

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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Only a Children's Book

IN Russia a national program has been built upon the text that no child, no youth, can escape from the influence of the books he reads or that are read for him. The elementary educational system has been purified of every book with a capitalistic taint. Directly and indirectly, all that the child absorbs has communistic socialism as a thesis or can be construed as sympathetic therewith. He hears and he reads only relevant discussions. Sovietism for him becomes more than orthodoxy; he is so conditioned to its ideas that they are natural, expected, and right. Only a shock can break through his crust of certainty, and not even a shock, so the sponsors of this system believe, can permanently adapt his mind to a capitalistic world.

The Soviets seem to have taken modern psychology as their guide in this, but of course they could have learned from organizations far older than the science of psychology. In early New England they were well aware that as the twig is bent the tree is inclined, and were scrupulously careful in their control of youthful reading. The Roman Church has been especially solicitous in this respect, and has always insisted upon the strictest supervision over the early educational period and a censorship of reading, both as a right and as a duty. The minds of those educated under its influence reveal characteristic tendencies even when all allegiance to the church has long since been relinquished. In our public schools, the struggle as to whether books shall teach what is known to be relatively true about our country, or what various organizations wish children to think is true, is still in full combat. If books for children teach points of view or doctrines they arouse interest enough, too much interest sometimes, among interested parties.

But all books for youth, and all books for children, aside from the emptiest of narratives or an A, B, C, teach inevitably some idea, some philosophy of life, some idealism or cynicism, some morality or its lack,—even when written with no such purpose whatsoever. And they teach it in direct proportion to their excellence as books. It may be only a mood the child gets from his reading, it may be notions of right and wrong, it may be desires which supply motivation for his life. It may be bad taste or good taste, it may be a sense of fairness or tolerance, it may be prejudice or obscurantism.

Whatever is read, however it is written, children's literature must be regarded as a prime factor in civilization. And literature for children, in contrast to text books and manuals, is especially important because it is not usually tendentious, is written to give pleasure, and is read without restraint.

Literature for childhood was born in the liberalism of the nineteenth century when the child began to get its rights, like women and negroes, and the disciplinary children's tract was going out of fashion. When the first books written just to please children were published, there was little need of criticism and selection, for there was little to select from and that little was good.

Today we publish a hundred children's books for one in the mid nineteenth century, and today children's books, which were a class privilege at first, go into every home and every library. Their influence is gentle, pervasive, incalculable.

Yet in spite of the patent examples around us of what books do to the young man, there are still too many who will not take seriously the need of

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The Death of Robin Hood

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THERE hangs the long bow, the strong bow,
once was bent
To cleave the clout, to split the willow
wand;
'Till the quiver's shafts were spent
The bow that wrought wild justice in this land.
The red deer, the roe deer knew that bow,
And king and clergy knew
How sure its clothyards flew
To right the poor and lay oppression low.

There grows our great oak, our girthed oak; over
all

The shires of England may it branch and be
As once in Sherwood, tall
As truth, and honor's ever-living tree!
The hunted and the hounded knew its ground
For refuge, knew who stood
A stiff yew hedge in the wood
Around its bole, when that the horn was wound.

Mer y men all, God spare you to the hunt;
Through time it stretches, down the centuries.
Outlawed, we bore the brunt
Of the hour's disfavor, and its penalties;
Freemen, forever we with free men ride
Whenever, by God in Heaven,
They gather to make odds even!
Our souls with them they shall not fail that tide.

Now, lift me; I would see my forest walls
Badged with our colors, yea, till Time be done.
Where this last arrow falls
Sod me with turf the stag treads lightly on.
Go soft then, saying naught; but, hark ye! kneel
When the evil hour would awe,—
Kneel and bend bow and draw
And loose your shafts in a whistling sleet of steel!

Note on Children's Books

By CHARLES J. FINGER

CAPABLE booksellers who combine sensitiveness with the stern, orderly, business-like temperament tell me that there is, about this time of the year, an immense amount of poor stuff in the juvenile field of literature coming from publishers, so much indeed that things have an appearance of a triumph of ineptitude over ability. I, myself, in the various offices of libraries and such-like clearing houses have seen books for the young which bring forth nothing from the librarians but looks of devastating scorn. Also, any intelligent reader of mature age will mourn because disaster has overtaken many excellent periodicals which, designed for the entertainment of the young, flourished for many years but have gone down in disaster or sunk into desuetude, recently. Still, there is no reason to erect an altar to grief. There are as many good books being written for juveniles as ever there were. The number of readers has increased in the past two decades. But there are writers and publishers who have mistaken notions regarding the field they wish to exploit, and there are parents and guardians who see as crookedly as those writers and publishers. Hence this.

