This chapter concerns changing patterns of serial publication, a term we use to cover two related practices: the publishing of periodicals with miscellaneous contents, including both magazines and newspapers, and the issuing of unified texts at intervals in independent fascicles or parts. In practice, there is a good deal of overlap between these two modes, as indeed between serial publication in general and book publication itself. Parts are typically issued within paper covers bearing advertising material and are marketed alongside issues of magazines that look much the same. Periodicals commonly give over a significant proportion of their space to the serialisation of lengthy homogeneous works (the aspect we tend to focus on here), while the texts issued in parts can be remarkably heterogeneous ones like encyclopaedias or dictionaries. Both parts and periodicals are generally formatted so that either the purchaser or the vendor can have them bound up into volumes when the sequence is complete. This blurring of boundaries is also apparent in the instability of the terminology used to describe serial publication in the early decades of the Victorian period especially. Judging by the citations in the OED, though ‘number’, ‘part’ and ‘fascicle’, ‘miscellany’, ‘journal’, ‘magazine’ and ‘periodical’ have a rather longer history, the term ‘serial’ itself – whether as adjective or noun – only comes into common usage around the 1830s. The emergence of this new word helps to justify the use of the concept of ‘revolution’ to define the changes taking place in instalment publication during the nineteenth century.

After the Napoleonic wars, issuing print materials in instalments at recurring intervals appealed to publishers, printers, booksellers and consumers. Markets were tight and racked by depressions and bank failures; capital was scarce and national banking only in its infancy. Instalment issue enabled publishers to recycle their investment and to gauge the market, and let printers count on regular business, set large jobs without increasing their stock of fonts, and, in the case of artisans such as Samuel Bentley, produce crafted books at affordable prices. Booksellers liked serials because repeat customers might purchase other
material as well; and consumers could obtain expensive publications on an instalment plan. In 1830, one could buy ‘piecemeal’ books on many subjects: fine arts (often by subscription), geography, history, poetry, fiction, essays, religion and theology, reference works, surgery, botany and other sciences, and reprints of celebrated titles: Edward Gibbon’s *History of Rome* in ten two-shilling monthly parts, William Hone’s *Every Day Book* in shilling monthly parts. Serial publications appeared in regular cycles of fortnightly, monthly, quarterly and half-yearly issue; but also sometimes more irregularly, whenever they were released by the press or publisher.

Certain kinds of books seemed particularly appropriate for this kind of release and potential customer: reproductions of artworks, accompanied by letterpress; travel guides for continental tourists; collections of sermons; scientific, ornithological and gardening books. Readers brought up on the pamphlets and caricatures of the war years were accustomed to seeing nearly every day new pictures and text addressing hot topics. After the Peterloo uprising (1819) and agitation about Catholic emancipation (1823–9), a principal concern was reconstituting the franchise for the House of Commons. When the Reform Bill passed in 1832, the nation turned away from political activism and towards reassessment of its cultural and educational opportunities. Print caricaturists became illustrators of poetry and fiction. Enterprising publishers such as Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley concocted ‘libraries’, reprints of British and American titles whose copyrights could be obtained cheaply, and sold these books in uniform bindings as a series. Thus middle-class readers could purchase substantial collections of literature one per month, a marketing ploy that blurred the distinction between instalment publication and series issue. In either case the benefits to all participants in the communications circuit remained the same.

During the early decades of the century, some printers invested substantially in equipment that significantly increased their capacity to run off large numbers of sheets quickly. The Fourdrinier paper-making machines produced larger sheets that could print thirty-two or even sixty-four rather than sixteen pages at once. The cost of paper halved between 1840 and 1910.1 In November 1814 *The Times* installed a steam-driven press; and by 1834 the printers Bradbury & Evans had installed in Whitefriars a Middleton steam-driven cylinder press that required a steady stream of large jobs to keep the presses running six

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1 Weedon, *Victorian publishing*, p. 67. For assistance with research and commentary on earlier drafts, the authors would like to thank Richard Altick, David Finkelstein, Linda Kay Hughes, Suzanne Rindell, Peter Ross, Amelia Scholtz, and the staffs of the British Library and the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas.
days a week and thereby make the heavy investment worthwhile. Stereotyping and, by the end of the century, electrotyping substantially reduced the costs of reprinting and made possible issuing from the same plates both serial and later bound editions. While composition costs rose throughout the century (with the exception of a dip in the decades on either side of 1900), machining remained relatively stable as a percentage of production cost. As the number of copies of a title increased (1,000 was a standard run, but much larger editions were common by the Edwardian era), and production costs were distributed across more units, books could be sold cheaper while profits increased. Consequently technology itself to some extent drove publishers and writers to devise kinds of publications that would appeal to larger audiences and institute a steady demand for new products. In general, the very economic advantages that encouraged serialised issue when Victoria came to the throne transferred to newspapers, magazines and one-volume formats before the end of her reign.

Moreover, various economic and ideological forces combined to eliminate, by the 1860s, the so-called ‘taxes on knowledge’. The tax on houses with more than six windows, a revenue enhancement first levied in 1697 and falling most heavily on the middle classes, was halved in 1823 and abolished in 1851. While a house tax was substituted, at least thereafter homeowners could glaze openings previously bricked up and let daylight into their rooms. Spaces and times for reading were thus increased. Taxes were also imposed on paper: Charles Knight reckoned that he had paid £16,500 in paper duties to publish his *Penny Cyclopaedia* (weekly parts and twenty-seven volumes, 1833–44). Free traders, advocates for literacy and promoters of education combined to force successive governments to reduce the duty on paper, eventually abolished in 1861; import duties on foreign paper and printed materials were also reduced. And the charge for stamps levied on newspapers and pamphlets, which could for cheap publications nearly equal the production cost, was finally abolished in 1855. Postal services improved, making national circulation of print products easier. Since the value per pound of printed products is small, bulk shipping via the rapidly expanding railway system was the economical solution to national distribution. Books and periodicals were stacked not only in boxes in the goods waggons, but also on shelves on the platform: W. H. Smith started his railway stalls in 1848. And steamships sailing on reliable schedules year-round enabled printed serials or stereotype copies to be shipped to India, the US and Canada by the 1840s, and to Australia, New Zealand and other distant English-speaking settlements on a regular basis shortly thereafter.
The serial revolution

The emergence in Britain of print-capitalism – in Marxist terminology, the shift from petty-commodity-text production to commodity-text production\(^2\) – is apparent rather earlier in the part and periodical sectors than in that for books themselves,\(^3\) where the first edition tended to remain something of a limited circulation luxury item until relatively late in the century, and even series of cheaper reprint volumes only gradually began to reach a mass audience. Bibliometric studies confirm this point. Simon Eliot’s compilation of the government tax returns shows that there was a fivefold increase in the production of stamped periodicals in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the steepest rise occurring after 1836, while the abolition of knowledge taxes in the mid-1850s provoked a further phase of even more rapid growth.\(^4\) By contrast, Alexis Weedon’s estimates suggest that, despite a significant increase in overseas sales, total British book production increased only moderately between the 1830s and 1860s, though publication rose steeply from the 1880s.\(^5\)

