

## EXPERIMENTS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

By Mary Graham Bonner

THERE used to be a time, and not so far distant, when justifiable complaints were made that illustrators did not co-operate adequately with authors. They seemed to be removed from the creations of their authors' minds. But no such complaint can be made this year. The illustrators deserve only the grateful appreciation of authors, the publishers deserve credit for securing suitable illustrators, and the public — children in particular — will benefit. The authors have been considerably responsible for this change, too. They have tried their wings more than usual. They have been more bravely original and experimental, and the illustrators could not have done such fine work had they not had something upon which to work. It has all turned out beautifully. But enough of generalities.

Susan Meriwether has re-created the dramatic story of Troy with its Greek and Trojan heroes, its wooden horse of historic safety and unfailing delight to children, in a book entitled *The Playbook of Troy*. (Harper, \$2.)

Esther Peck has made striking cut-out illustrations so that the book is a game as well as a retelling of one of the world's immortal stories. There are some translated quotations from the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* and a vivid word picture of old Homer telling his tale to the people of his time.

*The Magic Pawnshop*, by Rachel Field, illustrated by Elizabeth MacKinstry (Dutton, \$2), is a story for the holiday time and for any time. It was a stroke of genius to take a pawnshop as a setting, to put magic into it, and to carry it through as a story that delights because of its originality and pleases because of the beauty of phraseology with which it is written. Such a magical place as the pawnshop was with its owner Miss Minerva MacLoon and her steed Charlie, the Broom. Charlie could carry his mistress on flights for more magic, while at the same time he could be utilitarian and do his duty as a

sweeping broom. They leave Prinda, the heroine of the story, in charge of the shop. It is no commonplace charge. And how gaily and with what spirit every character, object, action is described! It shows, too, a normal trend in books for the young. Fancy a book of an earlier century permitting one of its characters to pawn a Conscience! But that is just what Rose Martha does. Imaginative children will love this tale and its pictures.

*Peter Pocket*, by May Justus, illustrated by Mabel Pugh, (Doubleday, Page, \$1.50) tells the story of a little boy of the Cumberland mountains. He was so named, this lovable little boy, "because he was always going around with his hands out of sight and asking: 'Guess what I have in my pocket'." Peter's life is one of keen interest to the reader at the start. That is because he is so very real. I cannot believe that Peter isn't a reality. The reader feels with him — his affections, his loyalties, his suffering poverty and self-denials, his passion for music. And how deftly the author has given him the chance for earning money. Even Peter didn't understand it at all at first. The ending just couldn't have been any other way. So much do I care for Peter and this little book that I found myself at the end of the book dreaming dreams of Peter's future musical career! It's an enchanting story, full of freshness and poignancy.

*Petersham's Hill*, by Grace Taber Hallock, decorated by Harrie Wood, (Dutton, \$2) is a story of Jemima and Little Papa who go beyond a faraway blue hill, leaving the familiar green ones back home. There are adventures to be had there, as of course there would be, and they are told with imagination and attractiveness.

Then there are other adventures to be had in other books. Siri Andrews has translated a Swedish picture book by Maja Lindberg. *Karl's Journey to the Moon*, (Harper, \$1.50)

gives an account of his ride in a soap-bubble (could any ride be more effervescently fairy-like?), his experiences in that remotely exclusive domain, and at the end one sees the sleeping Karl, smiling so delightedly as the Moon-Giraffe stalks in to make him a present of an apple.

*Mickey and the Monkeys*, by Victorine Kirk, (Viking, \$2) illustrated by Christopher Rule, cavort themselves without cessation in the varied excitements that occur without a doubt if one has the good fortune to be dropped without warning right into the center of Monkeyland. Marion Bullard gives a rabbit and a number of night animals the chance to work out their problems in *The Somersaulting Rabbit*, (Dutton, \$2) while William Nicholson contributes the best picture book of the year in *Clever Bill*, (Doubleday, Page, \$1). Bill was a toy soldier, left out in the final packing by Mary, his young owner. It almost broke his toy heart. There is a picture of him, completely bent over in spite of his soldierly stiffness, shedding huge tears. But he ran after Mary. And he meets her train. Clever Bill!

