Cleveland, Thomas White, John Acland, Lawrence and Elizabeth Seldon, Peter Blundell, and Griffith Ameridith. Blundell's money was used by the city in 1605 to "construct highways," while the Chamber found it necessary in 1603-1604 to launch an inquiry, and later, a suit, to recover sums that Ameridith

⁷²Act Book V, fols. 113, 120, 134, 144, 148, 150-51, 408, 455; Act Book VI, fols. 61, 105, 378; Act Book VII, fols. 335, 443.

⁷³Act Book V, fols. 452, 53.

had left for the purchase of burial shrouds for the poor prisoners of the city.⁷⁴ The great bulk of legacy management, however, was centered around the grant and retrieval of loans from these funds, actions in which the city itself was intimately involved. That so much time was spent in this endeavor is indicative of Exeter's reliance on the money left by its more prominent citizens, not only for the relief of the poor but, more importantly, as a source of interest-free loans for city projects. That the civic corporation was able to borrow so freely from these funds indicates the extent to which the benefactions were performing the function for which they were meant; if poverty were such a pressing concern for the city, why were sums diverted from these endowments? Granted, the monies that were borrowed were generally used for important civic projects, such as the building of the city's canal, but their diversion into these endeavors seems to demonstrate that the poor must have been adequately provided for while these funds were being employed elsewhere; the only alternative to this assumption is that the city was more interested in achieving material civic goals than making provision for the less fortunate members of its community. That the city borrowed from these funds indiscriminately is thus evidence of an adequate system of relief within the city underpinned by private philanthropy.

Charles Carlton has written the definitive study of the Court of Orphans and its use in early modern England.⁷⁵ Exeter was one of three

⁷⁴Act Book VI, fols. 169, 100, 152.

⁷⁵Charles Carlton, The Court of Orphans (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974).

large English cities in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries not only to establish such a court, but to make it an integral and efficient part of the city's administrative apparatus. Carlton argues that Exeter, along with London and Bristol, possessed able men who were reacting to a general social change whereby urban merchants wished to pass on their hard-earned success to their children and maintain the family's position in the city. In Exeter's case, the effort was spearheaded by the city's chamberlain, the tireless John Hooker. Carlton notes that Hooker began pushing for the creation of an Orphan's Court in the city within two years of his appointment as chamberlain in 1555. In April/May, 1560, he met with the Privy Council to start the process of obtaining a charter for Exeter's Orphan's Court. That Hooker's efforts were successful are indicated by the issuance of a charter by Elizabeth I on February 21, 1561 entitled "The Charter for Orphans and a Chamberlain and other liberties within the city of Exeter."⁷⁶

Carlton suggests that Hooker took advantage of the queen's regard for the city's steadfastness during the 1549 Prayer Book Rebellion to get the charter granted, and indeed, the charter does mention the city's loyalty to "our very dear brother Edward" in the rebellion and noted that the city's "faith, obedience and truth should stand out in everlasting memory."⁷⁷ However Hooker managed to achieve his goal, the charter certainly assigned a prominent place to the chamberlain in the administration of the city's affairs. The chamberlain was given total

⁷⁶Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:425-39.

⁷⁷Carlton, Court of Orphans, 28; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:427.

authority (with advice from the Mayor and the Chamber) over all matters regarding the care of the city's orphans. As the queen put it:

wishing of our abundant grace to make provision for the wardship, defence and recognition of the orphans and infants, which now are and hereafter...shall happen to be in the city aforesaid, [and] that their goods and chattels shall in future for ever and from time to time be faithfully and justly guarded without destruction or spoilation of the same....⁷⁸

And that the same chamberlain of our said city of Exeter for the time being, and his successors, shall have, in future for ever, the custody and government of all and singular orphans of any citizens whatsoever with the said county of our City of Exeter.⁷⁹

On April 19, 1564, the Chamber, acknowledging the volume of work which the Orphan's Court would mean for the Chamberlain, ordered "on consideration, that John Hooker, now Chamberlain of this city and his successors for the time being shall be attendant and of good service in the case of the orphans of this city, shall have and forever more enjoy the fourth part of all such ordinary fees" arising from the orphans' probates.⁸⁰ The Description of the Citie of Excester gives examples of what the Chamberlain and other officials might charge; for example, Hooker was to receive 3s. 4d from each probate of £100 or more, 2s. 6d for estates between £60 and £100, 1s. 8d for estates £50 pounds and under, and 1d per pound for estates £20 and under.⁸¹

⁷⁸Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:435.

⁷⁹Ibid., 437.

⁸⁰Ibid., 2:482; this estimate differs from Carlton, Court of Orphans, 19, who states that Hooker received a third of all fees emanating from orphans' probates.

⁸¹Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:482-85.

In 1575, Hooker published "Orders enacted for Orphans etc." which detailed the activities of the Orphans' Court under his direction, and dedicated the work to the "Mayors and Senators" of Exeter, noting that he had been "many times privy of your doings and present in your councils." He told them that "it is lamentable to see what troops and clusters of children, boys and elder persons lie loitering and floistering in every corner of the city" due to the fact that "great shows have been made and attempts pretended for erecting of the Hospital and for employing of such idle children in some honest arts, but of these great blothes [sic] comes small fruits." These idle children "swarm in clusters in every corner of your city and for want of good education and nurturing do grow to be thorns and thistles;" Hooker warned the officials that "it is your just and bounden duty to provide for the education, instruction and whatsoever is necessary for such." He was careful to compliment them for the efforts they had made, but reminded them that more needed to be done: "You have been and yet are careful and studious to do what in you lieth for the erection of a hospital, a thing in respect of poor, destitute and helpless children necessary and expedient to be done, so am I in good hope of your like affection, zeal and good will for and in the erecting and establishing of a free grammar school within this city, a thing no more needful than most necessary for the general education of children of all sorts and degrees in learning." Hooker acknowledged the difficulties inherent in this process by noting that "although your beginnings be hard and have many enemies which do what they may to hinder the same, yet you know that of hard beginnings

come good endings and good attempts have good success."⁸² Thus, the creation of the Exeter Orphans' Court was meant to prevent the charge of these orphan children being thrown upon the city. While it is apparent that the cases handled by the Court involved citizens who were generally well off, the city wanted to act immediately after death to insure that surviving children were properly taken care of and to forestall applications for aid or the possibility that the children might be forced onto the streets to beg.

Hooker set in right away on the inventories of estates left for orphans, which are faithfully recorded in the Book-Proceedings of the Orphans' Court; S. A. Moore's calendar contains a careful list of the inventories, which conflicts at points with Carlton's compilation, but, as Carlton notes, "one can rarely cross-check sixteenth-century statistics" and allows for a "maximum possible error of 5 per cent" in his calculations.⁸³ Aside from minor discrepancies in the total number of inventories, the only significant difference between Moore and Carlton is in the dating of the first inventory taken, although both agree that it was done for Thomas Grygge, a baker from St. Kieran's parish. Moore dates the inventory April 7, 1560, while Carlton believes it took place shortly after the city's reception of the February, 1561 charter. Since

⁸²Commonplace Book of John Hooker, Chamberlain of the City of Exeter, Book 51 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), fol. 133; see also J. H. Wylie, Historical Manuscripts Commission: Report on the Records of the City of Exeter (London: HMSO, 1916), vi.

⁸³Book-Proceedings of the Orphans' Court 1555-1630, Books 141, 142, 143, 144 and 145 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England); List of Orphans' Court probate inventories, based on Stuart Moore's calendar (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), no pagination; Carlton, Court of Orphans, 110, n. 15.

it is known that Hooker visited with the Privy Council in either April or May, 1560, and that he presented them with documents detailing the need for an Orphans' Court, it is possible that he conducted a sample inventory to bring with him to present to the councillors. That this may have occurred is buttressed by the fact that this is the only inventory listed for either 1560 or 1561, while the rest of the inventories are dated from February 24, 1563.⁸⁴

In any case, the work load grew over the decade of the 1560s and the decades that succeeded it: twelve inventories in the 1560s, nineteen in the 1570s, fourteen in the 1580s, thirty-four in the 1590s, twenty-eight in the first decade of the seventeenth century, twenty-seven in the 1610s, and forty-eight in the 1620s (twenty of which were completed by 1625).⁸⁵

As Carlton notes, the officials of Exeter were well aware that the charter granted by Elizabeth in connection with the Orphans' Court would lapse on her death, and they were greatly concerned when the queen fell ill with smallpox in 1562. Although the queen survived to reign for another forty-one years, the scare was enough for Exeter to send its members of Parliament, Thomas Williams and Geoffrey Tothill, to submit two bills, one of which was to grant the city the right to run a court of orphans freed from the charter process. An "act for the confirmation

⁸⁴List of Orphans' Court probate inventories, no pagination; see also Orphans' Court Proceedings Books for Exeter.

⁸⁵List of Orphans' Court probate inventories, no pagination.

of certain liberties granted to the City of Exeter" was subsequently passed, and became law on March 18, 1563.⁸⁶

The Act Books of the Chamber are rife with references to orphans and to the court which regulated the estates left to them. It is apparent from these entries that most of the work done concerning orphans was recorded in the Act Books, since the charter and the subsequent act vested the care of orphans' matters with the mayor and the council, which Hooker served as Chamberlain. There were sessions known as the "Curia Orphanoy" apart from the regular council meetings, but the participants were the same and the sessions presumably took place in the council chambers; as Carlton puts it, it simply meant "the clerk closing one set of books and opening another."⁸⁷

A brief survey of the entries in the Act Books will give us some idea of the matters dealt with by the Chamber in regard to the orphans and its court. The earliest reference is contained in Act Book III, dating from 1562, wherein "conditions of trust" are spelled out in connection with the orphans' accounts.⁸⁸ Decisions about custody were made and permission of orphans to marry given, and administrative issues included the appointment of an official in 1570 to audit the orphans' accounts.⁸⁹ In regards to the Court, the majority of the business centered around payments made and collected, and the issuance of recognizances of orphans. One interesting matter in Act Book III took

⁸⁶Carlton, Court of Orphans, 28-29.

⁸⁷Ibid., 40.

⁸⁸Act Book III, fols. 109-110.

⁸⁹Ibid., fol. 266.

place in 1570, when the daughter of one Arnold Reynolds got married without the permission of the court, and they levied a fine for her transgression.⁹⁰

The charter granted by Elizabeth and the subsequent act of Parliament granting a permanent orphans' court in Exeter are contained in Act Book IV, which details the first lawsuit in connection with the court; brought in 1582 on behalf of the Gilbert Lambell children, it was settled in 1583, and the expenses for its prosecution were ordered at the same time.⁹¹ Act Book V recounts no unusual matters before the council, although it appears that there was some concern over the handling of the court's matters, as a "committee for rules" was set up in 1600.⁹²

It was in the first decade of the seventeenth century that the business of the court seems to have increased dramatically; besides the usual matters, several lawsuits were instigated by the court. The stepfather of the Chaffe children had to be threatened with a lawsuit in 1607 before an agreement was reached on the amount of sureties to be paid on behalf of the children.⁹³ Much time was devoted to the estate of Thomas Spicer, including such matters as loans to his widow, the marriages of three of his children, and the issuance of bonds and loans on sureties; when one brother reached the age of majority in 1606, the court ordered him to pay the city for a younger brother, and in another instance, the court permitted one of the Spicer orphans to be sent to a

⁹⁰Ibid., fol. 252.

⁹¹Act Book IV, fols. 405, 428-29, 430.

⁹²Act Book V, fol. 514.

⁹³Act Book VI, fol. 297.

university at the charge of the estate in 1611.⁹⁴ During this period, it becomes clear that the city was borrowing funds from the estate amounts deposited with the orphans' court, since payment of interest to the orphans by the city is recorded in 1603, 1605, and 1611. A good example of this trend was the borrowing of funds from the Spicer estate to make loans to five widows in 1604 and 1605.⁹⁵

Carlton has analyzed the city's financial records, which, as he notes, are "incomplete" and "vague" in some respects, in order to determine the extent of the monies borrowed by the Chamber from the orphans' accounts. Between 1563 and 1639, he concludes that the city borrowed £3,889 pounds, but repaid the lesser sum of £2,252. In July, 1639, the balance of the debt owed by the chamber to the orphans stood at only £50, indicating that repayments of approximately £1,000 were not recorded. Carlton believes that the unrecorded repayments are indicative of the unreliability of the figures presented for amounts borrowed as well, and states that "Exeter may have borrowed as much as five thousand pounds from its orphans." The city also lent out the orphans' money in order to make a profit, as was made clear by transactions recorded in 1616: the orphans received a 5.9 percent return on their money, while the sums lent out were worth £70 and interest was charged in the amount of 8 percent; £150 was lent out several years later at a 7 percent interest rate. Carlton speculates that the reason for this activity was that, in the sixteenth century, "Exeter was chronically short of money."⁹⁶

⁹⁴Ibid., fols. 153, 165, 218, 298, 438.

⁹⁵Ibid., fols. 153, 154, 170.

⁹⁶Carlton, Court of Orphans, 87.

Despite the lending and borrowing, however, Carlton believes that the city "never became financially entangled with its orphans." He notes that only a quarter of the chamber's debts in 1639 were due to orphans--in the amount of £1,660--and these debts were paid within a few months. Improvements to town markets and the building of the Topsham canal to the sea increased the city's revenues dramatically in the eighty years after 1561, when the city's income was £480; it rose to £1,280 by 1640. Expenditure by the chamber rose as well--from £380 in 1561 to £1,202 in 1640--but it was clear that there was a surplus in the city's coffers by the mid-seventeenth century. Carlton notes that Exeter's experience in this regard stands out in sharp contrast to London, which perennially borrowed from its orphans' court to offset city deficits.⁹⁷ Carlton's analysis stands out in sharp contrast from that offered by MacCaffrey, who states that the orphans' court served as a "deposit and loan bank" for the city of Exeter. Once the funds were deposited with the court, the officials there could use the monies whichever way they chose to. As MacCaffrey notes, most of the money was lent out to private individuals who paid interest to the court, but at times, the Chamber took loans from the Orphans' Court reserves as well, making these sums "a steady and important item in the city's finances." Additionally, there is no evidence to indicate that the city paid interest on the amounts borrowed from the orphans until 1609. Though the Court admirably performed its responsibilities for the orphans it was meant to protect, there is no doubt that the sums deposited in its coffers represented a

⁹⁷Ibid., 88.

stable financial reserve for the city and for private borrowers as well.⁹⁸

The business of the court continued to be brisk into the 1620s, and the chamberlain was ordered to review and report on the condition of the orphans' accounts to the chamber in 1623.⁹⁹ Matters concerning the Spicer estate persisted into the third decade of the seventeenth century, primarily centered on payments made and received on its behalf.¹⁰⁰ The court continued to be vigorous in its prosecution of slack guardianship; in 1611, the court ordered that sureties be paid in to "keep a child properly" or risk being brought up on charges before the court.¹⁰¹

In 1619, a petition was brought by one Isaack Bidwell, widow, to the justices of the western district in which she requested them to call before the court the officers of the Corporation (the mayor and the council) of Exeter in order to have them render a complete accounting of amounts due to her deceased husband, who had been an orphan under the aegis of the Corporation. Apparently, the widow Bidwell's petition was not her first attempt to recover this money; at the end of her suit, a justice of Common Pleas, Sir Richard Hutton, recommended that the Chamber offer her some satisfaction in the matter or "to make some certificate to the Masters of Requests that his Majesty may no more be troubled" with

⁹⁸MacCaffrey, Exeter, 62-63.

⁹⁹Act Book VII, fol. 528.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., fols. 123, 124, 130, 132, 138, 329.

¹⁰¹Ibid., fol. 10.

her entreaties.¹⁰² The petition was referred to the Devon county justices of assize, who were to deliberate the truth of her charge that "the Mayor and Aldermen of Exeter took into their hands certain goods and chattels of his [her late husband] to the value of £150, of which she claims £23, eighteen shillings and eight pence as still due to her." The case dragged on for two years, and on July 28, 1621, Sir Laurence Tanfield and Sir Richard Hutton, who had received the petition on June 22 of that year, wrote to the Lords of the Council that they had heard the case and did not think "that she has any ground of complaint."¹⁰³ Mrs. Bidwell did not let the matter rest, however; in late 1622, she sent her plea to Edward Somerset, the Earl of Worcester, who forwarded her suit to the mayor of Exeter with a somewhat terse letter dated January 7, 1623:

After my very hearty commendations, whereas I lately received a letter and this enclosed petition, with direction from his Majesty that I should write unto you in the behalf of the Petitioner that you should think of some satisfaction to be forthwith given her or otherwise her cause to have a rehearing in the Court of Requests.

The Earl went on to instruct the Mayor that "accordingly you would take such order therein that this Petitioner may have no further cause to trouble his Majesty with her clamors and complaints."¹⁰⁴ Obviously,

¹⁰²Stuart Moore, ed., A Calendar of the Records and Muniments belonging to the Corporation of the City of Exeter preserved in the record room of the Guildhall, 3 vols., 1:126-27, Letter 189, July 16, 1619; the original suit brought against the chamber was entitled "Bidwell v. The Chamber" filed in 1615, and found among the bundled miscellaneous Law Papers.

¹⁰³Ibid., 1:128, Letter 198.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 1:155, Letter 264.

this dictum had some effect and Mrs. Bidwell received satisfaction (or perhaps she gave up), as the case is not mentioned again. The obstinacy displayed by both sides in this dispute illustrates the lengths to which both were willing to go in order to prevail when money was at stake.

Though the number of inventories completed through the 1620s kept pace with those of earlier decades, only ten were made in the 1630s, two in the next decade, and none at all in the 1650s. The Chamberlain in 1639, John Crewkerne, had to be forced to appear before the Chamber with a threat of dismissal, and by 1650 the council was sternly ordering the Chamberlain to take care of his business in regard to the orphans; the Chamber set up a commission in 1650 to report on the "present state and conditions of orphans' affairs" and another one in 1653 to "investigate such bonds, bills and other writing as are now in the orphans' chest." No report from either commission was ever filed. Over the next two decades, the court had increasing difficulty in enforcing its regulations, and by 1673, the officials were forced to admit that "suites for Orphans are being so much of late opposed." In the three decades following the Civil War, the court's meetings dropped from once a month to once a year, and the last recorded meeting took place in August, 1697; activity ceased, and the city recognized on September 15, 1721--somewhat belatedly--that the court no longer merited a place in the city's administrative apparatus. Carlton argues that much of the court's vigor passed away with Hooker, and his successors were unwilling to shoulder the burdens he had so enjoyed. In addition, new methods--either through chancery or by the purchase of land--were being employed in the seventeenth century that allowed merchants to pass their estates to their

children, so that the orphans' court became unnecessary.¹⁰⁵ That it existed at all was a testament to the indefatigable Hooker, but its eventual decline following his death indicates that government programs to aid children in distressed circumstances, even when created by statute, needed able officials in order to remain viable and of use to the community.

The Experience in Other Localities

The progress of the imposition of poor rates and its effects is more valuable when it is contrasted with the results achieved by other localities in England during the same period, insofar as it is possible to do so. One of the most striking comparisons is that made with the poor relief scheme advanced in Norwich in the 1570s, when the officials there ordered a census to be taken of the city's poor in order to reorganize their care. The census, taken in late 1570 or early 1571, showed that 2,311 persons were living below the poverty level, but of these, at least three-quarters were employed and were not deemed to qualify to receive poor relief, leaving approximately 577 people supposedly eligible for assistance. Like Exeter, the mayor of Norwich, John Aldrich, launched a campaign in the 1570s designed to rid the city of its vagrant problem, though the city records do not reflect many prosecutions for this offense, indicating that it must not have been extensive. Norwich had also been in the forefront of the move towards compulsory rate paying since the 1550s, when Ket's Rebellion took advantage of the large numbers of poor willing to be used for political ends; similarly, in the risings in Norfolk in 1569 and 1570, poor people

¹⁰⁵Carlton, Court of Orphans, 88-89.

again figured prominently. John Pound argues that the city's efforts in regards to its poor were thus intimately linked to local unrest, and not to any real concern for an overwhelming social problem, which, he asserts, Norwich did not have at this time. Indeed, Pound notes that the city had arrested a certain Mother Alden for begging in 1562, and she was found to have in excess of £44 on her person; the city confiscated the bulk of the money, and left her with 6s. 8d. Since generosity on the street to an itinerant beggar was so extensive, it is safe to argue that a great many vagrants and beggars, despite their mean life style, got along quite well without putting a burden on the city's relief resources. Only when circumstances threatened to disrupt the status quo did Norwich move to placate the poorer members of its community. Pound maintains that "few civic authorities in Elizabethan England would have regarded the maintenance of the poor as their personal responsibility" and that the attempts by Parliament and local officials "seldom had any lasting effect." Nevertheless, like Exeter, Norwich's citizens moved in times of emergency to provide for the poorer members of its community through purchases of grain, and sums were left by will to the care of the poor; similarly, charitable trust funds were established by certain wealthy merchants. In the end, however, Pound feels that "the idea of regular contributions to poor relief was anathema to all classes."¹⁰⁶

The collection from the poor rates imposed by the city officials before the reorganization of 1570 was, Pound terms, "respectable." 650 of Norwich's citizens contributed to the rate, and 180 of the city's

¹⁰⁶John Pound, ed., The Norwich Census of the Poor 1570 (Norwich: Norwich Record Society, 1971), 7-10.

destitute were given relief, rarely in excess of 2d a week; most contributors paid 1d a week or less. That relatively few people received assistance was due, Pound notes, to the city's belief that one had to be old or incapacitated in some way that precluded being able to work; all others, employed or not, were ineligible for aid. As did Exeter, Norwich established a House of Correction where the able poor were put to work on materials purchased by the city for that purpose. By relying on these extraneous measures, Pound estimates that, by 1570, some 75 percent of the city's poor received no relief at all from the poor rates.¹⁰⁷ After the reorganization of 1570, the number of poor relieved went up to 340, and by the mid-1570s, the poor rate was bringing in approximately £500 a year. This amount stands out in sharp contrast to the rates collected in Exeter, which we showed to be in the region of £197 per annum at roughly the same time. It is Pound's opinion that Norwich's scheme was so successful in abolishing begging and keeping the poor employed that it served as a paradigm for the national legislation of vagrancy and poor relief passed in 1572.¹⁰⁸

Two "typical rural parishes," Northill and Eaton Socon in Bedfordshire, were examined by F. G. Emmison in order to ascertain the imposition of statutory poor relief.¹⁰⁹ Northill's extant accounts

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 10, 19.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 20-21; in considering the difference in the amounts collected by rates in both Exeter and Norwich, we must keep in mind that Norwich was considerably larger than Exeter, so contributions were naturally higher based on a greater population base.

¹⁰⁹F. G. Emmison, "Poor Relief Accounts of Two Rural Parishes in Bedfordshire, 1563-1598," Economic History Review III, no. 1, (1931): 104-108.

cover the period 1562 to 1595 (with interruptions) and Eaton Socon's from 1591 to 1598. Emmison argues that the Northill accounts are suggestive of immediate compliance with the 1562 statute, "an instance [which was] rare at this period." The accounts, for the most part, record only the total amounts received and disbursed, and vary too widely, Emmison asserts, to be able to establish an average for either. Between 1563 and 1565, the poor numbered about thirteen, and each received from 2d to 12d a quarter, and at no time did an individual exceed 4s in a calendar year. Contributions seem to have averaged about 4s. 7d per quarter, resulting in an annual total of 18s. 4d. Between 1565 and 1577, the amount given rose significantly; twenty-five persons paid in around £2 1s.; after 1577 and up to 1595, this sum continued to grow, reaching a high of £9, meaning the average contribution to poor rates during those years was around £4, a relatively heavy tax. Not surprisingly, Emmison notes that there was some resistance expressed to the payment of these rates, as evidenced by a memorandum in the records stating that one Steven Lord had not paid his rate in 1590, and the collectors were ordered to demand it from him; if not successful in their demand, they were to report him to the Justices of the Peace. By the tone of the memo, it was apparent that this was the first case of its kind the collectors had been faced with.¹¹⁰

Eaton Socon's records, though brief in period, are more thorough in the information they contain and Emmison asserts that these accounts provide "ample evidence to prove that the Poor Law is being carried out almost to the full intent of Parliament," although he qualifies this

¹¹⁰Ibid.

compliance by pointing out that the adoption of the Poor Law there was "almost certainly caused by the Privy Council orders of 1587" which are mentioned in the accounts which start in 1591. Over the period, between twenty-six and thirty-three persons received relief in weekly amounts ranging from 3/4d to 3d; the highest per annum payment did not exceed 12s. The payments made in these years varied between £8 and £18 pounds, except for an extraordinary outlay of £25 in 1595, which included a special levy to be devoted to putting children to work as apprentices. This levy was probably taken, Emmison believes, in accordance with the statute of 1576, which ordered that both young and old, if able-bodied, were to be put at useful work. As to contributions, in 1591 sixty-six people were deemed able to contribute to the rates, and this number rose to seventy-eight by 1597. Weekly payments ranged from 1/4d to 2d on the low end of the scale to 1d up to 8d on the higher end; quarterly payments were extracted from less well-off citizens, as the officials allowed a 1d payment per quarter for some of these people. Emmison notes that the collectors of these funds were appointed not at the general sessions of the justices of the peace for the county, but were selected by local parishioners or local justices, indicating that poor relief was very much something that was conducted at the most basic level. Further, as Emmison points out, these collectors, in common with their counterparts in other parts of the country, often cannot account for delinquencies, overcharges and overpayments made out of the funds collected; in 1596, for example, the collectors of Eaton Socon could not explain the 26s. 7d balance remaining after an audit was conducted.¹¹¹ This confusion is

¹¹¹Ibid., 108-116.

perhaps typical of the administration of the poor law statutes, a situation that was summed up quite neatly by Dr. Vilvane of Exeter in 1624.

London during the reign of Elizabeth is examined by Ian Archer, who uses data from contributions to Christ's Hospital and accounts of the collectors of the poor in inner-city parishes to offer estimates on the amount of money raised by the poor rate.¹¹² 58 percent of parochial contributions were sent to Christ's, with the rest retained in the local parish. In 1573-74, the hospital received £1,279 from the collections, meaning that the parishes themselves had collected £2,205. With adjustments for other data, Archer estimates poor rates garnered approximately £2,500 in 1573-74. Since the rate was not reassessed until 1598, he posits that the £2,500 collected per annum in the aftermath of the 1572 statute was probably the largest amount realized until the end of the century. Though collections increased for a few years, Archer believes that overall, "amounts raised tended to drift downwards" over the ensuing years. Immediate increases in the collections ranged between 20 and 40 percent, but long-term improvement, he notes, remained between 10 and 20 percent. Though some Elizabethan parishes did have substantial increases at various times, many showed no improvement at all, or showed less being collected at the end of the period than at the beginning. The accounts at Christ's Hospital indicated that, out of £1,540 due to them in 1573, some £300 was still outstanding; over the period from 1570 to 1598, receipts averaged £1,200 and, as Archer notes, with price inflation

¹¹²Ian Archer, The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 161-63, 259.

resting at 43 percent in these years, this "achievement is not impressive." In 1598, after the passage of the comprehensive Elizabethan poor law, Archer sees "very substantial increases," in some cases amounting to 250 percent over previous collections. But these increase were not, Archer believes, "achieved without difficulty." In some parishes, collectors had to be imprisoned to force them to turn over sums taken through the rates, though the accounts do show that parish authorities showed a willingness to turn defaulters over to parish justices. But, as Archer explains, the reforms "came only in the wake of [a] crisis, and the large sums then realised suggest the inadequacy of provision in the recent past." Once the crisis had passed, enforcement fell concomitantly. Archer feels that this was due to the lack of "formal coercive powers" for local officials, and argues that most compliance was garnered through "a tyranny of vocabulary" in which the local officials sought to frighten the "middling sort" by "emphasising the threats to the social order" posed by the poor.¹¹³

In this regard, London shared much with Exeter.

For Havering, Marjorie McIntosh finds that "binding rates or taxes to support the poor were imposed at least occasionally in Romford and perhaps in Hornchurch."¹¹⁴ At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, local collectors of the poor used the statutes to compel people to pay rates, as the archdeacon's court records of 1569 list several people brought up on charges that they failed to make a contribution to the poor. However,

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Marjorie K. McIntosh, A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 283.

