

Children in Heaven, by Robert Nathan, on page 396

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Who Live Inside the Dream

He took a horn frae his side, and blew baith loud and shrill,
And four-and-twenty beltit knights cam' skippin' over the
hill,
And we'll gang nae mair a-rovin', a-rovin' in the night,
Let the heart be e'er sae lovin', or the moon shine ne'er sae
bricht.

—JAMES V OF SCOTLAND.

WHEN one's mind is more constantly loud with a dream and one's stature is less and one's years are fewer it is the bookshelves that are as a rack of trumpets to call forth the belted knights. And so far as the male young are concerned it is the tale of high deeds that they turn to. We do not mean literally the deeds of knights in armor, though Howard Pyle's delightful books are still popular in juvenile libraries, and we suppose that even modern youth reads such stirring narrative as his medieval "Men and Iron." But for the youth of the day there are modern exploits, particularly now in the broad heavens, to satisfy his desire to see himself as hero of the notable feat of strength, skill, and bravery. Girls, ordinarily, like stories of interesting families in the home, full of episode. They see themselves as heroines of domestic crisis. And "they all want to play Hamlet," as Carl Sandburg has said so sagely. That is when the melancholy fit doth fall.

Many younger children prefer the outlandish, not something that could happen or could have happened, but something perfectly fantastic that ought to happen. After all, their experience of the world is as yet so slight that anything may be just around the corner. They can't tell. So much for subject-matter.

But do children appreciate a good style in writing? Sometimes we have thought that it is the children, who have never pondered on theories of style, that have the surest instinct concerning it. If you can write really well for children, you are possessed of a good style. The embroidery of your statement does not obscure its clarity, your figures of speech strike home, you present scenes vividly to the inner eye "that is the bliss of solitude," your characters are convincing characters, their speech is credible,—yes, even when you deal in nonsense.

Over and above this you are not intruding yourself clumsily into the narrative; for you must be telling a story so that they forget you are telling a story. They must be able to lose themselves in the world you create for them. True, when we grow older we sometimes look back upon youthful enthralments with a changed vision. "I liked it when I was young. I couldn't read it to-day." But have we ever stopped to consider that our own natural receptivity may have been impaired?

This we feel fairly sure of: a children's book written well will always be enjoyed more truly than a children's book written cheaply, flashily, "for the market," though that may win many temporary suffrages from the young. That children often, surprisingly, like stories far more simple than one should have thought their age would warrant is no disproof of this. Some of the simplest stories are the best, they are rooted most deeply in that accumulated racial sagacity that has through the ages expressed itself more or less in allegory. The best of the famous fairy stories in all languages are of this kind. They reveal the bases of human nature. The people in them represent certain fundamental

(Continued on next page)

Two Rhymes

By WALTER DE LA MARE



I. THE WIND

THE wind—Oh I hear it—goes wandering
by,
Willow and beech stir the branches and
sigh;
Each leaf to its sisters lisps softly, and then,
The air being stilled, they are silent again.

Forlorn neath the stars stands a thorn on the height,
The snow of his flowers perfuming the night;
But so sharp are his spines, so gnarled his old bole,
When the wind calls to him, he just whistles, poor
soul.



II. TWINKUM

TWINKUM, twirlum, twistum, twy,
How many rooks go floating by,
Caw, caw, in the deep blue sky?

Twinkum, twirlum, twistum, twee,
I can listen though I can't see,
Seven sooty-black rooks there be.

Twinkum, twirlum, twistum, twoh,
Who can say what he don't know?
Blindman's in, and round we go!

This  Week

Cover Illustrations.

By ELIZABETH MACKINSTRY.

Silhouettes. In verses by De la Mare
and McCord.

By KATHERINE THOMPSON.

A Symposium on Juvenile Reading.

Writing for Children

By ROSE FYLEMAN

"IT'S a great mistake to 'write down' to children." That is what everyone says when discussing the subject of writing for the young.