The principal motivations underlying the success of serial publications were speed and economy. Serial issue itself, and the more dispersed channels through which serials could be distributed, notably colporteurs or canvassers, general stores and the postal service, continued to offer the reader an immediacy of access to written information that traditional booksellers could not hope to match. In the early to mid-Victorian period, as the balance of serialisation shifted from predominantly reprinted to original material commissioned for piecemeal issue, aesthetic considerations took on a much larger role; it became important to recognise not only the mechanisms of serial publishing but also the art of serial composition and the psychology of serial reading. In other words, serial publication facilitated not only the transformation of texts into commodities but also the creation of communities of readers. This aspect of serialisation has been investigated most thoroughly by Linda Hughes and Michael Lund, who conclude that ‘something in the culture of the time made it especially receptive to the serial’.\(^6\)

There is a large degree of overlap between apparently discrete classes of serial. For example, news itself is a slippery category to define with legal

\(^2\) See, for example, Feltes, *Modes of production*, ch. 1.
\(^3\) In the early 1830s, Charles Knight’s *Penny Magazine* had achieved regular weekly sales of around 200,000 (Bennett, ‘Revolutions in thought’, pp. 235–7), while by the end of the decade Dickens’s early monthly part-novels from Chapman & Hall were reaching sales of 50,000 (Patten, *Charles Dickens and his publishers*, chs. 3–5); by the mid-century, penny weekly part-novels and miscellanies aimed at a proletarian readership from publishers like Edward Lloyd and G. W. M. Reynolds were achieving sales of well over a quarter of a million (James, *Fiction for the working man*, ch. 3).
precision, and for tax reasons publishers deliberately mixed reports on current events with other kinds of prose. It is hard to specify the differences between newspapers and magazines, especially in the case of news weeklies that often issued supplements, sometimes in the form of fascicles of lengthy works. These might be fictional or non-fictional, though fiction is not always easy to distinguish from other narrative modes such as biography, history or travel-writing. Many Victorian miscellanies appearing weekly were also available to monthly subscribers at a commensurate rate, while quite a few novels appeared concurrently in cheaper weekly and more expensive monthly portions. Some examples: Harrison Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard* was serialised first in the monthly numbers of *Bentley’s Miscellany* (January 1839–February 1840) and later (1840) in fifteen weekly parts by the same publisher. In 1859, Dickens’s *A tale of two cities* appeared simultaneously in weekly numbers in his own *All the Year Round* and in monthly parts from Chapman & Hall. Wilkie Collins’s *Heart and science* was printed both in Chatto & Windus’s monthly *Belgravia* (August 1882–June 1883) and in a syndicate of around a dozen weekly newspapers. In this last case, typical of what has been termed ‘belt-and-braces’ serialisation, a subscriber to *Belgravia* would have paid eleven shillings (132 pence) to receive the complete text of the novel (among other material), while the typical cost to a reader of one of the weekly papers would have been only 2s 4d (28 pence). Another strategy widely employed by mid-century was to release a collected edition of an author’s works in cheap weekly parts: Scott and Dickens reached hundreds of thousands of readers in this form. Nevertheless, the categories of independent monthly number and miscellaneous weekly or monthly periodical remain useful in sub-dividing the years from 1830 to 1914 into three sub-periods, with the transitions occurring around the late 1850s and the later 1880s. For instance, in the first period monthly serialisation of fiction, magazines and other serial issues represents the dominant though far from exclusive mode for middle-class publications.

7 See Collet, *History of the taxes on knowledge* 1, ch. 1.
8 W. E. Norris’s *Thirlby Hall*, for example, was issued as a supplement with the weekly *Graphic* from 2 June 1883, though the practice was halted owing to opposition from the postal authorities. The Post Office judged that it fell outside the definition of a newspaper according to the Post Office Act of 1870, which regulated the sending of newspapers through the mail at cheaper rates, and the serial thus returned to the columns of the paper itself. (See ‘The Graphic and the Post Office’, p. 58.) This practice in fact seems to have been rather more common in the eighteenth century; see Wiles, *Serial publication in England before 1750*, ch. 2.
9 For example, it is difficult to categorise George Gissing’s late works *By the Ionian Sea* (1901) and the *Private papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) as fiction or travel sketches and autobiographical essays, respectively. Both of these appeared initially as serials in the *Fortnightly Review*, by then a monthly publication.
For late Victorians and Edwardians, however, the weekly number lost some of its associations with a proletarian readership and became more respectable. By the 1890s morning and evening newspapers selling millions of copies daily incorporated everything from international reporting to puzzles and prizes, while independent original part publication moved from the centre to the margins, having been replaced by inexpensive one-volume books and serialised original or republished stories marketed by authors’ agents to newspapers around the world through fiction bureaux. Though serial prices declined considerably overall, the rate of change from decade to decade was far from uniform. And whilst general economic, technological and social transformations may have been determining influences on production, pricing, marketing and consumption throughout this eighty-five-year period, the abating of knowledge taxes seems crucial to the first period of transition, as the formalisation of international conventions protecting literary property is important to the second.

The early years, 1830–1850s

Piecemeal publication blurred generic distinctions between news and fiction, but also between new print, revised print and reprint editions, and between serialisation, book, sequel and series. One of the most influential series, Bentley’s Standard Novels (1831–54), boasted that it supplied the authors’ revised texts of popular titles; these volumes appearing one per month encouraged a regular diet of reading and the consumption of diversified fiction by English, Scottish, Irish, American, French, German and Danish authors. Parts publication of original works, especially of fiction, grew up alongside serialisation in periodicals. Frederick Marryat is credited with being the first to issue instalment fictions designed for publication in magazines; but his early experiments needed some fine tuning. He stopped his first novel, Peter Simple (June 1832–September 1833), midway through its run in his own monthly, the Metropolitan Magazine, fearing that if it continued the public would prefer the cheaper periodical instalments to the completed volume edition (December 1833).

One mid-1830s innovation had profound effects on mid-Victorian fiction. Robert Seymour, a comic artist who contributed to the humour papers that replaced separate social and political caricatures, shopped around the idea of a series of images depicting the hapless sporting exploits of city-dwellers. A small publishing and bookselling house recently opened by Edward Chapman and William Hall in the Strand considered the idea of issuing these plates and

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letterpress monthly, an alternative to their projected Library of Fiction, an illustrated monthly collection of short stories. But they had trouble finding any writer willing to compose the narrative that led up to and explained the plates. Eventually, in February 1836, a young reporter making a name for himself as ‘Boz’ agreed to the collaboration, though from the start he pushed for his ‘own way’. The resulting publication, *The posthumous papers of the Pickwick Club*, appeared in twenty monthly numbers at a shilling each over nineteen months, with the last part being a ‘double number’ (parts xix and xx) at two shillings containing sixty-four pages rather than thirty-two, with four illustrations instead of two, and comprising all the necessary front matter to convert the monthly instalments into a bound volume. Seymour did not live to see the success of his project, which owed only its inception to him in any case. But Chapman, Hall and the author, Charles Dickens, reaped huge rewards from the recycled capital, the expanding sales (reaching 40,000 per month at the end), the repeated notices month after month, the word of mouth circulating among readers, the advertising supplement that became another remunerative feature of serialisation, and the subsequent reissue of bound sheets as a one-volume novel. At a stroke, this serial, comprising over six hundred pages and more than forty illustrations, reduced the cost of owning a new novel from 1½ guineas for three volumes paid at once – the standard price and format from 1821 to 1894 – to a pound, *paid out over nineteen months*.\(^{11}\) Publishers profited enormously; authors learned to lease rather than sell copyrights for serials and benefited by being paid while writing as well as sharing net receipts after publication; and illustrated serial novels released in varying numbers of weekly or monthly instalments rivalled three-deckers for the next thirty years.

