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THOMAS NAST'S ILLUSTRATED ALMANACS, 1871-1875

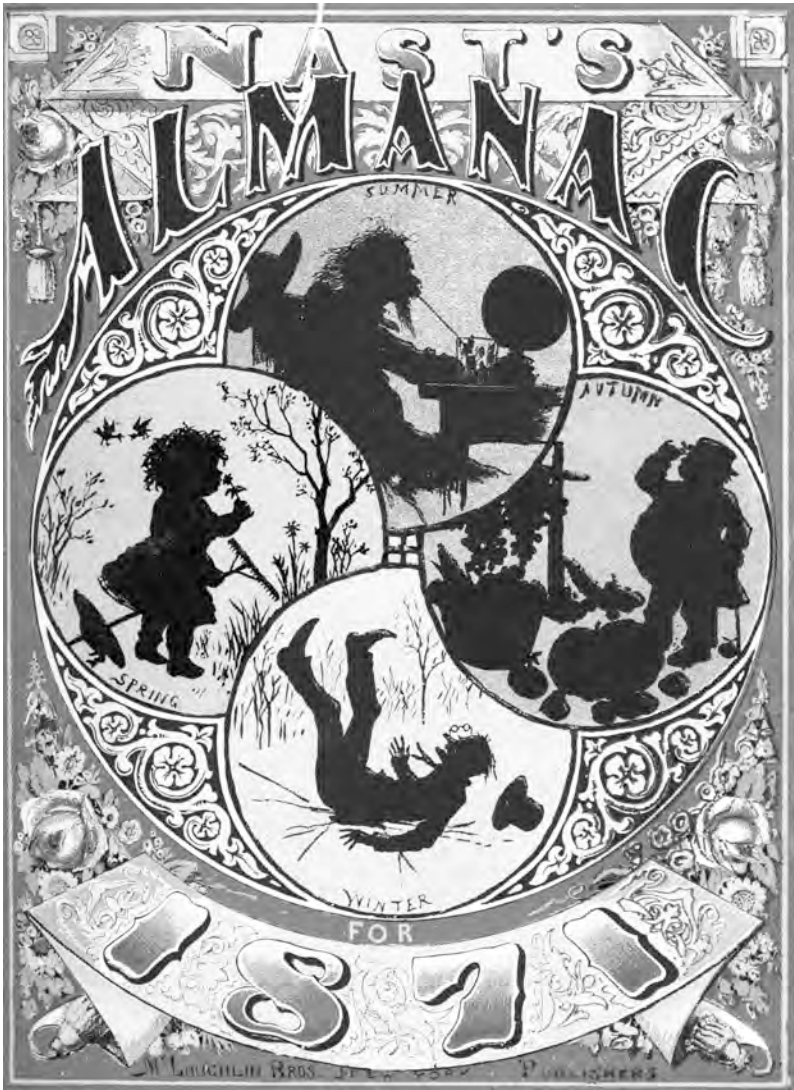
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Green Bag Almanac and Reader 2011,
pp. 212-220

**George Mason University Law and Economics
Research Paper Series**

11-04

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*Black-and-white version of the colorful outside cover of
Nast's Illustrated Almanac for 1871.*

THOMAS NAST'S ILLUSTRATED ALMANACS, 1871-1875

Ross E. Davies[†]

Editor's note: More than 300 pages of this year's Green Bag Almanac & Reader are devoted to reproducing in their entirety all five of Thomas Nast's "Illustrated Almanacs." Our reproductions are not perfect: (1) some of the pages are damaged (a few might even be missing); (2) all of them are presented in a slightly smaller size than the originals; and (3) the vividly colorful, 1960s-ish, psychedelic cover of the 1871 edition (reproduced in black-and-white on the page facing this one and on the outside front cover of this Almanac & Reader) is available in color only in the electronic version on the Green Bag's website at www.greenbag.org. Poverty (here the Green Bag's) limits opportunity, and full-color printing is expensive. What follows below is a short history of Nast's almanacs, which is nowhere near as entertaining as the almanacs themselves.

