

*The English Press in the
Nineteenth Century:*

An Economic Approach

Harold A. Innis

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The English Press in the Nineteenth Century: An Economic Approach

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The rationalism of the eighteenth century shed its light on the literature of the early part of the nineteenth century. In the second half of the century with the work of Darwin and Spencer that light began to grow dim. In the twentieth century we have seen the growth of irrationalism reflected in the interest in psychology, advertising, mass propaganda, totalitarian states and war. Mass propaganda of the Anglo-Saxon world, directed by such individuals as Hearst and Northcliffe, played an important role in the defeat of Germany in the last war. Its effectiveness was appreciated by totalitarian states who reinforced their instruction with the assistance of such new methods of communication as the radio and the cinema. The results were evident not only in the totalitarian states. Such phrases as "total war," "full employment," "anti-semitism," and the like, bandied about in the democratic states are a tribute to the influence of totalitarian propaganda, as are the innumerable measures which have been required to offset its effects and to bolster our morale. We have passed from the security and optimism which characterized the belief in progress in the nineteenth century to fear and pessimism and demands for security.

The nineteenth century was a period of transition from rationalism to irrationalism, and its literature reflects the character of the change. On the history of that transition it is hoped that this paper will throw some light. For the moment we shall say with Leslie Stephen^[1] that philosophical thought and imaginative literature can have no history, being a by-product of social evolution, "the noise that the wheels make as they go round," and concentrate on technological developments affecting communication.

I

The Industrial Revolution had profound implications for printing and literature, in lowering the costs of paper and introducing steam power to the

press. In 1799 Louis Robert at Essone in France designed a machine to make a continuous sheet of paper on an endless wire cloth turned on wheels, and a patent was taken out in England in 1804 by the Fourdiner brothers, after whom the machine was named. The length of time for the manufacturing process was reduced from five weeks to five days, and inventory charges were lowered sharply. The enormous expansion of demand for rags^[2] in Great Britain and the United States and the export restrictions in continental countries stimulated a search for substitutes. Esparto grass was used in England in 1857. The abolition of the duty in 1861 brought imports of foreign paper and the removal of obstacles incidental to industrial monopolies which had grown up under the tariff. Chemical and mechanical pulp were used in the sixties and seventies, and by 1882 the shortage of paper could be said to be at an end.

The total production of paper in the United Kingdom increased from 11,347 tons in 1800, all of which was hand-made, to 100,000 tons in 1861, of which 96,385 tons was machine-made. After the removal of the duty in that year, production increased to 651,650 tons in 1900, of which 647,764 tons were machine-made. Including imports, consumption by the end of the century reached over a million tons. Prices had declined roughly from 1s. 6d. a pound at the beginning of the century to as low as ¾d. a pound in 1900. They had fallen to 10d. a pound in 1836, and 6½d. in 1859.^[3] From 1861 they declined about two-thirds. The proportional cost of paper in publications declined during the century from two-thirds to less than one-tenth.

The use of steam power in the manufacture of paper was followed by its application to the press of *The Times* on November 29, 1814. Production per hour increased from 250 to 1000 copies. By 1853 Applegath's machine produced 200 copies per minute. The problems of the cylinder press were eventually solved by the Hoe firm in New York. The stereotype, and printing from a continuous sheet, or the web press, was introduced in the sixties, and improvements in folding machinery completed the long line of experiments leading to the fast press. The linotype solved the problem of type-setting in the late eighties and nineties. Development of the book press lagged behind the newspaper press, but the rotary press, the stereotype, and the monotype revolutionized production. Monopoly control in the newspaper field increased the supply of paper available for publication of periodicals and books during the first half century, and the substitution of esparto grass and wood for rags in the making of newspapers increased the supply of raw material available for books in the second half of the century.

II

The diffusion of the principles of free trade, which began with the publication of the *Wealth of Nations*, was perhaps most significant and least noticed in the field of literature. The monopolies, under taxation and the government regulation with which the press and the stage were distorted, were eventually destroyed with the growing interest in freedom of trade. In the main free trade was achieved in the commodities essential to literature after it had been achieved for other commodities. The monopoly position of the principle of free trade during the early part of the nineteenth century on the one hand weakened the position of other principles and on the other checked its rapid diffusion.

The introduction of machinery under conditions of restriction favoured the growth of monopoly among the dailies. Taxes had increased to a stamp of 3½d. net on each paper in 1815, and 3s. 6d. on every advertisement. "Four pages of advertisements and London and foreign reports cost sevenpence."^[4] Taxes were being lowered but the monopoly of *The Times* was strengthened. The advertising tax was lowered to 18d. in 1833 and the stamp duty to 1d., and paper duties from 3d. to 1½d. per lb. in 1836. The advertising tax was abolished in 1853, and the stamp duty in 1855. By the middle of the century the annual circulation of *The Times* far surpassed the total of all the other London dailies. The taxes and their changes were of far-reaching significance to literature in the first half of the century.