Serials were particularly hospitable to weaving multiple plots and classes of characters into a verbal tapestry, and to accompanying the story with illustrations that shifted over time from deploying the style and imagery of caricature (into the 1840s) to utilising theatrical and realistic pictorial conventions (in the 1860s) both to depict and to critique the letterpress.\(^{12}\) At least sixteen mainline Victorian authors published nearly two hundred novels in some variant of this parts formula, either as separate numbers or in periodicals, and in many cases in both formats concurrently.\(^{13}\) Thus Dickens, editing the richly illustrated *Master Humphrey’s clock*, published *The old curiosity shop* (1840–1) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) in the magazine’s threepenny weekly instalments (bound up half-yearly as volumes) and also in separate monthly parts; after each novel’s completion

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\(^{11}\) Patten, *Charles Dickens and his publishers*, ch. 3.  
\(^{12}\) Maxwell, *The Victorian illustrated book*.  
\(^{13}\) Vann, *Victorian novels*.  

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unsold sheets or reprints from the original plates were bound for sale as single volumes. Because these serialised fictions were read, discussed, circulated, dramatised and pictorialised in the press, their characters and stories became a part of the nation’s regular diet of news. Whether Little Nell died or Becky Sharp lied became nearly as widespread a topic of conversation as Chartism or the Irish famine.

By the 1840s, serial issue was accommodated to various calendrical cycles: not only weekly and monthly parts extending to eighteen, twenty or twenty-four months, but also monthly numbers timed to begin in January and conclude, thirteen as twelve monthly parts, so that a one-volume edition could be issued for the holiday trade which picked up with the renewal of Christmas festivities and gift-giving in the 1840s. Starting in the 1850s, twopenny weekly miscellanies of fiction and essays such as Household Words not only issued half-yearly volumes but also printed Christmas numbers selling 40,000 copies or more and containing specially commissioned seasonal tales. An index accompanied each biennial compilation, so that the resulting volume served some of the purposes of a reference work. Since many customers lost some numbers of a serial, publishers anticipated a need for reprints to fill in the run, and second-hand retailers advertised that odd parts could be taken in exchange in order to complete a volume.

Not only were some books neither conceptualised nor experienced as fixed entities, they were also not read at a sitting. Serialisation encouraged regular, periodic revisiting of a story, received either as a silent reading experience or as a public oral one. Our most substantial evidence concerns the reception of novels, with less information about poetry and almost none about other genres. But as novels took a central role in the construction of mid-Victorian culture, their regular appearance as instalments in separate numbers or magazines promoted public airing of the fiction alongside other ‘news’. By the heyday of sensation fiction in the 1860s, the overstimulation of fiction’s effect came in for extensive discussion. Critics self-appointed as society’s guardians instructed the enlarging middle-class reading public in the protocols and practices of reading; they began to inveigh against short attention spans and literary ‘snacking’.

14 Serials did not always come out regularly; Dickens missed a month (June 1837) on Pickwick and Oliver Twist when his sister-in-law died, Thackeray three months (October–December 1849) on Pendennis because of illness, and Harrison Ainsworth completed the twelve-as-eleven-part Mervyn Clitheroe after a four and a half year hiatus (December 1851–March 1853; December 1857–June 1858).

15 Mays, ‘The disease of reading’. 
In 1842 Charles Edward Mudie established his ‘Select Library’ in Bloomsbury to cater to the respectable classes. For a few guineas a year, patrons could check out books on assorted topics, from poetry to science. Mudie insisted that his stock exclude trash and anything that would upset family values. Since his business depended on lending volumes, he did not stock serials. ‘Library fiction’ could mean anything from improving tracts to discreet romances, and by the 1850s some commercial rivals did also stock serials. Consequently major Victorian serial fictions circulating in large quantities to readers throughout the kingdom evaded both Mudie’s censorship and his commercial model of lending; parts publications were more often sold than rented, and sold not only in bookshops and railway stalls but by pedlars tramping the countryside and wholesalers distributing large quantities to warehouses in Britain and abroad. In the 1850s, however, this distinction between middle-class fare circulated through commercial libraries and more demotic parts publications began to break down. William Makepeace Thackeray, until the mid-1840s primarily a journalist selling articles and serials throughout Grub Street, in 1852 wrote *The history of Henry Esmond* for George Smith, who commissioned it as a three-volume novel. Thereafter Thackeray reverted to parts publication, and Dickens never deserted the format, though *Great expectations* appeared post-serial in three volumes for the circulating libraries. By the 1860s if major middle-class novelists did write for serial issue in magazines or parts, the novels were likely to appear after serialisation as three-deckers. The extent to which migrating to the canonical volume format raised the cultural status of serialised fiction has not yet been thoroughly assessed.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of Britain’s population was working class, poor, lacking stable housing, much education, places in which to read, and time. For these consumers there were two opposite (though often simultaneously experienced) options: reading improving texts in subscription and other libraries, or picking up whenever possible penny bloods, convoluted and violent stories extended over many months. The largest volume distributors of serials were religious and educational organisations. The Religious Tract Society handed out 23 million books in the 1840s, and the annual production of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge increased from 1.5 million in 1827 to 8 million forty years later. Generally the tracts were purchased as charitable benefactions by the middle class and distributed to working-class households by volunteers whose visits were sometimes unwelcome. At a higher level, preachers converted sermons into tracts arguing theological

16 St Clair, *The reading nation*, p. 569.
points; the most famous of these was the series of ninety tracts issued monthly by Oxford theologians between 1833 and 1841, culminating in John Henry Newman’s apostasy. Beginning in the 1820s, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge established mechanics’ institutes, incorporating circulating libraries for literate working men often run and supported by their employers, who saw to it that the shelves held only improving utilitarian texts, no fiction or Byronic poetry. 17

At the other end of the spectrum in London’s Salisbury Square, Edward Lloyd, one of the most prolific publishers of working-class serials, issued plagiarisms of early Dickens and helped to start the vogue for sensational instalments; from the later 1830s onwards he issued around 200 lurid Gothic, historical and romantic tales in penny weekly numbers, including *Varney, the vampyre* (1845–7). Some of these publications, like the *Arabian nights’ entertainments* (1847), were lavishly illustrated by wood-engravings surrounding and framing the texts. Lloyd also prospered as the proprietor of cheap weekly newspapers, notably *Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper* in January 1843 (2½d, later 3d) and various penny magazines. In the 1850s he moved upmarket, abandoning penny dreadfuls for respectability and mass circulation. 18 G. W. M. Reynolds became famous and intermittently solvent through similar expedients – penny knock-offs of Dickens and cheap miscellanies. Then, beginning in 1844, he penned and published the serial that outsold Dickens – *The mysteries of London* (1844–8), with a circulation of 40,000 copies a week and over a million parts before being reissued in volumes. 19

As in other cases we have adduced, the boundaries separating genre, price, periodicity and audience melded by mid-century: half-crown quarterlies gave way to shilling monthlies, shilling numbers dropped to sixpenny or penny parts, fivepenny newspapers devolved to penny dailies, while blood-and-thunder adventures rose into the respectable ranks. *Lloyd’s Weekly* became a leading Liberal organ and achieved a daily sale of one million copies in 1896, while Reynolds’s penny *Reynolds’s Miscellany*, featuring illustrated serials, achieved a sale of 30,000 copies in its first year, 1846. 20 Although Reynolds offended the middle class, Dickens and Marxist radicals, he brought French notions of class warfare – villainous rich versus deserving poor – into British fiction, to which he added the capitalist calculations (Thomas Carlyle’s ‘cash nexus’) of the rising middle class; these class types influenced more complex

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versions in such monthly number fiction as *Vanity Fair* (1847–8) and *Bleak House* (1852–3).

