

The Reader's Guide

Conducted by EDWARD DAVISON

Inquiries in regard to the selection of books and questions of like nature should be addressed to MRS. BECKER, c/o *The Saturday Review*

F. K. V., Chicago, Ill., says, "I am so thoroughly enjoying rereading and introducing my son to 'The Bastable Children' that I am wondering if that other dear delight of my childhood, 'The Phoenix and the Carpet,' has been reprinted. If it has, tell me by whom; if it hasn't, I should like to put in an order with an English bookseller. I have no idea of its price if out of print, and would appreciate your telling me."

THE first action taken by this reader, upon reassuring herself that the Bastables were all represented in the noble volume above mentioned (brought out in the

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CURRENT READING GUILD
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United States by Coward-McCann last fall), was to flutter through the pages in the fond hope that the Psammead might have slipped in, or the Phoenix. It was too much to hope, considering how much has been already crammed into this charming "omnibus," and I can but trust that Coward-McCann have it in mind to continue tapping the rich vein of Nesbit-Bland literature. Out of print? not a bit; every London shop-window showing children's books blossoms with "The Phoenix and the Carpet" at three and six; T. Fisher Unwin publishes this, and "Wet Magic," and a long line of peerless stories whose names would stir responsive chords in the breast of any old reader of *The Strand Magazine*—by the way, that should have gone on the list of English periodicals mentioned in a preceding reply. There is another E. Nesbit story, not for children, that went out of print in the United States some time ago, but was so much in demand by a friend of mine that she used to order several copies a year for presents to convalescents, people in the dumps, and such-like objects of Christian charity. This is "The Red House" (Methuen)—not to be confounded with "The Red House Mystery," by A. A. Milne, though this admirable detective story appears

on the same page of Methuen's catalogue. E. Nesbit-Bland's "Red House" is leased for a honeymoon; there are some of the famous children as visitors; the atmosphere is sweet as lilacs and the fun of the sort that leaves one breathing freely, with the knots of nerve-strain at least partially loosened.

SOME time ago I asked for suggestions for a list of books to be given as presents, at the rate of one a year, to a class of boys in memory of one taken from them by death. The age of the heroes of these books was to rise with the years, and their characters were to be such as would compel their interest and admiration. I have received several replies, of which the one from Evelyn O'Connor, assistant editor of *Boys' Life*, is especially interesting from the experience of the writer in making such recommendations. "I assume," the letter goes on, "that the givers are not interested in suggestions about the great classics, nor about those classics for boys like 'Treasure Island,' 'Kidnapped,' or 'The Black Arrow'; like 'Kim,' 'Captains Courageous'; like 'Men of Iron'; like 'Martin Hyde'; but are interested in more recent stories which have literary quality. A beautiful animal story which a boy of almost any age would certainly enjoy is 'Bambi,' by Felix Salten; and 'Master Skylark,' by John Bennett, is a splendid story of Shakespeare's time. 'After School,' by Laurie York Erskine, is a really inspiring story about the career of Nathan Hale, presented as influencing a young man and a boy of to-day. After 'David Blaize' boys might be interested to read 'The Hill,' by Horace Annesley Vachell, and 'The Big Row at Rangers,' by Kent Carr, which ought to appeal to boys of fifteen or sixteen. This story is unusual in that it has a witty hero who is really witty. 'Jinglebob,' by Rollins, is a story of the West and of cowboys quite unlike the current story of this type. 'Swords on the Sea,' by Agnes Danforth Hewes, is a highly colorful tale of Venice in her great days. 'The Trumpeter of Kracow,' by Eric P. Kelly, which was awarded the John Newberry medal of this year, is a remarkable story. Then there is 'The Trade Wind,' by Cornelia Meigs, a story of pre-revolutionary days and the sea. For the older boy, 'Drums,' by James Boyd, would surely be interesting, and Sandburg's 'Abe Lincoln Grows Up,' the early chapters from his life of Lincoln ought to interest boys of fourteen up."

Another specialist, Fannie E. Teller of the Social Service Department of St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, Philadelphia, sends a list for a boy about Penrod's age, beginning to interest himself in society and girls; a list for which suggestions were asked. "Of course, you have thought of Walpole's 'Jeremy' books? Do you know of an English book called 'Lifting Mist,' by Austin Harrison? My copy I got straight from London for seven and six; the book deals with the youngest son of a high middle-class English family, who goes away to a public school. The boy, Sam, has a hard time to find himself, can find no grown person who will give him information about sex instead of pious advice, escapes an entanglement with an older boy, and finally adjusts through a very normal adolescent intensive friendship with an imaginative girl of sixteen. The book might be as good for the grandmother as for the boy himself."

"Do you know Hugh de Selincourt's 'One Little Boy'? I am sure you do. The book may be out of print, but it is worth the grandmother's getting, even if she has to advertise for it. I think it is unequalled in boy-literature for boys and for grown-ups, except that the book is marred by the unreality of the episode where the boy sees the girl bathing in the woods."

"For the second list, to be given to a boy's classmate, books about boys whose characters they would admire, for the present there is Kipling's 'Captains Courageous,' and in a year or two, when the boys are fourteen or fifteen, I think I should give them the following books, in their respective order, in four successive years: 'The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,' published anonymously, but written, I think, by Weldon Johnson; Conrad's 'The Rover'; Somerset Maugham's 'Of Human Bondage'; Galsworthy's 'The Dark Flower.'"

