

"Time Marches Back"

or

"History Defeats Itself"

By STAINLESS STEPHEN

A week or so ago we told you how the Space-Time Reporter from 3YA had devised a method of visiting the past and interviewing the good and bad women of history. It appears that about the same time a similar idea occurred to Stainless Stephen, the famous radio comedian of the BBC. In this article from LONDON CALLING he explains how he invented a remarkable machine called the Questaplane which enables him (so he says) to fly into the past. Listeners to Daventry's Transmission I. on October 11 were due to hear some of the extraordinary discrepancies he claims to have discovered between what really happened and the history we were taught at school. But even if listeners won't be able to hear this session now, they may like to read here about what they would have heard if things hadn't been what they are, if you follow us.

YES, sir, comma, *Time Marches Back* is the title of an hysterical extravaganza with a historical background, which we hope to put on the air soon. The title epitomises (that surprised you) the idea underlying this humorous (we hope) and philosophical historical anthology.

The aim of my learned collaborator and ace lyricist (is there such a word?) Henrik Ege, and myself in this series, is first to amuse you. *Time Marches Back* will unfold to you our glorious history. Surely it is about time history came into its own. Now that motor cars have taken to the highways in thousands, and pedestrians ditto to the fields in ten thousands, we would appear to be specialising more in geography than in history. And yet our island history, our two thousand years of *In Town To-night* (advt.) provides us with a tremendous amount of material on which to switch a searchlight of humour and fun.

You have all listened with delight to Carroll Levis and his Discoveries. But what about Chris Columbus, John Cabot, Captain Cook, and *their* discoveries? Surely they are worthy of honourable mention, exclamation-mark.

Napoleon once said that an army marches on its stomach. How true, for doesn't the Militia do its abdominal exercises every morning before breakfast? You see what I'm getting at? (Never mind the preposition at the end of this sentence. I'll ask the Editor to remit it for good conduct).

It Has Happened Before

There's nothing new in this modern world of ours. What is happening now has happened before. For all we know, our old chum Syd Walker had his prototype as a Druid

doing *locum tenens* at Stonehenge. Who was the original glamour girl? Surely Cleopatra had "it," or why did Julius Caesar go off on private manoeuvres (this spelling-bee stuff is getting me down!)

Even at the Court of King Arthur there may have been a Sir Lionel de Gamelin, a debonair adventurer who compèred and sub-edited the quips of Thomas à l'Handley, the court jester of the period. Remember that Richard Coeur-de-Lion, eight hundred years ago, was almost as big a national hero as "Big-hearted Arthur" is now. And can you imagine the Wessex Brothers satirising in song and *ad. lib.*, Good King Alfred's attempts at cookery?

So, in this series, come with us into the past. To delve or swallow-dive into the manifold mistakes and misdeeds of the past epochs is, via the medium of radio, comparatively simple.

This Age of Speed

I propose to cruise backwards through time in my super, hyphen, stream-lined stratospherical Spitfire, the Questaplane. We live in an age of speed. It was only a century ago, remember, that the Rocket flashed from Darlington *en route* for Stockton at twelve miles per hour. N.B. The wind was astern of the guard's van! But nowadays an L.N.E.R. or L.M.S. Pacific can attain and hold a speed of over a hundred miles an hour. We can cross the Atlantic (steerage in my case) by the *Queen Mary* in four days, while John Cobb recently passed the salt of Utah at a velocity of six miles per minute. In the air maximum speeds have developed even more sensationally. Four hundred miles an hour is just commonplace.

My ethereal craft, the Questaplane, is the last word in design. It is incapable of a tech-



"You may have no future, so come with us into the past," says Stainless Stephen (gloomy fellow!) His unusual "nom-de-radio" is sometimes misheard over the air; he has received letters addressed to Seedless Raisin, Painless Measles, and Shameless Satan.

nical hitch, and travels quicker than light. Even on half throttle (as in all-in wrestling) its horizontal speed is prodigious. Oswald, my distrusted mechanic, and I keep the plane in an invisible aerodrome. This is situated at a point, X, equidistant from Ilkka Moor not ont' map, next year's high tide mark at Southport, the fifth knot-hole on the fourth pile on Cleethorpes pier, and the middle left-hand pocket of the Hogs Norton Women's Institute bagatelle table.

All About The Questaplane

The fuselage of the Questaplane is constructed of meringueidum, a material lighter than hot air. The propeller is fitted with a variable pitch tuned by Stravinsky. To increase the safety factor we have incorporated a gyroscope in the layout, enabling us to keep an even keel through depressions from Iceland or high spots in Empire programmes.

As for the machine's effective ceiling, this figure may not at present be made public, but I can tell you that bats in the belfry no longer worry us. Once outside the vertical three-mile limit, gravity loses its effect on the Questaplane.

So, my friends, give us a trial, as some unfortunate Tudor replica once said to Empson and Dudley. Have a lucky dip with us into the Wash in search of King John's jewels. Learn how King Canute put his foot in it. For a small consideration we will look up your family tree: if you make it worth our while we will even prune it for you!