McIntosh notes, after the 1560s, that there are no further references to poor rates being imposed in either Romford or Hornchurch, and that the records do not mention collectors of the poor up to 1598, nor do they mention overseers of the poor after that date. McIntosh speculates that, "While it is possible that Havering's leaders found it unnecessary to impose poor taxes after the early 1570s because the level of private giving was sufficient to cover the need, this seems unlikely." It is possible, however, that the poor rates collected there during Elizabeth's reign were much less important in the relief of the poor than the monies proceeding from private philanthropy, which corresponds to the argument we make for Exeter.¹¹⁵

A. L. Beier's work on Warwick makes it clear that the issue of poor relief was not vigorously attacked until the 1580s, when wholesale arrests and prosecutions of vagrants took place. At the same time, begging was forbidden, censuses were taken to quantify the number of poor, and taxation was levied to support them. Two important Elizabethan figures got involved in the debate over poor relief in Warwick--Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Thomas Cartwright, the leader of the Presbyterian movement in England. The corporation of Warwick was composed of one bailiff and twelve assistants or "principal burgesses" who were advised by a second council of townsmen representing the interests of the "commoners." The disputes between these groups spilled over into the issue of poor relief; John Fisher, a burgess on the corporate board, had informed Leicester that the town had few resources to deal with its needs, let alone respond to the problem of poverty. The

¹¹⁵Ibid.

corporation split over the use of charity funds between 1576 and 1583, when Richard Brookes, another burgess, accused Fisher and his friends of misusing certain monies left for the use of the poor. The dispute centered on Brookes and his supporters' position against public taxation for poor relief; they declined to appear at a 1576 meeting to discuss the imposition of a rate, and Fisher and his loyalists decided that they would investigate "how and what every constable did within every ward of the same town towards the payment of the task [of poor relief]...." Brookes continued with his opposition to the elimination of begging as a solution to poor relief, but eventually, his support dwindled and the town was able to impose poor rate levies in 1582-83. This is not to say that other solutions to the problem had not been attempted before the 1580s; Warwick had casually followed the statutory directives on voluntary contributions to the poor to supplement private philanthropy, but by 1571, Fisher was telling Leicester that the sums proceeding from these sources were inadequate. Leicester proposed establishment of an institution whereby a trade such as cloth manufacture would be taught to the able poor, and even those who were incapacitated by age or infirmity could participate in the enterprise to some extent. Leicester offered to fund the scheme, but the townspeople felt that it would place them politically further in the earl's debt. Subsequent plans to put the poor on work in accordance with the 1576 statute also came to naught. The next step was the taking of a census and the imposition of a poor rate, but not without opposition being lodged in the Court of Requests from those who did not wish to have such a rate levied. The protest failed and the rates were put into effect; Beier uses one parish, St. Mary's,

to illustrate the sums collected. In 1582, weekly rates were 18s. 6 1/2d; during the crisis years of 1586-87, the rates were doubled and sometimes tripled in an attempt to deal with the increased poverty. £2 2s. 10d proceeded from the weekly collections in St. Mary's parish in 1587. The harvest failure which had precipitated the poverty in Warwick was dealt with not only by increasing the poor rates, but by placing strict controls on the grain supply, but Beier maintains that "the market controls were insufficient to relieve the town's poor...." Cartwright persuaded the burgesses to conduct a new census in 1587 that resulted in twenty-two persons being expelled as "foreigners" and aid being generally limited to children, who were often sent out as apprentices to ease the burden on the city's resources. It was apparent that Cartwright was more concerned with the maintenance of social order than he was with truly addressing the plight of the poor. In the end, Beier asserts, "the poor clearly received rate-supported relief, but what degree of comfort it afforded them and how ratepaying affected the wealth of the better-off are unclear." All the debate over the issue of poor relief resulted in, Beier maintains, was that the local gentry were able to take over the reins of power from the burgesses by the mid-seventeenth century.¹¹⁶

Carol Moore argues that Ipswich modeled its poor relief system along the same lines as London's, but that its system had unique features. She points out that there was a "close-knit cooperation" between public and private charity. Moore maintains that an examination of the city's records reveal the development of "a comprehensive,

¹¹⁶A. L. Beier, "The social problems of an Elizabethan country town: Warwick, 1580-1590," in Country Towns in pre-industrial England, ed. Peter Clark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 73-79.

efficient and consistent program that protected the town ... especially ... during the crisis years of the 1590s."¹¹⁷ Laws for the relief of the poor were passed as early as 1551 in Ipswich, and the city officials ordered the appointment of two persons to make inquiry about the poor people within the city and to make a report on their findings to the bailiffs. The next year, a proposal was made to increase voluntary contributions through the use of a guild festival. Moore notes that, by 1556, eight burgesses had been appointed "to frame measures 'for the ordering of the maintenance of the poor and impotent people, for providing them work, for suppressing of vagrants and idle persons.'" In 1557, Ipswich imposed compulsory poor rates and ordered that any persons refusing to pay such rates were to be punished.¹¹⁸ Moore does not offer any figures to support her inference that the imposition of rates was successful, and we cannot know if private charity or public aid dominated poor relief in Ipswich during our period.

For Gloucester, Peter Clark argues that, before 1640, the issue of poor relief was inextricably linked with the issue of social order. In response to the problem, the city of Gloucester "established, mostly piecemeal, an intricate system of poor relief."¹¹⁹ From the 1560s on, the city imposed poor rates, built and opened a house of correction, and

¹¹⁷Carol Moore, "Poor Relief in Elizabethan England: A New Look at Ipswich," Proceedings and Papers of the Georgia Association of Historians 3 (1986): 103.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹¹⁹Peter Clark, "The Ramoth-Gilead of the Good: Urban Change and Political Radicalism at Gloucester, 1540-1640," in The English Commonwealth 1547-1640, eds. Peter Clark, Alan G. R. Smith, and Nicholas Tyacke (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1979), 175.

embarked on plans to set the poor on work. Other measures included the control of grain prices during periods of dearth and the revamping of the city's hospitals and almshouses to make their administration and thus their effectiveness, better. Clark goes on to note that "overall, Gloucester's relief measures ... seem to have been implemented with drive and relative efficiency, particularly after the turn of the century."¹²⁰ Again, no figures are presented to judge the efficacy of the poor rates that were imposed.

The progress of poor-law legislation in Lincoln followed the path taken in other localities: starting in 1551-52, it slowly moved from a system based on voluntary contributions to one based on compulsion.¹²¹ Two collectors of the poor rate were nominated in that year, and in accordance with statute, the bishop was to exhort any persons who refused to pay after consultation with his parish parson. By 1563, obstinate defaulters might be bound by a recognizance in the amount of £10 to the mayor, who would then impose an obligatory rate. Refusal of this payment meant imprisonment. In 1560, beadles of the poor were appointed and the archdeacon of Lincoln, Aylmer, instructed his curates in 1569 to exhort their parishioners continually to give alms at their churches. It is about this time, J. W. F. Hill argues, that "systematic parish collection" began, as evidenced by accounts surviving from the parishes of St. Mark and St. Martin.¹²² Collectors were present in every parish

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹J. W. F. Hill, Tudor and Stuart Lincoln (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 89, 105, 134-35.

¹²²Ibid.

by 1592, and all defaulters were presented to the mayor. Measures to put the poor on work appeared from 1584 on, while the prices of bread, ale and beer were "overseen so that the poor were not robbed." The vagrancy problem increased greatly in the early decades of the seventeenth century, and marshals and beadles were appointed to go out on patrol to apprehend such persons, who would then be committed to the house of correction along with beggars; strange poor were put out, and newcomers had to put up security against becoming a burden on the parishes. Visitation of the plague in 1624 led to strictures against gatherings of beggars and appeals were sent out to strangers to aid in the relief of Lincoln's sick poor.¹²³

For Salisbury at the turn of the century and up to the mid-seventeenth century, Paul Slack maintains that the poor rate brought in twice the amount proceeding to the town from charitable benefactions, but that the two together were still insufficient to meet the problem of poverty in Salisbury.¹²⁴ Slack notes that "attempts to levy additional rates met with strong opposition" since critics alleged that "householders bribed the overseers not to assess them, and the overseers themselves distributed doles to their friends and relations." Following the passage of the great Elizabethan poor law at the end of the sixteenth century, Salisbury tried to follow statutory law by having the accounts of all churchwardens and overseers of the poor examined monthly by the Justices of the Peace. Despite the fact that houses of correction had

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Paul Slack, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666," in Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700, eds. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 179-80.

been ordered by the statute of 1576, Salisbury did not establish one until 1602, and only then under the aegis of private charity. Slack points out that, over the next two decades, "there was a succession of new committees and fresh 'projects for the poor,' all with no practical result." Even though, as Slack maintains, rates in Salisbury at the end of the century outstripped private philanthropy in caring for the poor, it is evident also that the system was greatly flawed and remained so at least up to 1625.¹²⁵

The examples of these other localities suggest the unique quality of each area's experience, based on its own resources and the extent of the problem it dealt with. Each locality developed its own system in response to particular circumstances and needs, although all operated loosely upon the same statutory framework. The feature that stands out in Exeter is the extent to which public charity derived from rates and city initiatives was able to alleviate the problems of poverty. As we will see in the conclusion of this study, the public effort in Exeter was admirable, but it did not exceed that made by private philanthropy.

¹²⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE OF CHURCH AND FAITH

From time immemorial, one of the traditional functions of the Church has been to provide succour to its less fortunate members, in the form of alms, food, or clothing. With the advent of the Reformation, however, this function was severely curtailed, as the Crown usurped the holdings of the Church for its own, which comprised, by some estimates, in excess of one-third of the wealth of England. Struggling to restore equilibrium in the aftermath of this watershed development, the Church's ability to dispense aid to the poor suffered a substantial decline. But what percentage of its income was the Church bestowing on the poor before its resources were appropriated? Joyce Youings notes that "Canon law, the law of the Church, required that at least one quarter of all ecclesiastical income be bestowed on the poor, and parish clergy were supposed to devote one third of their income to alms-giving and 'hospitality'."¹ An analysis of pre- and post-Dissolution religious charity in the city of Exeter will thus provide a clearer picture of the Church's role in the relief of the poor on a local basis. This analysis follows an examination of contemporary sermons and religious literature in order to illuminate early modern attitudes about the care of the unfortunate. In addition, these documents reveal the differences between Catholic and Protestant thought on the subject of poverty.

¹Joyce Youings, Sixteenth-Century England (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 255.

Sermons and Religious Literature

The literary exhortations to care for the poor have, of course, their foundation in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. For purposes of our discussion, we will use William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, which was completed in 1534.² Tyndale's Bible is acknowledged to be the foundation of the English Bible, as its influence is clear in the Geneva Bible of 1560, the Bishops's Bible of 1568, and the 1611 Authorized Version of the bible prepared under the direction of King James I.³

The gospel of Saint Matthew contains perhaps the most famous statement regarding the proliferation of poverty in the world. In the Catholic bible⁴, Jesus says "The poor you will always have with you" while Tyndale translates this statement as "For ye shall have poor folk always with you."⁵ This statement has become something of a "call to arms" when discussing the issue of poverty. Sermons of the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods are quite explicit in their biblical antecedents, and the gospel of St. Matthew was a favorite reference, as it told the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The gospel of St. Luke contains another popular phrase that praises the poor: "Blessed

²David Daniell, ed., Tyndale's New Testament (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

³Ibid., xi-xiv.

⁴For the Catholic version of the Bible, I have used the following: The New American Bible (Camden, NJ: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1971); Matthew 26:11 NAB.

⁵Matthew 26:A Tyndale.

be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God."⁶ When dining with the Pharisee, the Lord advised him to "give alms of that ye have, and behold all is clean to you."⁷ Again, in Luke 14, the Lord advises a Pharisee who had invited him to dinner: "But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, and thou shalt be happy, for they cannot recompense thee."⁸ The beggar Lazarus was allowed to die at the gate of a rich man who had refused him aid; on his death, he "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." The rich man, after death, suffered the flames of hell; crying out to Abraham to save him, he received this reply: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime, receivedst thy pleasure, and contrarywise Lazarus pain. Now therefore he is comforted, and thou art punished."⁹ The moral of the story, of course, is that the rich man, by passing up his opportunity to help the poor, insured his everlasting torment in hell.

"God loveth a cheerful giver" is the lesson of II Corinthians, chapter 9, while Hebrews, chapter 13, reminds us "to do good, and to distribute forget not, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."¹⁰ The epistle of St. James castigates those who favor the rich over the poor:

Hath not God chosen the poor of this world,
which are rich in faith, and heirs of the
kingdom which he promised to them that love him?

⁶Luke 6:D Tyndale.

⁷Luke 11:F Tyndale.

⁸Luke 14:C Tyndale.

⁹Luke 16:F Tyndale.

¹⁰2 Corinthians 9:B; Hebrews 13:C Tyndale.

But ye have despised the poor. Are not the rich
they which oppress you...?¹¹

Reward comes to those who give alms, as they will have nothing to fear after death. In Acts, the story of Cornelius illustrates that a life of piety and alms-giving is rewarded, as Cornelius was baptized by St. Peter, because his "alms are come up into remembrance before God."¹²

The Old Testament was cited by Tyndale for many precedents dealing with treatment of the poor. Ecclesiastes was cited for its admonition to secular leaders: "If you see oppression of the poor, and violation of rights and justice in the realm, do not be shocked by the fact, for the high official has another higher than he watching him, and above these are others higher still."¹³ Chapter 15 of Deuteronomy is entitled "Debts and the Poor" and deals with the oppression brought about by debt on all segments of the population. Relaxation from the pressures of creditors is dictated every seven years, and this relaxation is to flow downwards to the poorest individual:

If one of your kinsmen in any community is in need in the land...you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to him in his need. Instead, you shall open your hand to him and freely lend him enough to meet his need. Be on your guard lest...you grudge help to your needy kinsman and give him nothing, else he will cry to the LORD against you and you will be held guilty. When you give to him, give freely and not with ill will, for the LORD, your God, will bless you for this in all your works and undertakings.¹⁴

¹¹James 2:A Tyndale.

¹²Apostles 10:A Tyndale.

¹³Ecclesiastes 5:7 NAB.

¹⁴Deuteronomy 15:1-10 NAB.

This dictum is underscored in Proverbs, where we are reminded that "He who has compassion on the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his good deed." This book also tells us that it is better to be "a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked in his ways and rich."¹⁵

True fasting does not consist of falsely pious rituals, but means "sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own."¹⁶ In the book of Tobit, fatherly instruction includes a discourse on alms-giving:

Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, and God's face will not be turned away from you. Son, give alms in proportion to what you own...But do not hesitate to give alms; you will be storing up a goodly treasure for yourself against the day of adversity. Almsgiving frees one from death, and keeps one from going into the dark abode. Alms are a worthy offering in the sight of the Most High for all who give them.¹⁷

Both the Old and New Testaments, then, provided inspiration for the early modern sermonizers, who used these texts in a number of different ways.

The central argument of charity as a Christian virtue went hand-in-hand with the argument that alms-giving brings its own rewards to the givers. For the devout, the return comes in the form of a heavenly afterlife; for the social reformer, it is the maintenance of public

¹⁵Proverbs 19:17 NAB.

¹⁶Isaiah 58:7 NAB.

¹⁷Tobit 4:7-11 NAB.

order; the moralist sees it as compliance with the rule of God. In any case, though "charity is meant to be a free gift, a voluntary, unrequited surrender of resources" it is in fact performed in order to solicit a return of some kind.¹⁸ The giver expects gratitude at the very least, and sometimes a great deal more. Marcel Mauss argues that "free gifts" do nothing to create solidarity within a community; if there is no opportunity to repay the giver, a wedge is driven between sections of society that cannot easily be repaired. Further, Mauss posits that there really is no such thing as a "free gift;" we all give in anticipation of some kind of reward, however ephemeral or substantive it might be.¹⁹

Felicity Heal follows Mauss in the idea that charity was given in anticipation of a return. She argues that people in early modern England continued to follow the tradition of simple hospitality which emanated from both ancient and Christian traditions. A process of reciprocity was involved when a host invited an outsider to sit at table with him and his family; after the meal, the outsider was expected to show his thanks by performing some deed, usually the issuance of an invitation to partake of a meal at his table. The needy who appeared at the gates of the rich could not offer such a return, but Heal posits that their "gift" involved prayers and thanks which then accrued to the spiritual benefit of the giver. There was, according to Heal, an "aristocratic ethos of largess and openness" in pre-Reformation England that slowly disappeared over the course of the sixteenth century. The disappearance of this type of

¹⁸Marcel Mauss, The Gift (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990), vii.

¹⁹Ibid.

reciprocal hospitality was due, she believes, to three main factors. She points to the intrusion of the central state into local affairs, when national legislation of the problem of poverty removed it as a concern for the individual: one didn't need to feel guilty about the poor if the government was taking care of them. Secondly, an increased emphasis on materialism among the aristocratic class gradually drew them out of relationships where no tangible reward was forthcoming, as was the case with the poor. Finally, the Protestant dismissal of the idea of "good works" as an entree to heaven enabled its followers to quit giving alms in good conscience.²⁰ Heal believes that giving did not end abruptly, but that the advent of Protestantism, combined with national legislation and a new emphasis on material return, acted to reduce philanthropy to a secondary role, at least by 1700. As evidence, she recounts a ballad of William Blake in the early eighteenth century which celebrates the personal charity that characterized an earlier time:

Thus sitting at the table wide the Mayor and
Aldermen were fit to give law to the city; each
eat as much as ten: the hungry poor enter'd the
hall to eat good beef and ale--good English
hospitality, O then it did not fail!²¹

This theme of remunerative charity is one which figures quite largely in the Elizabethan and Jacobean sermon.

In a sermon titled The Poore Mans Teares (1592), Henry Smith used Matthew 10:42 for the starting point of his work: "He that shall give to one of the least of these a cup of cold water in my name, he shall not

²⁰Felicity Heal, Hospitality in Early Modern England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 123, 134, 391, 402.

²¹William Blake, quoted in *ibid.*, 403.

lose his reward."²² Smith's sermon was a call to alms-giving, and he was chastising his fellow men for withholding alms from the poor:

I know in these days and in this iron age, it is as hard a thing to persuade men to part with money, as to pull out their eyes, and cast them away, or to cut off their hands, and give them away, or to cut off their legs and throw them away. Nevertheless, I cannot but wonder that men are so slow in giving of alms, and so hard-hearted towards the relief of the poor, when the promises of God warrant them not to lose their reward.²³

Smith made it clear that the gift of alms should not be bestowed "as the Papists doth" to achieve merit through good works, but to show true Christian values and faith. Further, "alms is a charitable relief given by the godly" to relieve the needy; Smith said that the first reaction of what he termed "rich cormorants" to the sight of a person begging is to assume that they are "rogues" who should be sent to Bridewell, and should not "be suffered to live."²⁴ Smith did not deny that there were false beggars who "ought to be suppressed by godly policy," and he counseled the truly poor to have patience in waiting for help, however little it might be.²⁵ Since most people could not differentiate between a false beggar and a true one, Smith advised that one should not even try; the unworthy will be punished by God for any misappropriation. On the other hand, Smith was adamant that no alms should be given to any who

²²The Sermons of Mr. Henry Smith (London: Andrew Kembe et al, 1657), 502.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 503-504.

²⁵Ibid., 506.

exhibit "lewd behavior," as such action would be encouraging the continuance of ungodly behavior.²⁶

Smith asked the rich, when "in the midst of all your jollity" to "let the tears of the poor admonish you to relieve them" because these tears should "breed great compassion in the hearts of Christians...."²⁷ To those rich who plead that they are already too burdened by charitable giving, Smith pointed to the example of David, who said that the just man will always be taken care of, if he has met his responsibilities as a Christian. The theme of reward is sounded once again as Smith reminded his readers that "Blessed is he that considereth of the poor and needy, the Lord shall deliver him in the day of trouble."²⁸ He de the point even more plain further on: "No man giveth but he that hath received."²⁹ It is not enough to speak well of the poor and to make professions of charity; deeds, not words, are what the poor need. As Smith wrote, "great boast and small roast makes unsavory mouths."³⁰ Those poor who were not provided succour, and who were otherwise honest, were driven to commit wrong in order to provide for themselves and their families; if their want was assuaged, public order was assured.³¹

Archbishop Whitgift authorized the publication of three sermons or homilies in 1596 that had as their mission to "move compassion towards

²⁶Ibid., 506.

²⁷Ibid., 507.

²⁸Ibid., 509.

²⁹Ibid., 510.

³⁰Ibid., 512.

³¹Ibid., 515.

the poor and needy."³² These sermons were published at the height of the crisis in the 1590s, and spoke to a general lack of charity among the populace. The first sermon was quite eloquent in its indictment of this tendency:

In the Apostles' time, the love of many was waxen cold; and in our time, the charity of most men is frozen up; so that is now high time to blow up the dead sparks of love, and to kindle the cold coals of charity; lest the light of the one be quite put out, by doing of evil, and the heat of the other be clean extinguished by forgetting to do good.³³

Lest the readers forget, the sermon also emphasized the certain reward that would come from charitable acts by referring to Solomon's admonition to "cast thy bread upon the waters, for after many days thou shalt find it." The author of the sermon interpreted this directive to mean that money given to charity may appear to be lost, but one should not doubt that reward would surely follow.³⁴ We should never forget that "we are all God's beggars; that God therefore may acknowledge his beggars, let us not despise ours."³⁵ The author pointed out that it was the responsibility of the magistracy to take the lead in performing charitable acts, and to set a good example that other men would follow, such as that of the Queen who dispensed largesse to the poor of London.³⁶

³²Three Sermons or Homilies to move compassion towards the poor and needy set forth by authority A.D. 1596 (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1842).

³³Ibid., 1:5.

³⁴Ibid., 1:10.

³⁵Ibid., 1:12.

³⁶Ibid., 1:13-14.

The second sermon also decried the fact "that love and charity was withered, and quite dried up" and stressed that "a Christian man should do these things [charitable acts] in hope of resurrection."³⁷ It is interesting to note that good works were being alluded to as necessary to achieve resurrection, when Protestant theology was quite clear on the tenet of faith alone as the only requisite for salvation. As late as the turn of the century, then, Anglican sermons still bore marks of Catholic theology, lending credence to the theory that Protestantism was still not inculcated into the populace at large.

In one respect, however, these sermons echoed the prevailing view which differentiated between the deserving poor and others: those to be "called first" were those that "do labour, and take pains in their vocation and trade" but who were now forced, by current circumstances, to take charity in order to survive. Other deserving poor were those who could not labor due to infirmity or age, and who must "be relieved by men of ability...."³⁸ In contrast to these generous men of ability, there were many who were willing to take advantage of the crisis in order to make a profit; the author of the sermon seemed to be overcome by this naked greed:

But, alas, when I think upon this matter, I cannot contain myself, but I must cry out, O times! O Manners! There are in this land many greedy cormorants, I should have said corn-masters, who would rather keep their corn for vermin to feed upon than bring it to the market for the food of men....³⁹

³⁷Ibid., 2:23.

³⁸Ibid., 2:29, 31.

³⁹Ibid., 2:38.

As long as the poor have existed, so too have those who take advantage of their plight.

Good works were also emphasized, but with a decidedly Protestant aspect, in a sermon of 1621, written by Lewis Bayly, bishop of Bangor, and dedicated to Prince Charles, heir to King James.⁴⁰ Among the works of charity which a Christian should practice are the remittance of debts to the poor, and the "giving [of] almes to the poor, that want relief and sustenance."⁴¹ Bayly instructed that two things should be observed in the giving of alms: (1) the rules and (2) the rewards. As to rules, good works should "proceed from Faith, else they cannot please God" and one should "not think by thy good Works and Alms to merit Heaven; for in vain had the Son of God shed his blood, if Heaven could have been purchased either for Money or Meat." On the other hand, "every true Christian ... [who] hopes to come to Heaven, must do good works...."⁴² The inherent contradiction between these two statements is not explained, although it is assumed that good works proceed from true faith.

In addition, one "must not give thine Alms to independent Vagabonds, who live in wilful idleness and filthiness, but to the religious and honest poor...."⁴³ As long as one was not sure of the unworthiness of an individual asking for alms, it was permissible to give, since "it is better to give unto ten counterfeits, than to suffer

⁴⁰Lewis Bayly, The Practice of Piety (London: Philip Chetwinde, 1663).

⁴¹Ibid., 297.

⁴²Ibid., 298-99.

⁴³Ibid., 299.

Christ to go in one poor Saint unrelieved."⁴⁴ The rewards which come as a result of alms-giving and good works include a "means to move God in mercy to turn away his temporal judgements from us." Though couched in Protestant terminology, Catholic antecedents are apparent in the concluding paragraphs of Bayly's sermon:

When all this world shall forsake us, then only
good works and good angels shall accompany us,
the one to receive their reward, the other to
deliver their charge.

Liberality in Alms-deeds is our surest
foundation that we shall obtain in eternal life
a liberal reward through the Mercy and Merits of
Christ.⁴⁵

In both these passages, good works are touted as the most certain way to enter the kingdom of Heaven, though their performance, as Bayly notes, must be tempered by true faith and a belief in Christ's mercy and merits. As this sermon demonstrates, it was quite difficult to separate the notion of good works from its Catholic precursors.

Other Elizabethan sermons and homilies reinforced these sentiments as well. In A Sermon of Christian Love and Charity the unnamed author noted that "Of all things that be good to be taught unto Christian people, there is nothing more necessary to be spoken of...than charity: as well for that all manner of works of righteousness be contained in it...."⁴⁶ But the increasing emphasis on the denial of charity to those disposed to evil was apparent as well:

⁴⁴Ibid., 299-300.

⁴⁵Ibid., 300.

⁴⁶Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory (London, 1683), 36.

And such evil persons that be so great offenders to God and the Commonweal, charity requireth to be cut from the body of the Commonweal, lest they corrupt other good and honest persons: like as a good Surgion cutteth away a rotten and festered member, for love he hath to the whole body, lest it infect other members adjoining unto it.⁴⁷

An Homily of Alms-Deeds, and Mercifulness towards the Poor and Needy also highlighted the special place assigned to good works by God: "Amongst the manifold duties that Almighty God requireth of his faithful servants the true Christians ... there is none that is either more acceptable unto him, or more profitable for them, than are the Works of Mercy and Pity showed upon the Poor...."⁴⁸ The separation between Protestants and Catholics on the issue of good works is symbolized by the use of the word "duties;" for Protestants, almsgiving and other acts of charity towards the poor were considered a Christian duty, while Catholics stressed the voluntary aspect of such deeds.⁴⁹

Pointing out myriad examples in the Bible, the author reiterated his emphasis on the performance of good works as being most pleasing to God, stating that "nothing can be more thankfully taken or accepted of God."⁵⁰ In fact, God intends that poor people should always inhabit the earth in order to test his people's obedience to him. As to reward, the act of alms-giving purges the soul "from the infection and filthy spots

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸An Homily of Alms-Deeds, and Mercifulness towards the Poor and Needy (London, 1683), 241; this homily is contained in Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory (London, 1683).

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 242.

of sin." It further "purgeth [the soul] from all sins, and delivereth from death, and suffereth not the soul to come into darkness."⁵¹ Perhaps faith alone is not sufficient after all? The author responded that all the Scripture citations dealing with the care of the poor do not say that good works are the "original cause of our acception before God," and they cannot wash away sins; rather, the grace that comes with faith manifests itself in these good works, the performance of which enhances, but does not assure, one's admission to Heaven.⁵²

The irony in these sermons is that they were ostensibly written to inspire charity on the part of their readers and listeners, and many of them lament the failure of men to respond in this manner. If, as the Protestant sermonizers argued, good works proceed from true faith, the obvious corollary is that there were not many men of true faith if charitable giving had, as the sermonizers posited, dried up. The author of the Homily acknowledged as much, but said that those who were not content with this answer are people who were never content. Only the "reasonable and godly" would understand his argument, and the rest could be left "to their own willful sense."⁵³ So there is no answer to this dilemma, except that which is conferred by God upon his chosen, a clear expression of Calvinist sentiment.

In point of fact, Protestant sermonizers were eager that their flock did not misunderstand that alms were to be given because of one's duty as a Christian, not for hope of heavenly reward. That they rejected

⁵¹Ibid., 246.

⁵²Ibid., 247.

⁵³Ibid., 248.

the "reward" concept of Catholic theology was deliberate. Some Protestant preachers, such as Lawrence Chaderton, feared that Catholic emphasis on good works might gain them sympathy and converts and thus subvert the Protestant cause. The Catholic writer, Robert Parsons, in his attack on John Foxe, argued that the "new saints" had given up the old tradition of alms-giving, because they do not "think them any way to Paradise, for they count on faith alone to bring them there."⁵⁴ To this end, Chaderton and others wrote sermons that extolled the need for good works, though not their necessity for salvation. Henry Arthington rebutted Parsons, saying, "Neither let the Papists untruly reproach us, that we deny good works, or deedes of charitie, for...we urge them to all Christians...."⁵⁵ But most Protestant ministers told their flock to give because it was the commandment of God.⁵⁶ Edwin Sandys, in one of his first sermons delivered at Paul's Cross when he became Bishop of London in 1570, reduced the message to basics:

I shall therefore exhorte you the citizens of London, and in Christ Jesus require it at your handes that such order may be taken that the poor may bee provided for and not suffred to crie in your streetes.⁵⁷

We shall see that the solution to contradictions in the Protestant message posed by the author of the Homily and others like him was one

⁵⁴Robert Parsons, quoted in Helen C. White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944), 270.

⁵⁵Henry Arthington, quoted in *ibid.*, 270.

⁵⁶White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature, 275.

⁵⁷Edwin Sandys, quoted in *ibid.*, 276.

that was common to all religious writers of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

Helen White points out that the reformers who were the authors of popular religious literature in the sixteenth century inherited a tradition of social-religious criticism which they then adapted to address current social problems. That they sometimes subverted this tradition in order to prove a point was, to them, irrelevant. As White notes, they were "often, in all probability, not entirely aware of what they were doing."⁵⁸ In any case, some of the medieval tradition that was appropriated was to be found in the work of William Langland, The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman (1360-98?); the poem, White argues, centers around the issue of poverty, both the injustice which causes it and the advantage taken by some persons under its guise. Langland decried the tactics of all who conspired to cheat their fellow men, whether they be rapacious landlords, or unscrupulous butchers; he was equally dismissive of the "false beggar," because he not only took advantage of other men's charity, but kept the money that should go to the truly needy. Langland was thus establishing a distinction between those who were deserving of charity, and those who were not worthy of such succour. To Langland, the poor were called to their station by God, and their status was evocative of their closeness to God and his saints. Indeed, the poor, in Langland's view, would find it easier to enter heaven after death than the rich who had not attended to the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. In many ways, Langland regarded

⁵⁸White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature, 2.

poverty as a "blessed state," and counseled the poor to await with patience their heavenly reward.⁵⁹

As the sixteenth century dawned, however, and the problem of poverty grew larger, some reformers expressed their unwillingness to wait for the joys of the after-life and demanded relief in the here and now. Among them was Simon Fish, whose The Supplication of Beggars (1524), expounded on the belief that all the alms of the kingdom belonged to the poor, and should not be directed towards greedy monks and priests, who should be put to work to earn their bread. The writings of Fish and others, supporting the claims of the poor, contributed to the growing animosity towards the monasteries that would eventually culminate in the Dissolution. The dashing of the hopes of the poor to share in the largesse provided by the appropriation of the monastic holdings was given voice in sermons such as the one written by Thomas Lever in 1550, which imputed shame to all those who had taken their share of the booty without concern for their poor brethren.⁶⁰

As we will see, only a relatively small percentage of monastic wealth had gone to the relief of the poor prior to the Dissolution, but little or no provision was made by those who gained the monastic holdings to continue the charitable functions of the monasteries, and the Crown did little or nothing to insure this continuance, thus depriving the poor of one of its traditional, if scant, sources of aid. The land grab which followed the Dissolution was compounded by the process of enclosure that forced many small landowners into poverty and vagrancy, even if they

⁵⁹Ibid., 6-9.

