

**THE COMIC
ALBUM: A BOOK
FOR EVERY TABLE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649499489

The Comic Album: A Book for Every Table by Anonymous

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Cover @ 2017

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London:

WM. S. ORR & Co. AMEN CORNER. PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCLXIII.

11445.22 (747)



LONDON:

Wyethly Brothers and Co.

PRINTERS AND ENGRAVERS,

135 FLEET STREET.



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SOMETHING ABOUT "THE READER!"

BY LAMAN BLANCHARD.

THAT well-known and highly-important agent in the world of literature, THE READER! is a personage who, from the birth-day of typography to the present hour, has experienced one invariable, and we must say rather enviable fate—he has never had a single syllable spoken against him.

He is the only creature alive—nay, the only one that ever lived—of whom there has been at all times but good report—no evil—none, not a word! Everybody, in every age, has been run down, except the Reader! Seas of ink have been exhausted in establishing upon triumphant grounds the blackness of human nature, but not a drop has ever fallen upon the Reader's character. Myriads of books have been written—verily, the number would form a pile more huge by half than forty pyramids—to prove that patriots are enormous scoundrels, and honest men the most insidious of rogues; that philosophers are cheats, and poets liars; that saints are hypocrites, and self-mortifiers gluttons; that subjects are little better than slaves, kings

no better than they should be, and even queens a little lower than the angels. It has been shown, past doubt, that great conquerors are mere butchers, that lawyers are legal robbers, and apothecaries and physicians joint instruments for promoting the worldly interests of undertakers. There are whole libraries extant, crammed with irrefragable evidence that tradesmen are sneaks who live but to breathe the breath of knavery, and that their customers are, for the most part, little better than shoplifters.

Is there a character in human nature, how black soever it may be, that may not be matched by something quite as black in a book?—nay, fiction has now and then outstripped fact, and men have been made monsters of. We will go further, and ask, is there a character, of any description whatever, that has not at some period been the object of attack in remorseless black and white? Authors have always such an appetite for evil—they so enjoy the development of bad passions, and the pourtrayal of the darker and more demoniac lineaments of life—that no class

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has escaped, no crevice that might be the lurking-place of crime has been unransacked, no little foible or peccadillo has been unchronicled.

But, during all this time, even while the rage for running-down the whole world was at its height, one character was, by common consent of authorship, age after age, held sacred. It has been an established rule that one personage, and only one, should always be left alone. That personage is—the Reader!

Authors have not at all scrupled to attack one another—nay, they have not uncommonly proceeded so far as to attack themselves, writing so as to effectually destroy, at fifty, the reputation they had won at twenty-five. But differing upon every other conceivable point, they have all concurred in one thing—never to run down the Reader;—never to insinuate—no, not so much as to imagine, that the Reader could possibly be one of those poor forked animals whom they were picturing under the appellation of Men. Oh, no! the book might be full of hard, savage, cunning, mercenary examples of mortality, with “such is life” written beneath the frightful portraits—but the Reader all the time was “gentle,” “courteous,” “candid,” and “sagacious!”

As a certain poet was said to have perceived nothing, with his two open eyes, but “himself and the universe,” so the cunning author in general, whatever be the size or subject of his book, may be said to write with two distinct objects ever before his visual organs—human-nature and the Reader!

Now before we proceed to speculate who the Reader really is, we must intimate that this custom of extraordinary and exclusive civility to Readers of every kind, is not, at least in the present day, the result of fear; it is not the servile homage of the few to the many; because it is well known that if a correct return were made of their respective numbers in this country, the writing-public would be found to be in a great numerical majority over the reading-public. We mention the fact in no threatening spirit, but merely to remind the Reader, that the author who tells every man of his faults but *him* is really a member of the larger body; of a body strong enough, if mustered by proclamation, to take by storm every book-club and reading-room in the land, scattering their swarms of grumbling and spectacled inmates out at doors and windows. With this quiet warning we approach the Reader, just to ask his opinion, whether he has been always truly described by the epithets

referred to? Is he always courteous? invariably candid? gentle at all seasons?

