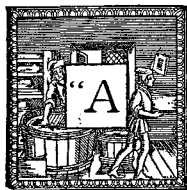


# THE MAGAZINE AGE LIMIT

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN



BABY'S first laugh," so the gorgeous Barrie has imagined, "travels out over the world and breaks into a thousand little pieces—and each little piece turns into a fairy." In cruel paraphrase, the editor of one of the metropolitan magazines makes it: "A baby's first 'composition' travels out over the world with a thousand other similar 'pieces'—and each little 'piece' turns into a magazine story." "That is," he qualifies, "each 'piece' turns into a magazine story in the minds of the youngster's proud parents."

Of the sentimental phase of the issue nothing need be said, save to remark that here, in all truth, is the real—and perhaps only—"heart interest" story of the editorial office. In the transcript of youthful manuscript facts alone must the narrative rest. The letters and contributions must be relied upon to tell their own stories. The province of this preface permits only the suggestion that the magazines are receiving constantly the literary offerings of coddled offsprings, youngsters whose fathers and mothers regard a school-given "A" mark in English composition as an unmistakable token of slumbering or budding or even full-blossomed literary genius and who provide the sending stamps so that the magazines and reading public may benefit by the publication of little Mary's or little Willie's first great effort. The resultant blame, when the effort is returned, is laid by the parents upon the editor's short-sightedness and lack of appreciation. The editors, with pardonable perspicacity, are wont more usually to lay the initial blame on relatives and neighbours who are too free with flattery, be that flattery sincere or insincere. But, above everything, remember that the purpose of this particular paper is nothing more profound than to suggest that, no matter whether the magazines, editors, parents, relatives and neighbours are wrong, the fact remains that

the contributions of the youngsters come as sunbeams through the grey sanctum windows and that each carries with it a smile-gift to some hard-working reader or editor. Many far more literary contributions fail to do as much!

Exhibit number one was handed the writer by the managing editor of one of the illustrated monthly publications:

MY DEAR MISTER EDITOR: I inclothes you a story ritten by me and it is called "the strike" because it discribes the strike that we had in our city last week. I hop you will print it becorse I wood lik to show it to my skule teacher who I love. I am ten years old and live in Chicago.

(Signed) LUCY —.

The manuscript entitled "The Strike" read as follows:

A strike is what hapens when men are starved becorse of the meaness of the rich men and many wives, sisters and loved wons sufer pangs when a strike comes. Men are killed dooring a strike and, heavens, what woe results! When men get to have more simpathy than men have got now their wont be any more strikes and then as my deer father alwys sais bisness wont be so dam bad. Piece on erth is what all of us want and pray for but their cant be piece as long as their are strikes. A strike brings sorow to all and joy to none. The moril is that to be happy we must never go on strike, starve tho we must on bred and the corse food of life. Pleese print this in your magizeen.

In place of the conventional slip of regret, the editor who received Lucy's contribution sent the little lady the following well-mannered if misspelled note:

MY DEER MISS LUCY: We hop someday to print a story of yours and are sorry we cant use this won. Tell your father we hop bisness will be better soon.

A boy of eleven whose home is in Cleveland, Ohio, several months ago submitted the following Arbor Day poem to one of the all-fiction magazines. The verses bore the title "The Giant Oak Tree."

Oh giant oak with hart of steal  
 Who stands on high up to the sky,  
 Who peers into the home of God  
 And gards the cows and bulls and veal.  
 We love you on this Arbor Day  
 And pay our homij to you—  
 But for one thing we mite compare  
 The maple tree unto you.  
 That one thing isnt akorns  
 Which no one can ever eat,  
 But maple sugar, dont you see,  
 For the maple tree's a treat.

Epic number two, entitled "The Fireman," arrived from a writing table, the locality of which is unknown to the present chronicler. According to the latter's informant, however, the poem was the work of a twelve-year-old. To quote from the editor's transcript:

The soldjer is a hero and so was Dewy  
 Each was a brave man and true,  
 The sailer is a hero and so was Dewy  
 Like all the other boys in blue.  
 But of all the heros, even Dewy,  
 None are heros half as much,  
 Not even generals or Dewy,  
 The brave fireman they cant touch.  
 The fireman puts out the fires  
 And climbs ladders and rescues ladies  
 And wares a fine unaform  
 And is grater than Dewy!

