Introduction

The first issue of *The Girl's Own Paper* appeared on January 3, 1880, published by the Religious Tract Society in Paternoster Row, London, price one penny.

Just a year earlier, with the express purpose of counteracting – "nay, of destroying and throwing out of the field" – the spate of "pernicious" publications arising in the wake of the 1870 Education Act, the Society had launched the *Boy's Own Paper*. The lively and progressive style of this magazine was an experiment, a departure from the Society's established religious periodicals (*Sunday At Home, Leisure Hour*, the *Child's Paper*), and considerable misgivings were voiced among the more conservative dignitaries of the Committee, dedicated as they were to the moral and spiritual welfare of the nation's youth. But – "I think every reader … will find that however exciting or interesting it may be, it is pervaded by a Christian tone," the Earl of Aberdeen, a former chairman of the Society, assured them. The immediate success of the venture came as a revelation, as did the fact that the paper's readers numbered girls as well as boys – eighteen-year-old Georgina Hamilton, for instance, winning a prize for a competition in an early issue. Very soon it was clear that there was wide scope for a feminine equivalent of the *Boy's Own Paper*.

However, although the *Girl's Own Paper* closely resembled its brother in appearance, it was by no means a *B.O.P.* with the sexes changed. The adventure stories so much associated with the boys' paper are rare in the Victorian years of the girls' – the greatest adventures for them being those of love and marriage, or of earning one's own living. Nor are there many school stories of the kind so popular with a later generation, where the heroine has ten to make and the match to win, and where chums converse in elaborate slang. The tone of the paper is less "schoolgirlish" than "girlish", and possibly the Editor might have preferred it to be described as "womanly".

Fiction was the mainstay of the magazine, with two serial stories running at any one time, and occasional short stories. There were articles on health and beauty, dress, needlework, housekeeping, cookery, hobbies, music (actual scores were printed from time to time, and Queen Victoria's youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, was a contributor), foreign countries,

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doing good, poems, jokes and anecdotes (termed *Varieties*), competitions and a weekly collection of answers to correspondents. Appropriately enough, the first issue was graced by a girlhood portrait of the Queen, thus setting the tone.

"There was a real want of a paper which girls could truly call *their own*," recalled the Editor years later in the thousandth number (February, 1899), going on to say:

> A paper which would be to the whole sisterhood a sensible, interesting and good-humoured companion, counsellor and friend, advocating their best interests, taking part in everything affecting them, giving them the best advice, conveying to them the best information, supplying them with the most readable fiction, and trying to exercise over them a refining and elevating influence … Success shone upon us from the very first, and *The Girl's Own Paper* at once and by general consent took a foremost place amongst the magazines of the day.
>
> Professional critics in the press were generous, and said many a friendly word in our praise. The late George Augustus Sala [a popular journalist] elevated *The Girl's Own Paper* to the position of "first favourite", and in an encouraging notice expressed a hope that "all the girls" of Great Britain would subscribe, for he thought it would be greatly to their advantage. Much-valued approval and friendly letters of advice and help also came to us in these early days from Mr John Ruskin, who, writing to a girl friend, said that he had ordered the paper to be sent to him regularly, and added, "Surely you young ladies – girls, I ought to say – will think you have a fair sixpennyworth." [Monthly numbers containing the four weekly issues bound together in blue covers were priced sixpence.]

Evidently the girls agreed with Mr Ruskin. The magazine proved extremely popular, its circulation quickly rising to over 250,000 and eventually outstripping even that of the boys'*; and the timely revenue from both publications enabled the Religious Tract Society to increase its support of its many mission stations in Africa, China and Catholic Europe. At the end of the magazine's first year, the Society's annual report noted that "some of the Society's friends have complained of the [*B.O.P.* and *G.O.P.*] as being too secular in tone", but added that "the attempt to give them an exclusively religious character would be to defeat the very purpose for which they were intended". Fortunately this purpose was not defeated and by the fifth month the gratified Committee had recorded their sentiments:

> There was an urgent need for such a publication.… We earnestly and with thankfulness believe that the hopes expressed in our preliminary prospectus … are being fulfilled – that *The Girl's Own Paper* is to its readers a guardian, instructor, companion, and friend, and that it is preparing them for the responsibilities of womanhood and for a heavenly home.**

The review attempted in this book of the magazine's first twenty-one years will, it is hoped, enable today's readers to judge whether at least the earthly hopes of the publishers were fulfilled.