The tendency of the printing industry to develop monopolies in London had from an early date attracted Scottish booksellers and writers intent on securing a share of the profits. Donaldson had secured a favourable court decision destroying perpetual copyright under the common law in 1774. Constable took full advantage of lower costs of printing in Edinburgh, of improved shipping facilities to London, of the restrictions on newspapers, and of the existence of a small energetic group of men in the law and the Church held back by aristocratic domination in Scotland, to support the launching of the *Edinburgh Review*. He paid unprecedented prices for articles and allowed complete freedom to his editors and contributors. The end of the long spell of drudgery by Grub Street writers, pilloried and made more despicable by Pope in the *Dunciad*, was in sight. The effectiveness of attacks on the Tories annoyed Sir Walter Scott and led him to support the *Quarterly Review*, published in London by John Murray. These reviews reflected opinions of the Whigs and Tories and were followed by the *Westminster Review* representing the radicals. But by the end of the first half

of the century their influence had declined. The publishers assumed more active direction—Macvey Napier who followed Jeffrey as editor of the *Edinburgh Review* was also editor of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* for Constable and for Blackie. Lockhart, following Gifford as editor of the *Quarterly Review*, was more closely associated with John Murray in the publication and review of books. By 1855 it was possible for Henry Reeve, a leader-writer on *The Times*, to become editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. J. D. Cook and his staff from the *Morning Chronicle* started the *Saturday Review* in 1855. The increasing prestige of the journalist^[5] accompanied a decline in the status of the reviews and a rise in the status of *The Times*. Its monopoly position enabled it to dominate opinion, drove it into competition with the reviews, and left a wider field for periodicals and later for papers emphasizing news.

The high price of newspapers after 1815, and the tendency toward monopoly, provoked a large outbreak of illegal sheets, and the introduction of severe repressive legislation in 1819. William Cobbett began his twopenny *Political Register* in 1816, but fled to the United States in 1817. When he returned in 1819, bringing with him the bones of Tom Paine, he stirred up new interest in his doctrines. The repressive measures of 1819 were powerless to control the outburst of polemical writing centring about the unfortunate Queen Caroline. The scurrilous *John Bull*, edited by Theodore Hook, could not be overlooked by the government in its attempts to repress opposition literature. Richard Carlile, who persisted in printing the works of Tom Paine and with his family and workmen exhausted the resources of his persecutors, after six years of imprisonment was released in November, 1825. The cause of freedom of discussion triumphed with the support of John and Leigh Hunt, Shelley, Southey, Byron, Bentham, and James Mill. By 1832 the struggle was absorbed in the larger issues of the Reform Bill.

The restricted development of newspapers, and the decline in importance of news after the Napoleonic wars, favoured not only the publication of scurrilous sheets but also the growth of publishing firms interested in circulating libraries^[6] and three-decker novels designed to extract revenue from readers. Sydney Smith wrote of the “customary phrases, union of souls, married in the eye of heaven, etc. etc. and such like diction, the types of which Mr. Lane of the Minerva Press very prudently keeps ready composed, in order to facilitate the printing of the adventures, etc.”^[7] Scott’s novels dealt a serious blow to the productions of the Minerva Press. Scott had relinquished poetry because (in his own well-known words) “Byron beat

me. . . . He beat me out of the field in the description of the strong passions, and in deep-seated knowledge of the human breast; so I gave up poetry for the time.” After the Napoleonic wars the demand for patriotic poetry disappeared, and Wordsworth wrote such verse as to lead Jeffrey to say in the *Edinburgh*, “This will never do.” Murray deliberately refused to publish poetry after Byron’s successes and took to tourist guides and cook-books.^[8] The firm of Edward Moxon specialized in poetry and, in spite of the popularity of Tennyson, eventually went into bankruptcy. Nor was the change confined to poetry. By 1821 Sydney Smith could write of *The Pirate* as “one of the least fortunate of Sir Walter Scott’s productions. It seems now that he can write nothing without Meg Merrilies and Dominie Samson! One other such novel and there’s an end; but who can last forever? Who ever lasted so long?”^[9] The advantages enjoyed by Scottish writers and publishers in attacking the monopoly in London came to an end in the crash of 1826 and the transfer of the *Edinburgh Review* to Longman and the *Encyclopædia Britannica* to Blackie, and in the tragedy of Sir Walter Scott’s life. The fashion shifted from Scott to the realism of the novels of Theodore Hook and the silver-fork school of fiction.

The tax on advertising encouraged publishers to establish journals designed to give extremely favourable reviews of their books. The review replaced the advertisement. Henry Colburn started the *Literary Gazette* with William Jerdan as editor in 1817, and in 1821 converted the *New Monthly Magazine* into a literary periodical edited by Thomas Campbell with the active assistance of Cyrus Redding. He transferred his interest in the *Literary Gazette* to Longman and the latter sold to Jerdan, who was charged with developing his periodical in the interests of prospective advertisers. “However meritorious he may be,” wrote Cyrus Redding, “the writer has little chance of attracting the attention of modern criticism without some preponderating influence on the part of the trade in paper and print.”^[10] Colburn not only exercised control over his own periodicals but also over other publications. Of the *New Times*, the *Examiner*, and *John Bull* he wrote regarding possible reviews of Lady Morgan’s *Italy*: “I am intimately acquainted with the editors, and advertising with them a good deal keeps them in check.”^[11] It was significant that the *London Magazine*, established in 1820 by Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, and acquired by Taylor and Hessey, publishers of Keats’s poetry, was absorbed by the *New Monthly* in 1829. The failure of the latter was “owing to the extraordinary force of the political tide at that period, the proof of which is manifest from the fact of some of their publications’ commencing with a rapid sale, and stopping abruptly after the

appearance of several virulent attacks from periodicals who were opposed to the politics or liberal sentiments of the writers. The other publishers have ruined themselves from adopting an opposite extreme.”^[12] S. C. Hall followed Campbell^[13] as editor in 1830 and was followed by Bulwer from November 1, 1831, to August, 1833. Colburn formed a partnership with Richard Bentley in 1829 but this was dissolved in 1832, and after Bulwer left the editorship, his novels were published by Bentley. Colburn retained control of the *New Monthly*, and Bentley persuaded Dickens to edit *Bentley’s Miscellany* in 1837.