What the young poet had against Admiral Dewey, the editor was unable to learn. The opinions of the male parent may have had something to do with the case. The following article on "politicks," in a like manner, must have been inspired by the table talk of elders. The manuscript was from the pen of a young lady of eleven, residence Louisville.

Politicks is something that makes my uncel Alfred sore. My papa says that uncel Alfred dont know what he is talking about and my uncel Alfred says my papa dont know what he is talking about and my mamma says my uncel Alfred and my papa dont know what they are talking about and then I always have to leave the room. Politicks always makes people talk loud and mamma says it is very embarasing on a count of the servants. There is two kinds of politicks, republican and democrats, but my uncel Alfred says there is only one. That always starts my darling papa going, but I dont see why because my papa also says there is only one. When they be-

gin to talk about theze politicks, my mamma always says to them that it would be better if they payd more atenshion to there wives and that is all I know about politicks. I think they are awful.

A future novelist possibility recently sent this self-explanatory letter to the editor of one of the New York fiction magazines:

DERE SIR: I am sending you a plot for a seeryal novel and if you like it I wisht you wood let me rite it for you as I am thirteen years old and am a country boy who goze to a country skool and who nose lots about the country. I reed your magaseen evry month because we suskribe to it because we got a set of books free.

Respektfully yours,

HENRY —

The "plot for the seeryal novel" follows. The spelling has been edited in this case, as it was less amusing than the context.

Miss Rutherford is a country school-teacher and is very beautiful and is beloved by her pupils and by James Varny, a rich farmer. She spurns his suit for three chapters because he is not handsome and because Miss Rutherford is not a grafter. In the fourth chapter I want Miss Rutherford to murder James for insulting her and William Tracy, a city lawyer who happens to be buying mortgages in the district prosecutes her for the deed. Tracy suddenly is afflicted with a passionate love for Miss Rutherford in the fifth chapter and she is about to wed him when the police interfere. In the name of the law they arrest Tracy for receiving stolen goods and in the last chapter the ghost of the dead farmer haunts the beautiful teacher so that she is about to commit suicide when she is saved by one of her pupils named Henry (!) who marries her and, if you want some more chapters, I will describe the twins they will have.

Not all the youngsters with literary ambitions, however, are poets, essayists and novelists. Any number of them are short-story writers. The following document may be placed in the files as the work of a little miss of twelve. The manuscript was received eight or nine months ago at one of the fiction magazine offices and a transcript was kept. Correcting the spelling:

## A LOVE STORY

From the time they was born, Jack and Mary was lovers. But they never told each other. So Jack fell in love with Jessie, who lived next door, and Mary fell in love with William, who lived across the street. When the war broke out, the two men went to it and Jessie died of grief. William came back when the peace was declared and said Mary marry me because your childhood lover Jack was shot in the last battle. Mary cried and said very well I will marry you, but if Jack does return I will also marry him. Mary married the deceitful William for by this time Jack had not been killed and had become a general. And when he came back, he shot William and took Mary into his strong, manly arms and they lived very, very, very happy until Mary's pet dog died, when she died too because of her sorrow. Jack never married again, because he loved Mary with all his heart and because he also loved her pet dog which's name was Abraham Lincoln.

Short story number two, not less interesting than the first, was handed to the present writer by the editor of one of the metropolitan general periodicals. It was from the quill of a bloodthirsty lad of fourteen and the envelope that carried it bore the postmark of Philadelphia. The story was entitled "The Sleuth's Desperate Revenge" and revealed a wide acquaintanceship on the part of the author with such eminent works of literary art as "Two-Toothed Tobias, the Terrific Terror of the Tucson Tenderloin" and "Dynamite Delmore, the Daring Destroyer of the Deathless Demon of Detroit." The story, with editorial corrections:

It was a stormy night in the Gulch when James Jepson set about his dastardly act! He planned to strangle our hero Jack Primrose in his bed and secured a rope to help him!! In his deed he was aided by Half-Breed, a cowardly Indian, who would hold our hero while the villainous Jepson wrung the life's blood from his brave body! Jack learned of the plot, however, and began to think up a way to foil the brace of villains!! At last, after much thinking, he decided upon his little scheme! Suddenly Jack heard a movement at the door! His breath came quick!! He listened!!! Click, click, click! Some one was tampering with the knob!! Jack lay very still!!! Click, click again! The door opened

and in the moonlight Jack, our brave hero, could see the deep-dyed villains enter!! They crept up to his bed and were just about to leap on the unsuspecting hero when he jumped out of bed and took the villains by surprise and hurled them out of the window into the bottomless ravine, where they perished from cold and starvation!! Then Jack Primrose, freed from his enemies forever, married his sweetheart who had been imprisoned in a cave nearby by the rascally Jepson and went East!

