CHAPTER 7

The Review of Reviews and the new journalism in late-Victorian Britain

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When he first heard about William Randolph Hearst’s notorious campaign to furnish a war between America and Spain in 1896 by filling the New York Journal with sensational stories of Spanish despotism in Cuba, William Thomas Stead immediately recognized this ‘newest of new journalists’ as a kindred spirit. Applauding the New York Journal as ‘a newspaper which, instead of confining itself to the function of chronicling other men’s deeds, boldly asserts its determination to supersede the journalism that chronicles by the journalism that acts’, Stead observed that its campaigning style ‘reminds me at every turn of what we tried to do in the old Pall Mall days’. As editor of the Pall Mall Gazette in the 1880s, Stead averred, he had succeeded in impressing upon the public mind, a conception of what Matthew Arnold called ‘The New Journalism’ which has never been entirely effaced. Coined by Arnold in 1887 as a pejorative epithet, the ‘New’ journalism that Stead claimed to have pioneered was distinguished from the ‘Old’ by a mixture of journalistic and typographical devices originally used in North America, and appealed primarily to the newly literate mass audience created, in part, by the 1870 Education Act. The new journalism, in fact, had its origins in several newspapers of the 1870s, but came to greater prominence with a number of periodicals that were founded during the 1880s and 1890s. The approach was exemplified in particular by Stead’s energetic editorship of the daily Pall Mall Gazette (1883–89) and then the monthly Review of Reviews (1890–1912), both of which engaged in crusades against various vested interests as well as pioneering new formats such as the interview. Stead boldly rejected the long tradition of ‘effete’ impersonal journalism and the ‘awe of the mystic “We”’, and instead enjoined a partisan and distinctly personal style of writing and editing, allowing him to put into practice his conviction that the ‘editor is the uncrowned king’ of the new era of mass democracy. Like the so-called ‘yellow journalism’ that Hearst introduced to 1890s America, the new journalism practised by Stead and others significantly altered several aspects of the production and consumption of periodicals and newspapers in late-Victorian Britain.

The emergence of the new journalism, as is discussed in the introduction, coincided with broad changes in the organization of the sciences as well as the ways in which they were presented to the public, with professional men of science becoming ever more isolated from the wider population. This chapter, which is based on a close reading of twenty volumes of the Review of Reviews from 1890 to 1899, will examine how the presentation of scientific material in Stead’s flagship journal was importantly affected by tactics such as the appropriation and recasting of elite scientific knowledge for a popular audience, the promotion of new ways of reading science that were suited to busy plebeian readers, the use of personality-based formats like the celebrity interview, and the prominent involvement of ordinary readers in the Review’s production. In particular, it will suggest that the treatment of science in the popular print media could be considerably more dynamic and less passive in this period than has usually been shown by historians, and will look at the problems which ageing scientific naturalists such as Thomas Henry Huxley, as well as more traditional popularizers of science like Grant Allen, now encountered with the journalistic devices pioneered by Stead. These formal aspects of new journalistic practice, as this chapter will show, were central to the troubled encounters between scientific practitioners and writers and the new type of campaigning editor exemplified by Stead, and signalled wider changes in the relationship between the spokesmen of elite groups, popularizers, and the mass reading public.

Several historians of the press have endeavoured to identify the defining characteristics of the ‘New’ journalism, with Alan J. Lee suggesting that it ‘constituted a new style of journalism, a style which reflected a changing relationship between the newspaper and its reader’, and Joseph O. Baylen proposing that ‘the New Journalism was . . . a projection of the Nonconformist conscience in Victorian life’ in which ‘agitations’ and ‘crusades’ were ‘an important device . . . to mobilize public opinion’. These were certainly highly conspicuous features of new journalistic practice, but the case of the Review of Reviews suggests that Stead’s brand of journalism was also importantly characterized by its particular relation to other periodical genres and its position in the marketplace. In 1889 Archibald Grove had founded the New Review, which set out to provide the kind of material usually carried in half-crown reviews like the Nineteenth Century for the cheaper price of 6d. The Review of Reviews, launched less than six months later, was similarly priced as a sixpenny monthly, but it went further by employing the format of so-called ‘snippet-papers’ like the penny weekly
Tit-Bits (short paragraphs culled from a myriad of other periodicals) in order to bring the actual contents of the 2s 6d reviews to a far wider readership. This generic hybridity and peculiar relation to the periodical marketplace was, as much as any other feature of the new journalism, to have significant consequences for the treatment of science in organs such as the Review of Reviews.

Stead had resigned his editorship of the Pall Mall Gazette in December 1889 after its proprietor Henry Yates Thompson became increasingly exasperated with his controversial editorial style and its deleterious effect on circulation. He had long harboured plans to edit a monthly journal, and, even before leaving the Pall Mall, had agreed with George Newnes, founder of the best-selling Tit-Bits, to begin a new monthly review, a venture that would combine Stead’s editorial flair with Newnes’s business acumen. The first number of the Review of Reviews appeared on 6 January 1890, less than four weeks after the initial agreement between Stead and Newnes. This frenetic pace of production was to become one of the hallmarks of the new journal, which the mercurial Stead moulded in his own image. Stead had earlier insisted that the ‘personality of the editor is the essential centre-point of my whole idea of the true journalism’, and readers of the first number of the Review were assured that while the new journal would ‘certainly not be a party organ’, neither would it be merely ‘a colourless reflection of the public opinion’. Rather, the Review would advance Stead’s own idiosyncratic Dissenting (Congregational) and Radical Imperialist outlook, exhibiting an ‘almost awe-struck regard for the destinies of the English-speaking man’ and exhorting ‘a revival of civic faith, a quickening of spiritual life’. This evangelical and overtly personal style of journalism, as Newnes quickly realized, was not sufficiently popular to ‘gather in the shekels’ in a mass-market dominated by fiction-based illustrated magazines, and in April 1890 Stead, with financial assistance from the Salvation Army, bought out Newnes’s half-share of the fledgling journal.