Authors were induced by publishers to take an active interest in writing and editing miscellanies. Harrison Ainsworth had raised the art of puffing his own works to new levels and had developed considerable skill in handling reviewers.^[14] His *Rockwood*, published by Bentley in 1834, had an instantaneous success. The fashion for criminal romances had its influence on Dickens, and *Pickwick* was regarded by Lockhart as “damned low.” As editor of *Bentley’s Miscellany*, Dickens was followed by Ainsworth in 1839. The latter’s *Jack Sheppard* was issued periodically from January, 1839, to February, 1840, and published in three volumes. He started *Ainsworth’s Magazine* in 1842 and bought the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1844. Thomas Hood resigned as editor of the latter in January, 1844, and started *Hood’s Magazine*.

From the forties to the sixties journalists were crowded out by the disappearance of newspapers in the unequal struggle with *The Times*, and were led to concentrate on weekly periodicals and numbers which, without news, were free from stamp taxes. *Old St. Paul’s* and *The Lancashire Witches* by Ainsworth were issued serially in the *Sunday Times*. Dickens, after his short editorship of the *Daily News* in 1846, started his *Household Words* in 1850, replaced by *All the year Round* in 1859. Dickens had begun as a reporter on the *Morning Chronicle* and the influence of journalism was evident throughout his work. Bagehot commented on his style as reflecting “the overflow of a copious mind, though not the chastened expression of an harmonious one.” His genius was suited to the delineation of city life since London was like a newspaper: “Everything is there and everything is disconnected.” According to the *Saturday Review*, the writings of Dickens were “the apotheosis of what has been called newspaper English.” He “makes points everywhere, gives unfamiliar names to the commonest objects, and lavishes a marvellous quantity of language on the most ordinary incidents.”^[15] The haphazard absence of form encouraged by journalism influenced Thackeray as well as Dickens. “Newspaper writing spoils one for

every other kind of writing. I am unwilling now, more than ever to write letters to my friends, and always find myself attempting to make a pertinent point at the end of a sentence.”^[16]

Monopolistic restrictions characterized the stage as well as the newspaper and contributed also to the development of periodical literature. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres still occupied a privileged position. The former was enlarged and reopened in 1810 and the latter in 1812. The stage was used to appeal to the eye rather than to the ear: spectacles and melodrama were the fashion. “At present the English instead of finding politics in the stage, find their stage in politics.”^[17] Writers such as Theodore Hook and Douglas Jerrold turned from plays to periodical publications, and managers turned to translators and adapters of French plays.^[18]

The work of authors who might otherwise have written for the stage was supplemented by the development of illustrations. Almanacs had been produced under monopoly privileges. Competition introduced by Ackermann from Germany in 1822 was astonishingly successful, and was followed by numerous imitations which emphasized increasingly elaborate illustrations, Lamb’s “ostentatious trumpery”. The work of Bewick in revolutionizing the technique of wood-cutting encouraged the development of illustrations in books and periodicals. The support of writers turned from the stage, merged with the increasing interest in illustrations, and political caricatures introduced from France, to produce the forerunners of *Punch* in the thirties and *Punch* and its numerous imitators in the forties and fifties. The *Illustrated London News* was a product of the same conditions and was strengthened by journalists such as Charles MacKay from the *Morning Chronicle*.

Periodical literature was enriched further by the work of Charles Knight in London and of the Chambers brothers in Edinburgh. Since governmental restrictions were particularly concerned with news, periodicals rigidly excluding news grew rapidly. *Chambers’ Journal* had an amazing success from the beginnings in the early thirties. Knight was supported by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, sponsored by Brougham and others, and his *Penny Magazine*, started at about the same time, while successful during the early thirties, eventually succumbed as a result of dullness and the burden of the paper duties. Hazlitt’s reference to “the diffusion of useless knowledge about useful facts” summarized the general view. It was the claim of both Knight and the owners of *Chambers’ Journal* that the dangers arising from the radical journals which flourished during the

long period of the fight against the taxes on knowledge, and which supported the Chartist movement, were materially lessened; and this claim was to some extent justified. In any case, numerous radical journals and the scandalous blackmail sheets, such as the *Age* under Westmacott and the *Satirist* under Gregory, disappeared in the forties.

The rank outgrowth of literature which sprang up as a result of monopoly in the newspaper field brought correctives. *Blackwood's* began in 1817, and under its auspices Lockhart and John Wilson (Christopher North) made vigorous attacks on London writers, which involved a duel and the killing of John Scott, editor of the *London Magazine*. It was followed by *Fraser's Magazine* in the early thirties. Under the editorship of Maginn, the writers for Colburn and Bentley were savagely reviewed. The *Athenæum* under Charles Dilke, more sober, refused to accept the dictation of publishers. From the beginning Dilke announced his "direct opposition to *trade* criticism and *paid* criticism." Perhaps the most effective attack on the artificialities of the literature of the first half-century was made by Bulwer who as an author of Bentley's suffered much from the personal abuses of anonymous journalism.^[19] He not only replied to the attacks in kind but he became influential in the political field. His speeches in parliament against the taxes on knowledge from 1832 to 1855 were masterpieces of analysis in the tradition of Adam Smith, and contributed powerfully to the removal of monopoly privileges for the newspaper and the theatre. Competition was encouraged with the lowering and abolition of taxes on advertising, paper, and stamps.

