

Artist and Child

FUNNYBONE ALLEY. By ALFRED KREYMBORG. Illustrated by BORIS ARTZYBASHEFF. New York: The Macaulay Company. 1927.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

PERHAPS just because he has often seen himself in the aspect of benignant age, as the absent-minded meerschau-puffing philosopher of the cluttered study, with certain shy musical propensities, the childlikeness of Alfred Kreymborg has always been patent; childlikeness being a very different thing from childishness. We associate Kreymborg's poetry and drama with playfulness, though this very playfulness has often approached profundity. To the mature he has usually addressed the poetry of an elf, extracting, with apparent diffidence, canny amusement from ironical life. Himself like a character out of Hans Christian Andersen (at least, as he appears in his work) he has often viewed existence singularly as Andersen viewed it. That is not all of Kreymborg, as no one aspect is all of any artist so versatile, but it is so great a part of him that it seems only natural that he has now presented us with a book for children.

His book will be read with absorption and delight by certain children of all ages; chiefly by those in whose brains a fretting starlight of fancy persists. Matter-of-fact children (and despite the sentimental view, there are many such), and matter-of-fact elders—well, concerning these I cannot prophesy. For Kreymborg has naturally not written what is known in the barbarous terminology of our time as a "juvenile." Rather here is exactly the same Kreymborg of many of his poems and many of his little dramas, embarked upon prose narration—not upon biographical narrative as in his "Troubadour," but upon an entirely imaginative tale. The imagination of Artzybasheff, the illustrator, has successfully supplemented the author's in color and line.

"Funnybone Alley" is a string of loosely related whimsical episodes afloat in a poetic and nonsensical atmosphere which is often charming in the extreme. On the other hand it seems to me that the vigor of invention sometimes flags. And in the interpolated verse, while much of it is ambrosia to the nonsense-verse lover, as well as being "brimmed with nimbler meanings up," verbal or metrical slovenliness sometimes treads upon the heels of spontaneity. To take a single instance, the first six couplets of "Enter the Cat" are so entirely satisfactory that the remaining four seem a distinct pity. And elsewhere Kreymborg proves that in the main he is hardly a jingle-master—quite, indeed, as Vachel Lindsay is not; though both can be deft on occasion. On the other hand, the true poet is ever present both in the verse and in the prose of this tale, conjuring, in the latter, with such statements as:

They always danced best of all to the most familiar echos. Like "The Sidewalks of New York." Since they could well nigh feel, if not see, the patterns left by former children for them to flit in and out of. Even when they stepped outside the pattern. And played or danced sharp or flat.

I speak of the content of that paragraph. Mr. Kreymborg will not agree with me, but I cannot wholly approve of the syntax. Such syntax often occurs in the book, and I am aware that it is modern usage; but though it may be used effectively as an occasional device, I feel that it hampers rhythm in prose as often as it stimulates. Yet I know that long, unbroken sentences afflict young readers.

The gallery of characters in "Funnybone Alley" is a delightful assortment, Kreymborg's nomenclature usually fortunate, and



Drawing by Boris Artzybasheff for "Funnybone Alley," by Dhan Gopal Mukerji

such a chapter as "What the Fishman Taught Them" seems to me fascinating writing for children. The book is rich in homely detail invested with glamour.



On Condescension

EVERYONE will agree that there is something wrong with children's books. They are thin stuff, poor fare. If your youngsters had to subsist on the year's output alone, they would die of anæmia or a mild but persistent ptomaine. This failure is of course due to a number of things which make no one as happy as kings—space forbids a closer inspection. However, there is usually a basic something wrong, given which other things cannot be right. Mass-thinking is the most popular scapegoat nowadays, and certainly it lies near the bottom of this as of most literary tangles. But we think we see in addition to the evils of standardization a root-trouble more irritating because more personal, a hindrance not on the part of the essentially indifferent populace, but on the parts of those personally interested, authors, publishers, buyers. Italics almost always creep under the word "children's"—"He writes children's serials." "She's not a children's reviewer." "Yes, it's a good children's book"—italics invisible to the eye but only too audible to the inner ear. We are sure that they come from an Attitude with a capital A. An attitude of condescension. And now our trouble is out. Of course the quality of children's books is thin. No one is going to put his best stuff into an inferior article.