Stead was now the editor, publisher, and sole proprietor of the Review of Reviews, but he had pledged that the journal would adhere to a certain standard of disinterestedness and be ‘without political prejudice or religious intolerance’. Above all, its aim would be to ‘make the best thoughts of the best writers . . . universally accessible’. The Review, in Stead’s grandiose and somewhat paradoxical vision, would bring ‘salvation from tutored democracy’ by popularizing Arnold’s elitist conceptions of criticism and culture, even though Arnold himself had been one of the principal critics of what he termed the ‘feather-brained’ tendency of the so-called ‘New Journalism’. Rather than detracting from the pursuit of these aims, Stead assured anxious readers that the ‘unity of control and concentration of responsibility’ brought about by Newnes’s departure would in fact enable him to ‘carry out more completely the ideal with which the Review was founded’, as well as allowing its enlargement from seventy-two to ninety-six pages.

The production of the Review of Reviews was initially carried out by Newnes’s skilled staff at the Tit-Bits office, but after only three months it devolved on to the much less experienced personnel at Stead’s new Mowbray House office on the Thames Embankment. While the Review was predominantly ‘mononymous’ (the only name mentioned in most issues was that of Stead) and deliberately gave the impression that almost every article emanated from the editor’s prolific pen, its rapid production required the collaboration of a number of anonymous contributors, including the young Grant Richards, as well as a host of nameless clerks and typists. In fact, when Stead suffered a mild nervous breakdown in 1895, his younger brother, the Revd Francis Herbert Stead, temporarily took over as editor, although this was never acknowledged in the Review’s pages. The staff of the Review was particularly distinctive for the large proportion of women that Stead – an advocate of female suffrage – employed at rates of pay equal to their male colleagues, and, under the supervision of the office manager Marie Belloc, female journalists such as Flora Shaw and Virginia Crawford, as well as the ‘indexer to the Review’ Miss E. Hetherington, contributed significantly to the work of the journal. From May 1891, though, the Review’s most important employee after Stead was the circumspect business manager Edwin Stout, whose financial prudence helped rein in Stead’s editorial recklessness and did much to ensure that the Review actually broke even (assisted by dividend payments from Stead’s shares in the more successful American Review of Reviews). Newnes’s hard-nosed concern about the commercial viability of the ‘kind of journalism which . . . upsets governments [and] does many other great things’ proved to be accurate, and, despite a circulation which began at 80,000 and reached 200,000 after two years, the self-proclaimed flagship of the new journalism struggled to remain financially afloat throughout its existence.

**Abstract Concerns**

To perform the momentous functions that Stead had proposed, the Review of Reviews was to be ‘a combination of two elements, – the eclectic and the personal’. As well as Stead’s personal commentary on current events in the opening ‘Progress of the World’ section, and the regular ‘Character Sketch’
of a notable personality, the bulk of the remainder of the journal’s ninety-six pages comprised the ‘Leading Articles in the Reviews’ and ‘The Reviews Reviewed’ sections. These summaries and evaluations of articles from a myriad of domestic and foreign periodicals – which ranged in size from over a page to just a couple of lines – aimed to ‘supply a clue’ to the ‘mighty maze of modern periodical literature’ by providing ‘a readable compendium of all the best articles in the magazines and reviews’, ‘winnowing away the chaff and . . . revealing the grain’ of the month’s journalistic output. This ‘humble but useful task’, however, was in fact, at least initially, the most controversial aspect of the Review’s journalistic practice, and was to have far-reaching consequences for relations between the journal and high-profile scientific experts like Huxley.19

One of the reasons that the Review’s method of abstracting material from the world’s press was contentious was that more expensive rivals feared that it would ‘gut’ them of their most appealing copy and thereby remove the necessity for readers actually to purchase the periodical in which it had originally appeared. James Knowles, editor of the Nineteenth Century, protested that the intellectual property of his expensively acquired ‘star’ contributors was being unfairly pilfered by Stead, complaining in a letter to Huxley of ‘the incredible impudence of this unconscionable cad . . . filching my copyright’ and ‘living upon other people’s brains’ with his ‘stolen goods truck the “Review of Reviews”’.20 In actual fact, the Review, unlike Newnham’s Tit-Bits, generally sought the permission of publishers to reproduce their intellectual property; Longman’s, for example, gave ‘express permission’ and ‘sent . . . advance proofs for the purpose of quotation’.21 But even Stead’s outraged insistence that the Review actually assisted ‘the older magazines’ by providing them with ‘an unexampled publicity . . . given “free gratis and for nothing” did not allay lingering suspicions about the legitimacy of his journalistic practice, especially among rival editors.22 Edmund Yates, editor of the illustrated weekly the World, dubbed Stead’s journal ‘Fagin’s Miscellany’, and alleged that various publishers were threatening to take legal action against him.23 Stead strongly repudiated this accusation, but, as with the earlier tradition of cheap ‘scissors and paste’ journalism, the Review did at times flout existing copyright legislation (which remained largely unchanged since 1842) with apparent impunity, vindicating its literary expropriations with an explicitly populist justification.24 As Stead later claimed, to reproduce in the Review maps and diagrams published by the Home Office which only ‘a very small proportion of the forty millions of our population will ever have the opportunity of inspecting’ was ‘a permissible infringement on their copyright’.25 Similarly, the principal aim of the

‘Leading Articles in the Reviews’ and ‘The Reviews Reviewed’ sections was to make the contents of 2s 6d reviews like Knowles’s Nineteenth Century accessible to a much larger audience.