Far right: on October 5, 1895, the G.O.P. published a setting by Princess Beatrice of a song by Queen Victoria's dear Disraeli, which recalled with "smiles and sighs" the long-lost days of youth.

* Patrick Dunae, *Boy's Own Paper: Origins and Editorial Policies*, The Private Library (journal of the Private Libraries Association), Second Series, Vol. 9, No. 4, Winter 1976.

** Rev. S. G. Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society*, R.T.S., 1899.

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THE GREEN CAVALIER'S SONG.

Words by The Earl of Beaconsfield. *Music by* H.R.H. Princess Henry of Battenberg.

Allegro moderato semplice.

Voice. I re - mem - ber, I re -

Piano. *mf* *p*

mem - ber when life was like a May - day flower; I re - mem - ber, I re -

cres. *cres.*

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The Editor

Throughout its Victorian existence, and for some years later, the *G.O.P.* had only one Editor, Charles Peters, who came to the R.T.S. from Cassells.

In the thousandth number, in 1899, he wrote: "To the Editor-in-Chief of the Society's magazines, Dr Macaulay, the hearty thanks of the Editor are due for liberty of action and a great deal of kindly encouragement." A deleted entry in the Minutes of July 20, 1882, however, suggests that he had earlier been criticised for over-secularisation: "A hope was expressed by the Committee that Mr Peters would act more in harmony with the principles of the Society."

Clearly there is the mark of a very strong editorial personality on the magazine. His successor, Flora Klickmann, called him "an editor of strong individuality" in the appreciation which opened the 1908–1909 Annual, at the end of his tenure:

> The death of Charles Peters, who had been the editor of this magazine for twenty-eight years, came as a personal loss to tens of thousands of readers who never saw him. There are piles of letters in my office at the present moment from people who never met him, nor ever exchanged a letter with him, all regretting his death as though he had been an intimate friend. And the reason for this is clear to all those who have followed, month by month, year by year, the pages of this paper. From the very first, Mr Peters had but one aim in editing this magazine, viz. to foster and develop that which was highest and noblest in the girlhood and womanhood of England, helping his readers to cherish their finest ideals, and teaching them to see the things of life in their proper perspective, putting the best things first, and banishing the worthless from his pages.
>
> It was inevitable that before long he became something far more than an ordinary editor to his huge constituency. Not only the girls for whom the magazine was originally started, but their mothers also, made him their final court of appeal when in any doubt or difficulty, and in this way he became the personal friend and counsellor of multitudes who would not have known him had they met him face to face.
>
> And no man took his work more seriously, striving to the last to give the magazine his very best. It was no wonder that when he passed away he left a blank that no one can really fill and hosts of friends to mourn his loss.

The Magazine

By the time these words appeared, the *Girl's Own Paper* had become very clearly an Edwardian publication. The new editor chose to re-title it *The Girl's Own Paper and Woman's Magazine*. The weekly numbers, price one penny, were discontinued, and a more compact monthly issue replaced them, selling at sixpence, as the old monthly had done. Flora Klickmann gave her reasons for the change (1908):

> In the days when *The Girl's Own Paper* was started, girls had not so much pocket-money as they have at present, but now any girl can afford sixpence a month for her magazine, and would rather scorn to take it in pennyworths … [Moreover] when the magazine started it was intended for girls only, but very soon it became apparent that it was being read by grown-ups as well … the girls of the past have become the grown-ups of today, and are still taking in the magazine.

Far right: the Editor's Christmas greeting to his readers. December, 1881. (The same design was thriftily used again many years later.)

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Throughout the eighteen-eighties and 'nineties, however, the changes were slight. Issues looked very like each other, printed in three columns of rather small type. Illustrations were line drawings, except for the rare "presentation" colour plates. In addition to fashion drawings and fiction illustrations there were occasional full-page pictures, with such titles as *Maiden Meditation*, *Sweet Seventeen*, *Fair Daffodils* and *The Flower Girl*, tending to have something of a family resemblance.

