

CHAPTERS FROM FACTS & FICTION HISTORY

A small selection of the many, short stories which have appeared in this mag over the past 21 years:

THE COMING OF THE GYPSIES (from #32)

Once upon a time in the realm of King Bahram Djour in what we now call Iran or Persia the poor subjects were lamenting their lack of music. For some reason they had no musicians. Bahram sent to his father-in-law, King Shankal of Kanauj to send 12,000 musicians.

When they arrived Bahram gave each a donkey, a cow and 1000 bushels of wheat. This was supposed to provide them with the basis of making a good, sustainable living whilst they performed for his subjects. However, at the end of the year they appeared before him starving. Instead of using them to provide for the future they had just eaten the cows and the wheat and had nothing left. Angrily the king told them to put silken strings on their instruments, get on their donkeys, take to the road and earn a living through their music. They have been doing so ever since. Their descendants are known to us as Gypsies and wherever they have been they have enriched the musical traditions with their skills.

THE DOG & THE SNAKE *A story from Romania (from #36)*

One day Dog was running around the fields howling and rubbing his head on the ground. Snake asked him what was the matter and Dog explained that he had the most awful headache. Snake told him that the best cure was to eat a particular kind of grass which grew down by the stream. It was an infallible cure. And it worked, Dog's headache went.

Some weeks later Snake was seen writhing around and rolling himself into hoops. Dog asked what was the matter and Snake explained that he had a backache. Dog said that the best cure was to go to the road and stretch out long and straight across its warm surface. Snake did so. After a while an ox-cart came along, ran over Snake and squashed him. Dog ate him up.

MORAL: This teaches us to be on our guard for there is always someone who is waiting to take advantage and willing to repay a good deed with a bad one.

STORY OF THE MOMENT or THE GENIE (from #37)

Submitted by Peter Wimpenny

I was walking along the beach at Skegness the other day when I saw something glinting in the sand. I picked it up. It seemed to be a curiously shaped bottle. I rubbed it with my sleeve and, as so often happens on these occasions, out popped a Genie. It was rather a grumpy old Genie who didn't take kindly to being disturbed and said "Huh! I'll grant you just one wish cos I'm too busy to waste much time."

I told him I would like to visit America but I am scared of flying and get seasick easily, so I wondered if he could magic me a bridge over from England to the States so that I could drive over.

He looked at me aghast, "What!" he said, "Do you know how long that would take? All that steel; all that concrete. I'm afraid it's too much to ask. It's out of the the question. Try something else."

So I said "Well, I know this chap in Derby by the name of Pete Castle... nice enough guy but he's let himself go a bit recently and I wonder if you could smarten him up, iron out a few wrinkles, remove a few grey hairs and perhaps make him look just five years younger maybe?"

The Genie thought for a moment then said, "About this bridge....."

THE PITS OF WOOLPIT, IN SUFFOLK (from #47)

Just outside the little village of Woolpit, in Suffolk, there are some curious pits or trenches. One autumn, when the reapers were gathering the harvest in the fields close by, a boy and a girl came up out of the pits. They were wonderful children. Their bodies were of a green colour, they were dressed in a strange stuff, and they spoke in an unknown tongue. Nobody could understand them, but a kind woman adopted them and brought them up.

At first they would eat nothing but beans, and the boy pined away and died. The girl, however, grew hale and handsome and learned to speak English and was married to a farmer. She said that she came from the country of St. Martin, which was a Christian country, and contained many churches. No sun ever shone there and the people lived in a dim twilight but, across the river by which they dwelt, they could faintly see a region of sunshine.

"One day," the girl said, "my brother and I were tending our father's sheep by the riverside when we heard the sound of bells, like the bells of Bury St. Edmunds. Then all at once we found ourselves in the pits of Woolpit.

No one has yet discovered the twilight land of St. Martin, and the pits of Woolpit are now almost filled up.

A TALE OF IMMIGRATION (from #50)

An ancient tale with a very modern message.

About a thousand years ago the Parsees wanted to leave Persia to seek refuge in India. They asked the Indian king for permission but he said no, he was sorry, but he already had enough people in his country, there just wasn't room for any more.

To prove that they could settle in India without causing any problems the Parsee leader asked for someone to bring him a cup full to the brim with milk and a spoon-full of sugar.

"Do you agree that this cup is full?" he asked the Indian king. "That there is no room to put any more in?" The king agreed it was. Well, this cup of milk is India, full to the brim with people, but we Parsees are like this spoon-full of sugar" said the Parsee leader as he stirred it into the milk.

"We can integrate into India with as little trouble and sweeten Indian life just as the sugar sweetens the milk."

THE JUDGE'S BEARD (from #54)

A story from the Fulani people of West Africa.

One evening a judge read in a book that everyone who had a little head and a long beard was a fool. Now the judge had a little head and a long beard, so he thought to himself "I cannot increase the size of my head, but I can shorten my beard." He hunted for the scissors but could not find them, so, without further ado he took half of his beard in his hand and put the other half into the candle and burnt it.

When the flame reached his hand he let go quickly, and all the beard was burned.

Then the judge felt ashamed, for he had proved the truth of what was written in the book.

WANTED, A FOOLISH MAN (from #54)

(from The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasruddin by Idries Shah)

Nasruddin was sent by the king to find the most foolish man in the land and bring him to the palace as Court Jester. The Mullah travelled to each town and village, in turn, but could not find a man stupid enough for the job. Finally, he returned alone. "Have you located the greatest idiot in our kingdom?" asked the Monarch.

"Yes" replied Nasruddin, "but he is too busy looking for fools to take the job."