The implication is that children's books are a different and inferior breed, pigmies with a silly squint; not the simple, subtle, utterly priceless darlings of our book-race that one might expect to find

on the shelf amidst grown-up volumes.

Now, the facts about the really good children's books flatly contradict such an implication. The older favorites were written not for children at all but for unsophisticated man, witness "Pilgrim's Progress." And the newer standby is certainly a true child of its author's brain, springing from a joy of youthfulness that has survived in that brain, and written not really for children but, like all good writing, primarily for self-expression, witness "Huckleberry Finn." There can be no fundamental separation of type, since the child is eternally father of the man. The best "children's books" are read by children because of suitable material and methods, but they express the world's youth.

With condescension comes laxness. Anything will do to try on the child. What a paradox in an age of youth triumphant and education rampant, with one out of three mothers helping to run a progressive school! Of course, there are the happy exceptions. And in general much is being done, but, alas! in nine cases out of ten with an apologetic shrug. Let us beware! We are conferring an inferiority complex on our children's books as hard as we can, and everyone knows nowadays what an inferiority complex can do when it gets a head-start. Pretty soon these books will indeed be a race of pygmies—already most of them are badly stunted.

Anyhow, we intend to make no apologies whatsoever when we ask leading literary critics to review children's books—and we beg our readers to note the absence of italics in the word "children's"!

A sign-painter, a street band, a performance at a toy theatre, the appearance of an organ-grinder, all these and many other phenomena that are capitalized Events in



Illustration by Elizabeth MacKinty for Rachel Field's "The Magic Pawnshop"

the world of the child, are described with beautifully humorous fantasy; and the philosophy underlining the course of events glows with the poet's essential kindness. His satire is light and gay and "Solemnity Street" much in need of it.

I hope I have not given the impression that the verse that performs turn and turn about with prose is by any means a mistake. It is often most ingenious and lends the spice of variety to the whole concoction. Finally, I find the queer dream atmosphere of "Funnybone Alley" both haunting and impressed with the individuality of the author. There is in the volume no "writing down" to the child; and it cumulatively acquaints the child with the true meaning of the word "artist." This last, so far as I know, has never been done so successfully before.

A Prize Story

THE TRADE WIND. By CORNELIA MEIGS. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1927. \$2 net.

THIS book now rests securely on the Beacon Hill Bookshelf, chosen from almost four hundred manuscripts submitted for the Bookshelf's prize—all of which means much thought on the subject of literature for the young. The \$2,000 was finally awarded to "The Trade Wind" because of its "vibrant atmosphere, its picturesque life, and its strong appeal to the creative imagination." Indeed, if the imaginative pitch of the first fifty pages could have been sustained the growing girl (for girls like ad-

venture) or boy would have had a lasting thrill. Our first thought was accompanied by a thrill: "Here is a book that equals 'Drums'!" We rejoiced that a book for youth should fly straight, free of the arbitrary limits of the imagination that usually cramp a juvenile writer's material and style. The young mind is superior to ours in the power of transmuting life. Perhaps it is a sneaking inferiority-complex that ties our thought in didactic knots in the presence of youth. In the first chapter a boy with a mind full of sea-romance passed down from his father, who returned to the sea and was lost in it after years on shore, looks out of his window above the bay on a night of rain and thinks sadly that nothing ever happens. Presto! A flash of lightning reveals "six or seven men coming along the path which slanted across the garden, men with sea-beaten faces, this one with a red handkerchief tied around his head, that one with an unsheathed cutlass in his hand. The noise of the rain drowned the crunching of their heavy boots. . . ." Immediately the spirit of David's father urged me to read as it urged David to run the seas.