One of the first advertisements for the first edition of *Nast's Almanac* appeared on October 29, 1870 in *Harper's Weekly*. The ad was just a small block of text that declared, "You Want a Copy of Nast's Comic Almanac for 1871," and provided instructions on where and how to buy it.¹ That early notice of *Nast's Almanac* appeared in *Harper's Weekly* would have come as no surprise to the contemporary reader in 1870, because *Harper's* was at that time the publishing home of renowned caricaturist Thomas Nast, the founder, editor, and illustrator of the new almanac that bore his name.² Harper and Brothers (hereafter "H&B"), publisher of *Harper's Weekly*, was also the publisher of *Nast's Almanac* throughout its five-year run.

From the beginning, *Nast's Almanac* was well-received. Positive reviews of the first edition — the full title of which was "Nast's Illustrated Almanac for 1871" (reproduced in its entirety on pages 106-178 above) — quickly followed the October 1870 announcement in *Harper's Weekly*. For example,

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¹ HARPER'S WEEKLY, Oct. 29, 1870, at 704; see also N.Y. TRIB., Oct. 29, 1870, at 6.

² For more on Nast's prominence and importance in American journalism, law, and politics during the second half of the 19th century, see *Thomas Nast's Crusading Legal Cartoons*, by Renee Lettow Lerner, on pages 59-78 of this *Green Bag Almanac & Reader*. Also see generally ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE, TH. NAST: HIS PERIOD AND HIS PICTURES (1904).

GREEN BAG ALMANAC & READER 2011

Our American Doré, Mr. Thomas Nast, has made an illustrated almanac which takes the lead of any comic effort before attempted in this country. Those addicted to fits of melancholy should invest twenty-five cents in this laugh-provoking affair.³

The contents of the 1871 almanac were indeed interesting and amusing,⁴ ranging from a rather violent version of the story of Mary and her lamb (“Mary’s Funny ‘Little Lamb’”) to silly historical and Shakespearean vignettes. And they were generously sprinkled with “105 illustrations by Nast” the famous editorial artist, including such gems as a sketch of Elizabeth I in which the Queen bears a striking resemblance to Mr. Punch (that is, the 19th-century English version of the classic, irreverent puppet and cartoon character) and a rendering of Sir Francis Drake as a mustachioed waterfowl.

But it was with the second edition — “Nast’s Illustrated Almanac for 1872” (reproduced in its entirety on pages 230-312 below) — that *Nast’s Almanac* really hit its stride with respect to both content and marketing. Most importantly, Nast enlisted several famous friends to provide signed works for his almanac, including:

Mark Twain (aka Samuel Clemens), who contributed a caricature biographical sketch of Benjamin Franklin (“The late Benjamin Franklin”) and a page of silly “Advice to little Girls”;

Charles Dickens, who provided an excerpt from *The Pickwick Papers* (“Sam Weller’s Moral Tale”); and

Josh Billings (aka Henry Wheeler Shaw, in his time a literary celebrity nearly on a par with Twain), who offered ludicrous advice on “How tu pick out a good Hoss.”

And Nast drew original illustrations for all of them. The 1872 almanac also included a wild and entertaining version of Red Riding Hood and the wolf (“Ye true Story of Little Red Riding-Hood”)⁵

In addition, H&B conducted a marketing campaign on a much larger scale for the 1872 almanac than it had for the 1871 edition. Advertisements placed in other publications made use of some of the earlier friendly commentary (see, for example, the ad in the October 19, 1871 *Zion’s Herald*, reproduced on page 218 below).⁶ H&B also devoted more of its own ink and paper to selling the almanac, an effort that reached its peak with a full page of excerpts and promotional chitchat in the “Supplement” section of the October 7, 1871 issue of *Harper’s Weekly* (a battered copy of which is reproduced on pages 216 & 217 below).

³ *Book Notice*, PHRENOLOGICAL J. & SCIENCE OF HEALTH, Dec. 1870, at 438.

⁴ And still are to at least some modern readers.

⁵ See JACK DAVID ZIPES, ED., *THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD* 43, 188-92 (1993) (“In [the Alfred Mills version of Red Riding Hood in the 1872 *Nast’s Almanac*,] bedlam and confusion are the results of careless actions by a vain Red Riding Hood and her lamb, who follows her to granny’s house in a wolf’s skin. Mills uses the traditional story to poke fun at political issues of the day, and Thomas Nast, the famous German-American illustrator, supplied appropriate illustrations.”).

