

Gale Primary Sources

Start at the source.

# Children's Periodicals

Diana Dixon

Southwold Museum

*The Bible Society Cleanings.*  
Various source media, 19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals  
DECEMBER, 1896.



IN CENTRAL AMERICA.  
*Native Indians at Home.* (See p. 42)



THE TOURISTS—T. W. HARKER AND H. GREEN.

## A CYCLING TOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA.

BY THOMAS WOODVILLE HARKER.

ii. HE vrou is indeed the helpmate of her husband in every way, would be useless. I do believe the American poet at some time or other must have had visions in his dreams of this portion of the globe, for has he not written:—

*Baptisms at San Salvador.* [FEBRUARY, 1899.]



JANUARY 1, 1890.] THE MISSIONARY HERALD.  
**CALABAR COLLEGE, KINGSTON, JAMAICA.**  
THE following graphic letter from S. B. Burton, Esq. F.R.G.S., of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, will be read with great interest:—  
"Newcastle-on-Tyne, December, 1894.  
"DEAR MR. BAYNES,—The request  
Royal Mail s.s. *Eden* on July 18<sup>th</sup> last.  
"On the twelfth day out we passed

During the nineteenth century there was a dramatic increase in the number of periodicals published for children, especially in the final third of the century. In the course of the period these publications shifted from being didactic and dull to making a conscious effort to entertain their readers while at the same time instructing them. In terms of the number of new titles that appeared and in their changing content, three decades were especially important: the 1820s, the 1860s and the 1880s.

### The Early Nineteenth Century

The first magazine for children appeared in 1751 and although a scattering of titles followed, none lasted long. However, the dominant motive of imparting a strong moral message was one that was rapidly adopted early in the nineteenth century. Religious societies such as the Religious Tract Society and religiously focussed publishers, such as Houlston, Nisbet and Stoneman soon recognised that the periodical was an ideal medium to influence young minds by meeting a demand for devotional literature. Consequently, *The Youth's Magazine or Evangelical Miscellany* and *The Youth's Instructor and Guardian* were established in the first decade of the century. In 1824 three long-lived and significant religious titles were launched: *The Child's Companion*, *The Children's Friend* and *The Child's Magazine*. All were characterised by a diet of fiction illustrating how good overcomes evil, the consequences of wrong-doing and by their emphasis on success in the mission field. They were intended for Sunday reading and for Sunday School prizes and provided the model for a succession of imitators. It is notable that over a third of all children's magazines were religious in character and because

they had the backing of religious organisations, their survival was guaranteed as they were priced cheaply, often at 1/2d, with an assured denominational readership.

### Boy's Magazines

Until the 1850s all titles were religious. The change came when a young and ambitious publisher, Samuel Orchard Beeton, identified a market ripe for exploitation. A marked increase in literacy, occasioned by the growth of British National Schools and Mechanic's Institutes, gave him an opportunity to launch a new periodical for boys. This, the *Boy's Own Magazine* (1855-74), offered something completely different: a journal full of fact, fiction, history and adventure. It recognised how to stimulate boys' interests with exciting fiction as well as scientific information. It also introduced the first commercial element by printing advertisements and offering lavish prizes for competitions. The journal was an immediate success and soon other publishers were producing rivals: including *Kingston's Magazine*, *Merry and Wise* and *Every Boy's Magazine*, all of which were informative, packed with illustrated articles, especially on science and natural history, as well as fiction from leading authors. The problem was that they all identified with a middle class market and priced themselves accordingly. This meant that a newly-literate working class readership had to look elsewhere for its reading matter. This was readily available in the numerous sensational penny weeklies, known as "penny dreadfuls".

In 1866 E.J. Brett issued the first number of *Boys of England: a magazine of sport, sensation, fun and instruction* and in so doing changed the face of periodical publishing for boys. Although he claimed he did so to counteract the pernicious influence of the penny dreadfuls circulating widely among working class boys, his own periodicals soon attracted condemnation. From the start *Boys of England* was eye-catching and ensured a loyal readership through its highly sensational fiction and extravagant prizes. Initially, at least, he was able to persuade reputable authors, such as Captain Mayne Reid and Percy B. St John to write for him. The fictional legend Jack Harkaway made his debut in its pages. Buoyed by the instant success of *Boys of England*, Brett was not slow to produce a number of other titles, including *Young Men of Great Britain* and *Sons of Britannia*. He was not without emulators anxious to capture this growing and lucrative market. It seems that he associated with a small group of similar publishers, most of whom were friends. These included Fox, Rayner, Rollington, Shurey and Stevens. Brett was less friendly with his main rivals, the Emmett brothers, William and George, who competed by issuing titles that were almost the same as Brett's. The rivalry came to a head in 1872 when Brett issued *Rovers of the Sea* at the same time as the Emmetts' *Rover's Log*. After the initial originality of the *Boys of England* copy was re-used time and again in his own and rival publications.

Cheap mass printing gave the periodicals a shoddy appearance, with crude illustrations. Often impecunious proprietors were extremely resourceful, giving the impression of a thriving editorial team by writing articles under pseudonyms. The heyday of these

publications was the late 1860s and early 1870s, although some titles consisted solely of material gleaned from earlier publications. *The Boy's Standard* is an excellent example. The sensational stories, full of violent action and cliff-hanging suspense, soon became the butt of serious criticism and many regarded them as worse than the penny dreadfuls they replaced. Nonetheless, they were extremely popular and there is evidence that middle class boys also enjoyed them. Their demise in the 1890s was more the result of competition from the larger publishing houses of Harmsworth and Newnes who had the ability to produce periodicals at half the price. Alfred Harmsworth publicly denounced his competitors and appointed a young editor to take charge of the boys' magazines. He, too, had regular contributors and was able to bring out a string of titles including *The Boy's Friend*, *The Union Jack*, *Halfpenny Marvel* and *Pluck*.