Alack! When David is actually off on the bounding wave, he becomes no longer the wistfully expectant David we know well already, but a boy on an adventure, any boy. Not any adventure. For this tale passes skilfully through outlandish fleets and about unfriendly harbors below the equator. The period is fascinating: life on the ocean never held more circumstantial picturesqueness than in the pirate-chasing, buccaneering, revenue-running days directly before the Revolution. There is no dull adventure in this book. Also, it may be added, no verbiage, no bunk, and the characters are solidly executed. Nevertheless, in company with David we do not get quite the thrill that the first chapters led us to expect; and only at the end do we recapture first-hand romance, when the gorgeous *Pegasus* sinks, and the winged horse, her figurehead, "in a final plunge, went under and was drowned forever in a smother of green water and white foam." To our mind at least, the appeal to the creative imagination, which after all comes from a creative imagination vividly at work, is not any too strong.

In short, "The Trade Wind" will be outstanding in the juvenile year because of its entire soundness and its partial vibrancy. But it misses the place in the ranks of books in general which any book, for young or old, that lives all through its being, can claim! However, we are more than grateful to writer and publisher and Bookshelf for giving our children an interesting and able piece of work, and such criticism as we offer is in fact a compliment.

Six and a Bull's-eye

NOW WE ARE SIX. By A. A. MILNE. With decorations by ERNEST H. SHEPARD. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by LEE WILSON DODD

BE very careful, Mr. Reviewer, or you will find yourself being tempted to say that "Now We Are Six" isn't quite so good, quite so spontaneously charming, as "When We Were Very Young!" Three things will tempt you to say this, and not one of them is a credit to critical human nature. For, first, you will begin reading this book entirely prejudiced in favor of another book—unreasonably jealous for that other book, if the truth were known. And, second, instead of yielding yourself to this book, you will be telling yourself that nobody can hit the bullseye twice in succession—not even so delightful and clever a man as Mr. Milne. And, third and worst, you will feel that a little delicately patronizing disparagement of "Now We Are Six" may make your review more entertaining in itself than a mere repetition of the indis-



Drawing by E. H. Shepard for "Now We Are Six," by A. A. Milne

criminate praise you heaped upon "When We Were Very Young." So watch your step thoughtfully, Mr. Reviewer.

Well, then, the truth is (as one reviewer sees it after long and self-denying reflection)—"er-h'r'm"—the truth is, that "Now We Are Six" is a second unquestionable bullseye for Mr. Milne. Not all the verses of "When We Were Very Young" were equally alluring. Half a dozen or so of the jingles in that famous volume were, like little Anne Darlington, to whom the present collection is dedicated, "so speshal." The King's Breakfast, The Three Little Foxes, what James James Morrison Morrison Weatherby George Dupree said to his errant mother; best of all, perhaps, Market Square, with the dying fall of its refrain, so funnily and tenderly wistful, "But they hadn't got a rabbit, not anywhere there!" Such things curled right in under one's ribs, to remain there warm and comfy—with just enough animating tickle—to the end of one's days. But there were other verses—a good many, indeed—pleasant enough in their way, which we have all easily forgotten. And this, I believe, will prove to be quite as true of "Now We Are Six."

Who, for example, having once read it, is going to disremember

If I were a bear,
And a big bear too,
I shouldn't much care
If it froze or snow—

or the Little Black Hen, who

"They want me to lay them
An egg for tea.
If they were Emperors,
If they were Kings,
I'm much too busy
To lay them things."

And I submit, further, that Busy and Sneezles and Binker and Twice Times and Explained and Forgiven and The Good Little Girl will soon twingle themselves into the heads and hearts of all companionable grown-ups and children. ("Twingle," by the way, is a brand new portmanteau-word, and it means to sing and twinkle simultaneously).

As for Mr. Shepard, look at his little boy in bed with a cold—just look at him!—and be grateful for ever after to Mr. Shepard.

And yet. . . . And yet, in spite of all caution I must regretfully confess. . . . But must I, really? No; I'll be hanged if I will!

(Continued on page 214)

DORAN BOOKS

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THE MESSENGER OF THE GODS

by Phyllis Bottome

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by Sacheverell Sitwell

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The Children's Bookshop

The Saga of a Pigeon

GAY-NECK. The Story of a Pigeon. By DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI. Illustrated by Boris Artzybasheff. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company. 1927. \$2.25.