⁶⁰Ibid., 87-92.

managed to hang onto their land. Fighting for their own survival, they were unable to help anyone else who had fallen on hard times, and thus, another source of traditional aid was eradicated. In 1549, Bishop Hugh Latimer reviled the landowners who were responsible for the ruination of his yeoman father, whose farm rental rose from £4 to £16 as ownership of the land changed hands; whereas the elder Latimer was once able to keep hospitality for his poor neighbors, and give alms to the poor, he was now "not able to do any thing for his Prynce, for himselfe, nor for his children, or geve a cup of drinke to the pore."⁶¹ Those preachers like Fish and Lever who had hoped that the new religious order would benefit the poor were equally disturbed that the former monastic lands were in the hands of laymen who had no concern for setting good examples to the populace at large by installing godly men in the benefices of which they now held the power of appointment. Instead, Fish argued, many of the old order had insinuated themselves back into the system, and he blamed the bishops for the restoration of the old order.⁶²

Was the state truly uncaring? There were efforts in the 1530s, spearheaded by Thomas Cromwell, to honor the duties imposed by the notion of the body politic: the idea that king and parliament working together created a political body which, in return for obedience from its subjects, was then responsible for looking after their welfare. Geoffrey Elton argues that this revolution in Tudor government created a paternal state that came to be known as a "commonwealth," composed of social reformers who gave much thought and effort to the issue of poor relief

⁶¹Bishop Hugh Latimer, quoted in *ibid.*, 99.

⁶²White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature, 101-105.

in the aftermath of the Dissolution and other economic upheavals.⁶³ Elton argues that the Dissolution itself had "little effect on rural life" though it did increase the fluidity of agrarian society; nevertheless, the contemporary perception (as symbolized by Latimer's lament) attributed the ills of the country to this event. The culmination, in political terms, was the development of the poor law of 1536 under Cromwell's auspices. Though it proved ineffective, it was the "main achievement of Tudor paternalism" coming from the fertile minds of the commonwealth men.⁶⁴

With the Elizabethan religious settlement, the tenor of the preachers on the subject of poverty did not center on the sufferings of the poor, but rather, "attacked the hard-heartedness that made those capable of giving relief withhold it."⁶⁵ By no means were these preachers decrying the acquisition of wealth; indeed, "God would have some rich, some poore, for distinction sake, and the mutuall exercise of

⁶³G. R. Elton, England under the Tudors, 3d ed. (London: Routledge Press, 1991), 184-85; for an extended discussion of these social reformers, see W. G. Zeeveld, Foundations of Tudor Policy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948).

⁶⁴This issue is further illuminated by the following works: A. B. Ferguson, The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance (Durham, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965); T. F. Mayer, Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal: Humanist Politics and Religion in the Reign of Henry VIII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); W. R. D. Jones, The Tudor Commonwealth 1529-1559 (London: Athlone Press, 1970); G. R. Elton, England under the Tudors, 184-85; see also his Reform and Renewal: Thomas Cromwell and the Common Weal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) and Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶⁵White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature, 193.

liberality and patience."⁶⁶ Under God, everyone had a place to which he or she was assigned, but the preachers were concerned that those whom God had favored with earthly riches should use those riches to benefit the commonwealth and their fellow men and women as well as themselves. As Lever put it, "ryche menne shoulde keep to theym selves no more then they nede, and geve unto the poore so muche as they nede."⁶⁷ So it is not the getting and keeping of money which is evil, but the failure to share that portion which is in excess of one's own needs with the poor. Richard Bernard wrote that, "Riches well used bring grace and estimation before men, for they inable men to shew forth godlinesse, & to passe on their time with more comfort, and to countenance and defend their poor Christian brethren in well-doing."⁶⁸ The rich man who provides for those less fortunate than himself is thus drawn ever closer to true love of God through his acts of charity. The preachers were willing to leave it up to the rich to decide the right ways to use their wealth, but they cautioned them, as did the puritan Samuel Ward, not to concentrate so much on business that they had little or no time to consider the callings of their consciences.

The Protestants, unlike their Catholic counterparts, gave no emphasis to good works to achieve salvation, and were thus, argued James Bisse, more prone to overlook them. Even those rich men who funded almshouses or hospitals late in life, or who left funds in their wills

⁶⁶George Benson, quoted in Millar Maclure, The Paul's Cross Sermons 1534-1642 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 125.

⁶⁷Thomas Lever, quoted in Maclure, The Paul's Cross Sermons, 125.

⁶⁸Richard Bernard, quoted in Maclure, The Paul's Cross Sermons, 125.

to accomplish these goals, often did so out of a guilty conscience, and this was not, Charles Richardson observed, true charity in the eyes of God; it was, in fact, "evidence of the rich man's damnation."⁶⁹ Lest it be thought that only Protestants were being taken to task for lacking true charity, the puritan preacher John Stockwood, in A Sermon preached at Paules Crosse (1578), pointed out that

Alms...doth not consiste in the greatness of that which is bestowed, but in the minde and disposition of the giver...All the large givings of the Papists, of whiche at this daye many make so greate bragges, bycause they be not done in a reverent regarde of the commaundement of the Lorde, in Love, and of an inwarde being touched with the calamities of the needie, but for to be well reported of before men whilst they are alive, and to be praised after thye are dead...are indeed no almes, but Pharaisaicall trumpets.⁷⁰

There is no question, however, that preachers of every stripe, from the Anglo-Catholic Bishop Lancelot Andrewes to the Puritan divine Thomas Adams, followed the medieval tradition espoused by Langland: there was indeed a difference between the deserving poor, and those able-bodied and "sturdy beggars" who took bread and alms illegitimately from the truly needy. The first were "of God's making" and the latter "of their own making."⁷¹ This position came to be clearly adumbrated in the successive Tudor statutes dealing with vagrants and unworthy beggars, as these

⁶⁹Charles Richardson, quoted in Maclure, The Paul's Cross Sermons, 126.

⁷⁰John Stockwood, quoted in Christopher Hill, "The Puritans and the Poor" Past and Present, 2 (November 1952): 49.

⁷¹Thomas Adams, quoted in Maclure, The Paul's Cross Sermons, 127.

measures were punitive in nature rather than responsive to the conditions that had created this large pool of "masterless men."⁷²

Much of the emphasis in these sermons was on the poor having patience in dealing with their hardships; they also pointed out that it was God who called them to their estate, so they were ordained to be poor. The English minister Henry Tripp, who translated The Regiment of the Povertie (1572) from the German writings of Hyperius, contended that distribution of alms by magistrates must be fair in order to forestall grumbling on the part of the poor, but he was emphatic that the poor were called to their state by God and should be content therein. Further, they should practice moral behavior, but Hyperius was more inclined to have the poor police themselves: "Moreover, lette them comforte one another to modestye, sobrietye, and taciturnitie."⁷³

Henry Arthington, writing in 1597, argued that the poor sometimes brought hardship upon themselves by committing six sins "whereby they provoke the Lord to pinch them."⁷⁴ Among these sins were idleness, wasting of goods, impatient complaining about their state, jealousy of others' good fortune, cursing when they do not get what they want, and finally, "their seldome repairing to their parish chruches, to heare and learne their duties better."⁷⁵

⁷²A. L. Beier, Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640 (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1985).

⁷³Hyperius, quoted in White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature, 262.

⁷⁴Henry Arthington, quoted in White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature, 250.

⁷⁵Ibid.

Emphasis on the rewards brought to the righteous through industry and church attendance began to pervade sermons and religious literature of the period. The writings of William Perkins (died 1602), a Cambridge don and Calvinist theologian illustrate Protestant thought on this issue.⁷⁶ Once the assumptions about the different types of poor had become a commonplace, the problem of poverty became one which required the implementation of statutory relief. Perkins wrote about the poor law statute of 1597 in a work called A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of men, written between 1597 and 1601, in which he stated that "Every person of every degree, state, sexe, or condition without exception, must have some personall and particular calling to walke in."⁷⁷

Perkins argued that if every person followed his or her true calling, they would be able to seek God's kingdom, and find whatever they needed on this earth to fulfill their life, regardless of their situation. It was *spiritual* poverty, rather than material poverty, with which Perkins was concerned. For Perkins, beggars "are (for the most part) a cursed generation...They joyne not themselves to any setled congregation for the obtaining of God's kingdome, and so this promise [of salvation] belongs not to them."⁷⁸ By disrupting God's plan that assigned each person to a particular place, beggars were rightfully denied a place in heaven: they "are to be taken as maine enemies of this ordinance of God; and seeing a most excellent law is provided to restraine them, it is the part of every good subject or Christian to set

⁷⁶Hill, "Puritans and the Poor."

⁷⁷William Perkins, quoted in *ibid.*, 39.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

themselves for the executing, strengthening and upholding of the same."⁷⁹ The only hope of salvation for the poor was to set them on work; once disciplined by a return to their calling, they can then be restored to the Church, and pray that salvation will be granted to them. There was a concomitant benefit as well: at the same time as the poor's spiritual health was being attended to, the economic health of the nation was improving through this increased industriousness. Calvin and his followers, Perkins among them, thought that almsgiving without any return was harmful to the poor.

A final consideration must be given as to the accessibility of the sermons, homilies, injunctions and other writings concerning the relief of the poor during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Did the populace at large "get" the message about caring for the poor in both a literal and figurative sense? Robert Whiting notes that the Protestant faith was most often communicated from the pulpit through homilies and official injunctions, but the evidence in the south-west shows that the reading of these documents was "less than frequent."⁸⁰ He goes on to argue that traditional preaching was gone by 1570, but was only "in part...replaced by its Protestant equivalent." The decline in traditional preaching was thus responsible for the displacement of Catholicism, and was also responsible for the lack of enthusiastic replacement by Protestant affiliation.⁸¹ In the early years of the

⁷⁹Ibid., 40.

⁸⁰Robert Whiting, The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 251-52.

⁸¹Ibid.

Reformation in Exeter, ardent propagandists of the new religion were not often to be found. An exception was Bishop Hugh Latimer, whose sermons were delivered at Exeter in June, 1534.⁸² In 1549, Hooker bemoaned the lack of "learned preachers...to teach and instruct the people."⁸³ Whiting notes that it was not until the appointment of Miles Coverdale in August 1551 that Exeter "experienced a bishop who was firmly committed to the preaching of the Protestant faith."⁸⁴ Preaching daily, Coverdale exhorted not only the congregation at the Cathedral, but also that at St. Mary Major. After the death of Edward VI, Hooker wrote, came the end of "the preaching of [the] gospel and the true religion."⁸⁵ If the message in general was not reaching the public, then it was possible that the admonitions about charitable behavior were also not being disseminated.

Even after Elizabeth came to the throne, and the Protestant message was once again heard from the pulpit, it was clear that there was a great lack of ministers to preach the new faith and inspire their listeners to works of mercy. William Alley, Bishop of Exeter from 1560, compiled a report of the parishes of the diocese, and in some six hundred parishes, only twenty-eight licensed preachers could be found. The result was that approximately 95 percent of parishes in the southwest had no minister who

⁸²Ibid., 245.

⁸³Commonplace Book of John Hooker, Chamberlain of the City of Exeter (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), fols. 349-50 and John Vowell alias Hoker, The Description of the Citie of Excester, ed. Walter J. Harte et al, 3 vols. (Exeter: The Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1947), 1:26.

⁸⁴Whiting, Blind Devotion of the People, 247-48.

⁸⁵Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:26 and Commonplace Book, fols. 349-50.

could preach the reformed religion.⁸⁶ The efforts of private patrons and the bishop in securing such ministers went forward in the 1560s, but, even by 1570, the average layman was still not getting the Protestant word in any but a limited sense.⁸⁷ Whiting argues that the great bulk of sixteenth-century southwestern people did not, due primarily to illiteracy, read literature in general, and religious literature in particular. What religious instruction they got usually came in the form of hearing it read aloud by a "literate elite."⁸⁸ It was not until the 1580s that agitation began to take place to assure that Protestant theology was being properly dispersed to the public; only with the establishment of the civic lectureship in 1599 did Exeter have a regular source for the preaching of the Protestant gospel. Even then it was fraught with dissension, and it was not until the 1620s that the element of regularity in the preaching of the Protestant faith was present. All of these factors seem to indicate that philanthropic impulses were not the result of haranguing from the pulpit, nor did they proceed from a widespread reading of other literature on the subject of poverty. While the Church was trying to inspire charity in its congregations, was it fulfilling its own role in this regard? The following analysis suggests answers to that question.

The Church and Charity

Although monastic charity is not a feature of philanthropic efforts in the Exeter of our period, it is important to examine the antecedents

⁸⁶Whiting, Blind Devotion of the People, 249.

⁸⁷Ibid., 250.

⁸⁸Ibid., 199.

of monastic charity in order to determine the gap, if any, left behind when these benefactions ceased. Relying on the work of Alexander Savine, W. K. Jordan argues that "the charitable burden borne by the monasteries was ... relatively slight, though ... it cannot be dismissed as without importance."⁸⁹ Savine examined the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 to determine the gross income of a large number of the monasteries and monastic foundations extant before the Dissolution and found that, of 323 foundations which had a combined gross income of £112,000 per annum, that only £2,700 per annum, or 2.4 percent of the total, was being expended on the distribution of alms. Jordan acknowledges that this figure is an underestimate and offers a statistical projection of £6,500 per annum based on an annual income of £130,000; the percentage of charitable giving thus doubles to approximately 5 percent.

Dom David Knowles, however, points out that Savine clearly notes that the *Valor* commissioners were both "inconsistent and grasping," and relied heavily on secondary (read: faulty) evidences to make their assessments of any given monastic establishment.⁹⁰ Knowles recasts Savine's findings to arrive at a substantially higher percentage of monastic charity, based on the inclusion of all forms of philanthropy in which the monasteries were involved. A substantial amount of aid was

⁸⁹W. K. Jordan, Philanthropy in England 1480-1660 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), 59; Jordan's conclusions are based on the work of Alexander Savine, English Monasteries on the eve of the Dissolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909).

⁹⁰Dom David Knowles, The Religious Orders in England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 2:264-65. Other scholars, notably Joyce Youings, have argued that Savine's work on the *Valor* is a "remarkably reliable, if conservative, survey of monastic resources." Youings, The Dissolution of the Monasteries (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971), 15.

technically disallowed by the *Valor* commissioners, including a number of eleemosynary expenses; in addition, the commissioners did not include educational benefits provided by the monks to young boys residing within the monasteries who were there strictly to attend grammar schools sponsored by the monks. Income from gifts or legacies that required charitable acts on the part of the monks was also excluded from income, and Knowles believes that these "bona fide legal obligations" were perhaps as much as 50 percent greater than the amounts allowed by the commissioners.

Many acts of charity could not be gauged in monetary terms: following age-old monastic traditions, the poor were given relief through gifts of meat, clothing and other small necessities they might otherwise not have been able to obtain, and this aid was dispensed on a daily basis to supplicants at the door or gate of the monastery. Referring to Lanfranc's Monastic Constitutions, Knowles recognizes another monastic tradition, the practice of giving the full portion of food and drink of a dead monk to the poor for a month following his death. Similarly, monks who did not consume their daily food allotment could be assured that any excess would not go to waste and would, in fact, be doled out to the poor.⁹¹ Another source of charity came from the abbots and other officials of the monastery, who dispensed alms from their own funds "to friars and other victims of calamity," and were similarly generous in bestowing plate and vestments on village churches whose incomes did not extend to such luxuries.⁹² Despite the indiscriminate nature of these

⁹¹Knowles, Religious Orders in England, 265.

⁹²Ibid., 265-66.

gifts, Knowles argues, they must be considered when constructing a true picture of monastic charity. He contends that this unrecorded aid doubles, and perhaps even trebles, the amounts noted by the *Valor* commissioners; under these circumstances, then, the true percentage of monastic philanthropy lies nearer the tenth, the traditional apportionment for charity.⁹³

What does this tell us about the situation in Exeter? We must first examine the amounts credited to the monastic foundations in and around the city by the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in order to determine the percentage of dispensed charity involved. Hooker prepared a list of all "the monasteries and religious houses within the Diocese of Exeter, of their dissolutions and of their several values," basing his figures, it appears, on those assessments found in the *Valor*. The Diocese was, of course, a much larger area than the city itself, and the total value assigned by Hooker to the monastic foundations within the Diocese was £5,678 3d.⁹⁴ Since this study is concerned with the poor of the city alone, however, we shall confine our examination to the monasteries and religious houses contained in the city and its immediate environs. In the city, the Priory of St. Nicholas--a foundation of Benedictine monks--had an income of £147 12s.⁹⁵ and was suppressed on the eighteenth of

⁹³Ibid., 266.

⁹⁴Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:267.

⁹⁵Ibid., 2:265; also, Valor Ecclesiasticus (London: HMSO, 1810-34), 2:314.

September, 28 Henry VIII (1536), but not without some small protest.⁹⁶ According to Hooker, the king's commissioners came to Exeter to execute their orders of suppression, and after visiting the priory of St. Nicholas, they ordered a workman to pull down the rood loft of the church and then left for dinner. After the work began

...certain women and wives in the city, namely Joan Reeve, Elizabeth Glandfield, Agnes Collaton, Alice Miller, Joan Reed and others, minding to stop the suppressing of that house, came in all haste to the said church, some with spikes, some with shovels, some with pikes, and some with such tools as they could get and, the church door being fast, they broke it open. And finding there the man pulling down the rood loft they all sought, [by] all the means they could, to take him and hurled stones unto him, in so much that for his safety he was driven to take to the tower for his refuge. And yet they pursued him so eagerly that he was enforced to leap out at a window and so to save himself, and very hardly he escaped the breaking of his neck, but yet he brake one of his ribs.⁹⁷

Needless to say, this action by a group of women highly embarrassed the city officials, and one of Exeter's aldermen, John Blackaller, was sent "with all speed" to the monastery to try to placate the women as best he could. He apparently was not very effective, as one of the women struck him and sent him on his way. At this point, the mayor, William

⁹⁶Prior to its dissolution, Hooker provides a glimpse at the work done at St. Nicholas' Priory, which had a special Poor Man's Parlor: "There repaired daily seven poor men before dinner-time, and to every one of them was delivered on the flesh days a two-penny loaf, a pottle of ale, and a piece of fish, and on the Fridays likewise at afternoon, as soon as dinner was done, all such poor as were tenants came, and every one of them should have also a two-penny loaf, a pottle of ale, a piece of fish and a penny in money. See Heal, Hospitality in Early Modern England, 234, which draws from George Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 116.

⁹⁷John Hooker, quoted in Youngs, Dissolution of the Monasteries, 164-65.

Hurst, concerned that a pending royal charter granting the city the status of a separate royal county might be withheld, went to the monastery with a number of his officers to apprehend the women before the king's commissioners could make a bad report. The women had locked themselves into the church, but the mayor and his men were successful in breaking into it, though it was "with much ado" that they managed to seize the women and send them off to jail. The commissioners proved to be understanding of the women's motives and asked the mayor to release them when it became clear that no men had been involved in the protest. It seems that the commissioners felt the womens' actions were strictly a nuisance, whereas male involvement would have been taken more seriously. A subsequent inquiry revealed that the women had only intended to stop the carpenters from pulling down the crucifix and the statues of the saints; they had apparently heard that the carpenters were looking forward to the task, having boasted that these "idols" would be pulled down.⁹⁸

This is one of the few incidents on record involving the reaction of local residents to the actions of the commission, and it reveals several interesting things about Exeter's religious attitudes. It is clear that the mayor and the officials of the city were anxious not to offend the king in the person of his commissioners and were willing to do whatever they had to do to quell the disturbance wrought by the women. While they were certainly concerned about the charter that was on the line, the episode also shows the city leaders' willingness to accept the crown's guidance on religious matters. There were known Catholics among

⁹⁸Ibid.

the council of twenty-four, but their quick response to the threat posed by the women's actions reveals a united determination to stay in the good graces of the king, regardless of personal religious preference. At the same time, the incident shows the divisions apparent within the local populace: the carpenters' reported reference to the crucifix and the saints' statues as idols is clearly indicative of a Protestant bias, while the women's attempts to protect the monastery's church impart their Catholic leanings. In any event, the suppression went forward without further resistance, and the priory of St. Nicholas was absorbed by the crown.

The reference to the crucifix and the saints' statues as idols worthy of destruction is an idea explored by Lee Palmer Wandel, who argues that the Protestant iconoclasts did not link idols to blasphemy "but to insubordinate piety and to collective ethics."⁹⁹ In Zurich, the iconoclasts referred to the eternal lights which burned on the altar as "lamps [which] symbolized the absence of Christian charity, both in that they were not supported through gifts and in that they consumed wealth that could feed the poor."¹⁰⁰ A more direct indictment of the idols said they "were voracious, stealing food and heat from needy human beings, the 'true images of God.'"¹⁰¹ For Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin's mentor in Switzerland, "other 'images,' the poor, were to be the true images of God: They best captured what an 'image of God' was to be."

⁹⁹Lee Palmer Wandel, Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 101.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 190.

Wandel is thus arguing for a close link between iconoclasm and the Protestant urge to provide meaningful charity for the poor.¹⁰²

Outside the East gate stood the Priory of Polslo, a small community consisting of fourteen nuns, valued at £164 8s. 11 1/4d; it was suppressed during 1538.¹⁰³ The Franciscans (Gray Friars), maintained a house that had been within the city in the area known as Friarhay until the year 1250 and was then removed to just outside the South gate; upon its suppression in 1538, Hooker estimates its value to have been £6. Similarly suppressed in 1538, the Dominicans (Black Friars), whose establishment had been founded in 1250 and which was located near the East gate, carried a value of £2. Both communities were quite small, as the Dominican house consisted of fifteen friars, while the Franciscans numbered ten.¹⁰⁴

The only other religious foundation was St. John's Hospital, which had been founded in 1239 under the auspices of two brothers, Gilbert and John Long.¹⁰⁵ According to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the total income of this establishment was £102 12s. 9d. Out of this income, £29 was allocated to provide for thirteen poor men who resided within the

¹⁰²Ibid., 194; see also Wandel, Always Among Us; Ann Kibbey, The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A study of rhetoric, prejudice, and violence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 57-63, provides a discussion of the concept of "living idols."

¹⁰³Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:265; *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, 2:315; Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 164.

¹⁰⁴Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 2:267; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 176.

¹⁰⁵The Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities (Exeter: T. Besley, 1825), 1.

hospital and to support nine grammar students.¹⁰⁶ This provision amounts to approximately 28 percent of the total income of the hospital; even if one excludes the student support, we are still left with (on a per capita basis) an allowance of £1 6s. for each pauper, totaling some £17, meaning that 16 percent of the hospital's income was being spent on the poor. This amount is clearly in excess of the traditional percentages accorded to monastic relief propounded by Savine and Knowles. While it may be that the hospital's expenditure on the poor was the exception rather than the rule, it can be argued that it reveals the uncertainty in assigning arbitrary figures for charitable spending on the part of the religious foundations in England prior to the Dissolution.

In any case, the hospital was suppressed on February 20, 1539, and Hooker estimates its value at dissolution to have been £902 5s 7d.¹⁰⁷ The fate of the hospital's worth can be traced in several documents. In 1555-56, under a proclamation issued by Queen Mary, a number of city worthies, including John Blackaller, William Hurst, and John Peryam, declared that they had "lately acquired for ourselves and our heirs ... all those free and quit annual rents ... belonging ... [to] the late priory or hospital of St. John within the City of Exeter now dissolved...." This income came from certain lands and tenements once held by the priory, providing the gentlemen with an income of £3 8s. 12d.¹⁰⁸ Two years later, the account of John Aylworth, who was the Court of Augmentation's Receiver-General in the county of Devon shows a

¹⁰⁶Valor Ecclesiasticus, 2:314.

¹⁰⁷Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 1:267.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 2:411-25.

cash receipt for income from the lands of St. John's, Exeter, in the amount of £37 5s. 5 1/2d for 1558-59; though the value of the lands are not revealed, the income generated by them approximates Hooker's earlier estimate.¹⁰⁹ It is apparent that certain rents were later reserved by the Crown for the use of the poor. Hooker notes that in 1562, Queen Elizabeth gave to city officials the nomination of the poor who had been receiving £1 1s. 8d apiece out of the income from the land rents of St. John's.¹¹⁰ What these different accounts tell us is that, both in its original incarnation and after its dissolution, St. John's Hospital must have provided a substantial income that was used in diverse ways, one of which, it consistently appears, was to provide relief for the poor.

As noted earlier, the purpose of this exercise is to establish the percentage of poor relief provided by the monastic foundations within the city of Exeter prior to the Dissolution. From the evidence, it appears that Savine's 2.4 percentage of monastic charity is too low; we must also concede that the tenth posited by Knowles is probably also unrealistic, despite the exception presented by St. John's, Exeter. The true percentage probably lies between the two extremes; since we cannot know, based on the evidence, the exact figure, we must use a median number that lies between the low of 2.4 percent and the high of 10 percent; this figure is about 5 percent, which agrees with Jordan's hypothesis.

¹⁰⁹Youngs, Dissolution of the Monasteries, 216; one can estimate the value of the lands based on a multiple of the rent according to Joan Thirsk, ed., The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. 4 1500-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

¹¹⁰Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:607.

The monastic foundations within the city of Exeter (excluding St. John's), had a combined total income, per annum, of £320 11 1/4d prior to the Dissolution; five percent of this amount is just over £16. With the addition of the £29 acknowledged to have been contributed by St. John's, we arrive at a total of approximately £45, per annum, derived from monastic sources within the city of Exeter for the relief of the poor. Sums contributed by chantries and benefactions connected to the parish churches varied in amount; a few pounds proceeded from the foundation established by Jasper Horsey in 1518 at the Cathedral, while twelve poor men were supported, along with a priest, by an income of £19 at St. Mary Arches church.¹¹¹ When we combine these miscellaneous sums they amount to approximately £20 directed towards poor relief on the part of the city's churches, which increased the religious-based aid in the city to just under £70. All but approximately £4 10s. of this support ended with the suppression of the monasteries in the 1530s, leaving an amount rounded off to around £63. Although this is not a substantial sum by any means, it did represent an attempt on the part of the Church to alleviate the poverty within the city of Exeter. We must also keep in mind that paupers who left the city in search of other sources of aid were also unable to apply to other monastic foundations in the county of Devon; we have already seen that Hooker estimates the value of these foundations to have been £5,678 3d and if we apply our established charitable percentage to this total, aid in the amount of approximately £284 was now no longer available within the region at large. By

¹¹¹Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 472; MacCaffrey, Exeter, 101.

contrast, the Devon amounts recorded in the *Valor* have been recast by Joyce Youings to account for, among other things, bailiffs' fees and clerical stipends, and she suggests that the total was approximately £6,740 for all of the Devon holdings; 5 percent of this figure is £337.¹¹² Youings's figure, which is based on careful research, is probably closer to the mark in determining the value of the Devon monastic lands, and thus the amount of charitable aid proceeding from these foundations. In any case, the absence of these benefactions meant that it was more likely that the poor migrated to or remained in the cities in order to receive help, as charitable aid was more accessible and plentiful in urban rather than rural areas.

The Role of the Church in Statute Law

Even as the Dissolution began in 1536, laws were being passed in Parliament to deal with the increasing problems of vagrants and beggars and the Church was assigned a pivotal role in these measures. A statute in 1536 (27 Henry VIII, c. 25), titled "An act for punishment of sturdy vagabonds and beggars," included a provision that

...all and every the Mayors Governors and head officers of every City Borough & Town corporate and the Church Wardens or two others of every Parish of this Realm shall in good and charitable wise take such discreet and convenient order, by gathering and procuring of such charitable and voluntary alms of the good christian people within the same with boxes every sunday holy day and other festival day or otherwise among themselves, in such good and

¹¹²Joyce Youings, "The Terms of the Disposal of the Devon Monastic Lands, 1536-58," English Historical Review 69 (1954): 20.

discreet wise as the poor ... may be provided
help and relieved...¹¹³

Trying to insure that these "voluntary" alms would be collected, the statute directed all the preachers, vicars, and curates in the realm to exhort their parishioners by way of sermons "to extend their good and charitable alms and contributions...toward the comfort & relief of the said poor..."¹¹⁴ The act, which was intended to channel the giving of alms into an orderly and systematic form, laid down instructions on the collection and reporting of any monies collected under the auspices of the statute. However, the act is riddled with provisos that exempted, in one way or another, significant sections of the populace from adherence to its dictums (i.e., monasteries, hospitals, the nobility). To address the concerns of the people who feared that this Act was a thinly-veiled attempt to impose a poor rate upon them, the voluntary nature of the almsgiving was reiterated at the end of the statute: "...not any of them to be constrained to any such certain contribution but as their free wills and charities shall extend...."¹¹⁵

The radical nature of this statute, even with its emphasis on the *voluntary* aspect of almsgiving, led to the failure of Parliament to continue its provisions in the next session, also held in 1536. Mechanisms for dealing with vagabonds and beggars reverted to reliance on the statutes passed during 1531. The Act of 1536 did reinforce the premier role of the Church in the relief of the poor: statutory reliance

¹¹³A. Luders et al, eds., The Statutes of the Realm (London: Record Commission, 1810), III, 27 Hen. 8, c. 25.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

on the ecclesiastical division--the parish--and the act's use of the English clergy to move people to Christian charity through their sermons spoke to a dependence by Parliament on the traditional ability of the Church to perform this function. But this reliance has an even deeper meaning; as Joyce Youings writes, "by avoiding the introduction of compulsory poor-rates, the members of the Reformation Parliament were, consciously or not, adhering to the traditional belief in the importance of good works. Unless entirely voluntary, the relief of the poor could not be an act of Christian charity."¹¹⁶ We must keep in mind, though, that the Reformation Parliament was effecting, for the most part, a jurisdictional split from the Church of Rome and not one of doctrine, so it is perhaps not remarkable that the idea of good works was implicit within the act. In the event, the provisions of the act were not enforced, but the statute did serve one useful purpose, according to Paul Slack: it "had laid down the guide-lines along which poor-relief mechanisms were to develop."¹¹⁷

Church involvement was once again dictated in 1547, when it was stipulated that weekly collections of charity were to be made at church every Sunday; following the reading of the Gospel of the day, "the Curate of every parish [was to] make according to such talent as God have given him a godly and brief exhortation to his parishioners moving and exciting them to remember the poor people and the duty of Christian

¹¹⁶Youings, Sixteenth-Century England, 264.

¹¹⁷Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 119.

charity...."¹¹⁸ The statute, however, did not include any mechanism of compulsion to obtain these weekly collections, and, like its earlier counterpart, it was not enforced.