Now my qualifications enabling me to write about that field are these. I have known the young of many peoples, Fuegian and Patagonian, Apache and Celt, Manx as well as those of forty and more of these states; and, as result of that knowledge, I hold that what is entertainment for one juvenile is entertainment for another. With intellectual enjoyment where the young are concerned, geographical lines have nothing at all to do, any more than geographical boundaries have to do, let us say, with the way in which a pup shows delight. The Alaskan huskie will wag its tail exactly as does an Airedale in Arkansas. Also there is this: Tales which I have heard told in many tongues I have turned into the Anglo-Saxon, and, these being again turned into still other tongues, as well as into Braille for the blind, seem, judging from letters I get, to give as much pleasure to the new readers as they did to the original listeners. For me that constitutes sufficient proof of a common interest. But I will go further. Time makes no difference in juvenile tastes. Verne and Marryatt and Lewis Carroll and Miss Alcott, Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver and the Arabian Nights are as welcome to the living age today as they were to my companions in the days when I was young and beautiful. The padding in which some of those I have named indulged is adroitly skipped by the present generation as it was by mine. Or I go further, undaunted, in proof of my contention. I remember the Fuegians, who, when I lived among them, were in a state of civilization somewhat akin to that of the neolithic savage. Yet, as I have said, the young Fuegian was so like the young Anglo-Saxon that had you turned specimens of both loose, in an hour there would have been mutual understanding. Furthermore, I point to the toys taken from the tomb of Tutankhamen, point also to those I saw the other day down at Mesa Verde which were popular among the cliff dwellers about the time of the Norman Conquest, then point to the toys to-day offered for sale on Fifth Avenue or in the Burlington Arcade, and, if you will consider them you must see that except for slight differences in manufacture they are much alike. So I infer that if we could step into times when ichthy-

This Week

Cover Design.

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Cover Poem: "I Give You."

By DAVID MCCORD.

The Gossip Shop.

By RACHEL FIELD.

Children's Books in Soviet Russia.

By HALLIE FLANAGAN.

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By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON.

A Bookseller Speaks.

By VERONICA S. HUTCHINSON.

The Readers' Guide Suggests.

By MAY LAMBERTON BECKER.

Next Week

The End of an Epoch?

By STUART CHASE.

osaurs sported in Jurassic seas, you would find the human young of that day of such sort that you could mingle briskly with them very pleasantly. Here I come to the important thing, the lesson that all who would write or print for children must learn. Touch them in time or touch them in place, you will find the young of the human race to be of quick apprehension, of lively interest, of quick sympathy; you will find them swift to detect the hollowness of those who talk up to, or down to them; you will find that they care nothing at all for such commercial prosperity as exists in their time or place, but they care very much indeed for real companionship and geniality; you will find them indignant at misrepresentation of the things they know, just as I saw some mountain children indignant in a merry way when a recent writer wrote this foolishness, "nothing is more dangerous than a thoroughly frightened sheep"; you will find that they avoid dreariness and sorrow and pontificality, that they admire heroes but not supermen; you will also find that they resent the preaching of goodness to them by their elders knowing such preaching to be hypocrisy and being well aware that the virtues so extolled are absent in the preachers. With such qualities and tastes and attributes, you may infer easily what would be agreeable to them in the way of intellectual amusement. It is hopeless to address those who cannot make proper inference.

* * *

The gist of the matter is that the young are, root and branch, conservatives who persist in the endurance of things. They will have the world as it always was. That is not to say they refuse new things. Indeed they welcome them gladly, but the new, in their world, is not to push aside the old. They have in them the spirit of true Confucianism in that they cherish the best that has been. But, I repeat, the new is not to displace the old. If you doubt the truth of this, then try an experiment. Engage some child that has heard Mother Goose fifty times and is ready for it again. Then try the exciting rhyme of Miss Muffett, substituting for "curds and whey" the words "eating an ice-cream cone," although mind you, the child may not have the slightest idea of what curds and whey are, while ice cream may be an everyday item. You will find that you are not regarded as wise. Indeed, with an intelligent child you will have some ado to remove intrusive anxieties lest you have laid rude hands on a sacred thing. Or, with older children, try the effect, when reading, of changing Alice's Mad Hatter's tea party into a chicken dinner, or a barbecue. Your fatuous serenity will be disturbed, I warn you. I repeat, with children you can bring in the new, but on no account shall you try to dislodge the old. I push that lesson further home by pointing out that any bright-minded child will show an interest in airplanes and automobiles, but not for all the automobiles made in a decade will Cinderella's coach be dispossessed of its place; nor shall all the men of Akron make a dirigible to take the place of the magic flying carpet, take thought as they may. So, bringing matters to the application, those in the work of producing books for the young who thought to change things, who talked of "keeping up with the procession," and of "changing tastes and changing ethics," have found to their cost that they were barking up the wrong tree. Indeed, so confident am I that conservatism is the thing, so certain that what has pleased will continue to please, that if I sought a new way to gainful pursuits I would take an old way, going forth on the highways to be envied and admired as a Punch and Judy showman. As the poetical nature is generally retrospective I would have the cream of adulthood as well as intelligent children in my audience.