The middle years, 1850s–1880s

As we have seen, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century those attempting to reach a readership beyond the privileged few who could afford to subscribe to a circulating library, or even purchase the latest literature in editions de luxe, had little choice but to adopt some form of serial publication. Nevertheless, despite some relief from tax reductions in the mid-1830s, fiscal constraints long continued to counteract the benefits from economies of scale enjoyed by the serial publisher. At the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851, journals incorporating information on and discussion of current events – to take the most onerous case – thus still faced excise duty of three halfpence per pound on ‘Class One’ paper for printing, plus eighteen pence tax on each and every advertisement carried, as well as the newspaper stamp at a penny per issue. For weekly papers striving to reach a popular audience like the *News of the World* (1843–), this amounted to a rate of taxation far greater than 100 per cent of the cost of production, thus pushing up the purchase price to threepence, beyond the reach of much of its intended audience. In theory, the removal after the mid-century of the principal fiscal constraints on the publisher ought to have resulted not only in the cheapening of serials like the *News of the World*, but also in a significant reduction in the cost of a fresh post-octavo volume from the inflationary heights of half a guinea, but this did not in fact happen. Parliament debated and abolished the taxes on knowledge not at a single sitting but gradually through the 1850s, beginning in 1853 with the advertisement tax, and followed in 1855 by the newspaper stamp, that is, the two imposts borne principally by producers of serials. In contrast, the paper duty, which, though a burden to all publishers, weighed most heavily on those producing editions for the libraries, was removed only in 1861 after especially trenchant opposition. Collet Dobson Collet, in his personal record of the twelve-year campaign against the taxes, suggests that this was not only for budgetary reasons – ‘the Paper Duty brought to the revenue nearly three times as much as the Advertisement and Stamp Duties put together’ – but also because of a residual ‘fear of knowledge, in the House, and outside it’. Certainly the prolongation of the debate reinforced the engrained conservatism of the library system, so that

22 Collet, *History of the taxes on knowledge* 1, pp. 126, 130.
The serial revolution

the ensuing phase of rapid growth occurred first and foremost in the serial market. However, the publishing boom was reflected not only within existing serial formats – by marked reductions in price, accompanied by steep increases in both the number of titles and the volume of sales – but also in the emergence of new serial modes, or new functions for old ones. This suggests not just the releasing of market forces but in addition the impact of changing social structures.

As the medium hitherto most fiscally hampered, though, the newspaper clearly benefited most rapidly from liberation, as demonstrated dramatically in Charles Mitchell’s *Newspaper Press Directory*, which itself moved to regular annual publication from 1856 (see table 3.1). Between 1854 and 1856 alone, Mitchell calculates, the number of newspaper titles published in the United Kingdom and the British Isles (Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man) rose from 624 to 801, a nearly 30 per cent increase which occurred predominantly among country journals. By 1866, the total had doubled to 1,257, with a large gain found also in metropolitan newspapers, and it continued to rise, though slightly less steeply, to 1,642 titles during the following decade. Already by 1856 there were penny journals on sale each morning in both the metropolis and the provinces, putting a daily paper within the economic grasp of the lower middle class for the first time. Among the pioneers were the *Daily Telegraph* of Sheffield, one of the first English industrial cities to host two cheap dailies of different political complexions,23 and the London *Daily Telegraph*, which by the early 1870s was claiming sales of over 200,000, the largest daily circulation in the world.24 From the late 1860s there was also a new wave of halfpenny daily evening papers, with Tillotson’s *Bolton Evening News* (1867) in industrial Lancashire and Cassell’s *Echo* in London (1868) among the early instances.

For our purposes, however, the most distinctive development was the emergence of the penny weekly news miscellany, which typically appeared at the weekend and featured not only a summary of the week’s intelligence but also a variety of instructive and entertaining matter. The popular news miscellany reached a broad social readership, to begin with based principally in the outlying provinces where metropolitan periodicals had penetrated little – the *Dundee People’s Journal* and the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* were important pathbreakers. However, the new format gradually reached back towards the

24 See Altick, *The English common reader*, p. 355. From the end of the official stamp returns in 1855 until early in the twentieth century, when advertisers began to demand audited evidence of sales, claimed circulation figures for specific newspapers are sometimes hard to find and often unreliable. For an attempt to estimate circulations over the period 1855 to 1870 using a combination of anecdotal information and statistical method, see Ellegård, *The readership of the periodical press*. 

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Table 3.1  *UK periodical titles, 1846–1916*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Magazines</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1,445</td>
<td>1,039</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>1,583</td>
<td>1,102</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>1,166</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>1,743</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1,787</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>1,825</td>
<td>1,271</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>1,814</td>
<td>1,257</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>557</td>
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### Table 3.1 (cont.)

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**Sources:** Mitchell’s *Newspaper Press Directory* (1846–1916) and Eliot, *Some patterns and trends in British publishing*, fig. 39, and table 33, pp. 148 and 83. The data provided here revise and supplement those found in Eliot, *Some patterns and trends in British publishing*, which does not cover the years 1846–63, 1876 and 1904–16. The abrupt rise in the number of recorded magazine titles in 1877 probably reflects less a publishing boom than a change in methods of recording. The NPD ‘Publisher’s Address’ for 1877 (p. [iv]) reports that ‘The Directory of Magazines, Reviews, etc has been specially revised and added to.’ This suggests that the data for 1860–76 may underestimate the true number of magazine titles.

**Notes:**
- Data not given in *Newspaper Press Directory* volume
- * No *Newspaper Press Directory* volume(s) issued in intervening year(s)

home counties and the metropolis. A good deal, though by no means all, of the material in these journals was supplied through various modes of syndication, initially local and informal, but by the 1870s highly systematic and nationwide in scope. The two most successful agencies here were Cassell’s General Press in the metropolis, best known for their partly printed sheets, and Tillotson’s Fiction Bureau of Bolton, specialising in material cast into stereotype. Though
serial fiction became an increasingly popular ingredient of these miscellanies, the syndicators often began by supplying metropolitan advertising and intelligence, and soon also provided regular features such as poetry and critical essays, or columns aimed at women and children.²⁵ Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, these news miscellanies remained the most comprehensive print resource for many of the members of the communities they served, and today they represent one of the most detailed records of developments in local social and regional culture.