The statute of 1552 again prescribed weekly church collections, and added that two collectors of these alms were to be appointed for each parish. The collectors were to appear in church every Sunday after the people "hath heard God's holy word" and then "gently ask and demand of every man and woman what they of their charity will be contented to give weekly towards the relief of the Poor...."¹¹⁹ Though the collectors were to make accounts of the poor of each parish and to list all amounts given for their relief, there was still no element of coercion present in the language of the statute. Indeed, the collectors seemed to have the short end of the stick; if they refused to accept the commission as a collector, they had to give twenty shillings to the alms box of the poor. In addition, failure to make a just account of collected alms could lead to official censure by the church, under the direction of the bishop of the diocese.¹²⁰

The first poor law legislation under Elizabeth echoed many of the provisions of the earlier statutes, but, for the first time, it also included a coercive element in the collection of alms. If any person able to give alms refused to do, he or she was to be "gently" exhorted by the parson or churchwardens to do his or her Christian duty; failure to comply meant the person was then to be reported to the bishop, who

¹¹⁸Statutes, IV, 1 Ed. 6, c. 3.

¹¹⁹Ibid., IV, 5 and 6 Ed. 6, c. 2.

¹²⁰Ibid.

would "induce or persuade him or them by charitable means and ways to extend their charity to the poor...."¹²¹ If the person remained obstinate, he or she was commanded to appear before an appropriate judicial body (justices of the peace for a county, mayoral court for a city); this body was to decide the amount of alms the person was liable to pay, and could commit him or her to prison if they refused to pay, where they were to remain until they decided to pay. The bishop himself was permitted to commit the obstinate person directly to jail if he or she refused to go before the appropriate judicial body.¹²² The statute also dictated that the bishop of the diocese was to "from time to time examine how and after what manner the said money is bestowed, and to call to account the parties which retain the said money" to insure that the collected sums were being used to their correct purpose.¹²³ Churchwardens' accounts in the south-west indicate a growing trend in the devotion of parochial resources towards the alleviation of poverty. Starting under Henry VIII, and increasing significantly under Edward VI, the trend continued in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth.¹²⁴ The collections made in this manner were, however, quite secular in nature,

¹²¹Ibid., IV, 5 Eliz. 1, c. 3.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Whiting, Blind Devotion of the People, 181-82. Churchwardens' accounts for five Exeter parishes are extant, but I did not become aware of them until recently, precluding their direct use in this study. The information they contain regarding poor relief collections in the period under study is recounted, in part, in the Book of the Poor for 1563 to 1572, which is given significant analysis in chapter 6. Revision of this study prior to publication will include an examination of the churchwardens' accounts.

as the churchwardens were city officials appointed by the mayor and the twenty-four.

In Exeter, the Act Book of 1560 records that six men were to be appointed to receive, each Monday, the sums collected in each parish under the auspices of the 1552 statute. Not only were they responsible for the parochial collections, but they were held accountable for any sums given in relief of the poor within the city.¹²⁵ Further acts by the Chamber made it very clear that this enterprise was under the direction and control of the civic government, and that poor relief funds collected under any official directive were to be overseen by the city officials.

While some few localities and towns tried to enforce the provisions of this statute, most attempts smacked of "scattered, haphazard activity."¹²⁶ In Exeter, the Book of the Accounts of the Poor from 1563 to 1572 consists of lists of contributors and recipients of relief by parish, and the monies received and spent. There is no indication in these books that enforcement, either religious or judicial, was needed to compel the payment of relief within Exeter.¹²⁷ The lack of recorded compulsion may indicate that the citizens of Exeter were more than usually predisposed to give aid for the poor, but it may equally mean that attempts at coercion were not made on a significant scale. In any

¹²⁵Act Books of the City of Exeter, Vols. II-VIII: 1508-1640 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), IV, fol. 22.

¹²⁶See Slack, Poverty and Policy, 124, 135 note 45.

¹²⁷Book of the Accounts of the Poor, 1563-1572, Book 157 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England).

case, the entire tone of the Book is overwhelmingly secular and it is therefore addressed at length elsewhere in this work.¹²⁸

With the passing of the statute of 1572, the role of the church in coercion was eliminated. Churchwardens and overseers of the poor who, as we have said, were secular officials appointed by the civic government, were to take responsibility for seeing that alms were collected and paid, with justices of the peace responsible for making lists of the poor within their districts and setting the appropriate assessments.¹²⁹ Bishops were ordered to oversee the administration of accounts at hospitals within their dioceses, if there was no one appointed by the founder of the hospital to perform this duty; they were also to accord the same diligence concerning accounts of the charitable foundations within their diocese.¹³⁰ The statute of 1572, in fact, is the last Act in the period under consideration in this study to mention any connection to the church or its officials in a coercive role.

By 1572, then, the religious components of charitable relief disappeared from the statutes, to be replaced solely by a secular apparatus which was trying to control a growing social problem. It was tacitly acknowledged that the Church was no longer capable of inspiring--or threatening--its members to acts of charity. We now turn to a consideration of whether civic officials used religion in determining community responses to poverty.

¹²⁸See chapter 6.

¹²⁹Statutes, IV, 14 Eliz. 1, c. 5.

¹³⁰Ibid.

"Godly Magistracy" and the Poor

Richard Greaves argues that various bibles of the Tudor period, including that of Tyndale and the Bishops' Bible, stressed that there was no correlation between godliness and prosperity, but some, such as the Geneva bible, urged that aid only be given to the godly.¹³¹ In considering the points of agreement between the Anglicans, Puritans and Catholics on the question of poverty, Greaves believes that the major division came over "the Catholic contention that giving was an act with soteriological significance."¹³² The Anglicans and the Puritans dismissed the "good works" aspect of giving in order to enhance their theological stance that works were not necessary in order to be saved. It is ironic, however, that many Protestant writers spoke of reward and works in the same breath; once convinced that works were no longer required, it must have been difficult for the Protestant ministers to persuade their listeners to perform them, so they used the "carrot on a stick" approach in order to entice them to provide succour to the less fortunate. All Protestants, whether Anglican or Puritan, Greaves argues, believed in the strict enforcement of laws against those persons who were "deliberately idle."¹³³

Susan Brigden asserts that there was no significant difference between Protestant and Catholic attitudes towards charity. As she writes, "adoption of one creed cannot have led automatically to being

¹³¹Richard L. Greaves, Society and Religion in Elizabethan England (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).

¹³²Ibid., 562.

¹³³Ibid., 566.

'out of charity' with partisans of another."¹³⁴ The higher commitment was to order, and the lack of major riots, in London as elsewhere, are indicative of cooperation between those of different religious persuasions. Brigden points out, "Awareness that in the end those of the new faith and of the old alike might share a common fate and a common enemy might argue some peace between them."¹³⁵

This brings us to a consideration of whether the Protestants, particularly Puritans, tried to impose some "godly rule" upon communities through the regulation of social ills such as poverty, and enjoined a "moral reformation" upon the personal conduct of the citizenry. An analysis of the historiography on this subject gives us some clues as to the truth of this contention. Joan Kent argues that statutes dealing with poverty and other social problems, such as drunkenness, adultery, bastardy, and theft, were often passed out of "social, economic and political considerations" as well as a concern for morality. In fact, Kent believes, "Members [of the House of Commons] often seem to have been less concerned about personal morality than about the implications for society of the conduct of the individual."¹³⁶ In fact, the continuing concern in the Commons over drinking and gaming were directly related to

¹³⁴Susan Brigden, "Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London," Past and Present 103 (May 1984): 111.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶Joan Kent, "Attitudes of Members of the House of Commons to the Regulation of 'Personal Conduct' in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England," Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research 46 (May 1973): 42.

the legislators' fear that these vices increased poverty, and this is the reason they sought to control such activities.¹³⁷

For Dorchester, David Underdown maintains that godly rule was attempted in the aftermath of a great fire there in August, 1613.¹³⁸ Problems with poverty had come with a growth in population and a series of crises, not the least of which was brought about by the devastation of the fire. The Puritan oligarchy, seeking to solve social problems caused by poverty, established a hospital for children, where they were to receive moral and religious training and were given education appropriate to a specific trade.¹³⁹ In the ten years after the fire, two new almshouses were established which were run according to a strict order: no quarreling was allowed, and one was expected to stay next to God by remaining clean.¹⁴⁰ Though the Puritan attempt at social reform through "godly rule" faded after 1662, Underdown claims that the chief reasons for its decline were financial; in addition, the post-war town leaders had grown up in a different moral climate, one which did not lend itself to idealistic reform.¹⁴¹ Unlike Exeter, Dorchester was not a cathedral city, so it did not have the direct ecclesiastical supervision that would have kept a check on non-conforming ministers who were inclined towards radicalism where social policies were concerned. The

¹³⁷Ibid., 43.

¹³⁸David Underdown, Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹³⁹Ibid., 109-113.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 124.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 244-45.

presence of a bishop and cathedral in Exeter may have tempered the passions of non-conformists who might have clamored for a stricter moral rule.

Keith Thomas argues that the Protestant reformers did believe that there was a correlation between adherence to the word of God and bodily or worldly success. If a man behaved morally, he was certain to succeed; in other words, "the godly would never need to beg."¹⁴² The imposition of "godly rule" to insure the prevention of sin would ultimately, Protestant rulers believed, benefit society both materially and spiritually, producing a concomitant reduction in social problems such as poverty. Thomas also points out that moral reformation had to come from the magistracy, as the poor did not go to church regularly, and many others avoided church services as well; it was well nigh impossible to impart religious doctrine to an absent flock. In point of fact, Thomas argues, the content of most sermons was far too intellectual for most listeners, as the clergy wrote and published them in the hopes of attracting the support of a wealthy patron.¹⁴³

Paul Slack asserts that the "religious enthusiasm" of the Protestants may indeed have been responsible for new ways of thinking about the social problems engendered by poverty. In opposition to R. H. Tawney, however, Slack argues that there was no Puritan hatred for the poor, or a specific ideology that exclusively supported harsh punishments

¹⁴²Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Redwood Press Limited, 1971), 88.

¹⁴³Thomas, Religion and Decline, 160-63.

and discrimination.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Slack states, "the social attitudes and objectives of Puritans hardly differed from those of other members of the social, political and religious elite in Elizabethan England."¹⁴⁵ Though their attitudes did not vary significantly from those of their non-Puritan peers, they were nonetheless social activists who wished "to shape a godly commonwealth" based on practical reforms to correct social problems. This activism, in the form of new institutions and new regulations, became very apparent in both Warwick and Norwich in the 1570s and '80s.¹⁴⁶ As indicated by the sermons discussed above, much Puritan writing associated poverty with threats to the social order, and it was this rhetoric which led, over time, to an increased emphasis on orders to control the poor. Always in the minority, the Puritans were nevertheless in the forefront of the adoption of "poor-relief as a means of social control." Theirs was an approach that began to be copied in many towns and cities throughout England.¹⁴⁷ In the final analysis, however, programs of social control were not widely enforced, and laws and regulations regarding poverty were overlooked as being too burdensome on a community's administrative and financial resources.

Slack's findings proceed from Patrick Collinson's study on English Puritanism, which holds that there was no opportunity to impose a godly discipline upon the mass of people as long as Elizabeth remained as head

¹⁴⁴Paul Slack, "Poverty and Social Regulation in Elizabethan England," in The Reign of Elizabeth I, ed. Christopher Haigh (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 236.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 236.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 237.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 238.

of the English church.¹⁴⁸ While individual towns and cities might come under the rule of "godly magistrates" intent upon imposing morality through legislation, there was no chance that such a program, on a national level, would gain support from the moderate queen. Under Elizabeth, Puritans concentrated primarily on further reform of the English church, in an attempt to rid it of its more Papist connections.

In supporting this view of "godly discipline" as ineffective, Margaret Spufford disputes the findings of Keith Wrightson and David Levine for the village of Terling between 1525 and 1700.¹⁴⁹ Wrightson and Levine suggest that the elite of Terling used the ecclesiastical courts to pursue increased numbers of bastardy cases during the late Elizabethan and mid-Jacobean periods, thus giving evidence of a godly elite imposing its morals upon the poorer members of the community. Spufford states that this contention is faulty in its assumptions about the inculcation of Puritan thought.¹⁵⁰ She maintains that religious belief is too often defined in terms of social viewpoints and moral codes; it should instead be centered around one's personal relationship with God. Once this relationship has been defined, a person's participation in groups of like believers and adherence to their

¹⁴⁸Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 292.

¹⁴⁹Keith Wrightson and David Levine, Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700 (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁰Margaret Spufford, "Puritanism and Social Control?" in Order and Disorder in Early Modern England, eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 41-43; see also Margaret Spufford, Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

attitudes can then be assessed.¹⁵¹ Spufford challenges the notion that Puritanism was the exclusive preserve of the elite members of society; for proof, she notes that over half of the martyrs listed by Foxe were agricultural laborers. She labels this as the "ultimate proof of religious involvement."¹⁵² By analyzing ecclesiastical court records of the late thirteenth century and comparing them to those of the late sixteenth century, Spufford is able to show that prosecutions of the poor members of any given community occurred at roughly the same rate during both periods. These findings, she argues, permit the dissassociation of puritanism from social control in an exclusive sense and further, show that attempts at the policing of morals were nothing new.¹⁵³

We must now ask if a godly magistracy developed within the city of Exeter. We saw earlier that there were proponents of both religions active in the region and in Exeter during the 1530s, but how far are the events of that period indicative of wider trends in the inculcation of particular religious beliefs? Did the government of Exeter subsequently base its social policy on those beliefs?

Robert Whiting argues that although the decline in popular support of traditional religious institutions and activities was much more swift in the eastern part of England than in the west, the southwest was not as "remote, conservative and change-resistant" as once thought; the turn from traditional religious practices in that region was, in fact, "both

¹⁵¹Ibid., 45.

¹⁵²Ibid., 46.

¹⁵³Ibid., 48-57.

more sudden and more drastic than has usually been assumed."¹⁵⁴ It was Hooker who had labeled popular pre-Reformation belief as "blind devotion;" as people were increasingly exposed to the tenets of Protestantism, commitment to the new faith grew. This argument reverses assumptions made by Christopher Haigh and others that a "slow reformation" took place in England under Elizabeth.¹⁵⁵ Before 1570, however, that commitment was restricted to "a relatively small percentage of the south-western population."¹⁵⁶ This notion is at the heart of our argument for Exeter, since Whiting finds Protestant commitment in the southwestern part of England to be "restricted" and the southwest includes the counties of Devon and Cornwall, and, in particular, the city of Exeter. Between 1554 and 1570, the Exeter city officials were noted to be of "several religions," although the religious settlement imposed by Elizabeth led many to Protestant allegiance. This allegiance may have been either a surface adherence to royal religious policy, or a substantive conversion; in the latter case, it is possible that a godly magistracy could have developed in Exeter. Indeed, Whiting notes that a few Exeter parishes did make a theological commitment to Protestantism, but in general, the civic corporation gave evidence of merely surface conformism. He argues that "positive commitment to the Protestant alternative" had not replaced the traditional Catholic devotion, though

¹⁵⁴Whiting, Blind Devotion of the People, 145.

¹⁵⁵See Christopher Haigh, The English Reformation Revised (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and his Reign of Elizabeth I (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985); also, see J. J. Scarisbrick, The Reformation and the English People (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁵⁶Whiting, Blind Devotion of the People, 147, 161.

that form of devotion had been "largely suppressed." Instead, Whiting asserts, Catholic devotion "was replaced by conformism, passivity, or even indifference."¹⁵⁷

Whiting's point is well taken: the upheavals in religious practice dating back to the reign of Henry VIII must have been difficult for the mass of people to absorb. Caught up in the daily fight for survival, many people may have felt it expedient to go along with whatever the prevailing religious notion happened to be, and simply got on with their lives. The ambiguity of Henry's reign, the doctrinaire positions of Edward's, the attempted return to Catholicism under Mary, and the compromises effected under Elizabeth were, in essence, a series of disruptions in traditional religious practice. How did one know what to believe? Why develop a commitment to a religion that might be made illegal in the next reign? In the end, it was safer for the majority of the population to conform publicly to official dictates, while maintaining traditional practices in the privacy of one's home, or even, as Whiting states, to become indifferent to religion in whatever form it was presented. This is a view shared by Eamon Duffy, who, in analyzing the conversion to the Protestant form of worship between 1570 and 1580, finds that most people became Protestant because it was imposed on them from above, not because of a true devotion to Protestant theology. To illustrate his point, he examines the case of Christopher Trychay, a vicar of a small parish in Exmoor, some fifteen miles from Exeter; Duffy argues that Trychay followed the admonition of William Perkins, who said

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 162, 171.

that "It was safer to do in religion as most do."¹⁵⁸ Trychay dutifully followed national directives issued under Edward VI for changes to his church but expressed joy at the return to Catholicism under Mary. On Elizabeth's accession, he once again made sure that he fell in line with the religious settlement imposed by the Queen's government.¹⁵⁹ The ability of Trychay to adapt to the changing religious atmospheres during the sixteenth century supports Whiting and Duffy's argument that conformism, not Protestantism or Catholicism, was the religion of the people, at least in the southwest of England, into the latter part of the sixteenth century.

Whiting underscores this argument by noting that one of the chief reasons for the failure of the south-western populace to convert to Protestantism in any significant way before 1570 was due to "the Tudor Englishman's sense of obligation to established authorities."¹⁶⁰ In the Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549, Hooker noted of the Exeter mayor and aldermen that their opposition to the Rebellion was certainly not due to their religious leanings, because many of them were sympathetic to the aims of the rebels. As Hooker observed, "some--and the chiefest of them--did like and were well-affected to the Romish religion."¹⁶¹ For the common people of Exeter, Protestant and Catholic alike, personal

¹⁵⁸Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England ca. 1400 - ca. 1580 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 591. For specific discussion of Trychay's conformism, see 497-503, 587, and 592.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Whiting, Blind Devotion of the People, 172-73.

¹⁶¹John Hooker, quoted in *ibid.*, 172-73.

religious preferences were cast aside in favor of loyalty to the King. As previously demonstrated by the incident involving the dismantling of St. Nicholas Priory during the Dissolution, the people of Exeter, like Tudor society in general, placed a higher value on "duty, obedience and conformity" than they did on religious commitment. In fact, the people of the southwest "tended in most cases to acquiesce in, or even to cooperate with, the official campaign against their traditional religion."¹⁶²

The evidence in Exeter, though scant, supports MacCaffrey's finding that, during the early upheavals of the Reformation, "the merchants of Exeter, however united in most of their sentiments, assumed widely divergent positions on the religious issue. But ... these divergences of opinion did not impair the working unity of the community in other matters. However important the religious problems of the century were for individuals, they were not an occasion for major social disagreement among the ruling classes of the city."¹⁶³ Purchases of furnishings for the parish churches reflect the ability of the populace to go along with whatever the official line on religion happened to be. Under Edward VI, one parish, St. Petrock, purchased the new Prayer Book, and sold plate, vestments and other items associated with the old faith. With Mary's accession, however, the same parish records purchases of items necessary to conduct the Mass in proper Latin style. Further, the priest of St.

¹⁶²Ibid., 173.

¹⁶³MacCaffrey, Exeter, 190: a 1564 report by the Bishop of Exeter indicates that, while there was no one who could be considered "positively favorable to the Reformed faith," two men, Robert Midwinter and Richard Hert (Hooker's mentor) were listed as unfavorable.

Petrock, installed in 1528, lasted through every religious change imposed from above, maintaining his post until he died in 1566.¹⁶⁴

The Elizabethan religious settlement of 1559 was met with equanimity in Exeter, when images were once again removed and burnt in the churchyard of the cathedral, though the new liturgy imposed by the settlement met with some resistance. In the end, however, the Council moved to suppress this protest, showing once again that the civic government was unwilling to do anything less than conform to national directives.¹⁶⁵

That the officials of Exeter proved to be acquiescent in accepting religious dictates from above did not mean that a concomitant growth in devotion to the new faith took place. By 1600, many of the churches in Exeter had very small congregations, and were without incumbents; curates took the services, with one curate assigned to two or three parishes. This overload of responsibility meant that services had to be shortened in order for the curate to be able to get to each of the churches under his aegis. Only in the late sixteenth century did this situation begin to receive attention; attempts were made in Parliament to consolidate some of the parishes, but opposition from the bishop brought these efforts to naught.¹⁶⁶ Growing religious feeling within the city is evidenced by the lobbying for a city lectureship from 1580 on, a position which was finally agreed to by the Chamber in 1599; the radical dissenter

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 190-91.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 193; see also Commonplace Book of John Hooker, Chamberlain of the City of Exeter, Book 51 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), fols. 352-53.

¹⁶⁶MacGaffrey, Exeter, 196-97.

Edmund Snape was appointed to the position in 1600, but his views and his previous clashes with the church hierarchy soon led the bishop, William Cotton, to demand that he stop his preaching.¹⁶⁷ Appointments to lectureships in the first twenty years of the seventeenth century show evidence of contention between the bishop and the Chamber, and it was only after 1620 that the two sides appeared to cooperate in the selection of an appropriate lecturer for the post.¹⁶⁸ The lack of consensus between the Chamber and the bishop thus belies the supposition that there was a godly magistracy driven to impose a specific social policy upon the citizens of Exeter.

What is clear is that the city oligarchy was determined to have an equal, if not a larger, say in the direction that the religious life of Exeter was to take. The main quarrels between the bishops and the Chamber were centered around questions of jurisdiction, patronage, and property rights; protection of criminals by the church in opposition to city authority was but one example.¹⁶⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that rancor developed over questions of religion. It becomes clear that the central concern, for both ecclesiastical and civic officials alike, was the protection of privilege, property and influence. Without the ability to bring the parishes under their direct control, the Chamber sought--and found--ways to dominate the religious life of the city. Lectureships and the regulation of education within Exeter were but two examples of this inculcation of civic rule in the area of religion. As

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 197; see also Act Book V, fols. 435, 502, and 506.

¹⁶⁸MacCaffrey, Exeter, 198.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 200-201.

MacCaffrey puts it, "religion was to become another province in the all-embracing realm of civic control."¹⁷⁰ Religion, then, did not dictate municipal policy; it was simply a pawn in the game of government.

Another way to analyze whether a godly magistracy developed is to examine prosecutions for behaviors that otherwise might be overlooked. From Act Book IV of the Chamber, the only one of the period under consideration to contain such prosecutions (covering the years 1559-1588), several conclusions can be drawn. First, the prosecutions that are recounted are conducted under the auspices of the Chamber acting under the direction of the Mayor, and show no evidence that the church was either an instigator or a participant in these proceedings. Second, although some of the charges are indicative of "sinful" pursuits, such as those involving sexual transgressions ("illegal intercourse;" "brothel-keeping;" "whoredom;" "adultery;" "bigamy"), the great bulk of indictments concern vagrancy, theft and the playing of cards or "unlawful games." Added together, these prosecutions--roughly seventy-one of them--far outweigh those for sexual misconduct, which is clearly indicated in only fourteen cases.

Fifteen cases of bastardy and seventeen cases of "ill life" were brought before the magistrates; even assuming that all the latter were morally offensive, we are still left with only forty-six cases that can be labeled as violations of moral conduct. In the fifteen bastardy cases, moreover, the judgments appear to be more concerned with the financial implications of these consequences of sin, rather than their immoral antecedents. Where a parish can be assessed with the burden, it

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 202.

is; when it is apparent that the mother and child have no place within the city, they are transported to their place of origin. The main interest of the magistrates was to ensure that the city not be responsible for any more charges upon its financial resources than was necessary or proper. In fact, banishment or transportation was specifically ordered in twenty-five cases during this period, a punishment that rid the city of drains on its funds.

Concern for order and expenditure far exceed any emphasis on the growth of immorality within the city, and the prosecutions appear to be mainly secular in nature. The subjective nature of prosecution precludes a definitive argument about the religious beliefs of the magistracy involved, but the analysis does shed some light on the "godly discipline" issue; it does not appear that the maintenance of morality was the chief driving force behind Exeter's prosecutions. Taken together with the continuing quarrels between bishop and Chamber, the account of prosecutions provides sufficient evidence to question the development of a godly magistracy in Exeter, at least until the third decade of the seventeenth century. As we have seen, Exeter, like much of the southwest, came to firm Protestant commitment much later than other parts of England--notably the southeast--and this factor can also help explain the failure of its oligarchic magistrates to impose some sort of godly discipline upon the city and thus introduce a religious element into the issue of poverty within the city.

In summation, Exeter was tradition-bound in terms of religious commitment up until the Reformation, and not even the great changes that took place from its inception to the religious settlement of 1559 and

beyond did much to disturb or disrupt Exonians from their primary loyalty, which was to the monarch. Faith was ephemeral; pragmatic royal authority was not. Part of the tradition which survived, and even prospered, was that of private philanthropy, despite the rise of divergent views on its dispensation. For the great bulk of people, religious change was superficial in many ways, and they continued to cling to the old ways of providing for the less fortunate members of their society, even as the government proposed new methods to regulate poverty.

CHAPTER 8

TESTAMENTARY CHARITY

The impulses behind individual provision for the poor are at once both simplistic and complex. One person might simply be moved at the sight of a stricken individual and react instinctively to alleviate suffering, while other people are led to philanthropic endeavors through guilt or hope of heavenly reward; still others participate in poor relief in order to maintain social order or to enhance their political or personal reputations. In every case, however, charitable actions are, at bottom, performed to achieve some specific goal for the giver, goals which run the gamut from personal satisfaction that occasionally smacks of a certain smugness to more devious forms which involve reward, whether spiritual or material. Elsewhere in this study we examined the impulses and motives behind private charity; in this chapter and the next, we present the actual provision of individual philanthropy through the medium of its two main components: first, testamentary stipulations of amounts for poor relief that are non-recurring or limited in their application and second, the establishment of long-term benefactions such as almshouses and charitable trusts. In this chapter, we concern ourselves with the first of these; the long-term benefactions are addressed in chapter 9.

We begin with a consideration of the efficacy of wills in determining the type and amount of individual aid to the poor during the early modern period. We then discuss the problems inherent in their use and propose an approach to testamentary evidence that addresses these problems. Following a brief discussion of the use of wills as evidence

in ascertaining the amount of charitable bequests in London and other selected localities, the final section provides an in-depth analysis of the evidence gleaned from the wills of Exeter's citizens. This chapter closes with a comparative analysis between the Exeter evidence and evidence from other localities follows. The same approach will be taken in chapter 9 regarding the endowed benefactions. In the conclusion, we will combine the amounts proceeding from both testamentary sources and endowed benefactions and compare that amount (on an annual basis) to the sums raised from public rates and city initiatives. We will then be able to determine whether private philanthropy played a dominant role in the relief of the poor in Exeter during the early modern period.¹

The Use of Wills

Margaret Spufford writes that wills are "the most personal of all records," often representing the only evidence that a person existed; they certainly provide interesting glimpses into various facets of personal life in the early modern period, such as social position, regard for family members, economic standing, and religious belief.² This last indicator has proven to be an area of some contention for historians, who are divided over the worth of testaments in revealing religious

¹The majority of the other studies dealing with this issue combine both cash bequests from wills and the valuations of endowments, revolving loans funds, and like benefactions, so a comparison based on Exeter's cash bequests alone would not result in a correct correlation between this study and others.

²Margaret Spufford, Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 55.

affiliation.³ The debate engendered by the use of wills in historical studies is proof of their value, regardless of their ultimate effectiveness in proving a particular thesis. It is not the wills themselves that present the major problem, but how carefully evidence is culled from them; we thus arrive at the crux of the will conundrum.

We are all aware that statistics can be manipulated to assure an expected result, and this manipulation, real or imagined, seems to be commonly associated with the use of wills. This perception is particularly difficult to overcome when one is dealing with the early modern period. At a time when literacy was confined to a relatively small (though growing) percentage of the population, the historian can be almost certain that wills from this period were most likely drawn up not by the testator but by someone with reliable writing skills, such as a priest or minister, a notary, lawyer, or another educated person. This person was often a relative stranger to the maker of the will and thus had no personal knowledge of the testator's life. More telling evidence of secondary will preparation is indicated in a majority of wills by the

³Margaret Spufford has led the charge in discounting the preambles of post-Reformation wills as indicative of Protestant religious belief; see Margaret Spufford, Contrasting Communities; Eamon Duffy agrees with Spufford that one must be sceptical in using the will preambles as evidence of Protestant religious affiliation, since they followed forms established in older wills, "precedent books, almanacs, and devotional treatises." Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England ca. 1400 - ca. 1580 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 505. Other illuminating comments on this issue are to be found in Rosemary O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation (London and New York: Methuen, 1986); Christopher Marsh, "In the Name of God? Will-Making and Faith in Early Modern England," in The Records of the Nation, eds. G. H. Martin and Peter Spufford (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press for the British Record Society, 1990), 215-49; Laquita Higgs, "Wills and Religious Mentality in Tudor Colchester," Essex Archaeology and History 22 (1991): 87-100.

relatively short periods between the date a will was made and the date on which it was probated: the testator was usually in the grips of his or her final illness and death was considered imminent. Unable to do more than dictate wishes, the person called upon someone who had the ability to commit those wishes to paper in the form of a last will and testament. It is not unusual to find wills that mention the continued mental acuity of the maker, but which also lament the poor state of his or her physical health.⁴ Additionally, the format of most wills follows a repetitive formulaic pattern that indicates will preparation by a specific individual belonging to one of the occupations noted above, most usually someone with legal training.⁵ Furthermore, though it was common for many wills to be drawn up in final form at the deathbed, certain testaments were complicated and required a scribe to take the will home in order to render it in "fair copy." Some scribes were also known to make changes in the language of a will which could substantially alter the intention of the testator. The result is that a number of surviving wills may not be "original" in terms of their provisions, thus muddying further the question of intentions regarding charitable giving.⁶

Having established the way in which wills were most commonly drawn up, we can now turn our attention to the execution of these testaments,

⁴See Margaret Spufford, "The Scribes of Villagers' Wills in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and their Influence," Local Population Studies 7, no. 5 (1971): 29; Lorraine C. Attreed, "Preparation for Death in Sixteenth-Century Northern England," Sixteenth-Century Journal 13, no. 3 (1982): 39; Marsh, "Name of God," 228.