The problem that editors and contributors from the more expensive end of the periodical market had with this populist piracy, however, was not merely financial. Rather, the practice of abstracting just the main points from long articles in reviews like the Nineteenth Century and the Fortnightly Review prompted serious epistemological concerns over the control of ideas. Whilst pondering the form that the Review of Reviews should take, Stead had canvassed the opinion of many of the most prominent intellectuals and statesmen in late-Victorian Britain, reprinted facsimile reproductions of their hand-written letters of reply in the front pages of the first number. Huxley, in his reply, welcomed ‘such a guide to magazinism as you propose’, but counselled Stead that he must ‘secure the services of a body of intelligent and painstaking précis writers’, warning, ‘I am not quite sure that extracts are fair to authors’ because ‘passages without context often give a very wrong impression of the writer’s meaning’.26 Huxley was less concerned than Knowles with the monetary and commercial implications of abstraction.27 Instead, his principal anxiety was that the Review’s method of journalistic abridgement might erode the author’s control over the meaning of an article. By giving an inaccurate summary, or by pulling out only those aspects of an article that were perceived to be of interest to a mass audience or served a journal’s ideological agenda, the process of abstracting might actually change the intended meaning of the original article. In the Early Modern period, as Adrian Johns has shown, such literary ‘piracy . . . had epistemic as well as economic implications: it affected the structure and content of knowledge’, and new journalistic methods of expropriation in the metropolis of the 1890s resembled aspects of the ‘rapacious practices of London printers and booksellers’ in the unstable print culture of the sixteenth century.28 What was at stake in the Review of Reviews’s method of abstracting was what has recently been termed ‘textual stability’: the ability of authors and publishers to control and manage the use of the words that are printed under their names once they are replicated in, amongst many other formats, reviews and excerpts in other publications.29

Huxley’s pellucid prose was one of the most highly prized commodities in the late-Victorian periodical marketplace. As Joseph Hatton noted in his survey of Journalistic London (1882), ‘Mr. Huxley often speaks without being reported, yet editors of periodicals . . . will pay him anything to write for them’.30 Huxley’s relationship with these editors, as he told John Morley of the Fortnightly, was like being ‘as spoiled as a maiden with many wooers’,
and he promised to ‘remain as constant as a persistent bigamist’. 39 Indeed, the lovelorn editors of monthly reviews like the Fortnightly and the Nineteenth Century were so anxious to retain Huxley’s journalistic services that they allowed him a great deal of autonomy in the writing of his articles. Able to dictate details such as length, format, and the kind of printing setup used for the manuscript, Huxley exerted a high degree of control over how his articles might be interpreted, even to the extent of determining when an article might come out in relation to the timing of other pieces on the same subject. 50 However, when evocative digests of these same articles appeared in the Review of Reviews Huxley lost much of this close control over how they might be understood.

The sexagenarian Huxley, at the height of his celebrity if not his intellectual prowess, was a constant presence in the Review during its first year, with five abstracts of his articles in the Nineteenth Century, as well as facsimile reproductions of two of his letters to Stead, appearing in its pages. Initially, Stead had asked Huxley to ‘cast your eye over a précis, that I have prepared, of your article [‘On the Natural Inequality of Men’] for the “Review of Reviews”, claiming that he was very anxious to express your view on the one hand without in any way infringing upon the copyright of Knowles on the other’. 51 Such scrupulous concern with accurately representing Huxley’s actual views, however, did not last for long. Rather, abstracts of his articles soon began to pick out and dwell on those aspects which apparently demonstrated Huxley’s ‘sledge-hammer polemic’ and ‘knock-down method of controversy’ and seemed to show that his ‘natural vocation was the prize-ring’. 52 Such an incessant focus on Huxley’s irascibility could make his arguments seem rash and unreasoned, and might even tarnish his reputation for scientific disinterestedness. Indeed, one abstract of a twenty-page article simply reproduced the four most intertemperate paragraphs, which were used to adduce that ‘Professor Huxley, as a Biblical controversialist, is rougher than Mr. [Charles] Bradlaugh’, thereby associating the ageing scientific naturalist with the notorious atheist and belligerent advocate of free thought. 53 There existed, as Stead acknowledged, ‘a gulf difficult to span’ between his and Huxley’s views on most questions, and, in Stead’s adept hands, the process of abstraction could be used to construct particular interpretations of Huxley’s writing that were often very different from the intended meanings of the original articles. 54

When this deliberately partial method of abstraction was combined with the breakneck speed with which the Review of Reviews was produced each month, the stability of the author’s original meaning became even more contingent. As Stead himself conceded, ‘Many of the magazines which are reviewed only come out on the 30th and 31st of each month, and the Review goes to press on the 1st of the month of issue; hence many shortcomings of which no one is more conscious than the editor.’ 55 Even with Stead’s apparent awareness of its inadequacies, however, the Review was not closely proof-read, for, as Grant Richards later recalled, Stead ‘[n]ever spared time to look critically at the actual magazine. By the time it reached his hands it was already a back-number. His mind would be on its successor.’ 56 The distorting effect of these shortcomings and the absence of proper proof-reading became particularly evident in July 1890 when a summary of one of Huxley’s articles for the Nineteenth Century suggested that his judgement of ‘the accounts given in Genesis of the Creation and of the Deluge as “lies” . . . is significant of the mental temperature in which the article is written’. 57 Adrian Desmond has suggested that this insinuation infuriated Huxley primarily because of his ideological animus against Stead’s support for the Salvation Army and belief in spiritualism. 58 In fact, what was principally at issue was the reliability of Stead’s new journalistic method of hurried abstraction, for in the following issue of the Review (August 1890) Stead was forced to offer an unconditional apology for printing a railing accusation against Professor Huxley last month which he did not deserve’, admitting that the ‘blunder’ had been caused by ‘mistaking a verb [i.e. “lies”] for a substantive’. 59 By abstracting it in haste, and with a predisposition to view Huxley as a hot-tempered controversialist, Stead had misconstrued the relevant passage from the article, which stated simply:

Now, not only do I hold it to be proven that the story of the Deluge is a pure fiction; but I have no hesitation in affirming the same thing of the story of the Creation. Between these two lies the story of the creation of man and woman and their fall from primitive innocence, which is even more monstrously improbable than either of the other two [my italics]. 60

In the wake of this very public blunder, Stead became, for a short while at least, more circumspect about the way in which he treated Huxley’s articles, noting warily that ‘even the most daring of reviewers would shrink from attempting to summarize’ them. 61 Despite this brief interval of chastened propriety, however, Stead soon reverted to new journalistic type, exasperating Huxley yet again by, once more, playing fast and loose with his public and private statements.