A further effect of the news miscellany boom in the second half of the nineteenth century is that it then becomes even more difficult to maintain a clear distinction between newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, it remains important to recognise that the impact of the abolition of the taxes on knowledge was a good deal less decisive in the magazine market. The classification employed in Mitchell’s *Newspaper Press Directory* suggests that, throughout the decade and a half from 1861, newspapers continued to represent rather more than two-thirds of the total of UK periodical titles, with the number of magazines increasing only from 481 to 657 by 1876 (see table 3.1). Yet the later 1850s and 1860s did witness a number of significant transformations, especially in the field of the general miscellany. Changes in the literary monthlies serving the middle classes have been well documented. Best known is the appearance of a new generation of lighter literary miscellanies, now elegantly illustrated and prominently featuring serial works by best-selling novelists, whether Thackeray or Anthony Trollope, Elizabeth Braddon or Ellen Wood, yet priced at only a shilling. The most successful examples, both founded in 1860, were Smith, Elder’s *Cornhill Magazine* and John Maxwell’s *Temple Bar*, taken over by Richard Bentley in 1866. But there were also original monthlies of a heavier kind, which, while finding room for superior instalment fiction by the likes of George Meredith, sought to take over many of the traditional intellectual functions of the quarterly review – yet at a much reduced cost; here the most distinguished examples are *Macmillan’s Magazine* (1859) and Chapman & Hall’s *Fortnightly Review* (1865), which quickly shifted to monthly issue. Both varieties were typically published by the established literary houses serving the circulating libraries, and occasionally featured works of non-fiction in instalments, including critical works in the fields of politics and philosophy.

Perhaps less familiar are the simultaneous developments in the weekly miscellany, as prejudice against the weekly number and the common reader simultaneously eroded. In 1861, when Lord Lytton condescendingly allowed his

The serial revolution

latest work to be serialised in Dickens’s new humble twopenny weekly, *All the Year Round*, rather than in the venerable *Blackwood’s*, the *Publishers’ Circular* commented with only a touch of exaggeration:

Perhaps one of the most striking features of the periodical literature of the day is the general levelling of all distinctions grounded upon mere price. The eminent author may now descend from the six shilling Quarterly even to the penny weekly without the slightest fear of losing caste; and Cobbett’s well-known defiance of the prejudice of his time by calling one of his own publications ‘Two-penny Trash’ would have been unintelligible to the present generation.26

With *Household Words* from 1850 Dickens had taken the lead in creating a literary journal in weekly numbers ‘designed for the instruction and entertainment of all classes of readers’.27 In this, he was belatedly followed by a number of literary houses, including Bradbury & Evans in 1859 with their own *Once a Week* after Dickens had abandoned them to start up *All the Year Round*. Yet there were earlier and more significant moves by publishers in other sectors. Instructional papers in the utilitarian and/or evangelical traditions, such as *Chambers’s Journal* (1832), the Religious Tract Society’s *Leisure Hour* (1852) and *Cassell’s Illustrated Family Paper* (1853), sought to reach a less sectarian audience by increasing the leaven of entertainment. The Salisbury Square publishers followed the example of the *Family Herald* in seeking female and juvenile readers, and the penny fiction journals thus became both less bloody and lustful and more instructive. Stimulated by the success of the provincial news miscellanies, the metropolitan press began to issue weekly journals in newspaper format, which included little in the way of public intelligence but a good deal of literary material. Notable examples include cheap popular sheets like the *Weekly Budget* (1860), and more expensive middle-class papers like the illustrated *Graphic* (1869), or the *World* (1874) with its concentration on society gossip. Though all of these weeklies relied a good deal for their appeal on instalment fiction, they also included many other works in serial, notably biographies, histories, travellers’ tales and other modes of narrative. The *Cornhill* was famous for attracting over 100,000 subscribers to its early issues,28 but there is no doubt that the weekly

26 *Publishers’ Circular*, 31 December 1861, p. 694. By the mid-1860s weeklies reached sales hitherto attained only by penny dreadfuls; the 1866 Christmas number of *All the Year Round* sold 265,000 copies within the first month (Patten, *Charles Dickens and his publishers*, p. 301).

27 See the advertisements for the opening numbers, reproduced in Gasson, *Wilkie Collins*, pp. 49, 53.

28 Sales of the *Cornhill* had fallen to 26,000 by December 1868, though 110,000 copies of the first issue had been distributed in January 1860; see Sutherland, ‘Cornhill’s sales and payments’.
miscellanies were generally attracting a far larger audience than the monthlies by the late 1860s.

Whether issued in weekly or monthly formats, serialised fictions built in expectations about structure and effect that were articulated by reviewers and perfected by some, but by no means all, of the authors who exploited the format. In the early days, critics scanned for plot and character; by the 1840s, more attention was being paid to motivation and credibility; and by the 1850s and 1860s, the social functions of popular fiction came under increasing scrutiny. Reviewing *David Copperfield* and *Pendennis* in July 1850, the *Prospective Review* grumped that serials afforded ‘the greatest excuse for unlimited departures from dignity, propriety, consistency, completeness, and proportion’. Sixteen years later Elizabeth Gaskell was considered inferior to Dickens or Disraeli in invention, vividness and vigour, but she excelled in producing an ‘air of perfect reality’ (*Saturday Review*, 24 March 1866). Trollope, who released novels in weekly and monthly instalments in magazines and parts, sometimes running two stories in two different formats simultaneously, was repeatedly chastised for composing, ‘as usual, no plot’. But by the 1860s critics granted that something other than suspense might make serial instalments attractive: ‘A little of it once a month is just what everybody would like’ (*Saturday Review*, 19 August 1865).

In this middle period serial authors were not just Grub Street scribblers, some were statesmen or celebrities, another marker of the respectability of the genre. Benjamin Disraeli, who became Prime Minister in 1868, never issued first editions of his novels in parts, but Edward Bulwer-Lytton, eventually Baron Lytton of Knebworth, did, and also served in Parliament for more than seventeen years. Dickens thought of campaigning for a seat in the Commons but didn’t; Trollope ran as a Liberal in 1868 but lost. Other prominent serialists included Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Cardinal Newman, John Ruskin and Herbert Spencer. James Murray initiated the *New Oxford dictionary on historical principles* in 1884 in the same way reference works had been published for a century, by issuing fascicles in alphabetical sequence; the series was completed in 126 parts in 1928. John Gould, Britain’s leading ornithologist, commenced his sumptuous *Birds of Great Britain* in 1862: it ran to twenty-five semi-annual parts and contained 367 hand-coloured lithographs. *Uncle Tom’s cabin* was a runaway best-seller in Britain, appearing in a variety of part issues including one from Cassell illustrated by George Cruikshank, and Harriet Beecher Stowe became as famous in Britain as in the United States. Isabella Beeton’s *Book of household management*, serialised by her publisher husband from 1859 to 1861, instructed the growing population of householders
The serial revolution

on everything from cookery to medicine and transformed its author into a trade name. Even poets sometimes resorted to instalment publishing: Robert Browning, during his obscure early years, put out *Bells and pomegranates* in six yearly parts, 1841–6, and Alfred Tennyson, eventual poet laureate and baron, issued various versions and parts of his serial poem *Idylls of the king* in at least twelve trial and first editions and one magazine instalment over more than half a century.