⁵Claire Cross, "Wills as Evidence of Popular Piety in the Reformation Period: Leeds and Hull, 1540-1640," in The End of Strife, ed. David Loades (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1984), 48.

⁶Marsh, "Name of God," 228-29.

and it is this function which often proves most troubling to a historian. The statements contained in wills represent a testator's *intention* as expressed by the testator; they do not contain evidence of performance of his or her wishes. Most wills indicate that an unnamed executor is to take care of seeing that the provisions of the will are carried out, but there is no guarantee that the executor did, in fact, honor this duty in all respects. One can be fairly certain that matters of inheritance or debt were frequently, if not always, taken care of; after all, the recipients of such things were still very much alive and would, no doubt, prod the executor to carry out the terms of the will. Moreover, suit could be brought against the executor for failing to dispense property or repay debt.

It is in the areas where proof of performance was less easily obtainable that executors might neglect the testator's instructions. Chief among these were bequests to institutions of religion, primarily parish churches, and provision for the poor.⁷ In many cases, people indicated a set amount and, where appropriate, a specific church, but bequests were not specific beyond that point. For example, in directing that 6d be given to each of twelve poor men, a testator would not mention which twelve poor men he or she had in mind (perhaps the first twelve the executor happened to come across?). Can we be sure that the executor did indeed dispense this amount as directed? The intended recipients, ignorant of the bequest, would not protest its omission; only family or

⁷Richard L. Greaves, Society and Religion in Elizabethan England (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 576; Greaves argues that Puritans were particularly encouraged to give money to the poor before death to prevent embezzlement of some bequests by executors.

friends of the deceased who were in a position to know the terms of the will might insist on such payments, but self-interest becomes a consideration at that point. Why share with the poor when it was not necessary? Hypothetical though this example is, it does illustrate the pitfalls of assumption about charitable bequests, particularly those of a short-term or limited nature. Thus, in using wills to assess levels of personal philanthropy, historians must be careful to allude to the uncertain nature of the performance involved.⁸

A final consideration is that of adjusting for inflation the sums dedicated to poor relief that are culled from will evidence. The central figure in this debate is W. K. Jordan, whose massive work, Philanthropy in England 1480-1660, details the amount of charitable giving in England for the early modern period. His figures (discussed in detail below) do not take into account price inflation over the period, and Jordan admits that he had "found it impossible to adjust our data to the rising curve of prices in the course of our period" as there was no basis for comparison to prepare such an adjustment.⁹

Turning first to the findings themselves, Jordan argues the following: from 1480-1660, charitable benefaction amounted to approximately £3,102,000 for all causes; 36.4 percent of this total, approximately £1,129,000, were dedicated to poor relief alone. Of the

⁸For this particular study, a further consideration in examining wills from Exeter must be noted: the amounts gleaned from these testaments are based on surviving wills only and we must keep in mind that they represent only a small percentage of the wills that were probated for our period of study. This caveat will be addressed in the conclusion.

⁹W. K. Jordan, Philanthropy in England 1480-1660 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), 36.

amounts, the merchant class contributed far and away the largest percentage: 43.17 percent; the other urban classes together constituted 14.3 percent. The upper and lower gentry together accounted for 11.3 percent of the total amount given. Interestingly, although Jordan is dismissive of the contributions of the nobility to poor relief, that class, combined with the benefactions sponsored by the crown, provided some 8.7 percent of total charitable giving. Jordan acknowledges that the great mass of gifts from donors of every class were in the range of 1d to £9 19s., representing a percentage of 65.22 of all donors.¹⁰ Based on these figures, Jordan argues for a steady rise in charitable benefactions from 1480 through 1540; 13.33 percent of all benefactions went for poor relief in this period. After slowing down in the 1540s, the rate of benefactions began climbing again; a sharp increase became apparent in 1601, an increase which was built upon until a high was reached between the years 1631 and 1640, when 43.58 percent of benefactions were directed solely to poor relief.¹¹

A number of historians have taken issue with Jordan's findings, with the majority of objections centering on his methodology. Paul Slack writes that, "hunting Professor Jordan has become so popular and successful a game that it sometimes seems that his labours were fruitless." He admits, however, that this belief is "unnecessarily

¹⁰Ibid., 338-42.

¹¹Ibid., 246-49. These findings concern the total amount of charitable benefaction provided from private sources 1480 to 1660; the synopsis of Jordan's conclusions are provided as a foundation for discussion about the extent of individual philanthropy and thus, do not conform to the current study's topical or period strictures.

dismissive."¹² The debate about Jordan's value to discussions of charity, then, must be acknowledged, but it must be tempered with a discussion of the revisions offered on Jordan's work, and the criticisms engendered by those revisions.

Given that Jordan himself noted his failure to account for the effect of inflation on his statistics, it is not surprising to find that the earliest reviewers of his work attempted to correct this omission. J. F. Hadwin points out that Lawrence Stone, in a review printed in History (1959), detailed Jordan's deficiencies and offered the following solution:

Let us re-draw Professor Jordan's basic graph of all charitable giving between 1480 and 1660 [Jordan, Philanthropy, 367] by altering the figures decennially according to the Phelps Brown cost-of-living index...We find that the scale of giving, instead of falling from 1510 to 1550 and then rising slowly to 1600, in fact falls catastrophically and all but continuously from 1510 to 1600. Instead of shooting up dramatically to unprecedented heights of generosity in the first decades of the seventeenth century, the graph certainly rises sharply but never approaches the level of giving of the first decade of the sixteenth century.¹³

The approach offered by Professor Stone and others was expanded in an article by William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, using the inflation

¹²Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 163.

¹³Lawrence Stone, review of Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660, by W. K. Jordan, History, 44 (1959): 257-60, quoted in J. F. Hadwin, "Deflating Philanthropy," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 31 (1978): 105.

scale developed by E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins in 1956.¹⁴ Bittle and Lane constructed a table of correlations between the scale and Jordan's figures for London and four other counties and determined that the correlations "seem to justify the application of the Brown-Hopkins scale to the Jordan data as a deflator."¹⁵ Proceeding from this assumption, Bittle and Lane developed a table which presents Jordan's figures for each decade of the period compared to the deflated figures adjusted by the Brown-Hopkins scale. The authors argue that two facts emerge from analysis of this table: one, that Jordan's "rising tide of philanthropy is simply not evident" and two, "in no case does the charitable giving during Jordan's peak period, 1610-50, exceed in value the benefactions of 1510."¹⁶ Bittle and Lane go on to argue that instead of an increase in philanthropy over the period, as Jordan suggests, there was in fact a decrease, particularly when the religious benefactions are separated from the total. They conclude that their approach is a valid one in terms of adjusting Jordan's figures for inflation and believe that some other explanation must be found for the mitigation of poverty over the period in question.¹⁷

¹⁴For additional details of this scale, see E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables compared with Builders' Wage-rates," Economica, n.s., 23, no. 92 (November 1956): 296-314.

¹⁵William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, "Inflation and Philanthropy in England: A Re-Assessment of W. K. Jordan's Data," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 29, no. 2 (1976): 206.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 206-208.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 209-210.

Bittle and Lane's work provoked a great deal of comment, spearheaded by Hadwin. Aside from their failure to acknowledge the earlier work of Stone and others on this problem, Hadwin argues that the table of correlations constructed by Bittle and Lane reveals "only one really high correlation" and that while there are links between the figures, there are also "important 'external' sources of variation" such as population statistics, philanthropic classifications, and the consideration of the yield of permanent endowments.¹⁸ In assessing the validity of Bittle and Lane's claim to have presented a better picture of charitable giving for the period, Hadwin calls their formula for deflating Jordan's figures, based on the Brown-Hopkins scale, "simplistic."¹⁹ The reason for this, Hadwin notes, is that the number Bittle and Lane used for their median in the formula is flawed; it is, in fact, the mean, and not the median number from the Brown-Hopkins index. Since they used this number incorrectly in deflating Jordan's statistics, Hadwin argues that their calculations, and thus their conclusions, must be skewed.

In an attempt to discover how relevant inflation is to the charitable impulse of the period, Hadwin reworks the table using the correct median, and concludes that "the answer for the crucial years of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seems to be 'less so than other factors'."²⁰ Hadwin points out that Bittle and Lane divided

¹⁸Hadwin, "Deflating Philanthropy," 107; see also C. G. A. Clay, Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700, vol. 1, People, Land and Towns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 227-28.

¹⁹Ibid., 107.

²⁰Ibid., 109.

"a set of totals of the benefactions made by one group of people...by an index of the current price of a basket of consumables such as might be bought by another group."²¹ Hadwin believes that the best index is one which would determine the "real value" of charity to its recipients. Allowing that there are "severe limitations" inherent in answering this question, Hadwin nevertheless offers conclusions based on his re-drawn figures for secular benefactions. First, the growth of the secular endowments was "very relevant" to the "needs of the time," and second, that the "income ... derived from private charity during the period nevertheless did increase much faster than did the prices of consumables and it may have increased even on a per capita basis."²² Applying the same method to private benefactions, Hadwin argues that "in real terms privately provided poor relief expanded four fold at a time when the population cannot more than have doubled. Unless, then, substantial endowments ceased to function, the conclusion must be that private philanthropy did, after all, make increasing provision for the poor in real per capita terms."²³

In dealing with the problem of proportional giving, Hadwin suggests that the approach offered by A. D. Dyer--that of assessing the proportion of inventories going to charity--is much the best one, as it illuminates the "crucial question of whether charitable purposes ... took an increasing share of the wealth left by those whose wills can be

²¹Ibid., 110.

²²Ibid., 111.

²³Ibid., 113.

analyzed."²⁴ In conclusion, Hadwin notes that "There does then seem to be something about what Jordan has called 'the golden flow of charity in the four decades which we have called the early Stuart period'" and that Jordan "was at least partly right about the change in men's social aspirations."²⁵ Nevertheless, Hadwin points out that his "least pessimistic" figures, adjusted to reveal national trends, "cannot represent more than some 0.5 per cent and 0.25 per cent respectively of current national income in any decade. In view of the social needs of the time, even after the early seventeenth-century 'explosion of giving,' what must have been more audible was not the bang but the whimper."²⁶

In the same issue of the Economic History Review, D. C. Coleman and J. D. Gould echo Hadwin's conclusions by pointing out the deficiencies in Bittle and Lane's work, particularly their failure to correct for the increase in population over the period.²⁷ The riposte does not end there; Bittle and Lane, in the same issue, reiterate their findings, while acknowledging the concerns offered by Hadwin, Coleman, and Gould. They note that accurate population statistics are difficult to obtain, particularly on a regional basis, and would thus make their figures lack "accuracy and credibility."²⁸ Bittle and Lane also apologize for their

²⁴Ibid., 114.

²⁵Ibid., 117.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷D. C. Coleman, "Philanthropy Deflated: A Comment," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 24, no. 2 (1978): 118-20; J. D. Gould, "Bittle and Lane on Charity: An Uncharitable Comment," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 24, no. 2 (1978): 121-23.

²⁸William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, "A Re-Assessment Reiterated," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 24, no. 2 (1978): 125.

failure to use the correct number for the median in their original article. As to Hadwin's reworking of their data, they doubt his use of a doubled population figure, saying that his approach "does nothing to speak to the 'immense generosity' thesis."²⁹ Bittle and Lane note that their work, along with that of their revisionists, does not refute this thesis, but only fails to support the conclusions reached by Jordan; finally, they call for local studies which will further illuminate these issues. The current study is such an attempt.

Ian Archer offers an analysis of charity in Elizabethan London that takes the Jordan debate into account. Using nineteenth-century charity commissioners' reports and two samples of wills at different points during the queen's reign (1573 and 1597), Archer is able to provide a "pattern of charity on the ground."³⁰ He found that "immediate donations to the London poor grew by 133 per cent in cash terms and 70 per cent in real terms" during the period; when combined with endowments, "private charity grew by 111 per cent in cash terms and 54 per cent in real terms." Taking into account the increase in the population of London during the period, however, Archer found that the per capita increase in real terms amounted to 13 percent, meaning that the impact on individuals was "very limited." Nevertheless, "the scale of the achievement is sufficient to put to flight Jordan's more pessimistic critics."³¹ In

²⁹Ibid., 127.

³⁰Ian Archer, The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 165; the charity commissioners' reports issued in the nineteenth century will be discussed in full in chapter 9 of this study.

³¹Ibid., 178.

addition, the poor rate of the 1590s in London (when adjusted for payments to Christ's Hospital) provided only £1,422 per annum for outdoor relief, while "immediate legacies" provided £1,312 per annum; added to the £909 per annum in endowments, private charity superseded public charity by £799 or 64 percent, an impressive accomplishment.³²

A. L. Beier analyzed wills from Warwick from 1480 to 1650, and concluded that most "testators were concerned chiefly with the immediate relief of friends and neighbours, and to be remembered by them."³³ He noted that 80 percent of the gifts in the wills represented charity in dole form (gifts at funerals, cash to be given shortly after death), while endowments never exceeded 14.2 percent of the total given to the poor at any time during the period; the height of endowments was reached during the years 1601-40, which seems to accord with Jordan's posited rise in charitable endowments during the first four decades of the seventeenth century, though not to the extent put forth by Jordan.³⁴ Despite his use of wills in the study of Warwick, Beier is dismissive of their ultimate reliability for the reasons we previously outlined: charity left "in kind" cannot be easily calculated, the transmission of charitable sums cannot be documented, and proportions of charitable giving for certain segments of society cannot be truly ascertained from inventories alone, since land was often excluded from them.³⁵ He

³²Ibid., 178.

³³A. L. Beier, "The social problems of an Elizabethan country town: Warwick, 1580-1590," in Country Towns in pre-industrial England, ed. Peter Clark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 72.

³⁴Ibid., 72-73.

³⁵Ibid., 65-66.

concludes that "post-Reformation philanthropy to the local poor hardly surpassed public rates."³⁶

Basing her conclusions on endowed relief rather than on evidence from wills, Carol Moore believes that "philanthropy could not carry the burden alone in Ipswich" but that "amiable cooperation between public and private charity" allowed the city to take care of its poor citizens.³⁷ Marjorie McIntosh did use the wills in Havering and found that, until 1560, up to two-thirds of all testators left something for the poor, but this figure dropped to around one-third during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.³⁸ A closer review of the wills dated from 1565-1590 reveals that 41 percent of all male testators left charitable bequests, while 18 percent of all women testators did so, but the overall percentage of giving was just under 28 percent of the wills surveyed.³⁹

Paul Slack agrees with Beier about the uncertainty of using bequests in wills to determine the extent of charitable giving to the poor in Tudor and Stuart England. He reminds us that execution of wills was sometimes delayed by disputes over other matters contained in them, and that "jealous executors" sometimes refused to hand over charitable bequests. Further, once the bequests had been turned over, the trustees, regardless of whether they were "private individuals, parish vestries,

³⁶Ibid., 71.

³⁷Carol Moore, "Poor Relief in Elizabethan England: A New Look at Ipswich," Proceedings and Papers of the Georgia Association of Historians 3 (1986): 113.

³⁸Marjorie K. McIntosh, A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 277.

³⁹Ibid., 278-79.

or town councils," abused their trust and did not use the income as intended by the testator. For Salisbury, Slack notes that a 1599 Chancery inquisition in that city discovered that £938 in charitable funds had not been used for their intended purpose. He believes that urban parishes were particularly susceptible to this type of misappropriation.⁴⁰ Slack agrees with Jordan that private charity continued to be important in the post-Reformation period, but he points out that "its significance must not be exaggerated."⁴¹ In forming this opinion, Slack does not rely on wills for Salisbury, but rather, on national legislative papers and Salisbury Council Ledgers, along with accounts of various funds found in the Salisbury Municipal Archives; he does not provide a total accounting of these funds for comparative purposes with this study.

Methodology

Recent work by E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield has offered a possible solution to the problems inherent in developing deflation factors in concert with reliable population statistics, and the findings of the present work are based upon their conclusions in this regard.⁴² Population figures were arrived at through a three-step process: first, using 404 parish registers garnered from local demographers for the years 1541-1871, the authors were able to compile the number of births, deaths

⁴⁰Slack, Poverty and Policy, 169.

⁴¹Paul Slack, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666," in Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700, eds. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 178.

⁴²E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

and marriages on a monthly basis; after 1801, censuses were used to provide this information. Second, national population estimates for the period 1541-1871 were computed in five-year intervals; these estimates were prepared using a process called "back projection." In this process, known population figures for a terminal year are used as a base from which the authors worked backwards in five-year increments to establish population figures back to 1541, by subtracting births from deaths; migratory totals are discovered from discrepancies between these two figures. The end result are "census" figures for every five year period from 1541 through 1871. The authors acknowledge that the process is subject to a small error percentage which accumulates in a 3 percent error in the population estimate of 1541. Lastly, Wrigley and Schofield compare the results derived from this process to discover rates of fertility, mortality, and other demographic changes over the period, and combine these results with economic considerations of prices and wages, and other factors such as weather to discover their effects on population.⁴³

Applying these findings to the period of our study, 1558-1625, we find that the population of England was approximately 3,128,279 in 1556; in 1626, it had risen to 4,719,684, an increase of 1,591,405 or just under 51 percent. This figure accords with Hadwin's finding that, although increasing, the population did not more than double until 1656.

⁴³I am indebted to the clarification of these facts by William A. Hodges and Carl Mosk, review of The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction, by E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, in Journal of Economic Literature 21 (March 1983): 92-93; Hodges and Mosk agree that the figures for all the areas studied by Wrigley and Schofield are "unquestionably the best estimates now in existence."

Having established rates of population growth, Wrigley and Schofield constructed a table that plotted "fluctuations in population totals and the changes in a twenty-five year moving average of the price of a basket of consumables using the series constructed by Phelps Brown and Hopkins."⁴⁴ The table shows that, between 1541 and 1656, while the population of England was doubling in size (keeping in mind that our period is also reflective of that growing percentage), the price series tripled. Both series peaked in 1656, and both followed a downward trend for the next thirty years. As Wrigley and Schofield note, this table supports the theory of Robert Malthus, the eighteenth-century demographer, who argued that rises in population put pressure upon food supplies, leading to higher food prices and lower real wages. The two series intersected in the 1580s, but as population growth stressed the food supply prices rose sharply, leading to the multiplication of the price index at a pace which soon outstripped the rise in population.⁴⁵ In the period before 1581, which was when the price index met the population index and began rising above it, each twenty-five year period starting in 1561 up until 1581 experienced a rate of inflation of about 1.5 percent per annum, and did not fall even when population numbers declined. Wrigley and Schofield argue that this reveals that there must exist "a threshold level of population pressure sufficient to modify the linear relationship between the two variables" of prices and population.⁴⁶ In the end, there exists a "comparative uniformity of

⁴⁴Wrigley and Schofield, Population History, 402.

⁴⁵Ibid., 402-403.

⁴⁶Ibid., 406.

relationship between price rise and population from the mid sixteenth to the late eighteenth century," a period which encompasses the years covered by the present study, and this relationship does not, the authors state, contain any prominent exceptions to expected responses between the two variables.⁴⁷

Wrigley and Schofield then considered the relationship between real-wage trends and population growth and note that, during the period of their study, "the level of money wages changed considerably...." Once again, the authors used the Phelps Brown and Hopkins (PBH) data to construct their real-wage index; they caution that the use of the PBH series in this regard must be treated with reserve, since its data referred to only one group of trades--that of builders; other limitations exist as well. Wrigley and Schofield, while recognizing these limitations, point out that the data gathered by Phelps Brown and Hopkins "is the only available series covering the whole period and we have chosen to treat it as if it were reliable" in the absence of any better collection.⁴⁸

Using once again a twenty-five-year moving average of annual figures, Wrigley and Schofield compare population statistics to real wages and find the following: wages fell sharply during a "period of rapid population growth in the late sixteenth century," with the steepest fall between the years of 1571 and 1606, when real wages bottomed out, due primarily to a slowdown in the population growth. Subsequently, population growth ceased and real wages began to recover sometime after

⁴⁷Ibid., 407.

⁴⁸Ibid.

1626, a recovery which was a certainty by 1640; they would continue to rise until population growth resumed in the mid-eighteenth century.⁴⁹

Wrigley and Schofield acknowledge that any real-wage series based on the Phelps Brown and Hopkins data is "open to criticism" because the material used in compiling this data was limited in its application; we have already noted that the wages were those of builders only, and its geographic element was entirely southern. Taking these caveats in stride, Wrigley and Schofield argue that "the PBH data are valuable in providing a guide to the approximate timing and magnitude of changes in real wages over a very long period."⁵⁰ They have reworked the data, accounting for gaps and jumps in the period not dealt with by Phelps Brown and Hopkins, estimated values for missing years, and made other adjustments to simplify presentation.⁵¹ Using the real-wage index, it is possible to calculate, in concrete terms, the actual worth of a charitable bequest at the time it was made, thus presenting, as much as it is possible to do so, a contemporary compilation of private philanthropy during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in the city of Exeter.

To calculate the real value of charitable contributions during our period, figures were taken from the real-wage index for England 1500-1912 constructed by Wrigley and Schofield⁵²; these figures, by decade, were

⁴⁹Ibid., 408.

⁵⁰Ibid., 639.

⁵¹Ibid., 638-41, for a full explanation of the construction of the real-wage series by Wrigley and Schofield.

⁵²Ibid., 642.

used in the following formula to arrive at "deflators" which could then be applied to charitable totals to discover their value in real terms by decade: for each decade, a mean average was established from the real-wage index figures; this mean average was divided into the mean averages (times 100) for each of the succeeding decades, producing a percentage or "deflator," which could then be applied to charitable sums given during the decade or period in question. The mean average of 619 was established for the first decade of our study, and it was this average that was used as a constant in establishing the deflators for subsequent decades.⁵³ An analysis of the charitable sums given during our period and adjusted for inflation is included in the examination of Exeter's wills which follows.⁵⁴

The Evidence from Exeter

Any consideration of testamentary charity in Exeter is hampered by the dearth of local probate records, most of which were destroyed in the German blitz of the city during World War II. Some wills survive in pre-war antiquarian collections of selected southwestern wills, but they are

⁵³The first "decade" of the study actually consists of 11.2 years, as the figures from November, 1558 through December, 1559 were added to the succeeding decade. This combination was made to compensate for the paucity of figures for 1558-59; only three wills were available from this period and they would not have been sufficient for a statistical sample. In order to determine subsequent deflators, it is necessary to establish a constant figure to be used in the formula, a figure which represents a standard against which all other values are to be measured. The figures for the first decade of the study were the highest for the entire period of our study; thus, the mean average of 619, derived from the values of that decade, stands as the constant in the formula.

⁵⁴I am indebted to Dr. Paul Paskoff of LSU for his help in constructing this formula and for his explanations of the economic implications of the rising inflation during the Tudor-Stuart period. I am also grateful to Dr. David Wiedenfeld for his statistical expertise in this regard.

often edited and, in many cases, duplicate wills on file at the Public Record Office. Exeter probates proved by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury are on file there, and these wills form the bulk of my testamentary analysis.⁵⁵

In accommodating the historical concerns about the use of wills, the base sample, which consists of two hundred and sixty wills taken from the two collections, excludes any wills which contained bequests to the poor which could not easily be quantified (i.e., "gowns to five poor women"); nor does it contain any wills which provide for long-term benefactions, such as almshouses, complicated work-loan schemes, and the like, as these programs are considered at length in chapter 9. In connection with the concerns expressed above, the present study assumes that the wills which form this sample represent intention only, and not performance, since execution of the bequests for poor relief in cash or in kind cannot be verified; the wills can, however, measure the extent to which Exeter's citizens were *willing* to contribute to the welfare of their poor brethren, thus providing a foundation for estimates about the extent of private charity during this period. In addition, the figures presented are adjusted for inflation, according to the formula explained

⁵⁵Sources for wills: Probate Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 1558-1630, Public Record Office, London; Miss Olive Moger, ed., Copies of Transcripts & Extracts from Wills and Other Records collected by Miss Olive Moger circa 1921 to 1941, West Country Studies Library, Exeter, England. Another editor, Sir Oswyn Murray, appears to be involved in this series, but he is not listed in the official title of this informal collection. For purposes of this study, note information refers to "PRO" for those wills coming from the Public Record Office; for all others, the designation "OMC" (Olive Moger/Oswyn Murray Collection) will be used. While the PRO provides probate, quire, and folio sections when referring to wills, the OMC exists in unnumbered volumes with no pagination and no reference numbers except for the appellation "8/36."

above. Since the bulk of the sample comes primarily from wills probated by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC), we must also consider the limitations implicit in their use. Testators whose probates were proved there were assumed to have holdings in more than one diocese and/or county, thus necessitating a regional or national probate to ensure equity in distribution. A supposition proceeding from that type of probate was that the testator was probably a person of some means; thus, PCC wills have been branded as dominated by the wealthier individuals of a particular city and/or region. As shown below, an analysis of occupations of testators from the Exeter sample (which rests primarily on PCC wills) clearly reveals a wide range of professions and social designation, running the gamut from "gentleman" to "servant." This range indicates that not all persons having their wills probated at the PCC were wealthy; indeed, a number of them lament the paucity of their estates. The PCC probate, therefore, was mandated by geographic distribution of one's assets, rather than the extent--or scarcity--of them.

Demographics

The demographics of the will sample provide illumination of the people who gave money to the poor--their gender, their occupations and their social positions. In analysing the gender considerations, we turn first to the Elizabethan period (1558-1603); 116 wills form the base of this sample. Men represented 108 or 93.1 percent of the testators, while women represented 8 or 6.9 percent. In the Jacobean period (1603-1625), 144 wills were used for the sample; 119 or 82.6 percent were men, and 25 or 17.4 percent were women. It is clear that the number of female

testators rose substantially in the Stuart period--an increase of 32 percent. Of the total sample of 260 wills, men far and away dominated, representing 227 or 87.3 percent, with the women comprising 33 or 12.7 percent.

None of the women in this sample referred to herself by any occupational term; when a title was used, it was invariably a reference to the woman's marital status: eighteen of the women called themselves widows, while two noted their position as wives; two others categorized themselves as spinsters. These appellations clearly reflect the male-dominated nature of society in the early modern period; women defined themselves in relation to the men--or lack of them--in their lives. That widows represent the majority of women testators reveals the relative independence that a woman achieved upon the death of her spouse; for one of the few times in her life, she could make decisions about property, business matters, and questions of inheritance, decisions which were formerly the provenance of her husband. In light of the new autonomy a widow might experience, the preponderance of this appellation in the sample is not surprising.⁵⁶

Of the men, a variety of terms are used to characterize their position, either social or in specific occupations. From the information

⁵⁶Additional information on the connection between women and the making of wills can be found in the following: Mary Prior, "Wives and Wills 1558-1700," in English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in honor of Joan Thirsk, eds. John Chartres and David Hey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 201-26; B. A. Holderness, "Widows in pre-industrial society: an essay upon their economic functions," in Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle, ed. Richard M. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 423-42.

found in the wills regarding reference to self, the following analysis is offered:⁵⁷

TABLE 1
OCCUPATIONS OF EXETER TESTATORS

	<u>Elizabethan</u>		<u>Jacobean</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Merchants	19	16.4	29	20.1	48	18.5
--Clerk	7		11		18	
--Chaplain	1		0		1	
--Bishop	2		1		3	
--Dean	1		0		1	
--Canon	2		0		2	
--Chaunter	1		1		2	
--Preacher/ Minister	0		2		2	
--Parson	0		1		1	
--Prebendary	0		1		1	
Religious	14	12.0	9	6.3	23	8.8
--Goldsmith	2		1		3	
--Stationer	1		0		1	
--Collier	1		0		1	
--Tailor	1		3		4	
--Mercer	1		1		2	
--Fuller	1		1		2	
--Haberdasher	0		1		1	
--Skinner	0		1		1	
--Dyer	0		1		1	
--Baker	0		1		1	
--Barber	0		1		1	
--Draper	0		1		1	
--Cordwainer	0		1		1	
--Brewer	0		1		1	
--Tucker	0		1		1	
--Carpenter	0		1		1	
Trades	7	6.0	16	11.1	23	8.9
--Gentleman	7		11		18	
--Knight	1		0		1	
--Esquire	0		3		3	
Social	8	6.9	14	9.7	22	8.5

(table con'd.)

⁵⁷For purposes of this study, only the numbers and percentages of the major divisions of occupations/social positions will be used; sub-headings of the major divisions are provided only to illustrate the variety of professions found in the sample.

	<u>Elizabethan</u>		<u>Jacobean</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
--Alderman	8		3		11	
--Receiver	0		1		1	
--Chancellor	0		1		1	
--Mayor	1		0		1	
--Notary Public	1		1		2	
Civic	10	8.6	6	4.2	16	6.2
--Yeoman	0		5		5	
--Husbandman	1		0		1	
Agricultural	1	.9	5	3.5	6	2.3
--Dr. of Laws	1		1		2	
--Dr. of Physicke	0		2		2	
Professional	1	.9	3	2.1	4	1.5
--Servant	1		1		2	
--Mariner	1		1		2	
--Citizen	1		0		1	
Other	3	2.6	2	1.4	5	1.9

Merchants represent the largest occupational category in this analysis, with their total number being more than double that of any other vocation listed. Religious professions are the next most numerous occupation, followed closely by those persons participating in trades; designations as to social position are quite frequent as well. The remaining appellations are primarily civic in nature.⁵⁸ It appears, then, that merchants were much more likely to make a will to dispose of their worldly assets than persons in other occupations, leading us to believe that they were also more likely to have something to leave.

⁵⁸It is worthwhile to point out that it is entirely probable that many of the persons listed as belonging strictly to the "civic" category were, or had once been, merchants or tradesmen, since governmental positions paid little or nothing in the way of compensation. In some instances, a testator might refer to himself as an "alderman and merchant"; for those persons, both of those references were counted as representing a half in the compilation of appellations. Chapter 4 contains a fuller discussion of the types of men who were most likely to be involved in the governance of the city, but it is important to realize that there is an overlap--perhaps a considerable one--between some of these professions.

Giving to the Poor

Amounts left by testament to care for the poor are analyzed in a number of different ways in this study. Wills are organized first as to probate date order and assigned to either the Elizabethan or Jacobean periods; the gender of the testator and his or her occupation or social position is also noted. Percentages of giving by gender and occupation are also compiled for both periods and for the comprehensive amounts.