After reading the erroneous abstract in July 1890, Huxley had at once penned a letter of protest to Stead in which he asked archly, ‘Will you be so good as to inform me on what pages [of] my article the passage to which you refer occurs; and more particularly where the word “lies” which you
research into all unknown phenomena.\textsuperscript{39} Even worse, a few pages later Huxley's apparently sympathetic words were contrasted with the dismissive scepticism of a letter from his close friend Edwin Ray Lankester, with Stead claiming proudly that his own 'invincible reluctance to depart from what Professor Huxley describes as the first principle of modern science gives me much more chance of success than even such an eminent physiologist as Dr. Lankester himself'.\textsuperscript{40} Complaining bitterly that Stead had quoted his 'opinion respecting the principles of scientific investigation, as if it were in some way inconsistent with the views expressed by Prof. Lankester', Huxley insisted that this 'conviction' was 'erroneous' and that, notwithstanding the misrepresentation of his views, he in fact fully endorsed Lankester's 'very plain speaking' as to Stead's 'own qualifications for dealing with the question'.\textsuperscript{41} Having had his words so distorted and misrepresented that he appeared to be a potential advocate of spiritualism,\textsuperscript{42} Huxley wanted nothing more to do with the Review of Reviews's wily editor, and even refused to add his name to a memorial for international arbitration to check the growth of European armaments which Stead sent to several politicians and intellectuals in the following year.\textsuperscript{43}

The troubled relations that Huxley experienced with Stead in the early 1890s, so different from his convivial dealings with editors of middle-class reviews like Knowles and Morley, reveal some of the tensions between the producers of expert knowledge and populist campaigning editors that were prompted, at least in part, by the novel publishing formats of the new journalism. Indeed, Huxley's evident irritation and frustration with Stead's incessant appropriation of his imprimatur shows vividly how the traditional relations of authority that men of science had earlier been able to establish with more respectful and deferential journals were now fracturing as the dynamics of the periodical marketplace were transformed by the massive increase in titles aimed specifically at a mass audience.

Stead's self-conscious aim was to bring expert knowledge, whether this be political, artistic, or scientific, to the common reader in a suitably cheap and digested form. As is obvious with the case of Huxley though, the process of abstraction that he employed to do this was never merely a passive mode of diffusion of a simplified form of knowledge. Rather, elite knowledge was transformed by the acts of ‘exchange, interaction, translation, and resistance’ involved in its condensation, with certain features being emphasized – like Huxley's acerbity – and others – such as Huxley's detailed use of evidence – being more or less overlooked.\textsuperscript{44} The process of abstraction, then, was never neutral, and could even become an important resource in Stead's campaigning style of journalism.
Stead believed that science, more than any other area of elite culture, stood in need of being made more accessible to the wider reading public. The *Review of Reviews* regularly abstracted material on a diverse range of subjects from specialist scientific journals like the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* and the *Journal of Mental Science*, as well as foreign technical periodicals like the *Neue Militärische Blätter*. Such ‘periodicals written by savants and specialists’, Stead noted in one abstract, had ‘the disadvantage of the scientific division of labour’ and ‘emphasised[d] division and isolation in science’. As such, ‘what was written in them’ needed to be made ‘interesting and accessible to the whole reading world’ and the ‘general public’ rather than just ‘meet[ing] the eye of the specialist for whom it was originally intended’. The rather donnish reports of psychological experiments in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, for instance, could nevertheless be plundered for intriguing and eerie copy such as ‘well-authenticated ghost-stories’ which expound the ‘theory that apparitions . . . can be explained scientifically by the analogy of telepathy’. Indeed, as he became increasingly fascinated by the supernatural, Stead pledged that his new journal *Borderland* would ‘attempt to do in a popular and catholic form that which is done in a more or less doctrinaire and exclusive way by the Brahmins of Psychical Research’. Such a campaign to ‘popularise . . . the study of the spook’, though, was not merely an attempt at a passive diffusionist popularisation, for Stead insisted that to improve psychical research the ‘collection of the evidence about the phenomena must necessarily be entrusted to a multitude of witnesses’. Reliable substantiation of psychical phenomena, Stead urged, could only be achieved by breaking down the exclusivity of the Cambridge-based Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and permitting the mass audience of cheap periodicals to participate in the collection of extrasensory evidence.

In fact, Stead considered that the *Review of Reviews*’s practice of abstracting and indexing articles from the world’s press could actually make a significant contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge by rendering the rapid growth of specialist information more manageable. ‘Scientific workers’, he reported, ‘are complaining of the ever-increasing difficulty of keeping abreast of current scientific literature, even the literature of one particular science’, and he bemoaned the fact that as yet ‘no one has invented a Scientific Review of Reviews’. Even the Royal Society’s momentous *Catalogue of Scientific Papers* (1867–) was judged a ‘very incomplete and unsatisfactory’ work that failed to fulfil adequately the function of an index of modern science. The *Review* gave encouragement to a scheme for a bibliography of zoological literature employing methods similar to its own, but suggested that in the meantime its own abstracts and indexes could be of use even to the most prominent scientific writers. In an abstract of the contents of the *Fortnightly* in September 1890 Stead remarked, ‘I am glad to see that Mr. A. R. Wallace is a diligent reader of the *Review of Reviews*’, noting that Wallace’s paper on ‘Human Selection’ in the *Fortnightly* ‘reviews the various summaries of articles on the subject of the improvement of the race which appeared in recent numbers of the *Review*’. Wallace, however, took exception to the presumptive tone of the abstract, and forced Stead, just two months after his embarrassing blunder over Huxley’s abstract, to apologize for doing him ‘an injustice in the terms of my reference to your article’, which, Stead conceded, could ‘be read to imply . . . that you had only read the summaries’ in the *Review of Reviews* rather than the original articles. Despite the concern of prominent men of science like Huxley and Wallace with the reliability of his method of abstracting articles from other journals, Stead nevertheless continued to believe that the formal techniques of the new journalism could be of immense benefit to elite science in a period which witnessed an unprecedented growth in scientific information.