From the later 1870s the periodical boom was sustained more strongly in the magazine than the newspaper or parts sectors. Mitchell’s statistics suggest that between 1876 and 1896 the number of British newspaper titles increased by only 43% to 2,355, whereas magazine titles more than tripled to 2,097. Indeed, early in the new century the number of newspapers peaked, so that magazines then began to take a clear lead and accounted for close to 60 per cent of the total by the First World War (see table 3.1). The major increase was in ‘class’ periodicals, a category that the *Newspaper press directory* began to employ in its statistics from 1879, in contrast to ‘mass’ periodicals targeting a broad and undifferentiated readership. It referred to the rapidly increasing number of magazines serving specific professional, social and cultural communities. Though the proportion of the total ‘of a decidedly religious character’, to use Mitchell’s categorisation, declined in the last quarter of the century, the absolute number continued to increase until around 1900.²⁹ Thus, the period from 1875 to 1900 witnessed a dense proliferation of scientific, technical and trade journals, and also of magazines affiliated to political parties, Christian denominations and regional interests, and ones catering to fans of leisure activities, including sport, music and gardening, as well as to demographic groups based on gender, age or ethnicity.

In terms of individual circulation, of course, these segmental periodicals were not in the same league as the latest generation of ‘mass’ miscellanies, of which the pioneer was George Newnes’s *Tit-Bits* (1881), which was selling over 300,000 copies per week within five years.³⁰ Unlike the first generation, represented by *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* or Charles Knight’s *Penny Magazine*, papers like *Tit-Bits* reflected not so much the common reader’s need for useful knowledge as the growth of disposable income and leisure time and the desire to escape from the tedium of repetitive work. The ‘class’ periodicals tended to remain committed to serialising lengthy works in their pages, including a surprising quantity of instalment fiction tailored to the community

in question, while, as the title of *Tit-Bits* suggests, the ‘mass’ journals generally turned away from texts of any length and complexity. For Newnes, of course, *Tit-Bits* was merely the foundation stone of what was to become Britain’s first modern press empire, which would eventually seek to exploit the ‘class’ and ‘mass’ markets indifferently.³¹ We will return to the implications of these shifts in the final section.

The ‘number trade’ altered significantly during the high Victorian decades. Publication of original novels in fascicles lost ground in the face of the new wave of literary miscellanies, whether monthly or weekly, which sold at lower prices once knowledge taxes were abolished and mechanical improvements cheapened book production and distribution. Moreover, the economic incentive to purchase new fiction in penny parts or shilling numbers was considerably diminished when, for the same outlay, the reader could choose among a range of magazines, some illustrated, containing only slightly shorter episodes from a couple of original novels, together with a cornucopia of non-fictional features. Indeed, in the 1850s and 1860s Victorian print culture moved towards cultivating a mass audience: for instance, the style and content of penny bloods moved upward into middle-class sensation fiction, while ‘higher-brow’ works were issued in multiple formats appealing to many different purses. Even threedeckers appeared in one-volume six-shilling editions within a year of original publication. So the familiar pattern of new works reaching the wealthy while labourers read out-of-date material in cheap reprints and excerpts began to change.

So long as Dickens’s fictions appeared inside the familiar duck-green wrappers of the monthly part, novelists challenging his celebrity such as Thackeray and Trollope might continue to favour the same format. But after 1857 only one of Dickens’s novels was completed in twenty parts (*Our mutual friend*, 1864–5, fig. 3.1); two others appeared in his weekly magazine *All the Year Round*, and his last, twelve monthly part, fiction, *The mystery of Edwin Drood*, which commenced in April 1870, was discontinued when Dickens died in June without finishing it. The boom in monthly part novels for middle-class readers passed its peak in the late 1850s; twenty years later the odd belated example must have appeared almost ‘as antediluvian as the powdered wig or the buckled shoe’.³² And, as the vogue for the proletarian penny blood read by working-class men and boys was displaced by that for the ‘penny dreadful’, a rousing tale of adventure marketed for a juvenile audience, the preferred mode of initial publication

³² Sutherland, *Victorian fiction* 2nd edn, p. 108.
Figure 3.1 Charles Dickens, *Our mutual friend*. Cover for the monthly part for June 1864, illustrated by Marcus Stone. The goods advertised inside included not only household and other daily needs, but also new books from A. & C. Black, Macmillan and Hurst & Blackett, besides Chapman & Hall. Apart from *Our mutual friend*, Chapman & Hall were also publishing Trollope’s *Can you forgive her?* and Lever’s *Luttrell of Arran* in parts at this time. (Private collection)

shifted noticeably from parts to periodicals, with Edwin J. Brett’s *Boys of England* (1866) among the most popular and typical titles. With reprinted fiction, however, part-issue remained an option for rather longer, especially in the case of well-known authors. For example, in 1866 John Blackwood counselled George Eliot to have her back-list novels reissued not as a series of flimsy two-shilling yellowback volumes, but each in seven or eight sixpenny monthly
parts on superior paper, to be distributed by ‘the “Number Men,”’ i.e. men who sell the weekly and monthly publications in large numbers.\textsuperscript{33} Similarly, from the 1860s John Dicks started reissuing Reynolds’s old romances in halfpenny weekly parts, though by the 1880s he had removed the issue numbers from the plates and was selling tales like \textit{Wagner the Wehr-Wolf} in complete paperback volumes at sixpence each in his series of Dicks’ English Novels.

In contrast, the part-issue of non-fiction, whether reprinted classics or new works of reference, seems to have continued to enjoy steady growth in the mid-Victorian decades, although production and distribution were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of specialist firms. There were many sides to this serial trade. On the one hand, as publishing firms consolidated capital, new titles might be issued in various formats simultaneously for different classes of customer. Serialised release was no longer an economic necessity for publishers or a growing consumer base. In 1860 Henry Lea provided scientific books ‘for working men’ in weekly three-halfpenny numbers and monthly sixpenny parts; an illustrated edition of Byron in monthly sixpenny parts with numbers 1–14 appearing in February 1860; and sixpenny monthly parts of Shakespeare and a \textit{Topographical dictionary of England and Wales}.\textsuperscript{34} Concurrently Edward Moxon offered Wordsworth’s complete works, in six foolscap volumes, cloth, for thirty shillings, in six pocket volumes, cloth, for twenty-one shillings, or in one octavo volume for twenty shillings. These same publishing houses might offer a range of other types of publication – magazines, schoolbooks, scholarly histories and even newspapers addressed either to mass or special (secular, religious, gendered) audiences.