III

In the second half of the century the decline in taxes was accompanied by a revolution in journalism. *The Times* was at the peak of its influence in the fifties and its competition had resulted in the disappearance of such rivals as the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Herald*, the *Sun* and others. Thereupon a new group of powerful newspapers emerged, including the *Daily News* and the *Daily Telegraph*. The advertising tax had been responsible for the rash of bill posters which broke out over London, and its removal led to the retreat of advertising to the newspapers. Following its success in distributing tea at a uniform price throughout England, the firm of Gillespie actively and successfully sponsored uniform penny postage in 1840. Post-office facilities were improved and extended with the construction of railways. The telegraph and the cable brought a vast increase in news for distribution and facilitated the rapid growth of a large number of provincial newspapers. The extension of the franchise in 1867, and the

Education Act of 1870, which reflected the necessity of educating “our masters” (in Lowe’s famous phrase), created a large number of readers. Competition was restricted by the government in the first half of the century and subsidized by it in the second half.

The marked expansion of a new group of newspapers in London and in the provinces in the second half of the century was accompanied by the decline of *The Times* to the point of bankruptcy by 1890 and its sale to Northcliffe in 1908. Its emphasis on political influence, which enabled it to destroy the Aberdeen administration in the Crimean War, weakened its position with the increasing importance of news. Editorial support of the South in the Civil War made it impossible for W. H. Russell to duplicate the success as a war correspondent which he had achieved in the Crimea. The training of correspondents in the Civil War (especially with the *New York Tribune*) and the use of the cable enabled the London *Daily News* and Archibald Forbes, in the Franco-Prussian War, to displace *The Times* and Russell. Finally, the publication of the forged Pigott letters destroyed even the political influence of *The Times*. The destruction of its political supremacy was the last phase of the struggle against the mercantile system. The success of Gladstone, the beginnings of large majorities in the House of Commons, and the emergence of the caucus as a device for party control reflected the influence of the *Daily News* and other papers and the provincial press. The increasing susceptibility of Parliament to the influence of the press was shown in the unfortunate expedition to Egypt under General Gordon, a result of the demands of W. T. Stead in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

The new journalism, in which Stead was a pioneer, received strong support from the development of penny weeklies in London, whose “principal characteristic is a senile imbecility on the one hand, or an irrational sensationalism on the other, equally destructive to anything like masculine vigour of thought.”^[20] By the early eighties these weeklies had a circulation of between five and six million. The *Family Herald* and the *London Journal*, started in the middle forties, were particularly popular because of the emphasis on correspondence. The founders of the *Weekly Budget* had discovered that readers in large cities demanded light amusing reading with news.^[21] George Newnes and later Alfred Harmsworth exploited this discovery, the one in *Tit-bits* and the other in *Answers*. From these origins there emerged the *Daily Express* under Arthur Pearson and the *Daily Mail* under the Harmsworth brothers and Kennedy Jones. American experience in the handling of news became important in the evening papers and then spread to the morning papers. But in both Great Britain and the

United States the Boer War and the Spanish American War enabled sensational journalism to reach new peaks. Wemyss Reid wrote of the Boer War: “It has been said that this has been a war made by newspapers. Evidently the newspapers are capable of carrying it on.”^[22]

The enormous expansion of newspapers and periodicals made heavy demands on writing. For his periodical, Dickens was said to have read 900 manuscripts of which he accepted eleven and rewrote them. Even the Rev. Whitwell Elwin, editor of the *Quarterly Review*, wrote in 1854 that “the art of writing pure English is almost lost.”^[23] By 1875, according to Maitland, “there was hardly a newspaper in England that was fit to read.”^[24] English journalism had suffered in the first half of the century from the effects of the stamp tax in ways already described but also from its emphasis on size and small type and from the necessity of using quantities of miscellaneous material. Anonymity, the low standard of journalism, and the gap between journalism and politics were in part the result. In France journalism without anonymity was recognized as the highway to office, whereas in England the most damaging charge ever brought against Brougham was that he wrote for a newspaper. The penny-a-liner was employed on an extensive scale to fill the columns of the paper. Even Charles Lamb confessed that he often used the statement, “It is not generally known that the three Blue Balls at the Pawnbroker’s shop are the ancient arms of the Lombards. The Lombards were the first money brokers in Europe.” The art of spinning out information is again illustrated in the sentence, “He was a policeman and his name was Smith.” With the demands of competition the necessity of relying on an organized staff of journalists reduced the work of the penny-a-liner but the demands for verbiage were still paramount.^[25] A. B. Reach was a pioneer in presenting journalistic material in readable and attractive form. George Augustus Sala was a conspicuous artist in the *Daily Telegraph*, of whom Matthew Arnold wrote: “he blends the airy epicureanism of the *salons* of Augustus with the full blooded gaiety of our English cider-cellar. . . . This mixture . . . is now the very thing to do down; there arises every day a larger public for it.”^[26] Professional journalists were influenced in style by popular writers, particularly Macaulay, Mill, and Froude, and by Carlyle in the United States.