Frank Ernest Hill and Joseph Auslander have written a valuable and a fascinating book in *The Winged Horse* (Doubleday, Page, \$3.50). It is sub-titled "The Story of Poets and Their Poetry"; it contains a bibliography by Theresa West Elmendorf, and is illustrated by Paul Honoré. In a line the authors have been capable of illuminating a lifetime such as the one regarding Robert Burns: "He was miserable and sang marvelously". The authors have shown not only a profound knowledge of their subject but an admirable facility in handling it so that it is inclusive without being cumbersome.

A. A. Milne, with the aid of his complete illustrator E. H. Shepard, is on the scene this year with a small volume of verses called *Now We Are Six* (Dutton, \$2). The best poem has to do with that age, and should really be quoted. The other poems in the volume aren't equals of those contained in "When We Were Very Young", but Mr. Milne has contributed enough to the world to be forgiven a quite human aptitude for unequal work. "The End" however is a poem that couldn't be better:

"When I was One,  
I had just begun.

When I was Two,  
I was nearly new.

When I was Three,  
I was hardly Me.

When I was Four,  
I was not much more.

When I was Five,  
I was just alive.

But now I am Six, I'm as clever as clever.  
So I think I'll be six now, for ever and ever."

Edith Ballinger Price has written and illustrated a book of verses called *The Four Winds* (Stokes, \$2.50), with simple poetical subjects simply yet charmingly versified. Cicely Mary Barker has also written and illustrated verses contained in three little books called *Flower Fairies of the Spring*, *Flower Fairies of the Summer*, *Flower Fairies of the Autumn* (Macmillan, 60¢ each), and Rachel Field has written and illustrated *A Little Book of Days* (Doubleday, Page, 75¢). There is a humorous footnote to the verse for Washington's Birthday which indicates that it will also do for Lincoln's birthday!

Rose Fyleman, best known for her verses of fairy people, has a prose work this year — *Letty*. It is called "A Study of a Child", and is illustrated with scissor-cuts by L. Hummel (Doran, \$2). Primarily the book is for parents, teachers and lovers of children, but children too will feel a bond of understanding and sympathy and kinship with Letty — which makes it quite a family book after all. Another book for this specified audience is *The Little Long-Ago*, by Laura Spencer Portor, illustrated by Maginel Wright Barney (Dutton, \$5). It is a pity the book is so expensive, for parents should have this book. It is quite a lovely thing.

*Nimble-Legs*, by Luigi Capuana, translated by Frederic Taber Cooper (Longmans, Green, \$1.50), introduction by Faith E. Smith, and illustrated by I. B. Hazelton, is a story of a little boy who hated quiet chores

but loved running. And he was rewarded and finally appreciated for his celerity in the work he did carrying messages which helped the cause of the Italian patriot Garibaldi. It is a vigorously written little book and moves along with the rapidity that a book with such a title should move.

*Italian Peepshow*, by Eleanor Farjeon, illustrated by Rosalind Thornycroft (Stokes, \$2.50), contains fanciful tales of Italy, and those who remember the author's "Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard" know how beautifully she can write.

Among other excellent books this year are *The Trade Wind*, by Cornelia Meigs (Little, Brown, \$2); Beacon Hill Bookshelf prize, \$2,000) illustrated by Henry C. Pitz; *The Wind that Wouldn't Blow*, by Arthur Bowie Chrisman (Dutton, \$2.50), illustrated by Else Hasselriis; *Heroes of the Air*, by Chelsea Fraser (Crowell, \$2); *Wonder-Tales from*