This is a courageous list, and one that I have no doubt the boys would be greatly the better for reading. Whether it is the sort of list for which the giver of these books is looking I am not so sure, but I am happy to have so many of my own preferences confirmed by it. I do think, however, that "One Little Boy," indispensable for teachers and parents, would be less suitable for the age about which it is written.

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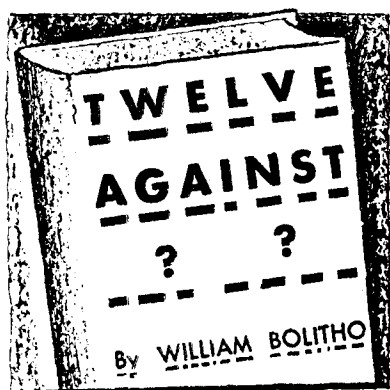
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Printing at Its Best

PRINTING at its best is hand-press printing. This is a statement which needs elucidation, and the recent issue by the Officina Bodoni of an elaborate *apologia* will serve as a reason for a summing up of the case for hand-press printing. A recent reviewer in writing of a very fine piece of modern book-printing by machinery said that he could hardly refrain from hyperbole in speaking of it. It was to his credit that he managed to refrain from more extensive eulogy than he did, because before one goes in for that sort of thing one ought, out of kindness to the reader as well as to the printer, to define one's terms a little carefully.

Hand-press printing makes use only of the fundamental elements of all letter-press printing—type, paper, ink, and press—but it is the form as well as the method of using each which distinguishes hand-printing from the machine product. The names are the same, and to the uninitiated the substances are identical—or at least near enough alike—but there are small but very important differences.

Take type. I believe that type from punches cut by hand is better than type which results from machine-made matrices. And the reason is that hand-cut punches, for reasons which are simple but technical, produce in the cast types a cleaner letter, and one which does not wear down in use to a different silhouette. This is apparently a

fact, no matter what the protagonists for the machine-cut matrices may assert to be the possibilities of their method. Again, in cutting punches by hand the minute irregularities of design, due to the individuality of the punch-cutter, produce a virility in design which makes many older types so extraordinarily "alive" on the page, and the absence of which in modern machine-cut type produces such an effect of monotony. Furthermore, as will be evident later, type cast from matrices struck from hand-cut punches can be used to far better advantage on dampened hand-made paper, because of the desirable heavy pressure.

Paper is a problem to most people interested in fine printing, but the question is simple enough if certain qualities are kept clearly in mind. So far as excellence of material—substance—goes, some of the modern machine-made papers are as good as any paper ever made—perhaps better than a good deal of the old paper. Chemical control of rags, water, and bleach, expert supervision of the making, etc., can produce in a modern paper mill a quality of product which is pretty nearly perfect from the points of view of surface, wearing and lasting qualities, and agreeable feel. On the other hand, hand-made paper has an individualistic quality, in feel, surface, and texture, which it is not possible to get in the machine-made product. This, obviously, is not to say that one is abstractly better than the other—only that they cannot be compared without considering for what purpose they are to be used, and what the temper of the critic may be. There are people who really believe that automobiles are "beautiful." As examples of skill, motor cars are incomparable, perhaps, but compared with sailing vessels (the best of which are probably the loveliest constructions of man), automobiles are mass-production-ugliness. So in thinking of paper it is necessary to have very clearly in mind what one is looking for. And considered abstractly, apart from the mesmeric effect of modern machinery and mass-production, hand-made paper, by reason of its charming irregularity, its surface, and its color, is more interesting, more attractive, than machine-made paper.

Ink is made from color and medium—say lamp-black and linseed oil. That is simple—but the chemistry of ink as well as its behavior in use on the press is far more complex and baffling. It may be enough here to say that the color used in almost all modern inks, and especially in those used in power printing presses, is a product of modern manufacturing chemistry which works well under the conditions of modern printing-offices (that is, dry heat and rapidly revolving composition rollers) at the expense of depth of color. Ink for hand-presses can be made from old and simple pigments and it can be made very stiff—a desideratum which renders it quite unfit for machine use.

The press in use to-day is almost invariably the rapid, two-revolution cylinder printing machine. This press requires for its most efficient handling—and in view of the cost of maintaining such an expensive piece of apparatus, as well as of operating it, nothing less than the more efficient methods can survive—(a) machine-made paper of definitely even thickness over the whole sheet and every sheet; (b) a relatively soft ink which will distribute well over the fast-moving composition rollers; (c) the printing of the paper in a dry condition—because there is no time to adjust damp sheets on the continuously moving mechanism. The hand-press, its operations of starting and stopping being governed completely by the pressman for each impression, permits the use of dampened hand-made paper, as well as of the heavier-bodied inks. The hand-press is constantly under control of the pressman, in a way that no automatic machine can be. It is practically a hand tool, acting only when directly called on to act, never able to function except in concert with the operator.

Now the combination of these elements, superficially the same for each method, hand and machine, calls for different ideals, and results in different effects. Inasmuch as the power machine is an actuality, it is clear that it may or it may not have a reasonable place in the economic and artistic scheme. Into that question I do not care to go farther than to say that it should be apparent to almost anyone that there may be times when one method or the other is the more economical or practical—and for any who are interested I suggest Mr. Austin Freeman's treatment of the matter in his "Social Decay and Regeneration." What is more clear, I believe, is that, artistically and esthetically, hand-press printing is superior to that done on the power machine. And for these reasons:

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