When clever pressmen write this way,
“As Mr. J. A. Froude would say,”
Is it because they think he would,
And have they read a line of Froude?
Or is it only that they fear
The comment they have made is queer,
And that they either must erase it,
Or say it’s Mr. Froude who says it?^[27]

The demand for writers was met in part by the universities. The monopoly of Oxford and Cambridge in education was weakened by the establishment of the University of London in 1827. The improvement in status of Roman Catholics, after the Quebec Act of 1774, was eventually followed by their emancipation in 1827.^[28] The problem of the established church in Ireland contributed to the Anglo-Catholic movement and the departure of Newman from Oxford. The influence of science began with the appearance of Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1833) and *The Vestiges of Creation* (1844), written by Robert Chambers but published anonymously, followed by Darwin and the controversy over *The Origin of Species* (1859). Oxford was opened to Dissenters in 1858. Young men who had planned to take orders found their faith weakened and turned to writing and journalism. J. A. Froude and Leslie Stephen renounced clerical orders; the latter calling in Thomas Hardy to witness the ceremony, after the act in 1870 permitting renunciation. He wrote, “I became gradually convinced after the most serious reflection I could give that the Christian position was untenable. I therefore gave up my profession and took to literature.”^[29] Morley entered journalism and politics. W. L. Courtney on the *Daily Telegraph* and Chenery, the successor of Delane on *The Times*, came from Oxford.

These writers contributed to the revolution in periodicals which accompanied the revolution in newspapers. Periodicals, such as *Fraser’s Magazine*, which after 1840 represented the Broad Church movement, the *Saturday Review* (1855) which reflected High Church opinion, and other periodicals had been supported by journalists released from newspapers such as the *Morning Chronicle* which disappeared under the monopoly of *The Times*. The interest in religion was evident in the vigorous disputes between Freeman and Froude; its decline was evident in the purchase of *Fraser’s* by Longman in 1863 and its absorption in *Longman’s Magazine* in 1882 and in the sale of the *Saturday Review* by the Beresford Hope family in 1891. The effects of the interest in science were shown in the rise of Chapman and Hall, publishers of Herbert Spencer’s work, and of

Macmillan's supported by the interest of Cambridge University. The *Fortnightly Review* from 1867 to 1882 published numerous articles with powerful attacks on theology. The *Revue des deux Mondes* was used as a model and anonymity was abandoned. The *Contemporary Review* was started in 1866 as a religious periodical and the *Nineteenth Century* in 1877.

Railway construction in the forties was followed by a marked improvement in methods of distribution shown in the organization of W. H. Smith and Co. and Mudies. The *Cornhill Magazine* (1860) was started by George Smith of Smith, Elder and Co. with Thackeray as editor. It combined the critical review and the serial novel in a magazine sold for a shilling. Its phenomenal success brought imitators, and fiction serials opened the way for the cheap novel. Authors became less concerned with their own magazines and, like Thackeray, Trollope and George Eliot, accepted fabulous sums for serial rights. The demands for cheap editions of novels brought the yellow-back of the early sixties.^[30] By the early nineties the three-decker novel, the staple of circulating libraries, was no longer able to compete with the serial and the cheap novel.

Whatever may be said of the three-decker novel at 31s. 6d., it had the advantage of handsome octavos, clear type, and splendid illustrations. There was no huddling of type and matter, and the pages were not a conglomeration of almost invisible lines.^[31] It had contributed to the petty piracy of Thomas Tegg of which Carlyle complained and to the second-hand book trade in which John Lackington had a phenomenal success in the early part of the century. In "The temple of the muses" he kept "about half a million of volumes" which he bought and which he sold only for cash. The novel's size involved Procrustean demands on the author,^[32] and its patronage by the wealthier classes and the circulating libraries required puritanical standards. Since novels were read aloud by lamplight in family gatherings, the contents had to be harmless. George Moore, in 1885, hastened its decline in his pamphlet *Literature at Nurse or Circulating Morals*, and opened the way to French influence and the treatment of sex. The climate began to change. As the influence of Italy was displaced by that of Germany after the defeat of Napoleon, the marriage of Queen Victoria, and the attraction of the brief intensive flowering of German culture in the Romantic era to Coleridge, Carlyle and others, so the influence of Germany was replaced by France after the Franco-German War in which Europe had lost a mistress and gained a master.

The collapse of the three-decker novel followed the destruction of the monopoly of *The Times*. The new literature followed the new journalism.

Murray had refused to publish Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* because it dealt with the middle classes. *The Times* during the monopoly period, and the *Daily Telegraph* and other newspapers which developed with the lowering of taxes, represented the middle classes of whom Matthew Arnold spoke with such contempt. With the gain in literacy after the Education Act of 1870 and the commercialization of literature, the lower classes made enormous demands for the new journalism and the new literature and these demands were met by cheap paper and printing and the new Grub Street described by George Gissing and Anthony Trollope.^[33] The popularity of fiction followed the lower prices of novels. Books were sold in enormous quantities and popular writers, particularly women, wrote incredible numbers of novels. Arnold Bennett in a series of articles written at the end of the century described the work of writers of whom many readers will not have heard: M. E. Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, Sarah Grand, E. T. Fowler, Mary Cholmondeley.^[34] Among the defects of the average reader's taste he noted an absence of all sense of beauty of form. "Perhaps the utter collapse of architecture the most influential of all the arts, has something to do with this condition of things; perhaps it is only an effect."^[35] The average reader showed an inability to perceive art-work as a whole, a taste for crude sentimentalism such as that supplied by Rudyard Kipling, and a dislike of all fiction disturbing to his basic ideas. Arnold Bennett, in spite of his concern for form, studied the art of meeting the needs of the average reader with effect. In the magazines "the final word of editorial cunning" was "the connected series of short stories, of five or six thousand words each, in which the same characters, pitted against a succession of criminals or adverse fates, pass again and again through situations thrillingly dangerous, and emerge at length into the calm security of ultimate conquest. . . . Its universal adoption is a striking instance of that obsequious pampering of mental laziness and apathy which marks all the most successful modern journalism."^[36] Conan Doyle, Grant Allen, and above all L. T. Meade, used the formula with effect. To quote Bennett once more:

The public, which hitherto had accepted meekly what the publisher provided, found itself elevated to a throne, with the publisher obsequiously bowing at the foot thereof. . . . The modern editor . . . explores the nature of the demand to be met as patiently and thoroughly as a German manufacturer. With a mixture of logic and cynicism he states boldly that what people ought to want is no affair of his; and in ascertaining precisely what they in fact do want he never loses sight of the great philosophic truth that man is

a frail creature. He assiduously ministers to human infirmities. The public would like to read, to instruct itself, educate itself, amuse itself, elevate itself, but no effort and no sacrifice must be involved in the process. The way must be made straight, every obstacle shifted, every lion killed in advance. Inducements must be offered and all the yielding must be on one side. Only by such means can a new market, however vast potentially, be set upon a secure and steady basis.^[37]

The large-scale circulation of sixpenny magazines at the end of the century was increased further by the more frequent use of illustrations. Improvements in wood-engraving had been followed by the half-tone process, and illustrated periodicals weakened the position of serial publications. Improved machinery for the printing of books and periodicals followed improvements in the printing of newspapers, and lower prices destroyed monopolies in publishing. Mechanization in book and periodical production created a revolution comparable to that in journalism. The low prices of periodicals and books and wide circulation favored the growth of the one-price system. Alfred Marshall allowed Macmillans to publish his *Principles of Economics* at a fixed net price and the experiment was followed by the organization of publishers for the control of prices. Under the leadership of Sir Walter Besant, authors in turn organized for the protection of their interests. American copyright legislation in 1890 created a new series of rights, and the literary agent emerged to interpret them.

The collapse of the three-decker novel and the circulating library cannot be understood without reference to other European countries and particularly to the United States. The high prices of the three-volume novel in the first half of the century stimulated competition from French and Belgian printers who smuggled copies of English books into England.^[38] The high cost of paper made the position of the English author, as compared with the French author, an unenviable one. In turn, the English author had a strong incentive to become editor and publisher and to publish in periodicals as well as in the novel-form, as we have seen in the case of Ainsworth and Dickens.

High prices meant not only smuggling from the continent but also, with the absence of copyright, large-scale piracy of English books in the United States and a smaller-scale piracy of American ones in England. English books were rushed to the United States and hurriedly printed in a wild competitive scramble.^[39] One of Carlyle's early works was published first in the United States as were De Quincey's collected writings. W. C. Bryant

published one of his first books in England, and Henry Adams deliberately published his attack on the Erie financiers there, in order to secure the widest possible circulation in the United States. English authors, such as Dickens, visited the United States to scold American readers for their refusal to pay royalties, and to secure a wider market. Harriet Martineau was asked by Harpers to write of her experiences in the United States by “Trollopizing” a book. Freedom of the newspapers from taxation encouraged rapid expansion in the United States as compared with Great Britain. The penny-newspaper emerged in the early thirties. The American author found himself driven into journalism by English competition and pulled into it by the demand for newspaper writers. Bryant became editor of the New York *Evening Post*. The English book dominated the American market and American journalism gained from American writing. The newspaper monopoly in England drove writers into periodicals and books, and these in turn drove American writers into American journalism.^[40] With the introduction of the steamship in the fifties, *Harper’s* was built up with English fiction at the expense of a market for the American writer. The removal of the taxes on knowledge in England left English journalism exposed to the full impact of the advances in American journalism. R. Hoe and Company presses were first used by English papers in the fifties. At the end of the century the new journalism was in command in the United States and in England.

In the economic history of literature and journalism in England and the United States the class structure occupies a dominant position. The reviews of the early part of the nineteenth century were crowded out by the monopoly position of *The Times* and ceased to play a crucial role in political strategy. *The Times* dominated the middle classes from the first Reform Bill to the fifties. The removal of the taxes on knowledge, the extension of the franchise, and the development of the telegraph and cable opened the way for the *Daily News* (1846) and the *Daily Telegraph* (1855), and a penetration of journalism to the lower classes at the expense of *The Times*. Finally, the Education Act of 1870, cheap newsprint, and low costs of printing brought a third revolution indicated by the coming of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*. Public opinion as a reflection of the middle classes became less important, and popular clamour made rapid headway.^[41] And so we entered the open seas of democracy in the twentieth century with nothing to worship but the totalitarianism of the modern state. A century of peace gave way to a century of war.