Choice of format and potential range of consumers meant that publications issued at predictable punctuated reading times diversified into printed products offering multiple kinds of reading experience: weighty newspapers and monthlies for careful perusal, inexpensive dailies for a quick skim, multi-volume works that improved the mind or professional competence, and miscellaneous magazines picked up and put down as time permitted. The lively new publishing houses known for cheap reprints, like Routledge & Sons (founded in 1836) or Ward & Lock (founded in 1854), issued their fiction titles predominantly in cheap uniform series of yellowbacks or paperback volumes aimed at the railway traveller. Yet they often preferred to employ part publication for works of non-fiction, especially in the case of lengthy and/or heavily illustrated works. Routledge’s Railway Library of fiction, beginning in 1848, included

\textsuperscript{34} Publishers’ Circular, 1 February 1860, p. 77.
over 1,300 titles before the end of the century, but the parallel Popular Library
of non-fiction starting up in 1850 petered out in under four years and fewer
than sixty volumes.\(^{35}\) On the other hand, such projects as J. G. Woods’s lavish
*Illustrated natural history*, with artwork by Joseph Wolf and others, and first
issued in monthly parts over nearly four years from February 1859, became
one of George Routledge’s long-standing best-sellers.\(^{36}\)

The most persuasive evidence of the continuing popularity of non-fiction in
numbers, however, can be found in the histories of those Victorian publish-
ers committed long-term to fascicle publication, notably Cassell in London
and Chambers in Edinburgh. William Chambers complained concerning his
house’s *Miscellany of useful and entertaining tracts* – ‘adapted for parish, school,
regimental and similar libraries’ and issued in 177 weekly numbers at three-
halfpence each from 1844 – that, though the circulation was ‘immense’, the
entire profits had been eaten up in paper duty.\(^{37}\) In contrast, Chambers’s *ency-
clopaedia: a dictionary of universal knowledge*, appearing in the same format from
1859 to 1868, paid handsome rewards and became their ‘crowning effort in
cheap and instructive literature’.\(^{38}\) The house of Cassell enjoyed a season of
substantial growth from the 1860s to the 1880s, due not only to their entry into
the field of country newspapers, but also to the expansion of their network of
‘number men’. Compared to fewer than a dozen back in the 1850s, at the peak
more than fifty different number publications were distributed simultaneously
by these door-to-door canvassers.\(^{39}\) The titles included both reprints of works
that had stood the test of time such as Cassell’s *Illustrated history of England*
(first issued 1856–64) and such original publications as Cassell’s *Natural history*
(1876–82). Like many of the new weekly literary miscellanies, typical instal-
ment works could be purchased indifferently in weekly numbers, monthly
parts and annual volumes, priced respectively at three-halfpence, sevenpence
and ten shillings.\(^{40}\) This development is indeed a symptom of a fundamen-
tal change in Victorian patterns of serial publication: earlier the distinction
between monthly and weekly instalments was constructed overwhelmingly
on the basis of the social status of the intended audience, and thus carried
with it a weight of ideological baggage; from the mid-Victorian decades, it

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\(^{39}\) See Nowell-Smith, *The house of Cassell*, chs. 5–6.

\(^{40}\) See *ibid.*, p. 36, where it is noted that Cassell’s part publications were sometimes ‘issued in
five forms: viz., weekly numbers, monthly parts, quarterly sections, half-yearly divisions, and
annual volumes’.
increasingly became a question of pragmatic choice, depending not only on the price but also on the genre or length of the work and the location and economic means of the customer.

The late years, 1880s–1914

Primary developments in serialisation at the end of the century included both the expansion of the mass periodical and newspaper market and the segmentation of the market into diversely identified readerships: boys, girls, men, women, sportsmen, the military, homemakers, office workers of both genders, and country, metropolitan, imperial, religious, political and fashion audiences.

One of the many signs of the rapid changes occurring in the serial market was the ‘twenty years of descent’ suffered by Cassell & Co. from around 1888. A major reason was the house’s continued dependence on methods of serial publication that had by the 1890s largely exhausted their marketing niche and passed their peak of profitability. Their flagship general miscellanies, the monthly Cassell’s Family Magazine (1853–1932, the old Family Paper in new guise) and the weekly Quiver (1861–1926), reflected the utilitarian and evangelical impulses of much earlier decades, while the new Cassell’s Saturday Journal (1883–1921) could only manage to be a pale and timid imitation of Tit-Bits. Deteriorating international situations, first in the Empire and then in Europe, left less space for literary and entertainment material purchased from the syndicators. Yet Cassell’s General Press continued to offer a menu of such serial material to provincial journals, which were steadily losing ground to metropolitan newspapers with a nationwide readership. Produced by the new media magnates in rivalry with Newnes, these notably included Alfred Harmsworth’s Daily Mail (1896) and Cyril Pearson’s Daily Express (1900), both aggressively populist halfpenny dailies. Above all, Cassell’s relied on the ‘number trade’ for too long – ‘half a century and more’, in Simon Nowell-Smith’s telling phrase – to distribute a by then ageing list of part publications house to house.

Symptomatically, in 1893 the firm was attacked in the correspondence columns of The Times by an irate Canon Ainger for originating ‘a new custom in the book trade which threatens to add a new terror to life’, that is, recruiting the ‘fashionably-dressed young lady’ to call and tout their wares in the drawing-room, rather than the traditional male hawker (the commercial

41 Ibid., p. 157.
42 On the concentration of circulation according to ownership that had emerged in the metropolitan press by 1910, see Lee, The origins of the popular press, table 31, p. 293.
43 Nowell-Smith, The house of Cassell, p. 36.
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incarnation of the religious tract distributor) whose visits had been ‘confined to
the kitchen entrance’. Though the firm replied defending the move towards
social and sexual equality in modern business, they could not erase the
perception that, as trade practices, both colportage and part publication were
themselves already outmoded.

The effects of such changes were not limited to Cassell. Chambers recognised
rather earlier the signs of general retreat in the number trade, so that new
reference projects like Chambers’s biographical dictionary (1897) were issued
from the beginning only in compact volume form. Though Tillotson’s Fiction
Bureau survived until the eve of the Second World War, ‘in both literary
and commercial terms, from the first decade of the new century at least the
story is one of long and slow decline’. The turn of the twentieth century
also witnessed the demise of most of the miscellanies founded by the literary
houses in the 1860s, including Temple Bar and Macmillan’s in 1906 and 1907
respectively. Though the Cornhill itself somehow survived the death of George
Smith in 1901, it was by then no competition for the latest generation of
monthly magazines, which were more liberally illustrated yet sold for only
sixpence. The longest-surviving miscellany, Blackwood’s, struggled to sustain
its traditions and Scots thrift within a marketplace dominated by more modern
periodicals paying higher prices for material. The market leaders came from
the new press magnates, with Newnes’s Strand Magazine (1891) once more in
front of Pearson’s Magazine (1896) and the Harmsworth Magazine (1898), though
all three could claim a circulation over a quarter of a million before the end of
the century.

Like Tit-Bits and its imitators, these periodicals featured a greater variety of
articles than their predecessors and preferred to avoid lengthy items, including
instalments of the traditional Victorian serial novel. Instead, they turned to
sequences of short tales by up-and-coming authors like Rudyard Kipling and
‘Q’ (the Cornishman Arthur Quiller-Couch, sometimes a Cassell’s author),
though most memorable of all were the illustrated detective stories serialised
in the Strand, featuring Arthur Morrison’s ‘Martin Hewitt, investigator’ and
Arthur Conan Doyle’s ‘Sherlock Holmes’. There were parallel changes in the
newspaper market. From the early 1890s, Tillotson’s Fiction Bureau had begun

44 Alfred Ainger to the Editor, ‘Messrs. Cassell and the “Number Trade”’, The Times 23 May 1893,
p. 10c.
45 Cassell and Company to the Editor, ‘Canon Ainger and Messrs. Cassell’, The Times 24 May 1893,
p. 12d.
47 Finkelstein (ed.), Print culture and the Blackwood tradition.
48 See Altick, The English common reader, p. 396.
to promote semi-annual packages of short stories by a team of authors, followed by quarterly bundles of 1,500-word ‘storyettes’, each designed to occupy only half a column or so in their clients’ diminishing feature pages. 49 By the turn of the century even big-selling metropolitan weeklies aimed at a family audience, such as the Illustrated London News, had dropped serial novels altogether, instead preferring to run sequences of juvenile tales by the likes of Edith Nesbit. Though narrative fiction thus retained a prominent place in the magazines and, for a time, in the weekly journals, these developments in the character of periodicals finally signalled a decline in the hitherto apparently limitless demand for full-length serial novels.