⁶ See also, e.g., Advertisement, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 4, 1871, at 12.

Finally, there are a couple of slivers of evidence that in 1872, at least, *Nast's Almanac* went through more than one printing. In one version of the 1872 almanac there is a full-page advertisement for "Books of Travel and Adventure" by Paul B. Du Chaillu. In another version, that page is occupied by two half-page advertisements for the "American Guide to Europe" and "Harper's Phrase-Book" (reproduced on page 219 below), and in yet another version, that same page is occupied by a full-page advertisement for "Harper's Library of Select Novels" (reproduced on page 220 below).

Like its predecessor, the 1872 *Nast's Almanac* was well-received. The *Maine Farmer*, for example, opined that,

Some of the best things Nast has ever done are to be found in this little pamphlet; and from the initial page, where Time is turning round the Four Seasons, to the last, where the traveller [sic] is amazed at four finger posts all pointing in differing directions, and all reading "[] to New York;" the one hundred and thirty-two illustrations form a study that will keep off the blues, for one year at least.⁷

The next three *Nast's Almanacs* (those for 1873, 1874, and 1875, reproduced below on pages 388-446, 570-628, and 690-746 respectively) also seemingly turned out well. Nast continued to attract work from Clemens, Dickens, Shaw, and others.⁸ And public commentary remained positive. According to the *Daily Phoenix* of Columbia, South Carolina, for example,

"Nast's Illustrated Almanac, for 1873," is the title of a comic publication, which has just been put forth by the Harper's. There are some capital hits in it.

Similarly, *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine* said of the 1875 almanac,

It seems scarcely necessary to say that the illustrations of this almanac are exceedingly humorous in their character, while the letter-press matches excellently well with them.⁹

Moreover, according to Nast biographer Albert Paine, Nast's royalties for the 1873 almanac amounted to \$1,200 — a substantial sum at the time.¹⁰

And yet the series came to an unexplained end in 1875. Too bad.

⁷ *Editor's Table*, MAINE FARMER, Nov. 25, 1871, at 2.

⁸ Clemens seemed quite happy to be a participant in Nast's almanac project. He wrote to Nast in praise of the 1873 edition:

The Almanac has come and I have enjoyed those pictures with all my soul and body. Your "Mexico" [illustrating the calendar for June 1873] is a fifty years' history of that retrograding chaos of a country, portrayed upon the space of one's thumbnail, so to speak, and that "Sphinx in Egypt" [illustrating October] charms me. I wish I could draw that old head in that way.

PAINE, TH. NAST: HIS PERIOD AND HIS PICTURES at 263 (quoting a "letter Clemens wrote").

⁹ *Local Items*, [Columbia, SC] DAILY PHOENIX, Nov. 3, 1872, at 2; *Literary Notices*, GODEY'S LADY'S BOOK & MAGAZINE, Dec. 1874, at 566; see also, e.g., *Books and Authors*, CHRISTIAN UNION, Oct. 29, 1873, at 347 (1874 almanac); Lizzie Chester Atwood, *My Christmas Present*, CHRISTIAN UNION, May 5, 1875, at 379 ("It wasn't a Nast's almanac either. So I was rather badly off for reading."); *contra New Publications*, BOSTON DAILY GLOBE, Oct. 14, 1873, at 2.

¹⁰ PAINE, TH. NAST: HIS PERIOD AND HIS PICTURES at 266.

M Y M O T H E R.—[FROM NAST'S ALMANAC FOR 1872.]



A helpless babe, who nursed me then,
And gave me one twiggie when
I wept with pain, till well he was,
My Mother,



And when her precious infant smiled,
"Ho called me 'sug', 'sug', darling child,"
and laughed and wept in transports wild?
My Mother,



And when the eddie vexed me sore,
so then at midnight walked the floor,
and in her arms her baby bore?
My Mother,



Who let me do just what I chose,
And taught me how to fuss children,
And taught me how to wipie,
My Mother,



And washed me still with anxious care,
And combed my face, and curled my hair,
And set me in my little chair?
My Mother,



And who my youthful body bent
Across her knee—oh, sad event!—
And spanked n. in her heart's content?
My Mother,