**Popular Reading**

The *Review of Reviews* supplemented its abstracts of scientific articles from other periodicals with original essays commissioned from prominent popularizers like Grant Allen, author of, among many other things, the bestselling *The Evolutionist at Large* (1881), and John Munro, who penned works like *The Romance of Electricity* (1893) for the Religious Tract Society. This specially commissioned science writing appeared primarily in the short-lived ‘Our Scientific Causerie’ feature, as well as in character sketches of major scientific figures like Lord Kelvin and Robert Koch. In all of these formats, however, Stead insisted that science should be presented to the general reading public in as concise and succinct a form as possible. When it came to science, it seems that Stead always felt that the shorter the better, and he praised Edward Clodd’s ‘little book’ *A Primer of Evolution* (1895) for its comprehensive ‘presentment of the theory of evolution in so short a space’. Even the most prolific of popularizers, however, did not share Stead’s enthusiasm for pithy abridgement and hasty summary. Allen, who had contributed over eighty articles to the * Pall Mall Gazette* during the 1880s, was now commissioned to write the very first ‘Our Scientific Causerie’ for the *Review*’s June 1890 number. At the beginning of his two-page essay, which discussed August Weismann’s recent experimental
work on the continuity of the germ-plasm, he informed the reader that a 'small difference of opinion has occurred between my friend the Editor and myself' concerning the form that the article should take. The 'Editor', Allen observed, 'says science has made itself into a Brahmin caste, which holds aloof from the people' and wants the Review of Reviews to carry 'every month . . . a couple of pages of summary, showing what the scientific world is just then mainly engaged in thinking and debating'. Allen, on the other hand, was of the opinion that

You can't explain these things off-hand in so short a space to the general public . . . Outsiders who want to know, even curiously, what these things are driving at, must make up their minds to devote to them a great deal more time and thought than is involved in glancing over a page or two of criticism in a general review.

Although he knew it 'will be heresy to the editor', Allen suggested that the unintelligibility of his own article ('the reader is as much at sea as at the outset', he concludes) has 'proved my point' that 'you really cannot compress' the latest findings on a recondite subject like heredity 'into two columns, so as to make it intelligible at a glance to the meanest understanding'. Stead had earlier labelled Allen 'the most indefatigable of all mag-mens', but his new journalistic ideal of popular science diverged widely even from that of such a prolific professional writer.

This difference of opinion over the journalistic popularization of science was part of a more general disagreement over the ways that periodicals and newspapers were to be consumed by a mass audience. Allen's concern that readers should 'devote . . . a great deal of time and thought' to reading rather than just 'glancing over a page or two' mirrored a wider concern with working-class reading practices, especially of periodicals, in the 1880s and 1890s. The 'periodical literature' which is full of 'miscellaneous, advertisements, and answers to correspondents', George R. Humphrey observed in the Nineteenth Century in 1893, 'begs to loose, desultory habits of reading, and the idea that the study of a given subject is the height of monotony'. These desultory habits of reading, moreover, were particularly damaging to the popular understanding of science, because, Humphrey insisted, while 'novels are read only . . . scientific books are studied'. Even Allen's journalistic popularization of science in titles like the Cornhill Magazine and the Popular Science Monthly required that readers invest a considerable amount of time and effort in the process of reading and understanding.

The new journalism of Stead and others, however, was predicated on a very different conception of how a popular audience could and should read periodicals. Another practitioner of the new journalistic style, Thomas Power O'Connor, insisted in the New Review:

We live in an age of hurry and of multitudinous newspapers. The newspaper is not read in the secrecy and silence of the closet as is the book. It is picked up at a railway station, hurried over in a railway carriage dropped incontinently when read. To get your ideas through the hurried eyes into the whirling brains that are employed in the reading of a newspaper there must be no mistake about your meaning.60

The process of reading encouraged by the new journalism was not only different from the way that books were consumed, but also from the way that expensive monthly reviews were read. Articles that frequently ran to thirty or forty pages posed considerable difficulties for readers who could not afford the 2s 6d cover price of these reviews. As John Burns, leader of the 1889 dockers' strike, told Stead, 'Being unable to purchase the Fortnightly . . . I have looked at the first two pages on a bookstall at Charing Cross, the next few at Waterloo, and finished the article at Victoria some days later, compelled, of course, to buy a paper to justify my staying the time at each.'77 The prohibitive cost, though, was not the only impediment to plebeian readers of titles like the Fortnightly. Rather, working-class readers generally could not afford to give the same amount of time to reading as the prosperous middle-class readers at whom the monthly reviews were principally aimed.

From the very outset, the Review of Reviews was intended to cater precisely to those readers with neither the money nor the leisure to read the monthly reviews. While organs of the so-called 'higher journalism' like the Nineteenth Century and Fortnightly were still aimed primarily at members of the intellectual elite who could read in the comfortable surroundings of metropolitan clubs, the Review was aimed defiantly at hardworking commuters who did much of their reading in crowded railway carriages. Advertisements declared proudly that it was 'UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE THE BEST MAGAZINE FOR BUSY MEN' (adding that it was 'also the best for busy women'), and newspapers like the Morning Post agreed that the Review was 'of considerable value in an age when few have the time to read the leading articles in the magazines, and the majority have neither the time nor the opportunity' (fig. 7.1). With characteristic hyperbole (and a lingering memory of the Dissenting traditions of reading in which he was brought up), Stead had initially proclaimed that his new journal should be 'read as men used to read their Bibles, not to waste an idle hour, but to discover the will of God'. However, with its concise digests of current news
and opinion the Review in practice encouraged partial forms of browsing and skim-reading rather than the intensive reading traditionally granted to Scripture. While Stead acknowledged that the ‘craze to have everything served up in snippets, the desire to be fed on seasoned and sweetened titbits’ was ‘deplored’ by many middle-class commentators, he nevertheless defended his journalistic practice by insisting that ‘although mincemen may not be wholesome as a staple diet, it is better than nothing’. The format of the Review self-consciously encouraged a form of what detractors termed ‘desultory’ reading that would allow readers without the time to cultivate more intensive modes of reading to have at least some understanding of – and sense of involvement in – the latest developments in subjects, like science, from which they had previously been excluded.75