Charitable bequests in each will are then broken down into a number of categories: (1) almshouses (supporting donations only); (2) care of prisoners; (3) distributions at funerals; (4) non-recurring work loans; (5) dowries for poor maidens; (6) funds left for use by the general poor and having no specific designation; and (7) miscellaneous bequests of gowns, bread, and other items that can be quantified. Amounts are compiled by decade in each of the two periods for all categories, and a grand total for each period is calculated. The figures for the two periods are combined, thus providing an overall illustration of the extent of charity by testament during the time frame of this study. Each decadal aggregate is adjusted for inflation based on mean average, as are the sums for the individual periods and their synthesization.

We have previously discussed the makeup of the will sample in terms of demography; we now wish to consider how many testators, according to gender and occupation, actually left bequests for the poor. The numbers and percentages by gender are as follows:

TABLE 2
GENDER DISTRIBUTIONS AMONG TESTATORS

<u>Elizabethan Period</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Men	60	55.6
Women	6	75.0
 <u>Jacobean Period</u>		
Men	68	57.1
Women	16	64.0
 <u>Total</u>		
Men	128	56.4
Women	22	66.7

These figures show that a higher percentage of women gave to the poor as opposed to men; this assessment is tempered, however, by two factors: first, the number of women represented in the sample is very small and one could argue that this sparse figure cannot provide a substantive conclusion and second, women, unlike men, often had more discretion over their estates, since they were not generally expected to make provision for heirs or to repay debts (although many did). Taking those factors into account, it is still noteworthy that, all figures considered, between 7 and 20 percent more women provided for the poor than men did. We must also keep in mind that many of these women were widows, so their bequests, in a collateral sense, represented their husbands as well; as well, this theory is tempered by the consideration that sons may have inherited the bulk of the father's wealth. The percentage of giving by the men is also impressive; well over 50 percent of all male testators made provision for the poor throughout our period.

Testamentary poor relief according to occupation is outlined along the major divisions used above; the numbers and percentages are as follows:

TABLE 3
TESTAMENTARY POOR RELIEF BY OCCUPATION

	<u>Elizabethan</u>		<u>Jacobean</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Merchants	13	68.4	18	62.1	31	64.6
Religious	4	28.6	2	22.2	6	26.1
Trades	5	71.4	10	62.5	15	65.2
Social	4	50.0	8	57.1	12	54.5
Civic	7	70.0	6	100.0	13	81.3
Agricultural	0	.0	3	60.0	3	50.0
Professional	0	.0	2	66.7	2	50.0
Other	2	66.7	0	.0	2	40.0

Again, we must keep in mind that this statistical sample is quite small, and we cannot be sure that it can be termed representative, even though it does encompass the majority of all available Exeter wills of the period and does account for all wills in the sample where an occupation is noted. The civic professions take the lead in giving, with 70 percent making provision for the poor during the Elizabethan period, 100 percent during the Jacobean, and 81.3 percent for all years of the study. Participants in the trades are second with 65.2 percent overall giving, followed closely by merchants with 64.6 percent participating in testamentary charity. Those persons using social appellations in their wills gave at a rate of 54.5 percent; agricultural and professional occupations left bequests 50 percent of the time, while all other professions represent a 40 percent frequency of giving.

How does this compare to Jordan's findings about frequency of contribution based on occupation?⁵⁹ He argued that the merchants were far and away the largest class of givers, amounting to 43.17 in his sample. In Exeter, they are the largest group in terms of numbers, but their percentages of giving fall below that of the civic professions, which Jordan would correlate with the gentry class, who represented 11.3 percent of the givers in his study. In the present work, the civic professions boasted the greatest percentage of contributors--81.3 percent. As to the urban classes--the trades--Jordan found that 14.3 percent of them made provision for the poor; in our sample, persons engaging in urban occupations gave 65.2 percent of the time, with the merchants following closely behind at 64.6 percent. Thus, the Exeter merchants gave more than those in Jordan's sample, but their generosity trailed that of the civic professions and the urban trades.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Mordechai Feingold takes exception to Jordan's argument that the nobility gave much less than the other classes, on a percentage basis, thereby devaluing the ascendancy of the merchant class in this regard; see Mordechai Feingold, "Jordan Revisited: Patterns of Giving in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England," History of Education 8, no. 4 (1979): 261-62.

⁶⁰Again, we must take into consideration the probable overlap between the merchants and the other professions under analysis. The above presentation is based solely on the appellations contained in the wills themselves; since we cannot be sure of an occupation other than the one listed, it is not possible to make a solid conclusion about any overlap between them. If one were to assume, however, that the civic and trade professions were composed primarily of merchants, the percentage of charitable giving is substantially altered: merchants (in whatever guise) would represent a total of 25 or 69.4 percent of the givers during the Elizabethan period; 34 or 66.7 percent during the Jacobean period; and 59 or 67.8 percent for the entire period of the study. The total percentage for giving for all other professions for the period would then amount to slightly less than a third. This percentage of merchant givers, however, far exceeds Professor Jordan's estimate of 43.17 percent for the same. To compensate for this variation, we must keep in mind that Jordan does not include the civic professions in his calculations

One rather startling figure emerges from this analysis: the segment of the population which gave the least to the poor in their wills were those persons in religious occupations. Elizabethan religious officials gave slightly more than their Jacobean counterparts, but at no time did their testamentary philanthropy exceed 30 percent; in fact, only 26.1 percent of these officials made provision for the poor during the period of our study. It is difficult to explain the relative failure of the religious in this regard, but we may postulate reasons for it. The church, as we have seen, had always played a traditionally large role in caring for the poor, and these officials' participation in such efforts may have satisfied their philanthropic urges. Another cause might have been due to lack of estate to make such provisions, since many churchmen existed on relatively small, and sometimes non-existent, stipends. Can this stricture, however, be applied to the highest religious officials, particularly bishops? The wills of three bishops of Exeter are included in our sample: William Alley (probated 1570), John Woolton (probated 1593-4), and William Cotton (probated 1621).⁶¹ Approximately twenty-year intervals separated their tenancies of the bishopric, so their wills essentially cover the entire period of our study. Alley made no provision for the poor in any form, while Woolton left £25 for the use

for the merchant class; in addition, the totals for Exeter are somewhat exaggerated, containing as they do the total numbers of persons belonging to the three separate categories. Taking these considerations into account, a more likely percentage of giving among the merchant class was approximately 55.5 percent.

⁶¹For William Alley: Probate Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 1558-1625 (Public Record Office, London), Probate 11/52, quire 10, fol. 70; for John Woolton: PRO, PCC Probate 11/83, quire 37, fol. 285; for William Cotton: PRO, PCC Probate 11/138, quire 78, fols. 117-18.

of the general poor; Cotton instructed that 40s. be distributed to the poor by his churchwardens after his death. Although it is not possible to generalize about giving among religious officials from the example of the bishops alone, we can see that there was a wide range of attitude among them about provision for the poor, and this attitude had little to do with church position or extent of estate.

The Extent of Testamentary Charity in Exeter

We now turn to a consideration of the actual amounts given through wills to the use of the poor, with particular attention to the strictures outlined above. The figures are arranged in decade order with a cut-off date between the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods at March, 1603, the date of death for Elizabeth I.⁶² Similarly, the Jacobean period ends at March, 1625 with the death of James I. The decedal amounts are presented first, and are followed by a separate presentation of total figures given for poor relief by decade, both in current (early modern) pounds and as deflated by the formula detailed above; an analysis of the findings follows these two sections.

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF TESTAMENTARY AMOUNTS

	<u>1558- 1569</u>	<u>1570- 1579</u>	<u>1580- 1589</u>
Almshouses	£ 0 0s. 0d	£ 4 13s. 10d	£ 0 7s. 8d
Prisoners	2 10s. 6d	3 11s. 7d	5 2s. 8d
Funeral Doles	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d
Work Loans	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d	230 0s. 0d
			(table con'd.)

⁶²For ease of computation, the figures for the period from November, 1558 through the end of 1599 have been added to the decedal totals for 1560-69.

	<u>1558- 1569</u>	<u>1570- 1579</u>	<u>1580- 1589</u>
Dowries	£ 0 0s. 0d	£ 20 0s. 0d	£ 0 0s. 0d
General Poor	65 10s. 0d	215 9s. 8d	63 9s. 2d
Miscellaneous	0 0s. 0d	0 20s. 0d	0 6s. 0d

	<u>1590- 1599</u>	<u>1600- 3/1603</u>	<u>3/1603- 1609</u>
Almshouses	£ 7 18s. 4d	£ 0 0s. 0d	£ 26 12s. 8d
Prisoners	8 0s. 0d	1 13s. 0d	2 10s. 0d
Funeral Doles	8 1s. 8d	0 0s. 0d	5 6s. 4d
Work Loans	40 0s. 0d	100 0s. 0d	61 0s. 0d
Dowries	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d
General Poor	126 15s. 0d	1 13s. 8d	21 13s. 10d
Miscellaneous	10 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d

	<u>1610- 1619</u>	<u>1620- 3/1625</u>
Almshouses	£ 49 5s. 0d	£ 95 0s. 0d
Prisoners	2 5s. 10d	3 10s. 0d
Funeral Doles	24 18s. 8d	49 6s. 0d
Work Loans	8 0s. 0d	24 0s. 0d
Dowries	0 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d
General Poor	162 9s. 2d	60 10s. 10d
Miscellaneous	5 0s. 0d	0 20s. 0d

Totals for the dedicated categories:

	<u>Elizabethan</u>	<u>Jacobean</u>
Almshouses	£ 12 19s. 10d	£170 17s. 8d
Prisoners	20 17s. 9d	8 5s. 10d
Funeral Doles	8 1s. 8d	79 11s. 0d
Work Loans	370 0s. 0d	93 0s. 0d
Dowries	20 0s. 0d	0 0s. 0d
General Poor	472 17s. 6d	244 13s. 10d
Miscellaneous	<u>11 6s. 0d</u>	<u>6 0s. 0d</u>
	£916 2s. 9d	£602 8s. 4d

TABLE 5

DISTRIBUTION OF TESTAMENTARY AMOUNTS (AS DEFLATED)

Totals for decades in current (early modern) pounds and as deflated:⁶³

	<u>Pounds</u>	<u>Shillings</u>	<u>Pence</u>	<u>Deflated</u>
<u>Elizabethan:</u>				
1558-1569	68	0	6	68
1570-1579	244	15	1	239
1580-1589	299	5	6	270
1590-1599	200	15	0	140
1600-3/1603	<u>103</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	*
	916	2	9	
<u>Jacobean:</u>				
3/1603-1609	117	2	10	133
1610-1619	251	18	8	156
1620-3/1625	<u>233</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>154</u>
	<u>602</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4</u>	
<u>Grand Total:</u>	<u>1,518</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1,160</u>

A mean average was also established for the entire period of the study and deflated by a percentage factor of 80.6, resulting in a deflated total for the period of £1,224, a figure which is somewhat more reliable than the combined deflated amounts for each decade which totaled £1,160. The decade totals are rounded off and change is more abrupt decade to decade rather than when the period is considered as a whole. For purposes of this study, then, the deflated total of £1,224 is accepted.

⁶³Deflated figures are based on rounded off totals; in addition, deflated figures are not computed for the separated Elizabethan and Jacobean totals in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The deflated figure is based on the total giving for that decade, i.e., 1600-1609, in order to conform to the real-wage index constructed by Wrigley and Schofield. The combined total for this decade is £220 9s. 6d. Its deflated value is listed on the line for the first Jacobean period; the line for the last Elizabethan period is skipped over, as denoted by the * symbol.

Turning to the figures, we note first of all that the amount given in the Elizabethan period exceeds that of the Jacobean by 65.7 percent, based solely on the compilations presented. We must keep in mind, however, that the Elizabethan period consisted of a forty-five year span, while the Jacobean period encompassed only twenty-two years, which is a little less than half of the Elizabethan. Since it is not the goal of this study to project trends for future years, we will not attempt to adjust for the variance in years between the periods, but will consider each on its own terms.

On a yearly average basis, Exeter's citizens contributed approximately £20 to the relief of the poor through cash bequests during the Elizabethan period; this contribution went up to £27 per annum during the Jacobean period. This increase occurred despite a continuing rise in prices (lasting from 1541 through 1656), and the fall in real wages--which had been of a rapid nature since 1571--did not bottom out until 1606. In fact, real wages do not begin to make any sort of recovery until after the Jacobean period, in 1626.⁶⁴ Therefore, in the face of continuing economic pressure, Exeter's citizens not only continued to leave money to care for the poor, but actually increased their average yearly contribution.⁶⁵

⁶⁴E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871: A Reconstruction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 403-408.

⁶⁵Useful discussions of the inflationary nature of Tudor and Stuart England, and the "crisis" of the 1590s can be found in the following: R. B. Outhwaite, Inflation in Tudor and Stuart England, 2d ed. (London, 1982); Peter Clark, ed., The European Crisis of the 1590s (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1985); M. J. Power, "London and the Control of the 'Crisis' of the 1590s," History, 70, no. 230 (October 1985): 371-85; M. J. Power, "A 'Crisis' Reconsidered: Social and

In analyzing the Elizabethan period, we find that the height of decadal contributions was reached during 1580-89, when £299 were given in support of the poor; though £230 of this contribution came from two donors, there were thirteen other contributors during that decade. The decade which showed contribution by the largest number of citizens was that of 1590-99, the period which suffered the greatest economic crisis in both prices and wages. During that decade, twenty citizens made provision for the poor in their wills, indicating that the less fortunate were not forgotten when times got tough; indeed, there seems to have been even more concern when resources were at their most scarce.

Going into the Jacobean period, the number of givers not only stabilized but reached its apogee during the decade of 1610-1619, when forty-six persons made bequests for the poor in their wills. In the half-decade which followed--1620-25, twenty-eight testators did so. This growth in the number of contributors seems to tally with Jordan's analysis that benefactions began to increase after 1601 and rose steadily thereafter, reaching a climax in the 1630s.

To what ends did the contributors direct their efforts? In both the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, the largest sum is that of bequests to aid the poor in general--funds that had no particular goal in mind other than to relieve distress caused by poverty. These monies were most often in the form of cash to be distributed after the death of the testator, usually as the executor thought fit. Specific amounts for bread or clothing were sometimes mentioned, and several testators even

Demographic Dislocation in London in the 1590s," The London Journal 12, no. 2 (Winter 1986): 134-45.

had particular people in mind who were to receive this help. James FitzJames, in 1574, after making bequests to both the general poor and the poor of several parishes, stated that he wished to "give to the poor John Aidge twenty shillings."⁶⁶ It was most common to indicate that the poor of a particular parish were to have the funds, a choice often made to honor the testator's place of birth, residence, or death. For instance, Thomas Martin, fuller, whose will was probated in 1597, spread his largesse around the city: to the poor of the parish of St. Mary the More he gave 5s., a like amount to the poor of St. Mary Steps, and a further 5s. in poor relief to the parish of St. David without the Northgate.⁶⁷

The next most common donations were given in the form of work loans, money offered to set the poor on gainful employment or to subsidize poor tradesmen of various occupations. In 1587, John Webb, a merchant, gave the sum of £200 into the care of the mayor and council to provide for "those ... young beginners of the fellowship or company of the merchant tailors of the same city [Exeter] seventy pounds for a stock in their trades...."⁶⁸ Robert Parr, in 1608, gave the wardens of the parish church of St. Martin the sum of £2 to be "lent freely to the poor people of the same parish for one whole year...."⁶⁹

A favorite device of many testators was to leave sums to support the various almshouses of the city, many of which had been in existence

⁶⁶PRO, PCC Probate 11/56, quire 43, fol. 339.

⁶⁷PRO, PCC Probate 11/91, quire 23, fols. 176-77.

⁶⁸PRO, PCC Probate 11/70, quire 21, fols. 162-64.

⁶⁹PRO, PCC Probate 11/111, quire 50, fols. 410-12.

since the medieval period.⁷⁰ William Payne, whose will was probated in 1570, wanted to "give and bequeath to the poor people of the four houses here following, that is of St. Anne without Eastgate in the parish of St. Sidwell's, St. Katherine, St. Kerrian and the house in the Bellwether's Lane ... [which] are situate[d] ... within the city of Exeter 40 shillings of good and lawful money of England...." The houses were to get 10s. each, paid out at four religious feast days during the year.⁷¹ During the Jacobean period, there was a substantial increase in the amounts left for the almshouses, but this increase was due to large amounts being left by a few testators, rather than to a growth in almshouse giving by the community as a whole.

A number of people appear to be concerned that their funerals would not be well attended, so they left money to the poor people who showed up at their burial; the bequest was frequently in the guise of gowns or bread, and generally accompanied by some small payment of a few pence. Occasionally, makers of wills requested that poor people be solicited to carry their coffin to the grave, thereby earning them a fixed sum. Peter Willis, who died in 1585, directed that "twenty poor householders" were to receive "a gown of black frieze or black cotton to be provided against my burial...;" he further desired "that four of them may carry me to my grave." In a non-quantifiable bequest to the poor, Willis went on to state: "I do clearly release and quitclaim by this my testament and last will unto all and singular such poor persons which shall be indebted unto

⁷⁰A full discussion of the almshouse endowments can be found in chapter 9.

⁷¹PRO, PCC Probate 11/52, quire 16, fol. 118.

me in the hour of my death," including such things as rents due from his tenements. His approaching death apparently made Willis much more willing to part with his worldly goods.⁷² The amounts distributed to the poor at funerals increased markedly in the Jacobean period, but as was true of alms-house giving, the increase was due to large sums being given by a small number of individuals.

Concern over the prisoners in the jails of the city appears in a number of wills during our period. Time and again, references to the "poor prisoners of the Queen's Gaol" are made in the testaments of Exeter's citizens. One of the major considerations was the disposition of the bodies of dead prisoners. Mrs. Joan Tuckfield, the widow of an Exeter alderman, directed that profits from certain of her lands be used to repair the walls of the prisons and to purchase a piece of ground at Ringswell to insure the decent burial of deceased prisoners. John Hooker writes that she had been inspired to this charity by the actions of Griffith Ameredith, a city alderman, who had become outraged at prisoners being buried either naked or in their rags. In 1561, he dedicated certain revenues representing a yearly value of approximately 38s. to the purchase of proper burial shrouds for the dead prisoners; Tuckfield, moved by this gesture, provided further comforts for them in her will.⁷³

The balance of Exeter's philanthropy was directed towards dowries for poor maidens and other miscellaneous sponsorships; in some cases,

⁷²PRO, PCC Probate 11/69, quire 62, fol. 483.

⁷³Walter J. Harte, Cleanings from the Common Place Book of John Hooker, relating to the City of Exeter (1485-1590) (Exeter: A Wheaton & Co., Ltd., 1926), 27; Samuel Izacke, An Account of the Legacies left to the poor of the City of Exeter (1736; re-published with remarks by William Carwithen, Exeter: S. Hedgeland, 1820), 3-4.

monies were to be given to "poor laborers" or "widows;" in one instance, a testator directed that clothing be given to a poor woman. For a number of wills, the bequests were too diffuse to be quantified. A good example of this is the will of Thomas Reynolds, a clerk whose testament was probated in 1562. For instance, Reynolds leaves every bedridden person in the city of Exeter 12d, and every inhabitant of every almshouse and hospital 4d, while each of the prisoners in the three city jails received 2d. A penny was to be given to each poor person who asked for general alms at St. Peter's, and fixed sums were allotted for the poor of six other areas. Not content with this show of generosity, Reynolds left the residue of his estate to be used in "bringing up poor children in virtue and learning," providing marriage portions for poor men and maidens, and relieving families burdened with too many children. One can only imagine the difficulties encountered by Reynolds' executors in fulfilling the terms of his will.⁷⁴

There is no question that Exeter's citizens gave a great deal of time and thought, not to mention money, to the pursuit of a solution to the social problem of poverty. In this chapter, we have considered only the cash bequests proceeding from their testaments. In the next chapter, we begin an analysis of the charitable endowments they provided; that evidence, combined with the findings of this chapter, will give us as complete a picture as we are likely to get of the true extent of the philanthropic nature of the citizen of an early modern English city.

⁷⁴OMC, 8/36, proved 10 October 1562.

CHAPTER 9

THE ENDOWED BENEFACCTIONS OF EXETER

As we have seen, the evidence from the wills of the citizens of Exeter provides only part of the answer about the extent of the philanthropic impulse in that city during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. In point of fact, the miscellaneous sums given in aid of the poor that we examined in the previous chapter, generous as they were, pale in comparison to the amounts which underpin the endowed benefactions that Exonians established for the benefit of their less fortunate brethren. These benefactions take three main forms, each of which will be considered in turn. Almshouses and hospitals, erected to provide refuge for the destitute and sick, represent a large percentage of the benefactions we will consider.¹ This type of benefaction was followed closely in amounts given by the revolving loan funds established by some of Exeter's leading citizens to provide aid to young craftsmen in setting up their businesses, thereby buttressing the city's economic base; loan funds were also used to set the poor on useful work in order to relieve the burden placed on other sources of poor relief. A third form of benefaction is the general bequest in aid of the poor; these bequests differed in approach and amount and were directed to very specific ends.

Almshouses and Hospitals

The concept of a charitable foundation was known in Exeter and the rest of England well before the period this study encompasses, but it

¹A good exposition of the link between pre-modern hospitals and charity can be found in Jonathan Barry and Colin Jones, eds., Medicine and Charity Before the Welfare State (London and NY: Routledge, 1991).

took on a new and different meaning during the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In concert with the Church, various benefactors endowed almshouses and hospitals for the specific relief of the poor in the medieval period, but this aid was offered in the absence of a governmental response to the problem. With the advent of legislation regarding the problem of poverty, the constitution of these charitable foundations took on a different cast in their administration, as the civic community became ever more involved in the regulation of the poor in any given city. While almshouses and hospitals found their beginnings in the generosity of individual citizens, during the sixteenth century these private endowments were managed, increasingly, by civic officials, who provided the administrative apparatus for these institutions. That they did so makes it sometimes difficult to separate "private" from "public" when discussing almshouses and hospitals. For purposes of this chapter, we are careful to note these distinctions when they occur, as civic administration of these private endowments is discussed earlier in this work.²

An almshouse which began its history as a hospital for lepers, St. Mary Magdalen, lying outside the south gate of the city, was established in the year 1163 by Bartholomew Iscanus, Bishop of Exeter.³ The bishop

²See chapter 6 for other aspects of the administration of these institutions.

³Material on St. Mary Magdalen Hospital comes from the following sources: Alexander Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History of the City of Exeter, 2d ed. (Exeter: W. Norton, 1841); George Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis (Exeter: P. A. Hannaford, 1846); The Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities (Exeter: T. Besley, 1825); John Vowell alias Hoker, The Description of the Citie of Excester, ed. Walter J. Harte et al, 3 vols. (Exeter: The Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1947); there was an earlier hospital named St. John's, which was

dedicated "five marks of silver" (£3 6s. 8d) per annum to the support of thirteen individuals, who were to be sent to the hospital by his nomination; in addition, he supplied them with "14 loaves, to be received weekly." Income from various rents and contributions amounted to £2 3s. 4d, plus several "sextertiums" of beer.⁴ He gave the inmates leave to beg in the city on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but this practice was discontinued in 1244, when the citizens complained that the "obnoxious" lepers were spreading their disease, and should be forbidden from entering the market. An agreement was reached whereby the then bishop surrendered his interest in the hospital; turning it over to the control of the city, he received in exchange the control of St. John's.⁵ Once in control of the hospital, the city appointed an official, to be called the Warden of the Maudlyn, to oversee operations: he was to see that all the "lazar and sycke" people were "well-governed," by providing them with all necessary items in addition to their stipend; he was to take care that no person not sick of the disease be admitted and was to make a yearly account to the Chamber of the sums collected and dispensed on behalf of the hospital.⁶ The Maudlyn was still restricted to lepers over two hundred years later, as evidenced by the admission of Richard Orenge,

suppressed on February 20, 1539. As part of the charity provided by the religious elements of the city, it is discussed in chapter 7. Certain of the rents derived from its former lands were directed by Queen Elizabeth to be used for the poor of the city in 1562; the disposition of these funds and the dissolution of the hospital itself are covered in chapter 7.

⁴Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 212.

⁵Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 379.

⁶Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:822.

a former mayor of Exeter, to the hospital sometime after 1454: "...being infected with the leprosy, notwithstanding his great wealth, [he] submitted himself to a residence in this hospital...." He died in 1458, after having been "very bountiful and liberal to the house in money and wealth."⁷

Though other poor people were being admitted to the Maudlyn by the sixteenth century, it was clear that it still functioned as a refuge for those suffering from leprosy, at least into the 1620s: the Act Books of the Chamber indicate the admittance of lepers who had been ordered to the Maudlyn in 1613 and 1626.⁸ By the 1580s, the annual income of the Maudlyn was £18 6s. 7d, with an additional £2 paid to the resident chaplain. Out of the income, 6d a week was paid to each of the residents.⁹ The Warden made sure that the income due to the institution was pursued vigorously; Hooker records that Thomas Suckesbeche held "one close of land called Maudlyn Close and certain acres of marsh ground which wrongfully he keepeth from the poor by the rent of six shillings, eight pence." In the margin of this account is the term "respited;" apparently prosecution of the matter was delayed, and there is no further mention of it.¹⁰ Among the significant contributors to the Maudlyn were a "sometime Mayor" Robert Chafe, who gave 14s. to its support, and Joan

⁷Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 379; Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 401.

⁸Act Books of the City of Exeter, vols. II-VIII (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), VII, fols. 110, 643.

⁹Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:686-94; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Exeter 1540-1640, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 102.

¹⁰Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:694.

Tuckfield who "bequeathed yearly to the poor lazar people in this hospital" the sum of 1s. 8d, to be shared amongst the inmates.¹¹

Several of the almshouse foundations were of fifteenth-century origin. In 1409, a three-times mayor, Simon Grendon, founded an almshouse commonly called the "Ten Cells" in Preston Street in the city. There is some confusion over whether Grendon intended it strictly as an almshouse for ten women: Richard Izacke maintains that it was for single women and widows, while Oliver notes that church authorities regarded it as being for all poor, and provides evidence of a fifteenth-century will leaving a legacy to thirteen poor men residing there. By the time of the charity commissioners' report in 1825, it was strictly a residence for widows. Grendon endowed the almshouse with a £2 annuity to provide 4d to each resident weekly, but other benefactors left legacies that brought the annual income up to £16 16s. 8d; the city paid interest on enfeoffed lands dedicated to the maintenance of the almshouse in the amount of £20, which brought the total to over £36 per annum by 1625.¹²

In 1408, Lord William Bonville founded an almshouse in Rock Lane, more commonly called Coombe Row or Street in the city, for twelve poor men and women; he gave three hundred marks (£200) to purchase lands worth fifty marks (just over £33) per annum to support the institution. Unfortunately, one of his descendants was Henry Grey, Marquis of Dorset (the father of Lady Jane Grey) whose treason against Queen Mary in 1553 led to his execution and the forfeiture of his lands to the Crown, which

¹¹Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 380.

¹²Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 403; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 367-68; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 91-103.

placed the control of the almshouses within the purview of the queen. In November of 1562, Queen Elizabeth restored the right of nomination of the poor of these almshouses to the city Chamber (subject to her occasional order) and directed that the founder's intentions regarding them be honored; income from the Crown rents of the former Dorset lands supported the residents in the amount of £21 11s. 4d per annum. John Baker added another 3s. 4d annuity to the total, bringing the annual income to £21 14s. 8d, out of which each inhabitant received seven pence per week.¹³

A one-time Recorder of the city, William Wynard, established an almshouse for twelve poor men and a resident priest in 1436 and directed that the income from certain lands and tenements go to support them; the chaplain received eight marks yearly (£5 6s. 8d) and each of the twelve poor men was to receive 8d weekly. Since the priest's pay reverted to the Crown during the Dissolution, the annual income of the almshouse is thus assumed to be £20 16s. Wynard wanted a truly religious house; he directed that the men repair to chapel twice a day for divine service and forbade them to beg or be vagrant. He asked that the mayor and the bailiffs of the city visit the almshouse twice a year in order to make sure that all was in order; to ensure that the funds of the almshouse were secure, he mandated the use of a strong box, secured by three locks. His descendants, the Spekes, maintained the almshouse under his

¹³Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 135-43; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 369; Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 404; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:606, 859; John Prince, Danmonii Orientales Illustres or The Worthies of Devon (London: Rees and Curtis, 1810), 110-13; Richard Izacke, Remarkable Antiquities of the City of Exeter (London: Rowland Reynolds, 1681), 187.

ordinances, and one of them, George Speke, raised the almsmen's weekly support from 8d to 13d during the reign of Charles I. During the Civil War, the almshouses were virtually destroyed, and the Chamber brought suit against a Speke heir after the Restoration to rebuild and maintain them in the tradition of his ancestor, William.¹⁴

John Stevens, M.D. and canon residentiary of the cathedral of St. Peter of Exeter founded an almshouse in 1426 to care for thirteen poor men, supporting them with a yearly rent of 17s. 4d, in addition to meat and drink worth just over £2. William Herne added a subsidy in the amount of £2 16s. 4d yearly, so the total income of the almshouse was £5 15s. 10d, doled out to the residents in weekly 2d allotments.¹⁵

John Palmer, a baker in the city of Exeter, established an almshouse in the city through his will of 1487; he instructed his executors to give each of the four poor women residing there 6s. 8d in two equal installments at Easter and Christmas. He added another pound yearly for the maintenance of his obituary at Holy Trinity parish, so the income of this legacy was £2 6s. 8d; William Herne and John Baker added annuities of 10s. 8d, bringing the annual income of the almshouse to £2 17s. 4d.¹⁶

¹⁴Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 404; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 375-79; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:859; Wynard's Almshouses, with seventeenth-century refurbishments, still stand in the southern part of the city, and are currently occupied (fittingly) by volunteer organizations.

¹⁵R. Izacke, Remarkable Antiquities, 188; Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 407; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:859.