And when I cut my finger, who it too
Thoughtful to me, and
And checked my juvenile boobies?
My Mother,



And when at school I made my wry,
Who heard my lessons day by day,
Of Paget Sound and Bath's Bay?
My Mother,



And when my pony just in play
Ran off, and carried me away,
Who staved the scene with great dismay?
My Mother,



And when he kicked with all his might,
And when he kicked me from a fight,
Who fainted and fell down—
My Mother,



Who gently said it was not right
To set the dog and cat to fight,
Or laugh at such a wicked sight?
My Mother,



Tough she is old and all alone,
And I to be a man have grown,
Who calls me still her boy—her own?
My Mother,

Bottom half of page 948 of the October 7, 1871 Harper's Weekly Supplement.

1872.

NAST'S ALMANAC.

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK,

Have Just Ready:

ILLUSTRATED ALMANAC FOR 1872. By THOMAS NAST. With nearly 150 Illustrations, from Original Designs by Thomas Nast, made expressly for this Almanac. Crown 8vo., Paper, 30 cents.

TERMS, POSTAGE PREPAID:

Single Copy.....30 cents.
Four Copies.....\$1.00.

"If the old couplet is true, that

'A little nonsense, now and then,
Is relished by the wisest men,'

Mr. Nast has done the public a real benefit in spreading before them such a feast of good things, pictorial and literary, as will be found in his Illustrated Almanac for 1872,' which Harper and Brothers have issued in an elegant and attractive form. The bill of fare is so varied and extensive that every one who comes to the table will find something tempting to the taste, and nothing to offend. Avoiding politics of every kind, Mr. Nast appears in this entertaining Annual simply in the character of a genial humorist, bent upon the amiable design of pleasing every body and putting him in a good humor with himself and the rest of mankind. His own contributions comprise nearly one hundred and fifty comic illustrations, whose rollicking humor and grotesque fancy will set many a 'table in a roar.' Mr. Nast's selections range from Shakespeare down to the latest humorists of England and this country, and the matter contributed especially to the Almanac is admirably adapted to make people 'laugh and grow fat.' He is not afraid to be 'as funny as he can.'"

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

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From the October 19, 1871 issue of Zion's Herald.

AMERICAN GUIDE TO EUROPE.

Harper's Hand-Book for Travellers in Europe and the East: being a Guide through Great Britain and Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Switzerland, Tyrol, Spain, Russia, Denmark, and Sweden. By W. PEMBROKE FETRIDGE. With numerous Maps and Plans of Cities. Tenth Year. Large 12mo, Leather, Tucks, \$5 00.

This new, revised, and enlarged edition of *Harper's Hand-Book* contains the following Maps and Plans:

Railroad Map of Europe, 25 by 22 inches (in cover-pocket).—London, 35 by 27 inches (in cover-pocket).—Paris, 19 by 24 inches (in cover-pocket).—Atlantic Routes.—Ireland.—Lakes of Killarney.—Dublin.—Belfast.—Great Britain, North.—Edinburgh.—Glasgow.—Environns of London.—Great Britain, South.—The Lake District.—Wales.—Paris.—Versailles.—Marseilles.—Nice.—Metz.—Strasbourg.—Antwerp.—Berlin.—King's Garden, near Potsdam.—Hamburg.—Dresden.—Prague.—Vienna.—Pesth and Ofen.—Trieste.—Venice.—Verona.—Milan.—Bologna.—Turin.—Genoa.—Florence.—Plan of the Uffizi Gallery.—Pisa.—Rome.—Roman Forum.—Ancient Rome.—Palace of the Vatican.—Naples.—Museo Nazionale.—Pompeii.—Palermo.—Egypt and Northern Nubia.—Cairo.—Thebes.—Palestine.—Jerusalem.—Church of the Holy Sepulchre.—Turkey in Asia.—Greece and the Ionian Islands.—Switzerland.—Munich.—Augsburg.—Nuremberg.—Carlsruhe.—Frankfort.—Cologne.—St. Petersburg.—Stockholm.—The Alhambra.