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- [1] F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 283.
- [2] Rags were imported to the extent of 7,061 tons in 1844, 10,140 tons in 1846, 6,953 in 1849, and 8,124 in 1850.
- [3] The costs of fine quality paper declined from 17d. a pound in 1814 to 12d. in 1824, or from 49s. 7d. a ream to 35s. Printing paper declined in price from 24s. in 1831 to 15s. 6d. in 1843.
- [4] W. H. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819-1832* (London, 1928), 30.
- [5] In the twenties Scott was horrified at the idea of Lockhart's being associated with the press.
- [6] "For as to the devotees of the circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their *pass-time*, or rather *kill-time*, with the name of *reading*. Call it rather a sort of beggarly daydreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness, and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole *material* and imagery of the dose is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the barrenness of a hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose. We should therefore transfer this species of *amusement* (if indeed those can be said to retire *a musis*, who were never in their company, or relaxation be attributable to those, whose bows are never bent) from the genus, *reading*, to that comprehensive class characterized by the power of reconciling the two contrary yet co-existing propensities of human nature, namely indulgence of sloth, and hatred of vacancy. In addition to novels and tales of chivalry in prose or rhyme (by which last I mean neither rhythm nor metre), this genus comprises as its

species, gaming, swinging, or swaying on a chair or gate; spitting over a bridge; smoking; snuff-taking; tête-à-tête quarrels after dinner between husband and wife; conning word by word all the advertisements of a daily newspaper in a public house on a rainy day, &c. &c. &c.” S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford, 1907), I, 34.

[7] *Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith* (3rd ed., London, 1845), III, 21-2; see also Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press, 1790-1820* (London, 1939).

[8] See *Autobiography of Henry Taylor, 1800-1875* (London, 1885), I, 193.

[9] Smith to Francis Jeffrey, Dec. 30, 1821, in *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith* by his daughter Lady Holland with a selection from his letters edited by Mrs. Austin (New York, 1855), II, 217.

[10] *Personal Reminiscences of Eminent Men* (London, 1867), II, 293.

[11] M. F. Brightfield, *John Wilson Croker* (Berkeley, 1940).

[12] R. H. Horne, *Exposition of the False Medium excluding Men of Genius from the Public* (1833), cited in *Edmund Blunden, Keats's Publisher* (London, 1936), 203.

[13] “He suggested the idea of Le Bon Dieu coming to London to seek the copyright of the Bible and going the round of the publishers. He hit off Longman wonderfully. Longman observed to his ‘Lordship’ that the copyright was of late years deteriorated in value, hazardous to publish, but might still do for a school book; he would be very happy to print it at his Lordship’s expense on commission.

“Then Le Bon Dieu goes to Colburn. Colburn does not dispute the general merit of the work but doubts whether it will take with the fashionable world. He suggests a few alterations of high life—the manger and

the fisherman are decidedly low—and a few piquant anecdotes about the court of King Herod.” Michael Sadleir, *Bulwer: A Panorama* (London, 1931), 204-5.

[14] See S. M. Ellis, *William Harrison Ainsworth and his Friends* (London, 1911).

[15] M. M. Bevington, *The Saturday Review, 1855-1868* (New York, 1941), 162.

[16] Quoted in Malcolm Elwin, *Thackeray, a Personality* (London, 1932), 55.

[17] Edward Lytton Bulwer, *England and the English* (London, 1833), II, 14.

[18] See Charles Reade, *The Eighth Commandment* (London, 1860).

[19] See Edward Lytton Bulwer, *England and the English* (London, 1833), II.

[20] The words are Francis Hitchman’s in an article on “The Penny Press” printed in the *Eclectic Magazine* for 1881.

[21] “No article in the paper is to measure more than two inches in length, and every inch must be broken into at least two paragraphs. . . .

“I would have the paper address itself to the quarter-educated; that is to say, the great new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention. People of this kind want something to occupy them in trains and on ’buses and trams. As a rule they care for no newspapers except the Sunday ones; what they want is the lightest and frothiest of chit-chatty information—bits of stories, bits of description, bits of scandal, bits of jokes, bits of statistics, bits of foolery. Am I not right? Everything must be very short, two inches at the utmost; their attention can’t sustain itself beyond two

inches. Even chat is too solid for them: they want chit-chat.” (George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, London, 1904, 419.)

“I know a man who was once engaged at Jolly & Monk’s—the chief publishers of that kind of thing, you know; I must look him up—what a mistake it is to neglect *any* acquaintance!—and get some information out of him. But it’s obvious what an immense field there is for anyone who can just hit the taste of the new generation of Board-school children. Mustn’t be too goody-goody; that kind of thing is falling out of date. But you’d have to cultivate a particular kind of vulgarity. There’s an idea, by-the-bye. I’ll write a paper on the characteristics of that new generation; it may bring me a few guineas, and it would be a help to you.” (*Ibid.*, 28-9.)

[22] Wemyss Reid, “The Newspapers” (*Nineteenth Century*, XLVI, 1899, 848-64).

[23] *Some XVIII Century Men of Letters, Biographical Essays by the Rev. Whitwell Elwin*, edited by his son Warwick Elwin (London, 1902), 130.

[24] F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 258.

“The evil of the time is the multiplication of ephemerides. Hence a demand for essays, descriptive articles, fragments of criticisms, out of all proportion to the supply of even tolerable work. The men who have an aptitude for turning out this kind of thing in vast quantities are enlisted by every new periodical, with the result that their productions are ultimately watered down into worthlessness.” (George Gissing, *The New Grub Street*, London, 1904, 31.)

“But surely before long some Edison would make the true automaton; the problem must be comparatively such a simple one. Only to throw in a given number of old books, and have them reduced, blended, modernised into a single one for to-day’s consumption.” *Ibid.*, 95.