It is time that the Reader hear the truth about himself. It is clear to us that, as books necessarily pass into hands of every possible degree of deviation from perfect cleanliness, some of them might open more appropriately with “Shabby Reader!” “Rascally Reader!” and “Contemptible Reader!” We know that the Reader must be in a great number of cases an abominable knave; but nobody ever told him so before. We know that he is, in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred, a bit of a rogue; but the fact has been kept a profound secret from him. We know, moreover, that in the odd hundredth instance he is not quite a Simon Pure; but authors, all his life through, have been crying him up as perfection, sparing, if not spoiling him.

If a tolerable husband—has he not, nevertheless, selfishly dragged over to his side the larger share of the bed-clothes, on some very cold night? and if an intolerable one—has he not inhumanly praised a neighbour's wife in the very presence of his own? If cautious and prudent in act—has he not obstinately retained some very uncharitable opinions? and if liberal in sentiment—is he not now and then rather intolerant in conduct? But worse—has he not broken more commandments than he ever rigidly kept? observing the sixth and the eighth we will suppose, but forgetting what follows, and what is between: might not the author sometimes have written under the worst character in his book, “this is the Reader!”?

And how has the Reader repaid his author for the flattery of attributing to him all or half the cardinal virtues? Why, generally, by assuming with amiable modesty, that the most upright person in the story is drawn after himself; and settling it as an incontrovertible fact, that the scamp of a hero is a portrait of the author. Readers have a very grateful and good-humoured knack of fastening the vice upon the writer, and dividing the virtues among themselves. “There must be something bad about him, or how should he describe the villain so well?” These are your “courteous” Readers! Your “candid” ones are those who frankly point out every fault they can find, with a few others which are not there. The “gentle” Reader is as commonly met with—he who flies into a furious passion at a semicolon turned upside down, or a *that* substituted for a *which*. And suppose the book, or the pamphlet, or the article, be indeed a bad one, the Reader might be grateful for the good intent—the desire to amuse him. But he is not; let

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the prose be ever so dull, the Reader would as soon think of buying a second copy as of thanking the author for the sound and invigorating slumber that has been afforded him.

Yet the Reader is neither better nor worse than other people; and, to prove the fact, we shall take the liberty to introduce this many-sided personage in his habit as he lives, exhibiting a few phases of his character in a manner that may command, we hope, no unwilling recognition even from himself.



Here now is the first of Readers, and, in many respects, no inapt representative of Readers of a larger growth. What cares he about his author? Arrange the letters as he may, they still spell "martyrdom," and no word else, to him. He soon lets you see that he thinks it very dull work, simply because he does not understand it. That is the way of the world, and the young Reader, tested by worldly usages, is a promising scholar.

There is one point, however, on which he more wisely agrees with his elders—in the keenness of his taste, and the ardour of his search for the pictures. How he grasps and crushes the leaves; turns over three at a time; uses two or three of his fat fingers for a paper-cutter, and turns the book upside down to view the engravings to the best advantage. Ah! those eyes are undimmed by midnight oil and black-letter! that little ridge of nose between the

mountain-cheeks, is innocent of learning's spectacles! those cheeks, moreover, they are not lean and sunken! no line betrays the care and labour of long and deep study! yet the wisest and most erudite Reader of all has only ransacked libraries to discover—that he is still as ignorant of what he most desires to know as that chubby young book-spoiler!



But at sixteen—presto!—what a change has taken place in the Reader! Here she is!—ah! it would be worth while always to write, if all readers were like her! Perhaps it is a sheet of music with which she dallies: no matter, then it would be worth while to turn composer. Or probably it is a pretty rose-bordered billet: better still; it would be worth while to write to her everlastingly such charming epistles. But, alas! she would cease to be sixteen; and it is only now that, read what she may, she possesses the enviable faculty of transfusing her whole soul into the subject she reads about, and of being borne away by it, as on a pair of paper pinions, millions of miles from her garden, and her glass, and her piano; her bullfinch, her milliner,—nay, even from the youth who danced with her last night!

Say what we will, it is only at this age that we can hope to find the Reader such as Sterne sighed for—and it must be a she, not a he Reader—"I would travel fifty miles on foot, to kiss the hand of that man whose generous sympathy can give up the reins of his imagination into his