In a similar vein, the Review also offered readers notices of ‘the leading books that have been published’ which would ‘enable the reader far removed from libraries to grasp the nature of their contents’.76 In exceptional cases, however, readers were advised to adopt a more intensive style of reading for certain monographs. James Sully’s Studies of Childhood (1895), for instance, was recommended as ‘a book which it behoves every parent to read, and not to read lightly’.77 Stead later elucidated the kind of careful reading practice he had in mind, suggesting that ‘Whenever you read a book have a pencil in your hand, and mark lightly in the margin whatever passages you wish to remember’, but he also acknowledged the problems that this intensive mode of reading posed for the audience of cheap periodicals by observing, ‘If you have borrowed the book from a public library... be careful to erase every pencil mark before you return [it].’78 Similarly, in a ‘Character Sketch’ of Herbert Spencer readers were told that, while they could use a recently published Epitome of Spencer’s philosophy as a ‘refresher or index’, they ‘must read [his work] through, not once or twice, but “tearfully and prayerfully” many times over’ in order to ‘assimilate its inner meaning’.79 Such a devotional and intensive form of reading, especially of the secularist works of Spencer, was a serious matter with significant moral and physiological consequences. As one abstract of an article from the American magazine Arena recounted, a mother who “became engrossed in Herbert Spencer’s writings” during pregnancy had given birth to a “child [who] reflects the mother’s mental condition in a most striking manner” and is “one of the finest reasoners... among children.”80 Indeed, the desultory and miscellaneous form of reading generally encouraged by the Review would at least prevent the fearful consequences of intensive reading revealed in another abstract, again from Arena, which claimed that the ‘way in which Colonel [Robert] Ingersoll became an Atheist... was clearly traceable to his mother’s reading during the time immediately preceding his birth’.81 As well as allowing busy plebeian readers to become informed on a wide variety of subjects, the miscellaneous reading practice encouraged by the Review could also prevent the fanaticism and unbelief that might possibly result from intensive but narrow styles of reading.

Reading the Review of Reviews was enlivened by a distinctive and eye-catching use of typography (headlines and crossheads, for instance), as well as a style of writing with such vividness and graphic force as to make a
distinct even although temporary impact upon the mind'. Each article, Stead enjoined, should be written 'in such a fashion as to strike the eye and compel the public at least to ask, “What is it all about?”. Such 'Sensationalism in journalism', he insisted, was 'justifiable up to the point that it is necessary to arrest the eye of the public.'83 The physical act of reading the Review, then, would stimulate, at least temporarily, the jaded senses of readers fatigued by the drudgery of daily life. Indeed, after perusing the Review's first number, a contributor to the weekly Methodist Recorder reported that 'no sooner did our eyes light on a paragraph than we were compelled to read'.84 It was precisely this capacity to attract the eye of overworked plebian readers with sensational and exciting accounts of its findings that, according to Stead, had been relinquished by an increasingly specialized modern science. When the 1893 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Liverpool 'passed without notable or sensational incident', Stead asserted:

the scientific picnic of the year has seldom yielded less amusement for the general public, and one feels more and more the lack of a lucid intelligible survey of the progress of scientific discovery in all fields. Science is so specialised and scientists tend to become such Brahmins that the ignorance of the average man seems likely to become denser the more minutely the field of knowledge is surveyed.84

What was needed to interest the general reader in scientific subjects were enticing works of synthesis like Max Nordau's Degeneration (1895), which, although 'generally wrong-headed', was at least 'as strenuous and fearless as the most sensation-loving reader could desire'.85 Works of science, according to Stead, should excite and physically stimulate their readers, and this capacity for arousing heightened feelings was considerably more important than their actual accuracy. Similarly, Benjamin Kidd's Social Evolution (1894) was, as the Review noted, 'one of the few philosophic or sociological books of our time, which have had the run of a sensational novel'.86 Stead had claimed earlier that Kidd's enticing and 'universally-talked-of' monograph was 'the scientific basis for the social gospel of the Review of Reviews', and the Review itself likewise offered abstracts and articles on scientific subjects that were 'served with piquante sauce' and were 'racy to read'.87 Stead's new journalistic ideal of popular science was predicated upon a reading practice that was, paradoxically, both desultory and physically stimulating, but, most importantly, eschewed the kind of intensive and studious engagement with the printed page demanded by more traditional popularizers like Allen.

Allen’s disagreement with Stead over the most appropriate way of reading popular science made it virtually impossible for him to continue to contribute to the Review. In a letter to Stead, Allen maintained that he would still be ‘very glad to write you another scientific causerie’, but his insistence on certain ‘conditions’, and especially that ‘every word I write . . . be printed’, suggests that he was no longer willing to supply the highly abbreviated and easily consumed form of popular science that Stead desired for the Review.88 As Allen remarked in another letter to Stead, the two were ‘so much alike in our aims, though so little in our means’.89 The proposed ‘Our Scientific Causerie’ (along with a review of Darwin’s Autobiography [1892] that Stead tried to commission from Allen) never appeared, and Allen’s only other original contribution to the Review—a ‘Character Sketch’ of John Tyndall—appeared almost four years later in January 1894.90 Stead nevertheless ensured Allen’s continued presence in the Review’s pages by, among other things, casually mentioning in an abstract of an article on the pathological consequences of riding bicycles that he had recently been ‘discussing the question . . . with Mr. Grant Allen’.91 With Allen preferring to write for more conventional journals like the Cornhill and the Fortnightly, however, the Review largely abandoned the attempt to incorporate traditional, essay-based, forms of science popularization within its new journalistic format, and instead embarked on more elaborate methods of bringing science to the mass audience for cheap periodicals.

INTERVIEWING EXPERTS

Without Allen’s high-profile contributions, the ‘Our Scientific Causerie’ feature lasted only another four months. The final article, written by Kidd, appeared in December 1890 and, like Allen’s initial contribution, it once again considered Weismann’s recent findings concerning the germ-plasm. Kidd, however, attempted to convey this abstruse theory of heredity to the mass audience of the Review of Reviews in a very different way to Allen. Whereas Allen had offered readers a dense and closely argued exposition of Weismann’s embryological researches that was almost identical to a review on the same subject he had written for the highbrow Academy,92 Kidd’s much less imperious article was based on ‘an interview which Professor Weismann was good enough to give me a few weeks ago at his home’. It began by giving a detailed and chatty description of the German scientist’s ‘detached English-looking house’ and the view from [its] front windows over ‘vine-clad slopes’, while photographs interspersed within the text showed the ‘tall, handsome-looking man with much of the poet in
his striking face'. The text of the actual interview was rendered as a dialogue which retained many traces of direct speech and attempted to recover the immediacy of the event and give a sense of how Weismann 'speaks English very fairly'. In recreating this convivial 'conversation' with the 'hero of the hour in biological science', Kidd even invited readers to enter the private space of Weismann's study, a 'charming little sanctum' where a 'bust of Darwin' sat 'in the place of honour ... over the Professor's desk'. Unlike Allen's abstract theoretical essay, the profusion of personal and domestic details in Kidd's illustrated interview provided precisely the kind of piquant and easily comprehensible science writing that Stead demanded for the pages of the Review.

