

BOOK REVIEW : 1

Derek Greenacre

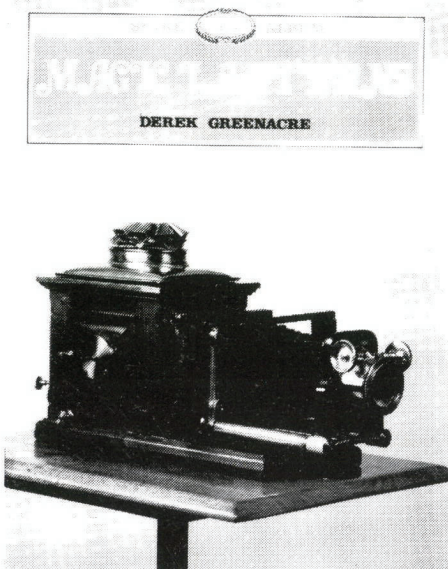
Magic Lanterns

Shire Album 169

Princes Risborough : Shire Publications, 1986

ISBN 0 85263 791 8

£1.25



Derek Greenacre, familiar to us from his account in an earlier *Journal* of his lantern shows *A Thrill in the Dark*, has provided this welcome addition to the well-known *Shire Album Series*. It must have been a daunting commission to undertake: to provide, for the general reader, in the space of thirty-two small pages, a profusely illustrated and fully detailed account of the full range of slides (life model, transfer, hand-painted, rackwork, dissolving view, cycloidotrope, choreutroscope), lanterns (single, double, scientific, epidioscope), accessories (Biokam, projection microscope attachment, gas-bags, limelight jets, projection table) – and to give, at the same time, much of the historical and social background from which lantern developments came and to which they contributed! Not many people could have been persuaded to undertake such a task – a very few indeed could have accomplished it with the apparent effortlessness that Derek Greenacre demonstrates.

At £1.25 it is a book which will be widely bought, providing its readers with an admirably clear account of its subject – entirely free from the sort of misleading information (including that about *collecting* and *prices*, two subjects which, we may perhaps be relieved to note, are nowhere even mentioned), which might so easily have been contained in a book designed for the general reader. We may even look forward to some of these readers, whose interest has been awakened, contacting the *Society* (whose address the book thoughtfully provides) – but regret that they will, alas, no longer be able to visit the *Magic Lantern Theatre and Museum* in Monmouth, to which they are also directed.

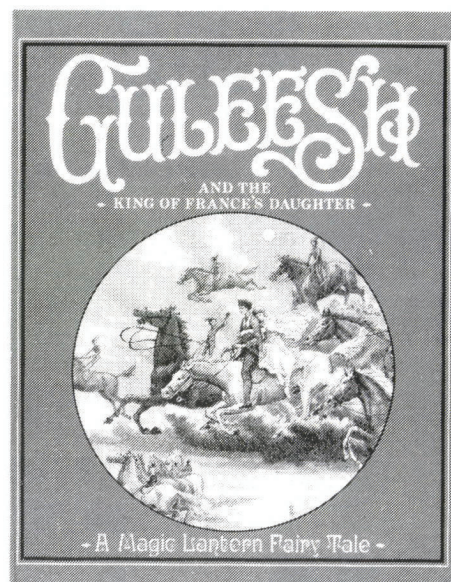
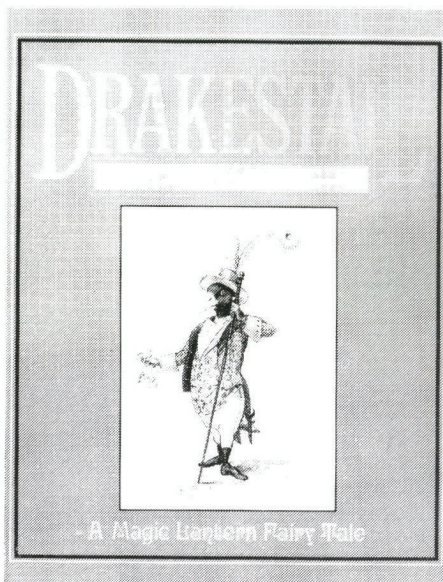
BOOK REVIEW : 2

Drakestail Visits the King : A Magic Lantern Fairy Tale

Retold by Neil Philip; illustrated by Henry Underhill

London: Collins, 1986. [25]p. £4.95.

ISBN 0 00 183158 5.



This is one of a pair of volumes, to which Mike Simkin has drawn our attention, which are the first of a planned series for children based on slides painted by Henry Underhill of Oxford – an apparently previously unknown amateur lantern-slide maker, a small collection of whose hand-painted 3 1/4" x 3 1/4" slides are in the archives of the Folklore Society, following a bequest by the artist's family. (We hope to cover the companion volume *Guleesh and the King of France's Daughter* in our next issue.)

The book reproduces twelve slides from the original set of fourteen which Underhill had originally produced under the title *Drakestail and His Four Friends at Court: a French Story*. These appear against plain backgrounds on the right-hand pages of each opening of the book, with corresponding text on the left, printed in colour with the slides reproduced the same size throughout and in full (ie. without adjustments in their 'framing' – the variation of circular and oblong format which appear reflecting those of the original slides). This admirable mode of presentation does everything possible to retain the feeling of the ordered flow of images which would have been encountered in the original magic lantern show – something which none of the other recent books based on slides has attempted, indicating a refreshing respect for the integrity of the original material.

Neil Philip, who was not only responsible for 'retelling' the *Drakestail* story – but also for the original discovery of the slides and, with Emma Bradford, for their appearance in book form – has kindly provided us with the following note on Underhill and his sources for *Drakestail*:

Henry Michael John Underhill was born in Oxford on 14 January 1855 and died there on 2 October 1920. He was a nephew of the missionary Edward Bean Underhill; his father, Henry Scrivener Underhill, was an Oxford grocer. While his younger brother George

went to the University and became a Fellow of Magdalen College, Henry went into the family business. His death certificate describes him as a 'Provision Merchant'.