If by "writing down," you simply mean writing less well than for adults the thing is of course quite obviously true. Only the best of its kind in any direction is good enough to give to the child. But I don't think that is exactly what is meant. There is a certain half-patronizing, half-ingratiating tone which people employ when talking to children which they very much resent and dislike. It is what one might describe as the well-my-little-man-and-how-are-you-enjoying-yourself manner. It is a manner which a good many people in England still employ when addressing what are horribly known as "the lower classes." The person speaking is not speaking as himself, in his own individual and proper person, but as one kind of human being (a superior one, be it noted) to another kind. And that is the manner employed by some people when writing for children.

There was a time when it was the inevitable manner. When, in addition, one got a moral atmosphere so insistent that it pervaded every effort in this sort as persistently as salt pervades the seawater, one wonders how any child can ever have been persuaded to read the stuff.

* * *

But some children, as a friend remarked to me the other day, will read anything. I certainly remember devouring, when I was a little girl, a certain publication which used to come into the house occasionally in the form of an advertisement for some popular nostrum of the time. It was a curious hotch-potch of medical and general information, and I loved it. But there may have been a touch of morbidity about the business; children are oddly inquisitive about and interested in disease and deformity, though very often in a strangely detached and rather callous way.

But, to return to this particular manner of which I was speaking. The condescending method, quite apart from the moral touch, has now fortunately declined from favor, and indeed it has nothing to recommend it. Children, as I said before, detest it. Are we then to write for children exactly as we do for grown-ups? And if so, why should we make any distinction at all between books intended for the young and books intended for the adult?

The necessary distinction, it seems to me, is hardly one so much of manner as, excepting in the case of the very little ones, of matter. Children are not interested in a great number of things in which grown-up people are interested. They do not want to hear about the problems of sex, about social and economic complications, about the reactions of men and women to the circumstances of life and to the characteristics and temperament of other men and women.

* * *

Literature for children must be concerned primarily with actions, secondarily with fantasies, or images which are within the range of a child's imagination, though not necessarily of its actual experience. For the imagination even of a child has its limitations. Speculative metaphysics, for example, do not interest him. He likes to read about things that happen, whether it be to real or imagi-

nary heroes, to animals, to human children like himself, or to fairies and goblins. And he likes these things that happen to have that atmosphere of plausibility, of harmony with their particular environment which is of the essence of good storytelling at all times and in all circumstances. It is then a choice of content rather than of manner that is of importance. But the manner, as in all good writing, will be conditioned by the matter.

It is, I am quite certain, a great mistake to pause and consider as to whether a certain word or phrase will be understood by a child. Children, it must be remembered, learn the use of words by hearing them used. Books are their dictionaries, as it were—books, and, of course, the speech of their elders. Occasionally they make a mistake, and a word will take on a false meaning the memory of which may go about with them for years—for life even. I think all of us have a few words of that kind on the shelves of our minds, just as we all have a few words which we have unconsciously mispronounced for a long time. We learn ultimately to know their proper meaning or pronunciation but the old atmosphere still clings about them.

It doesn't matter at all. One has a sort of affection for these double-colored words. Don't you know how people will tell you, "Do you know, I always used to think that that word meant so-and-so?" They treasure the memory as one treasures an old brooch which has lost a pin, an old button which has lost its shank. They are of no use now but they are pretty and interesting. They once meant something.

Our manner, then, is not to be consciously suited to the requirements of a child, and that is, I think, confirmed by the fact that many of the best-loved children's books are equally well-liked by adults, and many of the best grown-up books by children.

"Robinson Crusoe" was not, I think, written for children; neither were the old fairy tales, certainly not the "Arabian Nights" or "Gulliver's Travels." Many grown-up people adore "Alice in Wonderland," the works of A. A. Milne, and "The Wind in the Willows," to mention only a few examples. One might indeed continue to enumerate almost indefinitely books of this type.



I have so far been writing with the thought of prose in my mind rather than that of verse, though some of the same rules (though this is an insufficiently elastic word) apply here also. Poetry intended to please children must be concerned with the things that interest and appeal to children, and again the style must be suited to the subject. Occasionally one comes across a child who develops very young a taste for the more subtle beauties of rhythm and phrase, but this is rare, and I imagine that there would be very few children who would respond ardently to, let us say, Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn."