It gives the best routes of travel, names the places of interest, tells how much money certain trips cost, and furnishes the traveller with all the necessary advice and full information for a trip to any or all parts of the Old World. We do not see how a person crossing the Atlantic can afford to do without it.—*Home Journal*.

There is scarcely any information which the tourist may require respecting any part of Europe that will not be supplied by this hand-book.—*Montreal News*.

HARPER'S PHRASE-BOOK;

Or, Hand-Book of Travel Talk for Travellers and Schools. Being a Guide to Conversations in English, French, German, and Italian, on a New and Improved Method. Intended to accompany "Harper's Hand-Book for Travellers." By W. PEMBROKE FETRIDGE, Author of "Harper's Hand-Book." Assisted by Professors of Heidelberg University. With Concise and Explicit Rules for the Pronunciation of the different Languages. Square 4to, Flexible Cloth, \$1 50.

*** We do not hesitate to pronounce this the best-prepared volume of its class that has ever come under our eye. By experience Mr. Fetridge has ascertained what is wanted, and he has made a volume to meet the popular demand.—*Boston Journal*.

It has evidently been compiled with care and judgment, and seems to be superior on the whole to most of the European manuals which abound in the great European thoroughfares.—*New York Tribune*.

The best, by far, we have yet seen, whether as regards general correctness, variety, and utility of conversational subjects, or preliminary grammatical information.—*Philadelphia Press*.

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

✉ HARPER & BROTHERS will send the above works by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, on receipt of the price.

Advertisement appearing in place of "BOOKS OF TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE" in another edition of the 1872 Nast's Almanac.

HARPER'S LIBRARY OF SELECT NOVELS.

"THE LIBRARY OF SELECT NOVELS" has become an institution, a reliable and unending recreative resource essential to the comfort of countless readers. The most available entertainment of modern times is fiction; from the cares of busy life, from the monotonous routine of a special vocation, in the intervals of business and in hours of depression, a good story, with faithful descriptions of nature, with true pictures of life, with authentic characterization, lifts the mind out of the domain of care, refreshes the feelings, and enlists the imagination. The Harper's "Library of Select Novels" is rapidly approaching its four hundredth number, and it is safe to say that no series of books exists which combines attractiveness and economy, local pictures and beguiling narrative, to such an extent and in so convenient a shape. In railway-cars and steamships, in boudoirs and studios, libraries and chimney corners, on verandas and in private sanctuaries, the familiar brown covers are to be seen. These books are enjoyed by all classes; they appear of an average merit, and with a constant succession that is marvelous; and in subject and style offer a remarkable variety.—*Boston Transcript.*

	PRICE		PRICE
1. Pelham. By Bulwer.....	\$0 75	50. The Smuggler. By James.....	\$0 75
2. The Disowned. By Bulwer.....	75	57. The Breach of Promise.....	50
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20. The Neighbors. By Miss Bremer.....	50	76. Jessie's Flirtations.....	50
21. Nina. By Miss Bremer.....	50	77. Chevalier d'Harmental. By Dumas..	50
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23. The Banker's Wife. By Mrs. Gore...	50	79. The Commander of Malta. By Sue...	50
24. The Birthright. By Mrs. Gore.....	25	80. The Female Minister.....	50
25. New Sketches of Everyday Life. By Miss Bremer.....	50	81. Emilia Wyndham. By Mrs. Marsh...	75
26. Arabella Stuart. By James.....	50	82. The Bush-Ranger. By Charles Rowcroft.....	50
27. The Gambler. By Miss Pickering....	50	83. The Chronicles of Clovenhook.....	25
28. The Unloved One. By Mrs. Hofland..	50	84. Genevieve. By Lamartine.....	25
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49. The Improvisatore. By Andersen....	50	106. The Wayside Cross. By E. H. Millman.....	25
50. The Gambler's Wife. By Mrs. Grey...	50	107. The Convict. By James.....	50
51. Veronica. By Zschokke.....	50	108. Midsummer Eve. By Mrs. S. C. Hall.	50
52. Zoe. By Miss Jewsbury.....	50		
53. Wyoming.....	50		
54. De Rohan. By Sue.....	50		
55. Self. By the Author of "Cecil".....	75		

Another advertisement appearing in place of "BOOKS OF TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE" in yet another edition of the 1872 Nast's Almanac.