Reviewed by MARY GRAY

A NEW book by the author of Kari, the Elephant, will be sure of a welcome from a wide circle of all ages. This story of "Gay-Neck," the wonderful carrier-tumbler pigeon, whom the boy Mukerji, raised and trained and afterwards sent to service in the World War is more fascinating even than the adventures of Kari, partly because the material is so fresh. We had heard from Kipling and others a good deal of the habits of elephants, but we do not remember any previous animal story books about pigeons, with the exception of "Chico." Add to this a plot full of hair-breadth escapes on the part of the clever pigeon from hawks, eagles, and airplanes, and equally hair-breadth escapes from tigers and elephants on the part of his young master, and you have the material for a real "thriller" that will please the taste of even effete little movie fans. But unlike its movie counterparts, this story is told in Mukerji's excellent style, vivid, but thoughtful, with a good bit of Indian philosophy thrown in. Only once in a while are we conscious that Mukerji is using a tongue not his own, as when he says, "Let me give you just a slight picture of our setting," but for the most part he puts many of our native writers for children to shame. Listen to this bit of description:

The stillness was intense—like a drum whose skin had been so stretched that even breathing on it would make it groan. I felt hemmed in by the piercing soundlessness from every direction. Now and then like an explosion came the crackling of some dry autumn leaves as a soft-footed wild cat leaped on them from the branch of a tree not far away. That sound very soon sank like a stone in the ever rising tide of stillness.

That is from one of the adventures which befell Gay-Neck's master while he was searching for his runaway bird in the eyrie of an Eagle high up in the Himalayas. In one of the Lamaseries of these far-away mountains the pigeon is cured of his first bad fright by the touch of a Holy man who has conquered fear himself and Mukerji receives a lecture on the evils of that arch enemy, Fear.

Twice after that Gay-Neck suffers from what we have learned to call "shell-shock," and refuses to fly, and twice his owner succeeds in bringing him around again. The first time is after a very bad experience with two hawks, the second with German airplanes and their bombs. These incidents furnish further material for analyzing the effect of the conquering of fear.

The illustrations and designs by Boris Artzybasheff have a striking Indian flavor that fits the tale well. We can thoroughly recommend Gay-Neck to American youths, philosophy and all.

Magic and Realism

THE MAGIC PAWNSHOP. By RACHEL FIELD. Decorations by ELIZABETH MACKINSTRY. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1927. \$2.

YOU have read many a fantastic child's story, compounded of magic and nonsense, and you have read not so many naturalistic stories of real little girls in familiar situations,—not nearly so many, as a matter of fact, as the average little girl would like to read, for the magical tale seems to be far more frequent.

If you possess yourself of this little book of Rachel Field's, you will enjoy a very charming combination of both types, and that, too, in the continuous-story form which seems for some reason to be used less often for children than the short tale with which they are constantly supplied.

Not that even the most up-and-coming little girl could really involve herself in the delightful impossibilities that happen to Prinda during her visit to the magic pawnshop to secure a miracle for her sick uncle's use; but that they are all recounted with a running maintenance of realism in background, in character drawing, and in the logical following-out of a real plot—which even has two bits of love stories bound up in it. So a little girl reading will have the pleasures of recognition of many items

of her own surroundings, combined with the surprises of a magic broomstick and its proprietress-rider, and all the goings-on in the magic shop over which she presides.

Especially delectable is the idea of the Conscience which one of the characters has pawned, and which appears as a luminous, colored Something in a wicker bird-cage, fading gradually to nothingness unless reinstated in its owner's bosom; and of the superfluous elderly aunt pawned by her family only to find a comfortable realm of usefulness in the pawnshop itself, so that she cheerfully repudiates their efforts to reclaim her when they find they have made a mistake and need her very dreadfully after all.

Full of suggestion are Miss Field's pawnshop shelves, and many real bits of understanding of human nature flash from her lines, as her ingenious little plot develops. A grown-up will not lack enjoyment in reading this story with a child.

The little colored decorations are in keeping with the feeling of the book, and although they are slight and not very frequent they add to its satisfying make-up. We hope Miss Field will give us more books in the same key.