As a matter of fact the child does ask, just as the grown-up does, something of poetry which differs from that which he asks of prose. In a poem he demands primarily rhythm, and rhythm of a not too complicated and subtle kind. Our very babes learn to lisp in numbers and will repeat scraps of nursery rhymes almost before they can talk. But mere jingles are not good enough to give to our children, even though they please their ear.

There are people who seem to think that to be capable of shaping any banality into a rhyming pattern is to be a poet. Any person of normal education can turn out stuff of this sort by the yard, but the intelligent ones do not attach any value to this faculty any more than they imagine that because they can make a drawing which everyone recognizes as being intended to represent a human being they are therefore justified in calling themselves artists and offering such drawings to the public as artistic creations.

Certain qualities go to the making of a good poem, and these qualities must be evident in a poem intended for a child no less than in one intended for an adult, for we agreed from the very beginning, I think, that what we give to the child must be of the best quality available.

The Cat
Sat on a mat
It caught a rat
And that was that.

This is a metrical rhyme, but it obviously isn't a poem.

There is no music in it, no felicity of expression,

no happy touch of quaint whimsicality—in fact it possesses none of the attributes of true poetry excepting in so far as it has rhyme and rhythm of the very crudest and most elementary sort. But it would appear that there are still people (otherwise how does it get printed?) who think stuff of that kind is suitable poetry for children. But I imagine there is less and less market for wares of this quality.

Nowadays one constantly comes across charming, delicate, quaint, delightful verse in children's books which has evidently been written by people with craftsmanship as well as imagination. And the jolly thing is that children do respond to these qualities, most of them instantaneously, all of them very rapidly under guidance. They have their individual preferences, of course. The child who declaims Macaulay's Lays with gusto will possibly be less attracted by Walter de la Mare's "Little Green Orchard," but one finds that few of them have much patience with weak mush when they have once become acquainted with really good stuff.

It is the job of parents and teachers to see that children have opportunities of reading and hearing the best matter available. The actual choice among that matter can be left to the child itself. I don't know that our task as writers is really such a responsible one as that of the educators. If we want to be read and to be loved we have to write readable and lovable matter. If we don't we shall soon find ourselves left where we deserve in that case to be—on the shelf.

Who Live Inside the Dream

(Continued from preceding page)

traits, and the issue is not obscured by psychological complexities.

Our mature reading goes "nae mair a-rovin', a-rovin' in the night," worse luck; though there are all the great compensations of learning more and more about actual life around us through the books of our time. But then, that isn't altogether true, either. How often the average reader turns away to romance pure and simple. Intelligence tests set the actual mental age of the average adult, after all, at a pretty low figure. Most of us retain the desire to hear the horn blow and to see the belted knights come skipping forth. This is our common denominator, though you may pride yourself upon being as intellectual as you choose.

But books for children should be approached by the writer as as responsible a task—or amusement—as books for adults. When we see trashy "juveniles" heaping the book-counters we should feel it as much an affront to the adult world as it is to the child. You cannot write too *well* for children, though you may write beyond their understanding. You can write of their world as it is, if you write clearly. By the same token you cannot write too *well* for the adult, for if you are a great writer to the average intelligent person you will be clear. It is true that you may bore a child, however well you write, by presenting experiences that are beyond him in a terminology that is beyond him. That is the only handicap a good writer who writes for children will encounter. He should then be writing for the children of a larger growth; and even there he may encounter it. He may then be writing for the grown-up children of the future.

Strange words, however, do not much impede a child's progress through a work of fiction that has the power really to hold the attention. Plenty of adults have confessed to us that they profoundly enjoyed certain more-or-less adult novels in childhood though certain words therein were fascinating mysteries. Even such a simple word as "misled" was, we know, to one adult, always interpreted as "missiled"; which merely made things far more interesting and extraordinary.