Interviews and other forms of personality-based journalism, however, were not merely passive and trivializing modes of popularization. The format of the interview, one of the most distinctive of the new journalism's borrowings from North America, deliberately created a sense of intimacy (as well as the frisson of illicit intrusion) between the mass audience of journals such as the Review of Reviews and intellectual luminaries like Weismann. In interviews conducted at the subject's home, moreover, details of the topography of the private domestic space and the objects contained therein were recorded by the interviewer in order to reveal traces of the 'authentic' personality and 'inner' beliefs of the celebrity subject. In the case of science, such celebrity interviews provided important new ways of understanding the increasingly specialized researches of prominent practitioners.

The apparently incidental domestic detail of the positioning of Darwin's bust above Weismann's desk, for instance, was in fact integral to Kidd's contentious claim in the article about the degree of continuity that existed between the views of Darwin and Weismann. Allen, in his earlier 'Scientific Causerie', had emphasized Darwin's acceptance of the Neo-Lamarckian doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characteristics (which Weismann's germ-plasm theory now powerfully contradicted), and suggested that once 'Weismannism became the fashionable creed of the day ... even the ideas ... of Darwin himself ... began to be looked upon as antiquated and unphilosophical'. Kidd, on the other hand, grudgingly acknowledged that 'Darwin in some measure lent his name, after going the rounds for a quarter of a century' to the inheritance of acquired characteristics, but insisted that, far from being convinced of the pivotal role of use and disuse, Darwin had 'left unsolved' the 'answer to this riddle' which 'Professor Weismann ha[d] since attempted to give'. The presence of Darwin's bust, positioned 'appropriately' at the centre of his study, proved beyond question that Weismann 'remained a Darwinian' and that 'the great English naturalist' was the 'presiding genius of the Professor's life work'. The intimate personal details revealed in the interview format allowed Kidd to strengthen, at least implicitly, his controversial argument for the unbroken intellectual lineage between Darwin and Weismann.

As well as lionizing the celebrity subject as an exceptionally talented or interesting individual, the format of the interview also insisted, paradoxically, upon a quotidian intimacy which helped elide the boundaries between the subject and the reader. The revelation, for example, that the homes of even notable personalities contained everyday commodities similar to ones owned by the readers of cheap periodicals helped engender what has been termed the """"democratization"""" of ... celebrity in late nineteenth-century popular culture. There was, of course, nobody more acutely aware of the levelling potential of the interview than Stead, who proclaimed that 'No one is too exalted to be interviewed and no one too humble'. Interviews with men of science provided Stead with another means of overcoming their alleged aloofness and of reducing the hierarchical distance between professional scientists and the general public. After all, in the assumed intimacy of an interview even the most overpowering of scientific intellects could be humanized and shown to be not so very different from the more prosaic minds of readers. As an interview with Thomas Edison, which appeared in the Review in 1893, revealed, the inventor who 'sums up in his personality and achievements [the] genius of the American race' nevertheless struggled constantly with the 'forms and minutiae of business affairs' and other burdensome 'financial operations'. The interview, more than any other format of the brashly demotic new journalism, insisted that, beneath the veneer of celebrity, everyone had similar material concerns, whether genius, journalist, or journeyman.

Some members of the scientific community were extremely wary of the consequences of giving such unrestricted access to their personal affairs. In the late 1870s both Darwin and Tyndall had been featured in the pioneering 'Celebrities at Home' series in the World. When, however, Stead's Pall Mall Gazette reprinted in 1887 an article from the American Magazine in which 'Mr Grant Allen interviews himself after the fashion of the World's "Celebrities at Home"', Allen protested vehemently about the infringement of his privacy. The unauthorized publication of this auto-interview describing his 'modest Surrey cottage', Allen alleged, had caused him 'acute discomfort' and 'profound regret', and he even claimed that he 'would rather have cut off my right hand than have had it printed here in England'. The growth of intrusive personality-based journalism, as with other new journalistic innovations such as the encouragement of 'desultory' reading, perturbed
more traditional popularizers of science like Allen, who wished to maintain
a certain distance between themselves and their plebeian readers, at least
on this side of the Atlantic (Allen claimed that his own use of the interview
format was only meant to ‘suit a peculiar American taste’ and ‘was not
intended for English readers’). For populist editors like Stead, though, it
afforded a further means of critiquing the increasingly hierarchical nature
of professional science, and formed part of a wider campaign against the
alleged arrogance of scientific experts.

Stead’s profound antipathy towards anyone with specialist expertise was
prompted, in part, by his distrust of their ability to communicate mean-
ningfully with the general public. They might be the subjects of celebrity
interviews and ‘Character Sketches’, but so-called ‘experts’ were not per-
mitted to contribute original articles to any of the periodicals with which
Stead was involved. In ‘editing a newspaper’, he admonished,

never employ an expert to write a popular article on his own subject . . . If the
expert writes he will always forget that he is not writing for experts but for the
public, and will assume that they need not be told things which, although familiar
to him as ABC, are nevertheless totally unknown to the general reader.103

Certainly this strict prohibition on the writing of unintelligible ‘experts’
was adhered to throughout Stead’s long editorship of the New journalism: the Review of Reviews.