Although it may not be entirely relevant here, a quotation of the editor's reply to the author of the above may be of interest. (Every once in a while a good-natured, fun-loving editor, having a bit of spare time on his hands, will amuse himself in the dictation of a letter to some contributor below the magazine age limit.) The letter:

MY DEAR —: Your story, "The Sleuth's Desperate Revenge," has been read with deep interest. We regret, however, that it is too brief for our purposes. If you will permit the criticism, may we seek to advise you, in rewriting the story, to explain who, what and why the "Sleuth" of the title is and in just what manner the villains succeeded in landing on their feet at the foot of the bottomless abyss? Otherwise, the story is perfectly clear to the reader.

One of the magazines of outdoor life some time ago received the following contribution (spelling corrected) from a boy of twelve. It was entitled "The Secrets of Hunting."

To be a great hunter a man must wear a disguise, so that the people in the stagecoach that he holds up wont recognise him. He must also carry a pistol. Other kinds of hunting consist of bear hunting, deer hunting, lion hunting and my big brother says also collar-button hunting. Hunting is a fine sport and is better than playing Indian but I don't think it is better than baseball. Great men are all great hunters, my father says. I asked my father what they hunted and he laughed. He told me what they hunted but he didn't say anything about animals. He said they hunted jobs and offices but I think my father was joking. I haven't hunted bears and lions yet, but when I grow up and get as big as my brother Aldrich I am going to buy a gun and shoot game. Goodbye.

A periodical devoted to women and women's pursuits, according to one of its

"readers," not long ago received an essay on "Clothes" from a little girl out West. To quote, in part, from a transcript made of the contribution.

Cloze is a bother becauz you cant run in them, but they make you very bootifull and so ladies ware them and so does our cook on Sundays. Cloze is expensiv and hats is expensiv and shooze is expensiv and cost more than papa's soots and make him complane. But I lov cloze espeshly bloo ribbons and white stokings. When I am a lady I am

goin to ware silk dresses becauz then the boyz will lov me and marri me.

The present writer has selected the above quoted youthful contributions from among a considerably larger number that he has encountered from time to time during the last few years. They are by no means the best of their respective species, but it is believed that they are, in general, more clearly typical of their classes than the obviously parent-helped manuscripts.

## JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

BY ARTHUR GUITERMAN

Down in Injianny (ez you may 'uv heard before),  
The sweet, ol'-fashioned roses grow about the cottage door  
An' hummin'-birds go dartin' roun' the swayin' hollyhawks,  
An' daisies edge the gardin paths where Armazindy walks.  
The little boys plays hooky, an' they takes their fishin'-pole,  
Or you kin hear 'em splashin' in the riffled swimmin' hole,  
An' other things is happenin' what you mustn't write about,  
Or the Publishers 'll git you

Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!

Wunst there wuz a little boy what didn't mean no harm,  
But lived in Hancock County near a watermelon farm;  
He might 'a' been a lawyer, but wuz skeered o' bein' rich,  
So took to paintin' signs an' things an' actorin' an' sich,  
An' singin' songs with chirp o' bird an' plash o' summer rain,  
With here a tender, homely tale an' there a quaint refrain.  
But don't *you* go a-makin' rhymes that folks can't do without,  
Or the Publishers 'll git you

Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!

There's lots o' fellers pennin' odes which somehow don't connect,  
Becuz they think the major p'int is Hoosier dialect.  
Now dialect is handy ez a means o' savin' time—  
It often helps a lazy bard that's lookin' fer a rhyme;  
But poetry is poetry, no matter what the tongue—  
The lovin' thought, the lyric word appeals to old an' young;  
An' ef you got the hang uv it there isn't any doubt,  
That the Publishers 'll git you

Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!