[25] “You must know, that the first time I met Angus he told me imprudently some foolish story about a stick that bred a disease in the owner’s hand, owing to his pressing so heavily on the ball it had by way of a handle. I touched the story up a little, and made half-a-guinea out of it. Since then that note has been turning up in a new dress in the most unlikely places. First the London correspondents swooped down on it, and telegraphed it all over the country as something that had happened to a well-known Cabinet Minister. It appeared in the Paris *Figaro* as a true story about Sir Gladstone, and soon afterwards it was across the channel as a reminiscence of Thiers. Having done another tour of the provinces it was taken to America by a lecturer, who exhibited the stick. Next it travelled the Continent, until it was sent home again by Paterfamilias Abroad, writing to *The Times*, who said that the man who owned the stick was a well-known Alpine guide. Since then we have heard of it fitfully as doing well in Melbourne and Arkansas. It figured in the last volume, or rather two volumes, of autobiography published, and now, you see, it is going the round of the clubs again, preparatory to starting on another tour.” J. M. Barrie, *When a Man’s Single* (New York, 1896), 234. This volume includes numerous amusing accounts of journalism.

[26] *Friendship’s Garland* (London, 1903), 108-9.

[27] J. M. Barrie, *op. cit.*, 172.

[28] It was claimed that Irish law-students as reporters of debates played an important role in securing the legislation (“On the taxes on knowledge,” *Westminster Review*, July 1, 1831, 18).

[29] F. W. Maitland, 150.

[30] Michael Sadleir, *The Evolution of Publishers’ Binding Styles, 1770-1900* (London, 1930).

[31] William Tinsley, *Random recollections of an old publisher* (London, 1900), 534.

[32] “Messieurs and mesdames the critics are wont to point out the weakness of second volumes; they are generally right, simply because a story which would have made a tolerable book (the common run of stories) refuses to fill three books.” George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 117.

“How is it possible to abandon the three volumes? It is a question of payment. An author of moderate repute may live on a yearly three-volume novel—I mean the man who is obliged to sell his book out and out, and who gets from one to two hundred pounds for it. But he would have to produce four one-volume novels to obtain the same income; and I doubt whether he could get so many published within the twelve months. And here comes in the benefit of the libraries; from the commercial point of view the libraries are indispensable. Do you suppose the public would support the present number of novelists if each book had to be purchased? A sudden change to that system would throw three-fourths of the novelists out of work.” *Ibid.*, 183.

[33] Gissing has been cited earlier; Trollope likewise complains:

“All those who are struggling for success have forced upon them the idea that their strongest efforts should be made in touting for praise. Those who are not familiar with the lives of authors will hardly believe how low will be the forms which their struggles will take:—How little presents will be sent to men who write little articles; how much flattery may be expended even on the keeper of a circulating library; with what profuse and distant genuflexions approaches are made to the outside railing of the temple which contains within it the great thunderer of some metropolitan periodical publication! The evil here is not only that done to the public when interested counsel is given to them, but extends to the debasement of those who have at any rate considered themselves fit to

provide literature for the public.” Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography* (London, 1883), III, 93-4.

[34] E. A. Bennett, *Fame and Fiction* (London, 1901); see also Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, 1932).

[35] *Ibid.*, 13.

[36] *Ibid.*, 135.

[37] *Ibid.*, 125-6. “I have an idea of offering substantial prizes to men and women engaged in sedentary work who take an oath to abstain from all reading, and keep it for a certain number of years. There’s a good deal more need for that than for abstinence from strong liquor. If I could have had my way I would have revived prize-fighting.” George Gissing, *op. cit.*, 19.

[38] G. P. R. James, “Some Observations on the Book Trade as connected with Literature in England” (*Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, VI, 1843).

[39] See a reference to the printing of Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* in New York in 1816: T. W. Barnes, *Memoir of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1884), 194.

[40] “Nothing was said about the hatred or fear entertained of literature and its professors by the aristocracy of Great Britain; though much was said about the superior chances afforded in the United States, to men of letters who aspired to a political or a diplomatic career.

“In the United States a newspaper editor, if a man of talent and sagacity above the average, and endowed with the power of language, either with the tongue or with the pen, can make himself anything that he pleases—not, perhaps, President of the Republic, for that is a post which, for the last forty years, has not been within the grasp of any man of ability, or of anybody but some harmless third-rate politician, who has not made too

many enemies in his public career; but a Vice-President, a Secretary of State, or an ambassador to London or Paris. No such chances are afforded to the journalist or the mere man of letters in England, although Mr. Disraeli's career may seem an instance to the contrary. But Mr. Disraeli became a statesman, not because of his being, but in spite of his being an author." Charles MacKay, *Forty Years Recollections* (London, 1877), II, 281-2.

[41]

See W. A. Mackinnon, *History of Civilization and Public Opinion* (London, 1849).

"The magic of Gutenberg and Füst hath conjured a wide chasm between the past and the future history of mankind: the people of one side the gulf are not the people of the other; the physical force is no longer separated from the moral; mind has by slow degrees crept into the mighty mass—the popular Cymon has received a soul! In the primal and restless consciousness of the new spirit, Luther appealed to the people—the first, since Christ, who so adventured. From that moment all the codes of classic dogmatists were worthless—the expired leases to an estate just let to new tenants, and upon new conditions." Edward Lytton Bulwer, *England and the English*, (London, 1833), II, 257-8.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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