In uncovering the causes of this transformation in the patterns of serial publication, we must first of all recognise that they coincide with equally crucial changes in the market for books. Elsewhere in this volume will be found detailed discussions of the long-anticipated demise of the multi-volume first edition in the mid-1890s and the regulation of price discounting through the Net Book Agreement established in January 1900, developments which together served significantly to weaken the circulating library system and greatly to encourage the middle-class reading public to buy rather than borrow new books. The consequent reduction of the price of a standard new work to a maximum of six shillings put downward pressure on the pricing of all reprint formats, so that popular works were soon available in paperback volumes at sixpence or less. This effectively ended the purely economic motive for the production and consumption in instalments of all but the lengthiest and/or most lavishly illustrated of publishing projects, such as the substantially rewritten twenty-nine-volume eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica issued from 1910. Yet among the constraints enforcing a revolution in the book market were those that also had a direct effect on patterns of serial publication.

One pattern which has received rather less than its due attention in several earlier studies of the collapse of the circulating-library system is the growing pressure from external markets on British publishing. 50 Weedon provides detailed quantitative evidence of the steadily increasing commercial importance of exports to foreign and colonial markets in the expansion of the British book industry in the later Victorian decades. 51 The formalisation of international copyright mechanisms previously bilateral and ad hoc, through the

50 See, in particular, the anecdotal, bibliometric and neo-Marxist approaches of, respectively, Griest, Mudie’s circulating library, Gettmann, A Victorian publisher and Feltes, Modes of production.
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Berne Convention of 1886 and the American Chace Act of 1891, did much to accelerate the process.\textsuperscript{52} Publishing formats like the three-decker and the monthly fascicle, with their associated mechanisms of distribution – those networks of circulating libraries and teams of number men which had continued to thrive under what Matthew Arnold famously called Britain’s ‘highly eccentric, artificial, and unsatisfactory system of book-trade’\textsuperscript{53} – were obviously ill-suited for use in overseas societies taking a much more direct route towards the supply of cheap literature, whether in the Americas, Asia or the Antipodes. This then was clearly a major factor in the timing and pace of their decline. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the importance in this process of the ideological and intellectual reaction at the turn of the century against forms, practices and values perceived as essentially Victorian. This can be illustrated most effectively in the field of literature, where the various literary tendencies representative of early modernism, from naturalism and impressionism to symbolism and expressionism, were united in their resentment against the moral and aesthetic tyranny of the ‘select’ library and the ‘family’ magazine.\textsuperscript{54}

Thomas Hardy’s experience with the manuscript of \textit{Tess of the D’Urbervilles} illustrates the difficulties attendant on his trying to satisfy distinct classes of readers and publishers with a single text. Contracted in 1887 to Tillotson’s for a serial for their fiction syndication bureau, Hardy had to postpone delivery of the whole beyond the stipulated date. But he did by September 1889 supply the first half, of which sixteen chapters were typeset before his publisher could read them. Dealing as they did with Tess’s rape and illegitimate baby, these episodes shocked the publisher, who thereupon cancelled the contract. Then Hardy agreed to supply the conservative periodical the \textit{Graphic} with a full-length story (not telling them he had already written half of it), while at the same time showing the first part of \textit{Tess} to two other journals, both of which turned him down on account of the immorality of the story. Hardy responded in part by publishing in the January 1890 \textit{New Review} a protest against the censorship of circulating libraries and timid publishers. When Arthur Locker and his \textit{Graphic} staff read the opening chapters of \textit{Tess}, now newly set in type by their staff compositors, they had the same reaction as Tillotson’s: these incidents could not appear in their magazine. Hardy returned a heavily blue-pencilled manuscript, excising the rape and baptism scenes, and further bowdlerised \textit{Graphic} proofs forwarded to Harper’s in New

\textsuperscript{52} Nowell-Smith, \textit{International copyright law and the publisher}. \textsuperscript{53} Arnold, ‘Copyright’, p. 334. \textsuperscript{54} See, for example, Keating, \textit{The haunted study}, ch. 4.
York for serialisation in America. He published the objectionable passages in periodicals ‘addressed to adult readers’ – the Fortnightly Review and the National Observer – and more or less reconstituted his uncensored whole for the first three-volume edition of December 1891. But for some years thereafter, although Tess went through several editions and into one volume quickly, he was chastised by the ‘genteel’ reader for immorality, vulgarity and irreverence.

At the turn of the century, alienated from the comfortable expectations of middle-class readers, innovators in verse, short fiction and the novel alike demanded radical change not only in literary form but also in publishing format. George Moore successfully fought the domination of the circulating library and the three-decker, whilst George Gissing submitted to their tyranny out of necessity. Joseph Conrad resorted to serialisation, publishing almost all his fiction first in magazines. Illustrators, too, sometimes felt the reprobation of a bourgeois public – Aubrey Beardsley for instance; but others, such as Randolph Caldecott, Hugh Thomson and Kate Greenaway, turned out series after series of new works and reissues for the genteel. In 1903 the Baroness Orczy, who had been writing a series of detective tales for the Royal Magazine, decided to dramatis her novel, The Scarlet Pimpernel, which a dozen publishers had rejected over the previous three years. A revamped script featuring Ellen Terry’s brother Fred in the title role proved a big hit in London in 1905. Then the author published the novel (the 62nd edition appeared in 1935), extended it in a series of further adventures over the next forty years, sold several of these stories to film makers (the first released in 1928), oversaw many translations as well as publication in Bernhard Tauchnitz’s Collection of British Authors (1911), and even promoted unrelated works as belonging to ‘The Scarlet Pimpernel Series’.55 In short, in the early decades of the new century, writers and their agents (Orczy’s was A. P. Watt) could choose from a variety of options for first publication, subsequent reissues and dramatisations, and publishers energetically released new editions and collections of back stock in inexpensive reprints for sale in global markets. Modernists such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot often self-published or found backers willing to underwrite the cost of publishing little magazines and short runs of experimental writing. In the pre-war era formats were less instruments of class differentiation than choices made by authors and publishers for reasons of aesthetics, prestige and money.

55 ODNB; a somewhat different version, emphasising that the courts held that the play rights were owned by Terry, is told in Waller, Writers, readers and reputations, pp. 9–10. Orczy got possession of the dramatic rights after Terry died in 1932.
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During the late years of our allotted span Britain thus witnessed widespread changes in publishing mechanisms not excluding the various modes of publication in instalments. The result, it must be stressed, was by no means the superseding of serial issue in itself. Still today newspapers, magazines and book series continue to flourish, so that instalment publication remains a major device for adding surplus value to texts in print, as indeed to those transmitted via more modern communications media, whether film, broadcasting or the Internet. But the long-term effect was a marked decline in precisely those serial modes that had played such a central role during the reign of Queen Victoria in gradually building a mass readership, thus serving in both their form and content to reinforce that era’s faith in progress, growth and continuity.