He was a keen amateur naturalist and photographer – specialising in child portraits – and also played a prominent role in the affairs of the Congregational Church, George Street, with which his family had been associated since its foundation in 1832. He was for a long time Superintendent of the church's Sunday school, and something of his character may be discerned in his advice to the teachers, in a letter of 4 January 1885: 'If you will give your affections to your scholars for Christ's sake, not as 'immortal souls' merely, but as 'Tom' and 'Dick', 'Jane' and 'Mary', individual children, you will win their hearts.'

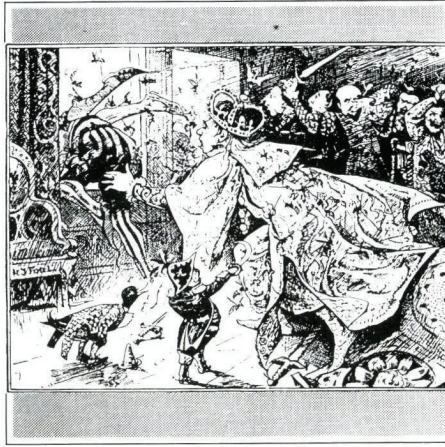
Besides organising the Sunday school and taking classes, Underhill arranged entertainments each year for the opening session of the Sunday school Band of Hope. These were sometimes plays adapted by him from folktales, but were often Magic Lantern shows, by limelight. The *Drakestail* pictures were painted in January and February 1891, and shown in that year. The bill advertises 'REAL OLD FAIRY TALES...PICTURED AND TOLD by Mr H. M. J. UNDERHILL... This will be one of our first-class lantern shows. The pictures are not coloured Photographs but Water-Colour Drawings painted expressly for this Exhibition.'

Henry Underhill found the story of *Drakestail* in Andrew Lang's *Red Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1890). He based his style for the pictures on the black and white line illustrations of Henry Justice Ford in that volume. Lang took the story from Charles Marelle's *Affenschwanz et cetera* (Braunschweig: Imprimerie George Westermann, 1888), from which source the present text has been translated and adapted, with touches from Lang's version and that of Brian Alderson in his 1976 revision of Lang's book.

Marelle remembered being told 'Bout-d'-Canard' in



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2a

childhood, both by his father and by an old schoolmaster, M. Guillaume, in the Champagne area. The French text has considerable charms of rhythm, internal rhyme and assonance, that are beyond English translation. Drakestail's repeated advice to his friends, for instance, is, '*Fais-toi petit, entre dans mon gosier, va dans mon gosier, et je te porterai.*'

The story is a refined version of the international tale of the *Demi-Coq* or Half-Chick. This story has been studied by Ralph S. Boggs in *The Half-Chick Tale in Spain and France* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications, 1933).

Ford's *Drakestail* illustrations from *The Red Fairy Book* prove to be two in number. The first of these being a composite drawing (1) illustrating Drakestail's meetings with the Fox, the Ladder, the River and Comrade Wasp's Nest (who is promoted to General, in Philip's retelling) – later to be *His Four Friends at Court of Underhill's* original subtitle. This provided Underhill with the material for four separate slides as shown (2). Ford's second drawing (3) (with his signature across the front of the chair), showing the King and his Ministers being driven from the Palace by the wasps, provided the basis for Underhill's almost exactly copied version in his circular format (4). It is interesting to note that, while Underhill signed several of the slides in this set – using his initials H.M.J.U., he very honestly signed none of the subjects that he derived from Ford.

The information which Neil Philip provides about the dates when Underhill undertook these paint-



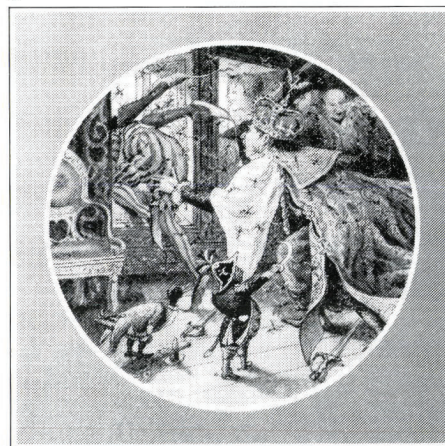
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ings comes from the slides themselves. For example, slide 3 (*Meeting the Fox*) is marked 'Jan 9, 1891. First slide made' behind the mask. (Unusually this text appears the right way round and is thus either written on the underside of the mask or, as appears to be the case, painted in reverse on the slide itself – an indication of the care and attention Underhill devoted to his work!). The final slide made was number 14 (*On the Throne*) and this is dated 'Feb 24, 1891.' As all the intermediate slides are also dated (Jan 11, 16, 20, 22, 26, 28. Feb 3, 8, 14, 16, 20 – only the title slide being undated) we can obtain a clear picture of the work in progress and are even able to see that slide 2 (which appears on the cover of the book and its title page) was the only one to be painted out of sequence. We can also see that this was probably because this, as an original subject, was put to one side at first until some experience of painting Drakestail figures had been built up, by first tackling three of the slides taken directly from Ford. Finally we note that slide 8 (*Palace Door*) has the text '3 days' behind the mask – which perhaps suggests that all the other slides, none of which carry similar references, were 1 day slides, each being painted entirely on the given date.

We hope to be able to provide further details of Underhill's work, both in the promised review of *Guleesh*, the other volume based on his slides, and in a separate study – and also look forward to the appearance of further volumes in this meticulously produced, and most interesting, series.



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