



# **The Newspaper Press as a Power Both in the Expression and Formation of Public Opinion: The Chancellor's Essay 1898 (Classic Reprint)**

*Frank Taylor*

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Excerpt from The Newspaper Press as a Power Both in the Expression and Formation of Public Opinion: The Chancellor's Essay 1898

Whenever the history of the origin and growth of public opinion shall be written, the history of the newspaper will be found to constitute its most important chapter. The difficulty of discovering the writer of that chapter seems likely to delay the original undertaking indefinitely. At present every fresh historian of English Journalism laments the incompetence of his predecessors, while the public has a fair case against them all. While they have collected facts, amassed anecdotes, and compiled statistics, they have made no scientific attempt to draw conclusions, to estimate values, and to suggest probabilities. They have done their work in the spirit of Herodotus rather than of Thucydides, of Maundeville rather than of Macaulay. The results are delightful, but they are scarcely history.

This deficiency has borne evil fruit. On the one hand, the practice of sneering at the newspaper press was fashionable once and is still extant. On the other, there have always been some, and to-day they are the majority, who basely flatter or ignorantly extol it. Vague declamation about its present power and predestined omnipotence is a nauseous commonplace of modern literature. But a judicial and searching enquiry into its real position and prospects has never been instituted. The world is already sufficiently informed upon the gossip of Grub Street. What is now required is a writer courageous enough to take something for granted, one who will be master of his material down to the minutest detail, but who will nevertheless presuppose a public in possession of at least the elementary facts. He will write the philosophy of history instead of the diversions of Bohemia.

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