*Pirate Isles*, by Frances Jenkins Olcott, illustrated by Herman Rosseo (Longmans, Green, \$2); *Canute Whistlewinks*, translated from the Swedish of Zacharias Topelius by C. W. Foss, edited by Frances Jenkins Olcott and illustrated by Frank McIntosh (Longmans, Green \$2.50); two fine books of particular interest to boys — *The Indian How Book* by Arthur C. Parker (Doran \$3), and *The Boy's Life of Colonel Lawrence*, by Lowell Thomas (Century, \$2). There are three stirring stories for girls that must be listed too: *Roselle of the North*, by Constance Lindsay Skinner (Macmillan, \$1.75), *Storey Manor*, by Ethel Cook Eliot (Doubleday, Page, \$2), and *Downright Dencey*, by Caroline Dale Snedeker, illustrated by Maginel Wright Barney (Doubleday, Page, \$2).

And still others! Children's Book Week, which celebrates its birth-week in November, can certainly celebrate right royally.

## NOTES ON NEW NOVELS

By Miriam Colgate

THE SENTIMENTALISTS, by Dale Collins (Little, Brown, \$2), is a book worth reading on a number of counts, although to me the reason given most urgently by Mr. Collins's other admirers, that in any of his books one may always be sure of a story, is the weakest of them all. The plot of this latest book is trite to the last degree: Cap'n Whelan, of the brig *Hiron-delle*, finds a white baby adrift in a canoe on the heaving tropic sea. The Captain, fat, coarse, capable of any brutality, melts into a quivering jelly at the touch of a baby's hand, and goes ashore to find a foster-mother for his foundling. He finds as young, hard and lovely a girl as ever cheated her way from England to the Outposts of Empire. Impulsive for all her cynicism, she goes away to sea and to the baby, leaving bewildered behind her the married lover to whom she has been on the point of succumbing, and starved parental love springs as miraculously to birth in her breast at the sight of the infant Samuel as it had in the Captain's. Add a charming wastrel to be reclaimed, a marital tangle to be unravelled, a gross of hard-drinking derelicts to feel momentary flares of noble emotions, the infant's true mother to turn up at the precise moment when Mr. Collins's charming heroine is about to go down before the Love that Conquers All, and you have the story that the wilder Collins-enthusiasts ask you to bow down before in awe and thanksgiving.

But aside from the story, which may or may not be to your taste, there are Dale Collins's talent for conveying the qualities of adventure and excitement, his ability to set a scene and sketch a character, his way of bringing to reality the sea and the tropics and the desolate out-stations where the world's failures congregate. And above all, there is Mr. Collins's real feeling for words; so that to miss one of his books is a minor tragedy.

I believe that Mr. Collins errs through an excess of honesty. He wants to give his best *and* a story, and in the fervor of his zeal he occasionally scatters scene, character, atmosphere and conviction to right and left so that the Juggernaut-story may pass through. Nevertheless he remains a writer to whom one may sacrifice sleep, eyesight and the next morning's freshness without any feeling of being cheated.

It takes a woman to give as unsentimentalized and still as fair a picture of one type of her fellow-woman as Susan Ertz does in *Now East, Now West* (Appleton, \$2). Here is so recognizable a portrait of *la jeune Americaine mariée* — smart, attractive, pseudo-intellectual, adored of her husband and all right-minded hostesses, and yet truly so shallow, selfish, insensitive and pretentious — that it seems as if even the legions of her prototypes must wince in reading about her.

It is the measure of Miss Ertz's gift for characterization that at the very moments when she is with merciless clarity showing Althea as a pushing, ruthless young climber she indicates almost with tenderness the bewilderment and confusion of ideals that make her heroine's successes fall into dust and ashes as she gathers them. London is better than New York; a baronet takes a business-man; freedom to go to Florence trumps motherly solicitude for all the Altheas in the world; and yet they are never quite sure why. Avid reading about What Our Best People Are Doing, trashy standards set at adolescence in the best finishing schools — these are implicit in the background that Miss Ertz has not needed to sketch in, since she has been able to give its end-results so concisely.

The story of "*Now East, Now West*" is straightforward. Althea Goodall outgrows New York and pushes her husband, who is