The popular penny weeklies from Brett and his colleagues were universally condemned for their sensationalism which, it was claimed, would lead impressionable youth into a life of crime. The groundswell of condemnation was serious enough to persuade the Religious Tract Society to start its own boy's periodical, which was founded, it claimed, with the express purpose of counteracting the influence of those pernicious weeklies. The result was *The Boy's Own Paper* in 1879. It was successful because it appealed both to boys and to their parents and sold at 1d a week. A periodical that attracted the leading authors and illustrators of the day, inculcating moral virtues but informing and entertaining its readers, was applauded. Its formula was simple: stories by popular writers such as G.A. Henty, R.M. Ballantyne and W.H.G. Kingston,

with high quality illustrations, some of which were in colour, and a substantial diet of practical information and sport. Numerous writers have singled it out with affection in their memoirs and boys loved it. Reader participation was actively encouraged through correspondence columns and competitions.

Other periodicals tried to emulate *The Boy's Own Paper* but none was as successful. Griffith and Farran brought out *The Union Jack* in 1880 with W.H.G. Kingston as editor but even though it looked very similar it never was as successful and even with G.A. Henty at the helm, it succumbed after three years, having failed to attract sufficient readers. In 1892 the publishing house of Cassell brought out *Chums* but this, like Newnes's *Captain*, was clearly aimed at a middle class market, and appealed particularly to public school boys. Both periodicals contained factual information, sports pages and plenty of high quality fiction.

### General Magazines

The 1850s and 1860s were extremely important decades for the development of high quality fiction for children with many major authors appearing for the first time. This paved the way for magazines for children which could devote considerable space to these authors, including R.M. Ballantine, Captain Frederick Marryatt and Juliana Ewing. Of these periodicals, one of the best was *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, originally edited by Mrs. Margaret Gatty and then by her daughter Juliana Ewing. Although it was never financially viable, it was innovative for its excellent fiction by Lewis Carroll, Hans Christian

Andersen and Mary Louisa Molesworth. In the same vein was *Good Words for the Young* whose editor, George Macdonald, brought fairy tales to its pages. All these titles were unashamedly middle class and too expensive for many, retailing at 6d per monthly issue.

In 1871 Cassell's *Little Folks* tried to widen the readership by being less didactic and moral. Its success may also be attributed to its emphasis on involving readers in correspondence columns and competitions. More downmarket was *Chatterbox* which sold at ½d a copy. Its importance was that it recognised that children needed entertaining as well as educating and this it addressed admirably. Its founder, J. Erskine Clarke did not envisage that it would appeal to children still in the nursery but it soon developed a loyal following among very young readers.

Nursery magazines also formed a distinct genre and while they were not numerous, they were often extremely attractive with an abundance of colour plates. Examples are *Bright Eyes*, *Toddles*, *The Infant's Delight* and *Tiny Tots*.

### Girl's Periodicals

In contrast to the lavish provision of titles for their brothers, girls were not nearly as well provided for. Between 1870 and 1900 only 10 percent of all titles were intended for girls compared with over 40 percent for boys. Although the *Boys and Girls Penny Magazine* was the first to admit to a female readership it was very short-lived. Magazines for girls suffered from many publishers' reluctance to recognise that

girls were a viable market and this is reflected both in the number of magazines available and their contents. A handful of titles appeared in the 1850s and 1860s, such as Charlotte Yonge's *Monthly Packet* and *The Young Ladies Journal* which were both devotional and emphasised the homemaking aspects of a girl's life. This meant that girls had to rely on general magazines such as *Kind Words for Boys and Girls* or *Sunday at Home* for their reading. There is substantial evidence from correspondence columns that many girls turned to boys' magazines and enjoyed reading them. Following the success of *The Boy's Own Paper*, the Religious Tract Society brought out *The Girl's Own Paper* in 1880. Selling at 1d a week, it was an immediate success and its circulation rapidly outstripped its brother paper.

Other magazines for girls soon appeared and all were attractively produced. However, unlike *The Girl's Own Paper* which aimed to appeal to a wide social spectrum, they were firmly directed towards the middle class reader. Examples are *Atalanta* under the direction of L.T. Meade and *Every Girl's Magazine*. The difficulty with them all was that they were never entirely sure whether they were aimed at girls or their mothers.

Working class girls would not have found them affordable and little effort was made by publishers to provide magazines for these readers. E.J. Brett tried to enter the market with his *Our Girl's Magazine* in 1882 but the venture was a disaster and the magazine folded within weeks. The Amalgamated Press was considerably more successful with its innovative halfpenny *Girl's Best Friend* in 1898. Described as a

"mill paper", it filled a gap in the market for factory girls and servants and soon had imitators.

The nineteenth century was important for the diversity and number of periodicals for children. From five or six titles in circulation in 1800 to many hundreds in 1900, children of all ages and from all backgrounds found periodicals readily available. There is no doubt that young male readers ranging from the public schoolboy to the messenger boy were the most fortunate with a wide choice of titles appearing.

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