Review of Reviews. Even as late as 1910 he assured Wallace, ‘I am not going to let any one-
eyed specialist of a biologist loose upon your book [The World of Life]’,
insisting that ‘Its importance is far greater than that, and I will allow no one but myself to summarise it.’103

Stead proposed that editors such as himself were in the unique position of being able to communicate with the
mass audience of cheap periodicals whilst also having almost unrestricted ‘access to experts’, and he claimed, in a disturbingly vampiric metaphor,
than on any important question an ‘editor can have sucked the brains of
every living authority in England or in Europe, and printed their opinions
in his columns’.104 Like Dracula, who was to become one of the mythic
figures of 1890s popular culture, Stead envisaged the editor sucking the
intellectual lifeblood of the ‘expert’, and then transuffling it into the veins
of an army of loyal plebeian readers.

Editors of popular journals, in Stead’s estimate, were singularly well-
placed to intercede between increasingly specialized professional experts
and a rapidly expanding periodical readership who were eager to know
about recent scientific discoveries. Such a mediating role, however, was not
the limit of Stead’s didactic ambitions. Even more urgently, he argued,
the oligarchic authority of scientific experts needed to be reined in and
redirected by energetic editors working in conjunction with the mass
audiences of their periodicals. Editors, in Stead’s immodest conception,
were the new demagogues of the nascent era of popular democracy, and
could readily enlist and mobilize the support of huge readerships. The
‘secret power in all journalism’, as Stead observed, was ‘the establish-
ment of close touch between the Editor and his readers’.105 Like the hugely suc-
cessful penny weekly Answers to Correspondents which Alfred Harmsworth
began in 1888, the Review of Reviews granted a large amount of space to
letters and contributions submitted by ordinary (and, of course, unpaid)
readers, who were encouraged to consider themselves an integral part of the
production of each monthly number of the Review. Stead prided himself,
above all, on having a relationship with the audience of the New journalism: the Review of Reviews
that was ‘so much closer than those which exist between the editors and readers
of most periodicals’, and he bolstered this sense of intimacy by appealing
directly to readers’ judgements on particular subjects above the heads even
of acknowledged experts.106

The support of the Review’s readers was eagerly solicited in Stead’s incess-
ant campaigns to overcome the dogmatic hostility of the scientific estab-
ishment towards heterodox forms of knowledge. He requested readers to,
amongst many other things, take ‘the trouble to write out’ the ‘confirmatory
evidence . . . of any apparition known to you’ and ‘send it in to “Review of
Reviews, London”, marked Ghosts’.107 The active participation of the mass
audience of cheap periodicals in the collection of evidence based on their
own experience, as has already been seen in relation to psychical research,
was, in Stead’s view, the most effective way of proving beyond reasonable
doubt the reality of myriad phenomena currently beyond the boundaries
of orthodox scientific enquiry. The avowedly inclusive and populist agenda
of the Review could thereby become a means of repudiating the condescending and intolerant scepticism exhibited by professional sci-
technical experts.

Such contributions of amateur evidence were of particular value when
they came from the most ordinary of readers, and plebeian patrons of the
Review were exhorted to ‘guard against the mistaken assumption that it is
only ladies and gentlemen of leisure and culture who can render valuable
service’ in such matters.108 The ‘ghostly census-taker’, Stead counselled his
working-class readers, must ‘overcome a most unscientific reluctance on the
part of the ordinary citizen to speak, or still more to write and append his
name to a statement’ regarding spectral apparitions.109 Once such ordinary
citizens conquered their instinctive reticence on scientific subjects, more-
ever, it would soon become evident just how much they had to contribute
to the supposedly expert knowledge of specialist professionals. Even 'the tourist', as Stead noted in a review of books on Arctic exploration, 'is an invaluable ally of the scientific investigator', and if only 'summer travellers could be induced to visit' little-known regions such as Spitsbergen then 'it might be possible to get a portion of the Arctic land minutely studied and exactly surveyed'. Inevitably, Stead's appeals for lowly readers to contribute to the discussion of important scientific issues, especially with regard to occult phenomena, were viewed with considerable distaste and suspicion at the more expensive end of the periodical market. The highbrow Saturday Review, for instance, greeted the opening number of Borderland by warning that 'a democratic congregation of inquirers is not likely to be cautious', and noted contemptuously that such a populist approach would 'bring vulgarity and twaddle, and perhaps even "interviewing", into our association with the world beyond the grave'. Journalistic innovations such as celebrity interviews and the prominent involvement of ordinary readers, however, had the combined effect of making scientific experts appear more accessible, and even ordinary, while at the same time encouraging commonplace plebeian amateurs to consider themselves as active participants in the making of scientific knowledge. The boundaries between what might be considered 'elite' and 'popular' understandings of science were constantly and deliberately blurred in the self-consciously democratic pages of the Review of Reviews.

The so-called 'positivist diffusionist model' of science popularization, which disdainfully rejects the role of popularizers as well as the wider reading public in the production of scientific knowledge, has been increasingly called into question in recent years. Historians are now admonished to 'be suspicious of any model that, in granting to scientists the sole possession of genuine scientific knowledge, supports their epistemic authority', and enjoined to instead 'treat popularizations of science as sophisticated productions of knowledge in their own right' and to 'become more open to examining a variety of sites of scientific activity'. One of most significant of these miscellaneous sites of scientific activity, as this chapter has argued, was the cheap periodical press in late-Victorian Britain, and particularly those titles that were identified as the purveyors of a novel and disturbingly different style of journalism. The Review of Reviews, the self-styled flagship of this new journalism, employed a range of innovative methods of science popularization, including the abstracting and recasting of elite scientific knowledge, the promotion of 'desultory' reading, personality-based formats like the celebrity interview, and reader participation, which make it clear that the growing division between 'elite' science and public discourse

in the final decades of the nineteenth century was contested much more actively than has generally been recognized.

New journalistic methods of presenting science, as has been seen throughout this chapter, posed serious problems to ageing scientific naturalists such as Huxley and Wallace, as well as to traditional popularizers like Allen. The increasingly troubled encounters between such scientific practitioners and writers and the new type of campaigning editor exemplified by Stead signalled wider changes in the relationship between the spokesmen of élite groups, popularizers, and the reading public that would become ever more apparent in the twentieth century as the dynamics of the periodical marketplace were transformed by the exponential increase in titles aimed specifically at a mass audience.