The first page of each number was headed by the upper half of a female figure with flowing hair, an expression of extreme spirituality, and no pupils to her eyes, bearing the title of the magazine on a banner, two little girls wrote in 1880 about this figure, apparently worried about the blankness of the eyes, and were told:

> The figure at the head of our paper is not the copy of a picture or portrait, but of a statue. It is not the custom in art to put eyes on statues of pure white marble. In the later and lower periods of Greek sculpture, statues were sometimes coloured, but no one now expects white marble to have eyes like dolls or wax figures. The statue of which our heading is a copy has been greatly admired. It was called by the sculptor "The Spirit of Truth and Love", and we think this a good motto for our paper. Our engraving was made from a photograph expressly sent for *The Girl's Own Paper,* by Mr S. C. Hall, Editor of the Art Journal.…

In 1893 the Editor decided that this heading had been used for long enough, and held a competition for a new one, open to all, professional and amateur, men and women. It would be pleasant to relate that a girl reader was successful, but the design chosen was by Henry Ryland of Kensington. The new heading appeared in October 1894 and depicted two young women in classical draperies, one drawing, one writing. Viewed rationally, it is more pleasing than its predecessor, but perhaps things are not quite the same without the soulful lady.

Other changes began to be noticeable about the same time. Photographs appeared, somewhat fuzzy, and instead of the delicate, detailed line illustrations there were halftone ones, still monochrome – more dashing, but rather less attractive. Early in the new century there was a major change in the appearance of the magazine, with larger print and two

Above: Henry Ryland's prize-winning design for the new masthead which showed "two maidens artistically attired in white sitting in graceful ease".

Far left: Our Novel Christmas Tree, *Ruth Lamb's account of preparations for a Christmas party, complete with the text of the special charade written for the occasion by Mamma, appeared in January, 1880.*

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Far right: captioned Biding Their Time, *this illustration appeared in the issue of April 16, 1892.*

columns instead of three. The extra Summer and Christmas numbers were romantically titled – *Silver Sails*, *Sheets o' Daisies*, *Lily Leaves*, *Victoria's Laurel*, *Rosebud Garden*, *Mignonette – Christmas Roses*, *Snowdrops*, *Feathery Flakes*, *Household Harmony, Christmas Cherries.*

The Contributors

"The Editor has been assisted in his labours by a band of very willing workers – authors, musical composers, and artists – whose names are familiar to all our readers," Charles Peters wrote in the thousandth issue. To mark the anniversary, a hundred of the contributors presented him with an autographed tea-table cloth, recognising "the ability, friendliness, and discretion which have been all along displayed in his dealings with his staff". He was ready to cast his net widely, and wrote of himself:

> Whilst surrounded by a tried staff, he has made it a rule to welcome contributors – indeed, to invite them – from every quarter.… Amongst our occasional contributors may be seen the names of a queen, several princesses, and leading members of the nobility, and a great many more who have distinguished themselves in various lines of activity connected with the life and work of women and girls.

Lists of the year's contributors were published at the front of each Annual. To take, at random, the volume for 1888–1889, the list of seventy writers includes one Queen (of Roumania), one Countess, one Baronne, four other titled ladies, one Baronet and five Reverends.* Also present as a young man of twenty-three is the poet W. B. Yeats. Among some fifty artists listed, three are Royal Academicians, including James Sant, "Principal Painter In Ordinary to Her Majesty".

A gallery of photographs of the regular contributors was published in the 1884 Summer issue, *Sunlight*; when this idea was revived in the thousandth issue, some fifteen years later, many of the earlier faces were still there. The Editor in Chief, James Macaulay, depicted in 1884 with flowing beard and skull-cap, looked conservative and stately in 1899; Charles Peters appeared modestly in the midst, a rather solid, round-faced man.

One of the chief regular contributors was Gordon Stables, M.D., C.M., R.N.; veiled under the pseudonym "Medicus", he was the author of the regular articles on health and beauty. This seems an unlikely profession for a Naval doctor, but he must have found it satisfactory since, like the Editor himself, he was connected with the magazine for nearly thirty years, writing in addition to his health and beauty articles other features, under his own name, on a wide variety of subjects – notably on animals. (At the same time he was contributing similar articles to the *Boy's Own Paper*, and writing adventure stories.) Reference to the Medical Register of 1880 reveals him as a graduate of the University of Aberdeen (he remarks on his "kilted knees" in an article about a Scottish holiday), with his address given as the Naval Medical Service – this no doubt owing to his

* Contributors included the Rev. W. J. Foxell, B.MUS., a member of the Religious Tract Society Committee. The Society is now the United Society for Christian Literature, proprietors of Lutterworth Press, who are the publishers of the present book, and whose General Manager is Mr M.E. Foxell, the contributor's grandson.

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BIDING THEIR TIME.

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