¹⁶Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 113-16; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 375; Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis

Evidence of two rather obscure institutions is found in the records as well; the Chamber gave permission in 1519 to John Moore, once mayor of the city, to construct, along with his friend Bartholomew Fortescue, an almshouse on the Exeter bridge that could accommodate three persons. There is no other information extant about its administration, but its adjoining chapel was demolished in 1833; under the entrance to the chapel was discovered the body of its founder, Walter Gervis. St. Anne's Chapel, constructed in 1418 in the precincts of St. Sidwell's, became St. Anne's Almshouse in 1558-59 under the auspices of the Mainwaring brothers, Oliver and George, and was meant to house an unspecified number of poor people. A gentleman, Ralph Duchenfield, subsequently endowed the almshouse with a tenement in Preston Street, but the land was kept from the poor through embezzlement of the funds. Not until 1618 did the almshouse receive any further supplements; the wife of a Mainwaring descendant gave them a meadow and tenement for their maintenance, property which reverted back to the family in 1665.¹⁷

The next two almshouse foundations were made during the period covered by our study, with the first being that of William Hurst, a five-times former mayor and then current alderman, who deeded certain lands in October, 1567, for the purpose of providing almshouses for twelve poor

Exoniensis, 407; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:859.

¹⁷For Moore and Fortescue: Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 408; Walter J. Harte, ed., Gleanings from the Common Place Book of John Hooker, relating to the City of Exeter (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co., Ltd., n.d.), 27; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:860; for the Mainwaring brothers: Oliver, Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis, 408; Samuel Izacke, An Account of the Legacies left to the poor of the City of Exeter (1736; reprint, with remarks by William Carwithen, Exeter: S. Hedgeland, 1820), 61-62.

people; they were to receive 20s. each per annum for their support, resulting in an income for the institution of £12. This amount was later supplemented by the will of John Lant, who left £100 to the Chamber to be employed to the maintenance of the poor almspeople; out of this gift, £5 was to be added to the £12 provided by Hurst to continue the yearly payments to the residents of the institution. The front of the almshouses was inscribed to indicate Hurst's tenancy of the mayoralty of the city.¹⁸

Another civic personage, John Davye, deeded lands and tenements to the city to endow almshouses in 1600, an endowment that rested chiefly on the rents from the rectory and parsonage of Mariansleigh; total income amounted to £20 16s. 8d. It provided for the care of two poor men and their wives, plus two single persons, either male or female. Davye directed the Chamber to make sure that a "sufficient minister" be installed at the almshouse to meet the religious needs of the inhabitants, who were to be picked from the residents of the city by the Chamber after viewing at the Guildhall. They were required to be at least sixty years of age and have lived in the city at least ten years prior to their selection for the almshouse. The married couples were to receive 2s. 4d per couple, while each single person was to be granted 1s. 6d. In the event that one spouse from a couple should die, 1s. 10d was to be distributed to the other almshouse dwellers until a replacement couple was appointed. Davye was explicit on the duties the residents had

¹⁸Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 103-113; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 352; R. Izacke, Remarkable Antiquities, 189; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:861; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 45-46.

one to another and was also specific about their conduct while living at the almshouse. No single person could marry; if they did so, they would forfeit their place and repay an unspecified sum. They were to help each other in times of sickness and accompany former residents when they were buried. Maintenance of decorum inside and outside the house was expected and begging was forbidden; if a resident was caught begging, a week's payment was to be forfeit. Like Wynard, Davye directed that surplus funds be locked up in a chest, and protected with three keys; all paperwork concerning the almshouses was to be kept in the chest as well. Trustees were to make yearly account of the monies and report on the condition of the almspeople to insure their compliance with the terms of residence. For their pains, the mayor and town clerk were to have 1s. each, with the bailiffs receiving 4d apiece; the sword bearer and sergeants each got 1d.¹⁹

The foregoing discussion provides evidence that the almshouse foundations in Exeter were, for the most part, in place well before the Reformation; as we have shown, only two foundations were established between 1558 and 1625. Of the eighty-one places available in the almshouses that existed in the city by 1625, the civic corporation, meaning the mayor and the Council of Twenty-Four (referred to as the Chamber), had the nomination of fifty-six spots. The evidence suggests that the city officials, by maintaining these almshouses, were simply continuing a tradition that existed since the early Middle Ages.

¹⁹S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 31-33; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 174-79; R. Izacke, Remarkable Antiquities, 190; S. Moore, Calendar of Records and Muniments, 1:419, doc. 350a.

Wynard's continued to be controlled by the family, while the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral selected those poor residing at St. Katharine's. The intersection of public and private interests and what it meant for the administration of these funds is discussed later in this chapter. For now, we will note that a total of £145 17s. 9d proceeded annually from the almshouse endowments in the city and its precincts.

Revolving Loan Funds

We now turn to a consideration of the revolving loan funds left by various benefactors during our period.²⁰ These funds were set up with specific purposes, and MacCaffrey argues that their directives in this regard were indicative of a new sense of purpose by the donors: since they were primarily used to set the poor on work, or to sponsor business starts for young tradesmen, the argument is that social control of poverty had moved from mere alleviation to assisting the poor in getting off the relief rolls by offering them work, teaching them new skills, or funding new business ventures. It was welfare with a return; by offering opportunities to individuals to support themselves, communities were actively pursuing tactics designed to reduce the burden of poverty with which they struggled: they saw it as a win-win situation.²¹ By analyzing

²⁰There is no evidence to indicate that the Devon gentry, which, during our period, was primarily represented by the Russell (Bedford) and Carew families, concerned themselves with charitable foundations of any kind within Exeter proper; most of their holdings within the city were of a business nature and it was left to the citizens themselves to devise ways to care for the poor of the city.

²¹MacCaffrey, Exeter, 110; since the first revolving loan fund in the city was established in the late 1560s and early 1570s, it is clear that this was a post-Reformation innovation, unlike the almshouse foundations.

the composition of these funds and the donors who sponsored them we can perhaps make a judgment on this thesis.

The paradigm for the revolving loan fund scheme was set by Mrs. Joan Tuckfield, the widow of an Exeter alderman (and tailor), who laid out the terms of her loan in her will of June 14, 1568 (probated 1573); she noted that she was owed £300 in debts and ordered that the repayment be made to the civic corporation to be used in a series of two-year, five-to-twenty pound loans to "artificers and occupiers" who were "free citizens of the city." Each of these men had to put up a 1s. surety to guarantee the return of the loan; after repayment, the funds would then be loaned out again on July 20th of each year. Like the donors of almshouse funds, Mrs. Tuckfield also wanted to ensure that her monies were being treated carefully. She instructed that representatives from the civic corporation, the Company of Tailors, and the Company of Merchant Adventurers meet on the 20th of June each year to make sure all funds due her had been collected; the funds were then to be placed in a chest with "three locks and keys," of which each organization was to hold one key.²² She evidently had a lot of influence in Exeter; three other revolving loan funds were set up that mentioned Mrs. Tuckfield by name. Thomas Chappell, a merchant whose will was dated August 22, 1589, gave the sum of £30, which was to be used in much the same way as Mrs. Tuckfield's. The bequest was to be paid out on the same day of the year,

²²Description of the Various Charities in Exeter, Book 149 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), fols. 79-92; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 407-408; Harte, Gleanings of Hooker, 28; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 88-90; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:726; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 225.

and given in sums of £5 for three years, with the same sureties as were required for her funds. It seems that Chappell did this to ensure the continuance of Mrs. Tuckfield's legacy, as he notes that "[her] money is limited" and he wants to make sure that it is "continued forever."²³

Tuckfield's one-time servant, Joan Cleveland, was also inspired by her former mistress's generosity; in her will of May 24, 1599 (probated 1604), she gave £200 "to be employed for the benefit of poor young beginners;" £100 was to be lent to tailors, while the other half of the fund was to go to artificers. All was to be done "in such manner and as near agreeable as may be to the device of Mrs. Joan Tuckfield, deceased."²⁴ Christopher Spicer endowed his loan fund with £100 according to his will of October 17, 1599; eight weavers were to get £40 in loans, with the rest distributed as the corporation saw fit. The money was to be lent "at the same time when they deliver forth Mrs. Tuckfield's money with sureties."²⁵

By far the largest of these funds came as the gift of John Periam the younger, a merchant and alderman in the city. His charitable aspirations followed those of his father, John Periam the elder, who had left £100 in 1571 to be lent to two young merchants of the city.²⁶ His

²³Book 149, fols. 31-34; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 24; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:732.

²⁴Book 149, fols. 93-97; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 24-25; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 409-410; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 226.

²⁵Book 149, fols. 65-72a; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 81-82.

²⁶S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 74; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 409; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 228.

son, moved by "thankfulness to Almighty God for the great and unspeakable benefits both spiritual and temporal which he acknowledged to have received at his hands," made an indenture with the civic corporation to pay £1,000, plus "one Bason and one Ewer of silver weighing 3 score and 13 ozs. or thereabouts" to be used in the manner described in the indenture. He ordered that £100 of his gift be a direct present to the Chamber to be used in repaying any debts they might have, "without any reckoning to be demanded or expected for the same." The remaining £900 was to be added to the £100 previously given by his father, and on the 30th of November every third year, the £1,000 was to be disbursed in £200 portions to five "merchant adventurers trafficking beyond the seas." There is no evidence to suggest that these "merchant adventurers" were poor in the strictest sense of the word, but they were obviously considered to be in need of assistance in order to pursue their vocation. Sureties in the sum of £5 6s. 8d were to be paid by the recipients for each of the three years they held the loan and they were to pay the total sum back by the twenty-fourth of November of the third year; the total amount issuing from the sureties of just under £27 was then to be paid to the Warden of the Maudlyn, who was to use the funds for "relieving sick poor people inhabiting within the ... city." Receipts dated November, 1616, indicate that five merchant adventurers received £200 each in that year, but there is no evidence of repayment. We may, however, glean some indication as to the difficulties inherent in retrieving these loans; the act book of the Chamber for September, 1670 notes that

Whereas several great sums of money are due from
several persons by bond to this city, which are

given to charitable uses, and by reason that the accounts have not been made as heretofore; and whereas it is not certainly known from whom these monies are due, or in whose hands much of the said monies do now remain, it is...ordered, that the same shall be speedily examined, and that such persons as shall have detained any of the said monies since the same was due by their bonds...such of them as do refuse to pay in any of the said monies...be forthwith put in suit at law for the recovery of the same.²⁷

A subsequent entry in the act book for 1674 indicates that funds from the Periam endowment were loaned out, so it appears that the Chamber was successful in prosecuting for the return of the monies.

Another generous benefactor was Peter Blundell, a clothier from Tiverton, who underwrote a loan fund in the amount of £500 by his will dated June 9, 1599 (probated 1601). Blundell's story is quite interesting: he started his life in 1520 as a poor child who "for a little support, went errands for the carriers that came to that town; and was tractable in looking after their horses, and doing little services for them...in such means, he got a little money" which he used to set himself up in the clothing business. At length, he moved to London where his industriousness in the kersey cloth trade made him a rich man, but he never forgot his humble origins. His will reflected his care for the poor; based on sources found in the Devon Record Office (detailed in note 29 below) it has been estimated that his charitable legacies amounted to over £40,000. In connection with Exeter, he left the sum of £500 in the care of the civic corporation to be lent out to twenty-five poor

²⁷Report of the Commissioners Charities, 228-31; S. Moore, Calendar of the Records and Muniments, 1:485-92, doc. 523; Book 149, fols. 9b-15a; Walter J. Harte, ed., Gleanings from the Manuscript of R. Izacke's Antiquities of the City of Exeter (Exeter: A. Wheaton & Co., Ltd., n.d.), 23.

artificers and "people of handicraft"--but no merchants of any kind--in portions of £20 each for four years. Part of the money was to be dedicated to payment for the town officials involved in the administration of his trust; 40s. went to the town clerk, and £16 to the members of the corporation, to pay for dinner on the days when they met to make the accounting for his trust.²⁸

These loans are but a few examples of the funds established in this manner. The following list details the total of the revolving loan trusts endowed during our period:²⁹

²⁸Book Relating to the Administration of Blundell's Charity 1601-1690, Book 146 (Devon Record Office, Exeter, England), will: fols. 1-21; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 170-74; Prince, Danmonii Orientales Illustres, 89-91; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 410-11; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 10-11; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:862.

²⁹The information concerning these loans comes from myriad sources, which are too extensive to list for each loan; the following were relied upon in compiling these figures: DRO, Books 146, 149; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies; R. Izacke, Remarkable Antiquities; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester; Harte, Gleanings of Hooker; Harte, Gleanings of Izacke; S. Moore, Calendar of the Records and Muniments; Prince, Danmonii Orientales Illustres (see previous notes for full information on these sources). Additionally, the loan funds indicated by a * are funds which were accounted for in chapter 8, Testamentary Charity. All of these amounts are listed under the work loans section of the wills; they were included in chapter 8 because the testator suggested other uses for the funds as well. The money left by John Periam, Sr. (PRO, Prob. 11/55, quire 37, fols 279-80) was listed under the funds for use of the general poor, since its first application was to go for the purchase of corn for the poor; work loans were a subsidiary request, though there is some indication that this is the way the money was dispensed. Under the terms of his son's indenture, they were clearly marked as such. The total of all monies dedicated to this purpose are presented here solely for comparative and analytical purposes, and the amounts previously accounted for are noted; the conclusion will quantify these funds only once.

TABLE 6

REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS ESTABLISHED BY EXETER CITIZENS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>		
		<u>Pounds</u>	<u>Shillings</u>	<u>Pence</u>
1571	*John Periam, Sr.	100		
1573	Joan Tuckfield	300		
1576	Thomas Prestwood	40		
1578	Alice Macey	50		
1586	John Haydon	200		
1587	*John Webb	200		
1588	Lawrence Attwill	600		
1589	*Thomas Chappell	30		
1592	Hugh May	60		
1594	*Henry Ellacott	40		
1599	Peter Blundell	500		
1599	*Christopher Spicer	100		
1602	Hugh Atwill	6	13	4
1602	Philip Whitrow	16		
1604	Jane Hewett	10		
1604	Joan Cleveland	200		
1604	*William Spicer	60		
1608	*Robert Parr		20	
1609	William Martin	20		
1609	John Acland	56	13	4
1614	*William Newcomb	3		
1616	John Periam, Jr.	1,000		
1616	John Berryman	100		
1616	Ralph Hamer	100		
1619	*John Gilbert	5		
1622	*Peter Colleton	20		
1624	*John Birdall	<u>4</u>		
		<u>3,822</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>

There is one other fund that was established during our period of study: Sir Thomas White, a London merchant, established an accumulating fund in 1583; originally endowed with £100, it was increased by that same amount every twenty-four years, making it worth £300 by 1631. This was a massive fund that supported twenty-four different cities at the rate of one per year, with Exeter receiving a portion of the largesse on the eighth year of the cycle. Four young occupiers were to have the use of

the money in £25 portions for ten years, and were, as was true of the other funds, to make sufficient sureties for its repayment.³⁰

An analysis of these loan funds reveals that the gender distribution is heavily weighted in favor of men, who represent 84.6 percent of the total sample; the remaining 15.4 percent belongs to the four women donors. Endowments for these funds total £2,242 13s. 4d, or 58.7 percent of the total given, for the Elizabethan period; 41.3 percent or £1,579 pounds 13s. 4d represents that of the Jacobean. How do these figures compare to those arising from testamentary bequests? In the Elizabethan period, 108 men left money for the poor, for a percentage of 93.1; eight women did so, amounting to 6.9 percent of the total. In the Jacobean period, 119 men, or 82.6 percent, left funds for the poor, while women, numbering 25, or 17.4 percent, made provision for the relief of the poor. We see that men remained, far and away, the primary givers by testament and through endowed benefactions (reflecting a male-dominated society), while bequests by women remained steady.

Again, we must keep in mind that the Elizabethan period, in terms of years, more than doubles that of the Jacobean, though we are considering each on their own merits. Additionally, the Jacobean total is considerably enhanced by the massive Periam fund. In terms of contributions, the givers for each period are roughly approximate, with fourteen in the Elizabethan period and thirteen in the Jacobean, although several of the Jacobean funds had been established under the auspices of Elizabethan wills that were not probated until after 1603. Two facts

³⁰Book 149, fols. 2-8, 107; Vowell alias Hoker, Description of the Citie of Excester, 3:861; Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities, 243; Jenkins, Civil and Ecclesiastical History, 406-407.

emerge from a consideration of the evidence for these loan funds: first, giving in the Elizabethan period clearly exceeds that of the Jacobean; this calls into question Jordan's contention that the "golden flow of charity" was much more obvious in the first half of the seventeenth century. Second, the amount given speaks to the belief that Exeter was growing more prosperous than other of its counterparts in the country.³¹

As to the thesis that these loan funds underlay a new type of philanthropy, it is certainly true that they were an innovation in terms of providing for the less fortunate; their emphasis on economic independence in order to enjoy a good life is a definite turn away from an earlier emphasis in literature and sermons that poverty was something to be endured. These endowments emphasized a work ethic, an element that was missing in earlier philanthropic efforts. Those with the ability to help were no less willing to do so, but they now expected the recipients of their largesse to contribute something to their own support and, hopefully, in turn, to the support of others in similar circumstances. We note, however, that donors had various reasons behind the establishment of these funds: Periam wished to show his appreciation for the success God had granted him, while Blundell was clearly honoring his roots by dispensing charity. Also, the restrictions placed by the contributors on the loan funds emphasize their wish to advance the fortunes of selected individuals, and not the poor in general, although there are references in the indentures to "poor artificers" or "poor beginners." Blundell was emphatic that no merchants of any kind benefit

³¹See chapters 2, 3 and 4 for a fuller discussion of the city's prosperity on its own terms and in relation to other localities.

from his fund, while Tuckfield and others specified that their money was to go to artificers or tailors and Periam directed that his loans be made to merchant adventurers. We cannot know with certainty if the recipients of these funds were truly poor or were simply struggling to get started in trade, although the terms of the loan funds, for the most part, refer to the funding of people for specific trades. Regardless of the reasons behind their charity, however, the amounts contributed by these philanthropists represent a significant contribution to the alleviation of poverty in the city, relative or otherwise.

General Bequests

We now turn to the third category of long-term benefaction, that of general bequests for the care of the general poor; annual bequests were monies contributed on a yearly basis that were not directed in any specific way (although there might be restrictions on the parishes in which they were applied) other than to the care and comfort of the unfortunates within the city. We have also included information on non-recurring (one time only) bequests that were not found in the will evidence.

Again, Joan Tuckfield's largesse, though certainly not the largest of the amounts involved, bears witness to the extent that this woman was involved in poor relief in Exeter. Out of a sum of just over nine pounds, she directed that £5 in bread be annually distributed to the poor, in the form of six hundred loaves two weeks before Easter and another six hundred two weeks before Christmas. Also, twelve poor women were to receive 1d each at five religious feasts during the year; a further 6s. 8d was divided among the poor of the almshouses and the

residents of the prisons. The prisoners were of particular concern to Tuckfield, as she provided a piece of ground at Ringswell, near to the place of execution, for their decent burial. The commissioners reported that when it ceased to be used for this purpose, it was let to a member of the Company of Tailors who agreed to keep up the property. Though it was not an annuity, she did request that a marriage portion of 6s. 8d be given to twenty poor maidens. Unquantifiable bequests included two sets of clothing per year to each of twelve poor women.³²

Some donors, such as Sir John Acland, instructed that funds be restricted to poor householders with children, but that "no common beggars" be allowed to apply for his money.³³ Care of prisoners continued to be a popular contribution; Griffin Ameredith endowed a 38s. annuity in shrouds for dead prisoners, while both William Parrymore and John Haydon directed their monies toward the relief of the prisoners.³⁴

The acquisition of these bequests by the civic corporation could take time in some cases. Nicholas Hurst, who left a one-time legacy of £40 to the poor of the city by his will of June, 1604, apparently picked a crooked executor; the "said bequest [was] for many years concealed from the Chamber of Exeter." Under the Statute of Charitable Uses, the Chamber sued to recover the legacy in 1622 and was successful; they not only got the original £40, but received another £30 in interest.

³²For sources, see note 29, above.

³³Harte, Gleanings of Izacke, 24.

³⁴Harte, Gleanings of Hooker, 28; S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 46, 72.

Expenses of £6 7s. 8d for pursuing the suit were deducted from the award, and the remaining £63 12s. 4d was then applied as intended.³⁵

Sir John Acland, who provided one of the revolving loan funds, was also generous to the general poor, and he instructed that his bequest be divided among the poor of six of the city's parishes.³⁶ Another interesting annuity was that provided by Lawrence Atwill, whose will of November, 1588, conveyed certain lands and tenements to the Chamber, with the revenues to be dedicated to setting the poor on work by buying materials.³⁷

One of the more complicated additions to the annual income received by the city came with the will of Lawrence Seldon in May of 1598. Seldon directed that a sum just in excess of £19 be expended on the poor of several parishes in several different ways. Besides a cash distribution which varied from 4d to 8d in four different parishes, Seldon directed that bread be made available to the poor at three parish churches in the following fashion: his trustees were to see that there were constructed "3 little table boards of the value of 16p apiece and 3 yds. of linen cloth of the value of 3 shillings to make 3 coverings for the said boards...to be placed in a convenient location in each of the parish churches...." The bread that Seldon had bequeathed to the poor was "every Sunday before or near the beginning of morning prayer [to] be brought, set and placed upon the said table boards and there to stand and

³⁵S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 47-48; Book 149, fols. 115 and following.

³⁶S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 6-7; Book 149, fols. 98-100, 101; Harte, Gleanings of Izacke, 23.

³⁷S. Izacke, Account of the Legacies, 4-5.

remain until the end of Common Prayer and then to be distributed to and amongst the said poor people...."³⁸ It seems that Seldon was determined to get the poor into church, and once having gotten them there, was equally determined that they give thanks for what they were about to receive. A year after his death, his widow, Elizabeth, his trustees, and the Chamber entered into an "indenture tripartite" to ensure the continuance of the Seldon bequest; Elizabeth added another 3s. 8d to her husband's annuity and paid the Chamber one hundred marks (£66 13s. 4d) to keep her husband's trust secure. The indenture included a "schedule and note of all such payments" that were to be made according to the terms of the will.³⁹

We have seen the variety of the annual and non-recurring bequests made by the citizens of Exeter; we must now consider the income brought to the city's poor by these endowments:⁴⁰

³⁸S. Moore, Calendar of the Records and Muniments, 1:503-505, doc. 561.

³⁹Ibid., 1:505-507, doc. 562.

⁴⁰* denotes a benefactor whose bequest needs to be qualified. For John Haydon, the first contribution comes from an indenture made to the civic corporation, while the second comes out of his will of 1588. For Lawrence Seldon, his will is included in the estimates for chapter 8, but his bequest is listed as a one-time £10 legacy to the general poor; subsequent evidence in the sources used in this chapter have revealed the extent of his generosity. Additionally, his wife, Elizabeth Seldon, added a further 3s. 8d to his annuity upon his death to ensure its continuance.

TABLE 7

INCOME FROM ANNUAL RECURRING BEQUESTS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>		
		<u>Pounds</u>	<u>Shillings</u>	<u>Pence</u>
1561	Griffin Ameredith		38	
1570	John Peter	20		
1570	William Parrymore		10	
1571	Christian Chapman	5		
1573	Joan Tuckfield	9	3	4
1579	John Haydon	3	6	8
1588	*John Haydon	20		
1588	Lawrence Attwill	11	7	5
1588	David Hensley	1	4	
1598	*Lawrence Seldon	19	13	8
1602	Richard Bevis	4		
1603	John Baker		3	4
1609	Nicholas Spicer	1		
1609	John Acland	11	14	
1619	John Periam, Jr.	20		
1625	Walter Borough	<u>6</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>—</u>
		<u>135</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>5</u>

The various sources used in this chapter also provide information on several other non-recurring bequests that were not indicated by the will evidence in the previous chapter. These bequests are as follows:⁴¹

TABLE 8

INCOME FROM NON-RECURRING BEQUESTS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>		
		<u>Pounds</u>	<u>Shillings</u>	<u>Pence</u>
1567	Elizabeth Buckenam	2	16	8
1604	Nicholas Hurst	40		
1616	Joan Haymon	6	13	4
1618	John Acland	<u>30</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
		<u>79</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>

⁴¹There are other benefactors not listed in this section, as their contributions are accounted for under the almshouse foundations, above; they include William Buckenam, John Haydon, John Baker, Thomas Martin, Robert Lant, Stephen Ridgway, and John Lant.

Again, according to gender divisions, women are far in the minority in making these gifts, though that they still maintained a presence in this as in other areas of philanthropy is significant.⁴² Unlike the revolving loan funds, the annuities reflect that giving in the Elizabethan period nearly doubled that of the Jacobean. £91 19s. 5d, or 67.6 percent of the bequests were made before the death of Elizabeth, while 32.4 percent or £43 17s. was given during the reign of James I. More important in terms of our study, however, is how the annuities compare to the amounts given under the compulsory poor rates. We have already noted the dearth of figures available for the poor rates before the mid-seventeenth century; the evidence, as discussed earlier in this study, comes primarily from accounts between the years of 1563 and 1572 and reveals that the poor rates for this period brought in between £120 and £197 yearly. Since we do not have a complete set of wills for this period, we can only speculate as to how many other persons were involved in making such bequests, but the amount that we do have compares impressively with what is known of the actual poor rates. Our total of just over £135 falls on the high end of the amounts brought in by the poor rates for most of the 1560s, and buttresses our argument that philanthropy maintained a strong, if not dominant presence in the relief of poverty, since annual bequests only form one part of the philanthropic impulse.

⁴²For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see Merry Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 189; Wiesner argues that "the secularization of public welfare which accompanied the Reformation did give some women the opportunity to create permanent institutions to deal with social problems...."

The intersection of public and private which these almshouse foundations, loan funds, and bequests represent lend shape and definition to the policy of social control in the area of poverty. Endowments were made and maintained by private individuals, but they were generally administered by the mayor, bailiffs, and commonalty of the city government as trustees for the private donor. In many ways, it made sense to select civic officials for these posts, as one did not have to worry about the fate of the endowment should a private trustee die, since the benefaction might wind up in the hands of someone untrustworthy or worse, be left unattended. Also, most of the benefactors were current or former members of the city government; in selecting their civic peers, they were choosing men much like themselves. This is not to say that they trusted them completely, however; it is apparent from the lengthy instructions and ordinances attached to the endowments that donors were not willing to leave anything to chance. Further, trustees were paid a fixed sum in exchange for their care of the trust, on the assumption that they would be less tempted to raid the coffers of the benefaction. A telling instruction is one which is included in almost every bequest of any significance: the requirement that a yearly accounting be made of monies taken in and paid out, with surpluses kept under lock and key(s).

Over time, the civic corporation, like any entity entrusted with myriad responsibilities, lost sight of its original role as trustee and began to think of itself as the fount of these benefactions. We have seen earlier that the government made a practice of borrowing from these funds in order to underwrite city projects for which ready money was not available. There is no proof to indicate that these loans were not

repaid, but we cannot be sure that every "transfer" was faithfully recorded. Also, these loans came free of interest, a bonus that the city could not have received from any other financial source with which it dealt.

An excellent resource to assess the longevity of these various endowments is found in the charity commissioners' report of 1825, which traced the origins of all monies given for charitable purposes to the city of Exeter since the twelfth century, and assessed their efficacy through the centuries. That many of the almshouse foundations, loan funds and bequests survived to 1825 is testimony both to their usefulness and to the generally sound administration provided by the civic corporation of Exeter. Charities under the management of the Warden of the Poor that survived from our period include all of the almshouse foundations, except for the small one on the Exe Bridge; of the revolving loan funds, just over £3,300 still continued to be loaned out of the £3,822 that comprised the funds during our period. Continuing records of the annuities for all of our benefactors can be found in 1825, with Joan Tuckfield's taking pride of place.⁴³

Summary and Comparison

We can now turn to a consideration of the extent of Exeter's endowed benefactions during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods and compare its experience to that of other localities in the country. There are, however, several caveats to the presentation of these figures:

⁴³Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities; the Charity Commissioners' Report also included information on defunct charities and endowments, thus lending credence to their estimates on the surviving foundations.

first, the figures in this section have not been subjected to the deflators used on the testamentary funds, primarily because these benefactions were underpinned, for the most part, by income from land rents. Since these were annual payments, they reflected the prevailing economic forces at work in any given year; also, land--and the income proceeding from it--generally increased in value and kept pace with inflation. Second, most of the almshouse foundations we have discussed were made in the period before our study, and the contributions to them prior to and during our period are inextricably linked; we cannot, therefore, make any real distinction as to Elizabethan and Jacobean demarcations. Finally, any comparison to public poor rates must be done in a comprehensive sense, since those figures, as we have previously established, are sketchy for our period and involve a great deal of projection. Thus, the amounts from endowed benefactions are presented in the annual form in which they existed in 1625, the end year of our study; the revolving loan funds are given as a comprehensive figure, with appropriate deductions as noted above.

Summary of amounts from endowed benefactions in Exeter from 1558 to 1625 (less amounts quantified elsewhere):

TABLE 9

SUMMARY OF ENDOWED BENEFACCTIONS

Almshouses and Hospitals:	£	145	17s	9d	per annum
Revolving Loan Funds	:	£3,259	6s	8d	(1558-1625)
Annual bequests	:	£	135	16s	5d per annum
White legacy	:	£	300		(1558-1625)
Other non-testamentary bequests	:	£	79	10s	(non-recurring)

The annual bequests for almshouses and hospitals and for the aid of the general poor amount to a per annum total of £281 14s. 2d. In the conclusion, we compare this amount to the annual sums proceeding from the public poor rates as established in chapter 6.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the experience of other localities in connection with testamentary charity. Were their experiences with endowed benefactions similar to those of Exeter? Beier maintains that, for Warwick, "more foundations were lost than were maintained" but that "the picture of charity for the poor [in Warwick] is a mixed one that cannot be said to support or refute the argument favoring post-Reformation beneficence."⁴⁴ He argues that if the bequest of the Earl of Leicester, the paramour of Elizabeth I, is excluded, charity to the poor rose "no more than two-fold before 1620 and four-fold thereafter"; including the Leicester bequest--£200 a year to the hospital which bore his name--means a "30-fold [increase] between 1540 and 1650, from a mere £20 a decade to over £600."⁴⁵ Beier goes on to conclude that "the most common charity to the poor at Warwick was not, therefore, an endowment...."⁴⁶ In point of fact, the maximum amount proceeding from bequests in the 1580s was £65.⁴⁷

In Ipswich, the endowed benefaction was not unknown; Carol Moore details the establishment of the Tooley Foundation there which provided

⁴⁴A. L. Beier, "The social problems of an Elizabethan country town: Warwick, 1580-1590," in Country Towns in pre-industrial England, ed. Peter Clark (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 68-69.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 72.