The patronizing attitude toward books for children is a mistake. Some of the best writing in the world has gone into books for children, some of the most beautiful flights of imagination, some of the shrewdest aphorisms. And the child mind properly stimulated develops far more quickly than one readily realizes. Let our children's books therefore lend it the fibre and flexibility it so readily assimilates. Literarily and pictorially we should adopt the attitude that the best is none too good for it.



Memoirs of a Lady of Quality

HITTY: Her First Hundred Years. By RACHEL FIELD. Illustrated by DOROTHY LATHROP. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1929. \$3.50.

Reviewed by MARGERY WILLIAMS BIANCO

WHEN three such persons as Rachel Field, Dorothy Lathrop, and a genuine hundred year old American doll put their heads together the quite unusual must result. Few books have excited such curiosity as the memoirs of Hitty during their making, and still fewer perhaps have so amply justified all expectations.

I have always contended that the ideal children's book should approach in form as nearly as possible the adult novel. "Hitty" comes close to accomplishing this, and I personally found it far more arresting than the greater number of recent novels I have read. Hitty is a person of much character and originality, and to the reconstruction of her life history, from the Preble homestead in Maine over a hundred years ago to her honored old age in the Eighth Street antique shop, Miss Field had brought not only the invention, dramatic instinct, and happy use of the unexpected which color all her writing but also an amazing knowledge of certain phases of early American life—as in the description of the whaling voyage—and a feeling for the past which gives extraordinary vitality to her pictures. Children reading "Hitty" will have a clear and very intimate impression of a little girl's life in early New England, of sea-faring in the old days, of the Philadelphia Quaker household, of New York in the gay 'seventies, and of the quiet, shuttered existence of the two little gentlewomen in the old New Orleans house.

To read this book is like looking back not only on one's own childhood, but on a long perspective of other childhoods, each picture sharp and clear-cut, like something experienced rather than imagined. Phoebe Preble, the smug meanness of poor Little Thankful, wistful Clarissa, and gay daring Isabel, all stand before us vividly. They are living children. Each glimpse is admirable. And one of the best scenes in the book is when Sally, that strange, passionate child, who deliberately steals Hitty from the glass case in the Cotton Exposition and secretes her for many weeks, suddenly experiences religion at a negro camp-meeting and, overtaken by judgment in the shape of a thunderstorm, sacrifices her in terrified repentance to the black waters of the Mississippi.

"Oh, God," she wailed, "don't let the lightning strike me dead and all of a heap, don't, please . . . I tell you I'll give Hitty back. I won't keep her another minute, Lord—look, here she is! You can have her, only just let me get back to Pa and the *Morning-Glory!*"

She was sobbing hysterically now. I could hear her even above the storm. Now she was running pell-mell down the bank toward the river. I knew only too well what she meant to do with me.

It is rare to find writing like this between the covers of a children's book.

There is humor, tenderness, and a gentle irony in this portrait of the little doll who goes through fire and flood, suffers shipwreck, captivity, and man's ingratitude, whose very existence is at the mercy of those human friends with whose lives, in turn, her own is so closely associated, and who in the end is doomed to outlast them all. "She must be dead a good many years now, even if she lived to be an old lady," remarks Hitty, not without complacency, of little Phoebe Preble.

For like all imaginative writers who find freedom under the covering phrase, "a children's story," Rachel Field has spread her canvas far beyond its acknowledged bounds and created something real, truthful, and enduring—a philosophy of life.

For the pictures of Dorothy Lathrop, who has here given of her very best, only the warmest admiration can be felt. Against a background rich and wise in color, in a hundred expressive poses, she has portrayed Hitty for all time; Hitty prim, composed, with her faint, pleasant smile, whether surrounded by tropic palms and monkeys, floating among the wonders of the rock pool, or falling in all her finery at Mr. Dickens's august feet. Each drawing is a masterpiece. Looking at the serene little face in the daguerreotype frontispiece one feels, with Hitty herself: "What is a mere hundred years to well-seasoned mountain-ash wood?"

As a joint production the book is unsurpassed, nor could its production be bettered.