Book Lists for Children

Suggested by JACQUELINE OVERTON

Children's Library, Robert Bacon Memorial, Westbury, Long Island

BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS, a suggestive purchase list published by the Bookshop for Boys and Girls, 270 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 1922. Price 25 cents. A new edition is now in preparation.

A LIST OF BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS, suggested for purchase by Marion Cutter of the Children's Book Shop, 108 East Fifty-seventh Street, New York. Price 35 cents. Although published seven years ago, this is still a good basic list.

THE CHILD'S FIRST BOOKS, a study of the best picture and story books available for the pre-school child. Prepared for the Child Study Association by Elsa H. Naumburg, Child Study Association, 54 West Seventy-fourth Street. Price 35 cents.

THE HORN BOOK, a charming little magazine published quarterly by the Bookshop for Boys and Girls in Boston. Besides excellent annotated lists of books, it contains special articles. Subscription price \$1. Single copies 25 cents.

BOOKS OF ADVENTURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS of all ages. A booklist guide to stories, trails, voyages, discoveries, explorations, and places to read about as illustrated in the Map of Adventure drawn by Paul M. Paine. The Map may be purchased at Brentano's, New York. Price \$2.50.

OUTDOOR BOOKS published by the Bookshop for Boys and Girls, 270 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. Price 25 cents.

PLAYS FOR CHILDREN, a selected list compiled by Kate Oglebay. H. W. Wilson Co. 1922. Price 50 cents.

A list to aid dramatic directors and teachers in the selection of plays for children from six to sixteen.

CHRISTMAS, legends, stories, carols, and festivals. Children's Library, Westbury, Long Island. Price 25 cents.

An invaluable list for mothers and teachers. The stories have all been tried and tested many times in the telling.

HALLOWE'EN, a selection of poems, stories, and plays, compiled by Jacqueline Overton. Children's Library, Westbury, Long Island. Price 15 cents.

THE HARPER BOYS' AND GIRLS' BOOKSHOP, 460 Park Ave., New York City, has in preparation a Selected List of Books for Boys and Girls which may be ordered for 25 cents.

A Suggestion

FOR a group of mothers of children of the same grade to supplement their children's school work in any special field by forming for the children's use at home a circulative book-club of thoroughly interesting collateral reading in that field. Possibly each mother would donate one or more books. This plan, of course, could be carried out, at greater expense, individually. It should lead children to widen collateral reading at the library.

(See page 225 for brief review of children's books)

INTERNATIONAL

RUSSIAN POETRY

an anthology, chosen and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky. A selection of lyrics covering the period from Pushkin to the present day. \$2.25

MODERN RUSSIAN
COMPOSERS

by Leonid Sabaneyeff. Aesthetic characterization of about forty representatives of Russian music, including Scriabin, Stravinski, Myaskovsky, Prokofyeff and Rakhmaninoff. \$2.75

MATERIALISM and

EMPIRIO-CRITICISM

(Vol. XIII, of Collected Works) by V. I. Lenin. In this book Lenin fights against all attempts at philosophic revisions of Marxism. \$4.00

The AMERICANIZATION

of LABOR

by Robert W. Dunn. A new book giving the ramifications of the present employers' offensive against the labor unions. \$1.90

VOICES OF REVOLT

a series of small books in which are collected the outstanding utterances of renowned revolutionary leaders. The first to be published are: Robespierre, Marat, Lasalle, K. Liebknecht, Debs and Lenin. Each, 50c

HISTORY of the

AMERICAN WORKING CLASS

by Anthony Bimba. An account of the rise and struggles of American labor against the background of political and industrial development. \$2.75

The Life and Death of SACCO and VANZETTI

by EUGENE LYONS

A complete account of the social drama which has shaken the world, by a brilliant writer who has been associated with the case from the very beginning. Fascinating as a novel, penetrating as a history. \$1.50

RUSSIA AFTER TEN YEARS

Report of the American Trade Union Delegation to the Soviet Union. \$1.00

HISTORICAL MATERIAL-
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