⁴⁷Ibid., 71.

for lodgings, relief payments and other services for five people. Moore does not, however, offer an estimate on the comparison between public and private aid in Ipswich.⁴⁸

In writing about Havering, Marjorie McIntosh argues that bequests were generally used to cover special needs of the populace, rather than as regular payments to the poor, although a revolving loan fund was established in 1589 by Mildred Cooke Cecil, wife of William Cecil, Lord Burleigh. In addition, a late medieval almshouse foundation made by Roger Reede continued to provide succour for up to eight poor people during the Elizabethan period, giving them housing as well as a cash income. Like Moore, McIntosh also does not draw parallels between public and private care for the poor.⁴⁹

For Salisbury, Paul Slack notes that, by 1620, there were five sets of almshouses in the town, which provided places for forty-seven people. In assessing the loan funds and other annual bequests made by the citizens of Salisbury, Slack finds that, by 1640, "a little under £1,000 should have been available to the council for loans to poor tradesmen, and an annual income of about £100 for general poor relief." He points out, however, that the almshouses "catered for a few carefully selected, deserving poor" and that "the revolving loan funds ... were open to

⁴⁸Carol Moore, "Poor Relief in Elizabethan England: A New Look at Ipswich," Proceedings and Papers of the Georgia Association of Historians 3 (1986): 103-104.

⁴⁹Marjorie K. McIntosh, A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 281-83.

constant abuse" leading him to conclude that "charitable funds ... to be effective ... must be supplemented by other relief."⁵⁰

A much more positive picture is painted by Ian Archer for London; in 1570-73, of the £3,529 given in support of the city's hospitals, £2,028 or 57 percent was provided by private sources. By 1594-97, £4,417 or 73 percent of aid to the hospitals came from benefactions. In addition, endowments for the general poor and the poor in prisons, which amounted to £360 per annum from 1570-73, rose to £765 per annum by 1594-97. Amounts for all endowments and legacies (excluding those made by the Crown) between these two periods came to £4,675 annually, while the poor rate only brought in £2,250 per annum, making for a 48 percent difference between public and private aid.⁵¹

Admittedly, the experience of London, England's largest city by far, is an aberration when compared to other cities which could never begin to rival it in size, but its example does provide illumination for what it was possible to achieve. The other localities serve to illustrate the wide range of services and payments made to the poor through private efforts, and this range underpins the argument that each city approached the problem of poverty in a different way, with varying success and varying differentials between public and private attempts to deal with the problem. The situation in Exeter, then, must be evaluated on its own merits, as we shall see in the conclusion of this study.

⁵⁰Paul Slack, "Poverty and Politics in Salisbury 1597-1666," in Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700, eds. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 178-79.

⁵¹Ian Archer, The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 181-82.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The example of Exeter has provided a rich matrix in which we have explored the connections between the problem of poverty and the social response to it in early modern England. In this study, we have been particularly concerned with the efforts of both private philanthropy and governmental legislation in the relief of this pressing concern. I have made the argument that private philanthropy, while not sufficient in and of itself to alleviate poverty, did assume a more dominant role for the period under consideration than has previously been demonstrated. In assessing the validity of this argument, we must review the evidence that has been offered, set in the context of historical assessments of the relative efficacy of both efforts.

Historiography

We end this study as we began it, by referring to the work of W. K. Jordan.¹ In chapter 7, we carefully examined Jordan's contentions and the challenges offered to them by other historians, most notably Bittle and Lane.² We determined that, indeed, Jordan's conclusions were suspect because of his failure to account for inflation during the period under consideration, and offered a formula by which sums given to charity could be deflated to arrive at more precise valuations; this study thus rests

¹W. K. Jordan, Philanthropy in England 1480-1660 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959), 140.

²William G. Bittle and R. Todd Lane, "Inflation and Philanthropy in England: A Reassessment of W. K. Jordan's Data," Economic History Review, 2d ser., 29, no. 2 (1976): 203-210.

on a more solid foundation than does Jordan's, a foundation which lends credence to its findings.

Before analyzing those findings, we must look at the opinions of other historians on this debate. Paul Slack, the current leading historian of poverty in early modern England, found that, by 1700, taxation raised as much as three times more money for the poor than the sums from charitable benefactions; moving backward from 1700, Slack takes issue with Jordan over his 7 percent figure of total relief coming from rates for the mid-seventeenth century, stating that monies derived from rates represented at least 50 percent of the sums devoted to the care of the poor. He acknowledges, however, that "the proportion was lower at the beginning of the seventeenth century...but even then the two elements may have been more equally balanced than Jordan suggested." As a result, Slack concludes that "public relief from the rates provided nearly half as much for the poor as endowed charity at the beginning of the seventeenth century, at least as much in the middle of the century, and nearly three times as much by the end."³

The success of the Tudor poor laws in alleviating poverty is questioned by J. Thomas Kelly, who states that the "suppressive and punitive aspects of legislation operated more efficiently than measures designed for aid and comfort" of the poor." The central government passed off the responsibility of caring for the poor to the overburdened, amateur, and most unpaid officials of local communities; indeed, when it came to getting national assistance for local relief schemes, Kelly

³Paul Slack, Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England (New York: Longman Inc., 1988), 171-72.

writes that "the Elizabethan government refused to cooperate if the proffered aid cost it anything."⁴ Kelly takes issue with Frank Aydelotte, who, while admitting that the statutes through 1601 did not work "immediate reform" does believe that "conditions gradually improved in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign."⁵ To refute this, Kelly points to the plethora of statutes, proclamations and Privy Council orders which were meant to stem the tide of vagrancy and enforce existing regulations; the repetitive nature of these pronouncements must have meant that they were not very effective.⁶

Sir Frederick M. Eden's findings support those of Kelly; he pointed to a publication of 1622 entitled "Greevous Grones for the Poor" written by M. S. London, which complains that the statutes and other regulations passed to care for the poor were "excellent, but not enforced."⁷ He noted the increase in the number of the poor and stated that no collection had been made for them in seven years, especially in the country towns, which turned their poor away, leading them to beg and steal to survive. Eden asserts that "the Poor Law in its origin, therefore, was purely a matter of police regulation and the desire to

⁴J. Thomas Kelly, Thorns on the Tudor Rose (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1977), 123-24.

⁵C. H. Firth and Walter Raleigh, eds., Oxford Historical and Literary Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), vol. 1, Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds, by Frank Aydelotte, 74.

⁶Kelly, Thorns on the Tudor Rose, 127.

⁷M. S. London, "Greevous Grones for the Poor, done by a well-wisher, who wisheth that the Poore of England might be so provided for, as none should neede to go a beggin in within this realm," 1622; quoted in Sir Frederick M. Eden, The State of the Poor (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1929), 26.

succour those in distress merely an unavoidable corollary, imposed by necessity, and not dictated by philanthropy."⁸

E. M. Hampson echoes Eden in his assessment of the Tudor poor law legislation as being primarily a tool for social order designed to keep the lower sort from imposing themselves on their betters, and believes that the Privy Council orders only concerned issues related to vagrancy and the regulation of grain prices during times of dearth, and did not address issues of general relief.⁹

Sidney and Beatrice Webb agree that the efforts of the national government were not done so much to relieve the distress of the people as it "sprang partly from fear of popular insurrection...Apprehension of general disturbances was by no means unwarranted...."¹⁰ The Webbs maintain that, at the end of the sixteenth century, "repeated statutes of great severity, Privy Council proclamations and special Commissions had failed to repress an increase of vagrancy."¹¹ Further, the poor rates imposed by the statutes through 1601 were, in "many parishes of England...not put in operation." The Webbs speculate that "it may well be that, if there was no complaint that voluntary charity had proved inadequate to local needs, neither Quarter Sessions nor the Assize Judges

⁸Eden, State of the Poor, xxiii.

⁹E. M. Hampson, The Treatment of Poverty in Cambridgeshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).

¹⁰Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part I. The Old Poor Law (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1927), 61-62.

¹¹Ibid.

insisted on a compulsory tax."¹² They note that a pamphleteer writing in 1698 indicted the failure of the Elizabethan and Jacobean statutes for poor relief; the pamphleteer declared that "though parishes were enabled (by the 43rd of Elizabeth) to make rates, and the owners of estates obliged to the payment, yet in many places no such rates were made in twenty, thirty or forty years after...."¹³ The Webbs believe that efforts to enforce the statutes after 1597 were made, but that the great thrust of compliance came with the issuance of the Caroline Book of Orders in 1631.¹⁴

Barry Coward argues that "more energy seems to have been directed by parish authorities into the punishment and resettlement outside their parish of the vagrant poor...than into the more complicated business of establishing workhouses and employment schemes."¹⁵ He feels, however, despite the haphazard administration of the poor law in the early seventeenth century, that the gaps in provision for the poor were not filled by philanthropy, and the poor law did succeed in relieving poverty to some extent. He bases his contentions on Jordan's failure to account for inflation, but, as we have shown, adjusting for this factor still

¹²Ibid., 80.

¹³Bread for the Poor, 1698; quoted in Webb, English Local Government, 80-81.

¹⁴Webb, English Local Government, 88.

¹⁵Barry Coward, The Stuart Age (London and New York: Longman Group, Ltd., 1980), 57.

does not reduce the dominant role played by philanthropy in Exeter during this period.¹⁶

D. M. Palliser opines that contemporary reports of crises, such as that which occurred in the 1590s, may have exaggerated the extent and seriousness of the problem, and believes that it was only in the crisis times that "legislation had to be activated."¹⁷ For the most part, he asserts, "Private philanthropy and municipal charity seem normally to have been sufficient to cope with the worst of the problem...."¹⁸ John Pound concurs, noting that "national legislation was seldom implemented and...local schemes for the relief of the poor were seldom long-lasting...."¹⁹ He maintains that legislation on both the local and national level failed because of "municipal apathy" and "inadequate organisation" but the passage of legislation did not matter, because "in any case, the philanthropy of most of the nation's wealthy...was sufficient to offset the deficiencies" caused by the failure of the national and local schemes.²⁰ Anthony Fletcher contends that, from the available evidence, "one is left with a strong impression that parochial

¹⁶Ibid., 58; see also his Social Change and Continuity in Early Modern England 1550-1750 (London and New York: Longman Group, Ltd., 1988), 72.

¹⁷D. M. Palliser, The Age of Elizabeth: England under the later Tudors 1547-1603 (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1983), 129.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹John Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England (London: Longman Group, Ltd., 1971), 83.

²⁰Ibid.

relief as a national scheme was slow to get off the ground."²¹ He cites the assize judges in Lancashire in 1618, who were haranguing the justices of the peace for the county to see that overseers were being appointed and rates taken up from the parishes. In an examination of Northumberland, he argues that "the poor laws appear to have been totally unenforced [there] before 1640."²² That resistance to payment of the rates occurred was, he contends, not surprising, since many assumed that traditional methods of relief continued to function, a belief that Fletcher asserts was not far off the mark; after adjusting Jordan's figures for inflation, he claims that "total giving rose roughly four times and produced a per capita improvement between 1540 and the Restoration."²³

Peter Clark, in writing about the crisis of the 1590s, states that "there is no evidence that parish relief was able to cope with this landslide of poverty...."²⁴ Inhabitants in the county of Kent gave £24,048 in endowments for institutions such as almshouses and hospitals for the poor, and a third of this sum, Clark notes, was given in the last decade of the sixteenth century; it was not, however, sufficient to meet the problem which went, as Clark states, far beyond the "local impotent" to the "large mass of resident and non-resident destitute who formed such

²¹Anthony Fletcher, Reform in the Provinces: The Government of Stuart England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 184-85.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Peter Clark, English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640 (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1977), 241.

a large part of late Elizabethan poverty." Since private philanthropy was not enough to solve the problem, local authorities turned to the solutions imposed by statutory law, including the imposition of rates and schemes to set the poor on work. But by the 1590s, the rates collected could not keep pace with the sums expended, leading Clark to his assessment of the inability of parish relief to handle this massive problem. The problems with aid given through parochial taxation included the fear of parishes that too much help would encourage more able people to apply for assistance; a bigger concern was what Clark labels "the inelasticity of the rating system." Supervision of rates collected and disbursed by the justices of the peace was never more than "sporadic" and since, as Clark points out, those in charge of assessments were often the same persons who bore the greatest tax burden, the incentive to apply the statutes in regards to rates was minuscule. In fact, Clark argues, "there was widespread respectable opposition to poor rates and assessments were often left unpaid...due to a combination of self-interest, village conservatism...and growing resentment at the great number of Crown exactions...."²⁵ Even with enforcement being generally widespread in Kent during the last decade of the sixteenth century, Clark believes it was never quite "locally successful" and the system was "as yet...probably only a shadow of its later, Stuart importance."²⁶ In the

²⁵Ibid., 235-41.

²⁶Ibid.

end, as Merritt Ierley writes, "Tudor relief laws, on the whole, were administered in a notoriously negligent way."²⁷

The purpose of this study is to examine the validity of these arguments for and against the efficacy of the Tudor and early Stuart poor laws, and to assess the extent to which private philanthropy, as we argue, dominated statutory regulation in the relief of poverty in early modern England. The findings of this study of Exeter will, it is hoped, shed some light on this debate.

The Evidence from Exeter

Before we turn to an analysis of the data from Exeter offered in this study, we must first qualify it in order to accommodate statistical deficiencies in the evidence. We noted in chapter 8 that the wills which we examined--numbering 260--represented only a small portion of the testaments that were probated during our period of study, since most of the wills were destroyed in the blitz of Exeter in World War II. In addition, inventories of personal property were lost, making it impossible to establish what percentage of a person's estate was given to charitable uses; the wills catalogued in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury do not include inventories.

Information on the number of births and deaths for the city is relatively sketchy: the parish register records for eleven parishes for 1570 to 1640 have survived, but many of them have gaps, so they can only provide us with a rough estimate on the number of wills probated during our period. Using Ransom Pickard's compilation of statistics from the

²⁷Merritt Ierley, With Charity For All: Welfare and Society. Ancient Times to the Present (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 33.

registers, MacCaffrey concluded that, between 1570 and 1640, there were 17,360 burials (as compared to 19,360 baptisms), making for an increase in population of 1,730 persons over the period.²⁸ Since we cannot know how many of the burials were those of children or other persons (i.e., women and servants) who did not leave a will, we cannot make any definite conclusion about the percentage of persons who made testaments. We can, however, based on the foregoing information, offer a tentative estimate of the percentage using the following formula: MacCaffrey suggests that, in accord with Dr. Julian Cornwall, one can posit that the percentage of the population which was under sixteen amounted to 40 percent.²⁹ Another 36 percent (following W. G. Hoskins³⁰) represented *nil* assessments on the subsidies, a percentage that can, more than likely, stand for the percentage of women and servants who did not leave a will. Thus, we are left with 4,167 burials over the period 1570 to 1640 of persons who probably left a will. When we apply that total to the number of wills which we have analyzed, we see that our will sample represents approximately 6.2 percent of the wills for our period which presumably existed prior to the blitz.

What does this mean for the implications of our study? Obviously, our sample represents a very small percentage of the wills that were likely probated during our period and, as such, is limited in its use for conjectures as to the extent of the philanthropy of Exeter's citizens. However, we did establish (based on our sample) that approximately 56

²⁸MacCaffrey, Exeter, 12.

²⁹Ibid., 289.

³⁰Ibid.

percent of all male testators left a bequest for the poor, while giving by women amounted to 66.7 percent. By applying the lower, male percentage to the number of burials for the period that likely involved a will, we can offer the possibility that another 2,300 persons (excluding women) made provision for the poor in their testaments during our period. These figures involve a great deal of conjecture and speculation, but do provide some idea of both the difficulties and possibilities inherent in their use.

In chapters 5 and 6, an analysis of the government's response to poverty centered chiefly around the enforcement of the poor rates ordered by the central government, rates which were buttressed by independent city initiatives. We have already stressed that the paucity of figures in regard to the rates for our period of study precludes an absolute comparison with private philanthropy, but we can make conjectures based on the available evidence. We showed that, by 1572, the poor rates imposed by the city were bringing in around £197 per annum; we also know that by 1699, the sums collected under rates amounted to £1,508 yearly. There can be no effective comparison between the two rates both because of population differentials and because the 1699 rate was collected under a new system imposed in 1698, a system which may have been far more efficient and organized than the system under which officials during our period operated. We can, however, assume that rates collected between 1572 and 1625, the end year of our study, must have increased, although we do not have any reliable formula to ascertain that increase. We do know that the population was increasing over the period, since estimates have been made that approximately 8,000 persons were residing in the city

in the 1520's, and about 12,000 in 1660.³¹ We do know that in 1699 the poor rates that were collected fell far short of the amounts expended by the city, and that this gap may have been filled by private philanthropy. The deficit, however, was not as large as those which characterized our period.

In addition, we have seen that the city officials often had difficulty in collecting rates, and, during times of crisis, the city had to act on its own to relieve distress not addressed by poor relief. So how are we to arrive at a reasonable figure for the amount expended by the city on poor relief during our period? MacCaffrey states that, based on the cost of salaries for the corporation, the cost of living rose approximately 29 percent between 1550 and 1640; by 1640, the cost of wages for common laborers had doubled, making for a 50 percent increase.³² Between 1572 and 1625, we can therefore estimate that the cost of living rose around 17 percent for the wealthier citizens and about 29 percent for the laboring class; if we apply a median of that percentage to the known poor rate of £197 in 1572--23 percent--we can project that the rate collection had probably increased to at least £242 per annum by 1625. Added to this rate were the sums the city expended on charitable contributions made at Christmas, which, as we have seen, amounted to £6 a year by 1625. The civic corporation also bore the cost of underpriced grain for the poor at times of crisis, but we have no reliable figures to extrapolate that amount in order to arrive at yearly expenditures. We have shown that in several dearth years, the mayor was

³¹See chapter 3.

³²MacCaffrey, Exeter, 67-68.

ordered to spend between £20 and £50 to help the poor; based on the records, this probably never amounted, on average, to more than £5 per annum. Costs of the Maudlyn were born by private subscription, though the city did provide sums to support the Bridewell and the jails; again, based on the evidence presented, this amount was probably in the region of £11 annually.

Therefore, if we take all the sums expended on poor relief by the city into consideration, we arrive at a yearly total of approximately £264 in 1625; with allowances for monies spent that cannot be quantified, it is likely that the annual expenditure of the city on poor relief cannot have exceeded £275 by 1625.

Turning to the monies given through private philanthropy to the poor of Exeter, we find first of all that testamentary bequests averaged £20 annually during the reign of Elizabeth I and £27 per annum under James I. Bequests which were paid in yearly for the care of the poor by 1625 amounted to £135 16s. 5d; annual almshouse support totaled £145 17s. 9d. Together, these sums represented £281 14s. 2d spent by the citizens of Exeter to care for its less fortunate members. In addition to these amounts, non-recurring bequests over these years totaled £79 10s.; combined with the White legacy which brought in £300 over our period, extraordinary income for the poor amounted to £379 10s.; averaged over the period, this represents an additional £5 per annum donated for poor relief. As we established earlier, the wills on which this evidence was based only represented approximately 6.2 percent of the wills that were probably available for our period before the blitz. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the totals we have presented as coming from

private philanthropy probably only represent a minimum of the amounts that were likely left in this endeavor. This probability further buttresses our argument for the dominance of private philanthropy over public assistance for the poor.

Taking all these figures into consideration, we see that, by 1625, the citizens of Exeter, of their own volition and under the aegis of private philanthropy, were giving £313 14s. 2d yearly. In addition, the revolving loan funds during our period brought in £3,259 6s. 8d; averaging this sum over our period adds another £49 to the annual coffers, for a grand total of approximately £362 14s. 2d. In comparing public to private aid to the poor between 1558 and 1625, we see that, while the city expended approximately £275 per year, private charity, based on the minimal evidence available, brought in just over £362. The figures presented thus suggest that the civic corporation of Exeter provided 24 percent less of the cost of caring for the city's poor than did the private efforts of its citizens. These findings therefore support our contention that, despite the passage of extensive poor laws under Elizabeth I, the dominant role in poor relief up to 1625 in Exeter was that played by private philanthropy.

This evidence does not support Jordan's thesis of an overwhelming dominance of philanthropy over public aid during this period; it does, however, offer proof that the implementation of the poor laws was a slow process and one which did not manage to supplant private charity until at least after the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

At the beginning of this study, we suggested that an examination of the central question of this thesis--whether private philanthropy or

public initiatives played the dominant role in provision for the poor from 1558 to 1625--would enable us to explore broader issues connected with early modern English society, politics, religion and economics. It has been the central thrust of this study that continuity, rather than change, informed the attitudes of early modern English men and women in Exeter, a fact which is particularly suggested first of all by the relationship between central and local government and second, by the reception and evolution of the Reformation in Exeter. In turn, these broader issues provide a basis for our argument that poor relief in our period, remained, as it had in times past, in the hands of neighbors, be they private citizens or local officials; that it was not turned over to centralized authorities underscores our contention that it was private efforts, rather than public, which bore the larger burden in making provision for the poor.

In exploring the connection between the central government and the local one at Exeter, we have seen time and again that, while city officials were more than willing to cooperate with the national authorities in order to preserve the city's economic or political independence, they were equally unwilling to let go of the myriad powers vested within the self-perpetuating oligarchy which ruled Exeter. During the Prayer Book Rebellion in 1549, the city had stood with the crown and been liberally rewarded; we have shown that the order creating the Orphans' Court in Exeter was a direct outgrowth of the queen's gratitude for the city's loyalty during that disturbance. We argued that the city successfully exploited its allegiance to the crown whenever it needed to do so, but also showed that Exeter jealously guarded its monopolies and

privileges, even to the extent that its members of parliament requested special acts designed to protect these perquisites. Indeed, as MacCaffrey puts it, "the bold, skillful, and successful exploitation of every vantage point and the creation of new ones by the Exeter magnates" was the key theme of the period between 1540 and 1640.³³

From 1539 on, the city had been known as the County of the City of Exeter, as it was a chartered borough--a status which conferred other singular benefits, primarily of an economic nature, upon its citizens. This designation reinforced Exeter's sense of itself as privileged above most other cities, and, as such, contributed to the city's consideration of itself as autonomous. Its rigid policies regarding admission to the freedom of the city revealed a strong bias against what the Exonians termed "foreigners:" anyone not born in Exeter, be they English or otherwise, bore this distinction. This attitude reinforces our argument that Exeter thought of itself as a self-contained province which just happened to be in England, and points up the city's emphasis on local above national allegiance or identity. Residents of Exeter referred to themselves first as Exonians and then as Englishmen or women. We showed that Exeter was one of the few English cities with traces of its Roman foundations, and argued that the traditions and customs evident in the early modern city, particularly in its governmental and economic structures, descended from medieval practices. Continuity with older forms and practices inexorably shaped early modern Exeter.

Guilds, which were a powerful force in most English cities, never gained a real foothold of influence in Exeter, although the oligarchy

³³Ibid., 22.

which governed the city was composed primarily of wealthy merchants. In addition, we have shown that, in common with many other localities, Exeter did not rush to comply with the statutes, proclamations and Privy Council directives concerning the poor, except when such compliance would bring a practical benefit to the city. Indeed, while it may have welcomed the early poor law statutes, Exeter set up its poor relief system in response to its own needs, thereby adapting central directives to the best local advantage. The city knew who its poor were, and constructed a program that best suited its particular requirements.

Similarly, although Exeter was a cathedral city, its government resisted the blandishments of the bishop in matters both secular and religious, and reduced it to just another branch of city life which was to be controlled by the ruling oligarchs. That this was true was shown in the introduction and reception of the Reformation in the city.

In discussing the impact of the Reformation in Exeter, we have relied upon the findings of Robert Whiting and Eamon Duffy, who have agreed that conformism, rather than Protestantism or Catholicism, characterized the religious attitudes of the majority of the population in the southwest and, perhaps elsewhere in England.³⁴ The best expression of this thesis is that offered by Diarmaid MacCulloch, who states that popular theological adherence to Protestantism and Catholicism was probably confined to minor pockets throughout England; he believes that the majority of the population "were probably punch-

³⁴Robert Whiting, The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England ca. 1400 - ca. 1580 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

drunk on religious change, passively wedded to traditional habits and shapes of life, but largely apathetic to either extreme of religious activism."³⁵ Indeed, MacCulloch argues that "from this story of confusion and changing direction emerged a Church which has never subsequently dared define its identity decisively as Protestant or Catholic...."³⁶

That this thesis holds true for Exeter is shown in the city's readiness to accept national directives regarding religious change, but without relinquishing local governmental control over the religious apparatus of the city itself. The city's stand with the crown against the rebels in the 1549 disturbance shows that Exeter was unwilling to diverge from centralized policy on religion, but only because cooperation with the rebels might have affected the city's perquisites; we have already seen that they exploited their loyalty to gain an even stronger advantage with the central government in order to garner more monopolies and privileges.

More evidence of Exeter as conformist is shown by the fact that there were very few instances of public protest against the removal of articles associated with either of the religions, apart from the incident in the 1530s, when women attacked the workman charged with removing the rood loft from St. Nicholas's Priory during the Dissolution. Why was this so? In the first place, most people would not have been willing to buck the system, since--as shown by the Prayer Book Rebellion--it would

³⁵Diarmaid MacCulloch, The Later Reformation in England 1547-1603 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 135.

³⁶Ibid., 172.

have been an exercise in futility. It was much easier to "go with the flow" and continue to follow the personal practices with which one was most comfortable, while maintaining a surface conformism to government directives. Religious adherence, as history as shown, is not dictated by the head (i.e., the government), but by the heart (the individual); while the Elizabethan Religious Settlement may have directed specific religious practice, the central government could not inculcate it into the hearts and minds of individuals unless the people chose to be receptive to its strictures.

Even in the distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, we can see a certain continuity with past practice; as far back as the thirteenth century, the government had made distinctions between the two types in labor and other legislation, while secular literature, such as Dives and Pauper (ca. 1400, published 1493) stressed the difference between those who should be cared for first--people brought to poverty through no fault of their own--and those cared for last--the "sinful poor."³⁷ Thus, the division of the poor into "worthy" and "unworthy" was not an unknown concept in early modern England; it only acquired more forcefulness than it had in the past. That it did so was due to economic and social pressures, chief among them the increase in what were termed dangerous rogues and vagabonds, people who were unacceptable to any level of society. We have already seen that an increase in population, along with periodic crises of dearth and famine and the practice of enclosure, all worked together to create an economic climate that created more and more of these type of individuals, who were often quite successful in

³⁷Slack, Poverty and Policy, 22-23.

melding into the general poor population. Their ability to do so lay at the root of the debate between "deserving" and "undeserving," since the government wanted, above all, to maintain order and security, but could not do so if the vagabonds and rogues managed to elude recognition and capture. Thus, the growth in a debate that was not at all new.

However, by forcing the poor into definitive straitjackets, the government was setting itself up for failure; if you do not know that you are poor, and someone tells you that you are and further, that you are can receive assistance for it, it is a short step to feeling entitled to it. Clearly, the authorities in Tudor-Stuart England would not have been eager for anyone to feel entitled to assistance; hence, the evolution of poor relief schemes meant to put the poor at work and thus prevent their burden on civic resources. Regardless of these attempts, early modern English officials failed to recognize that by labelling the poor, they were also forcing them to accept a new social reality about themselves, try as they might to resist it. Therefore, it is the acceptance by the poor of their own designated status within society that defines a real shift in caring for the poor, and it is a shift which does not occur during our period.

By 1625, then, most people in early modern England drew firm distinctions between those persons who deserved aid and those who used poverty as a cover for criminal activity, although they had yet to reap the "rewards" inherent in making those distinctions. That they made these differentiations did not deter them from making provision for the truly unfortunate members of their society, and their efforts in this regard must certainly be commended. Perhaps, as MacCaffrey states, the

attempt on the part of individual communities to care for the early modern poor in England was a "relative failure" given the size of the problem, but it was a gallant endeavor which must be considered on its own merits, a consideration which is offered by this study.³⁸

³⁸MacCaffrey, Exeter, 117.

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VITA

Born in 1953, Connie S. Evans is a native of Savannah, Georgia and graduated from Savannah High School on June 8, 1971. She attended Louisiana College, Pineville, Louisiana, from August, 1971 through December, 1972. From 1973 to 1977 she was a homemaker; a son, Robert, was born in 1974. Ms. Evans pursued a career as an administrative assistant and secretary from 1978 to 1985, but returned to college on a full-time basis in the fall of 1985. Her bachelor's degree in history was granted on December 16, 1987 from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she was inducted into the honor societies of Phi Alpha Theta (history) and Mu Sigma Rho (general). Ms. Evans served as president of the Zeta Eta chapter of Phi Alpha Theta from 1987 to 1990. She received her master's degree in history from Louisiana State University on May 18, 1990, and began her doctoral studies in the fall of that year at Louisiana State University. She passed her general doctoral examinations in September, 1991, and was awarded a graduate fellowship exchange to the University of Exeter, Exeter, England, for the 1991-92 academic year in order to conduct research for her dissertation. Ms. Evans held a graduate teaching assistantship at Louisiana State University from January, 1988 to May, 1991 and again from August, 1992 to December, 1993; since January, 1994, she has been an instructor in history for the Division of Continuing Education Evening School at Louisiana State University. She will receive the doctorate in history from Louisiana State University on May 17, 1996, and plans to pursue a career in academics.


DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

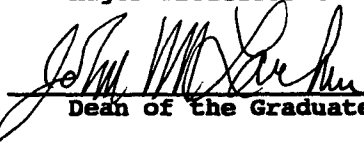
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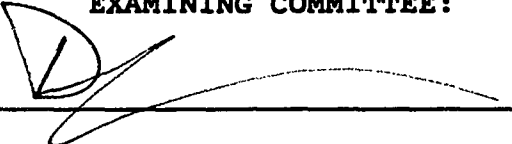
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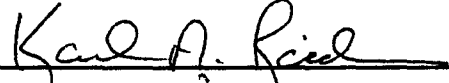
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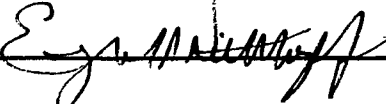

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