It is my contention that certain magazines when in their prime, had, as managers and editors, those who understood this conservatism of the young, and that the prime of those magazines passed when there came an attempt to force a sort of modernism upon the readers. I refer particularly to the *Youth's Companion* and to the old *St. Nicholas*, and the names of these have as much right to appear in histories of American and English literature as the names of the *Tatler* or the *Spectator*, such was their excellence. And there is a case in point, an outstanding specimen of editorship of a juvenile periodical that seems to be going as strong now as in 1878, the year of its birth; going strong on both sides of the Atlantic as well as in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Africa. I refer to the fifty-two volumes of *Chatterbox*. As it was in the beginning so it is now; the very appearance is unchanged; the

same size and make-up, the very wood-cuts in the title page are familiar as the everlasting hills. But look through the stories and see the pictures to catch the drift of them. The latter are as straightforward as the work of Hogarth, no attempt to force the fantastic or the bizarre. And they illustrate well the stories of chivalry, of adventure, of school and home life done by hands that know the value of interest first and foremost. You look through the pages to be assured of the truth of what I have pointed out, that the young admit the new but refuse to have it displace the old. When bicycles became common, stories deal with and pictures show the machines, but there is no attempt to ram the bicycle down the throat of the readers as some editors, to-day, to the disgust of their readers, try to ram the airplane everywhere, in season and out of season. No. *Chatterbox* kept the bicycle in its place, gave some of it, but hung fast to things old and permanent. There were still tales of horses, and of ships, and of smugglers, and, curious enough, one bright fantastic story of fourth dimensional people breaking into this world of ours. But whatever the subject, always and always there is revelation of that which the young hold most dear, the splendor of courage and endurance, which, mark you, is a very different thing from mere mastery of things mechanical. Always too the tales and the columns of general information were done by hands that avoided, instinctively, the snobbery of conscious superiority. Always there is evident the knowledge that what is silly to adults must needs be silly to juveniles.

There are no bewildering attempts to drag young readers into the complications of life with a lot of pompous nonsense about attaining position and gathering money, except the last was gained by the hidden treasure route. There are no attempts to pump knowledge historical, geographical, and religious into the young in the guise of fiction—especially there is none of that harping upon historical heroes. Stories may be serious but they are never solemn. In short, the policy of *Chatterbox* is exactly the policy that shall inform some new juvenile periodical some day, and the time for such is ripe and ready. It is a policy somewhat like the policy of a first class executive in charge of a railroad station, or rather a grand terminal. It is a policy that will see patrons come and go with equanimity, not troubling because the crowd did depart but conscious that departure was inevitable. But, mark you, the management saw to it that the entertainment was all that entertainment should be for those passing through. Such an editor, or a manager to keep the parallel true, would not fall into the error of being torn with excitement because of so many departures to places unknown and unknowable; he would not try to detain his patrons; nor, and this is important, nor would he try to turn his depot into a movable mansion in any vain hope of competing with the trains. Yet exactly that attempt to be peripatetic is what many editors and many authors and many publishers have tried, to their grief. They have surrendered their strength in trying to keep up with the procession, but the procession is never ending. Standing still and establishing the right atmosphere they would have served a very definite purpose at a certain point of the procession's route. As for the atmosphere to be created, it must be one suitable to those of fastidious delicacy and self-respect. It must be one suitable to those of rich imagination, to those filled with admiration and enthusiasm, to those who see the world with wide-open eyes, and who see arrow straight. For laughing childhood is as it always was. Disenchantment belongs to a later age.

A Bouquet of Poetry

FIRESIDE POEMS. Selected by VERONICA S. HUTCHINSON. Illustrated by LOIS LENSKE. New York: Minton, Balch & Co. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH COATSWORTH

LAYING down the large green volume of "Fireside Poems," one sighs to think that it is finished. But Miss Hutchinson has shown her excellent taste even in the number of her selections. There has been just enough. One's mind is fragrant with the true bouquet of poetry, the charm and freshness and beauty of poem set against poem like meadow-flowers. And how easy it is for an unwise arrangement to fade even a good selection! But here the old mingles with the new and Blake and Herrick are set beside De la Mare and Colum and are as weighted with early dew. Spring rests on the book and on the imaginative and frolic-

some drawings by Lois Lenski that accompany nearly every poem and blossom in bright, pale colors in the five full-page illustrations.

Here one will find the classics of humorous verse, the romance of Tennyson, the quaint primness of Ann Taylor, and a line of lyrics beginning in the great days of Shakespeare. Few of the poems were written for children, but they are almost all such as children may love and continue to love for the rest of their lives, without having to discard them as they grow older as merely steps in the development of their appreciation. Perhaps nothing in the book has more magic than Humbert Wolfe's *Tulip*:

Clean as a lady,
cool as glass,
fresh without fragrance
the tulip was.
The craftsman who carved her
of metal prayed,
"Live, oh thou lovely!"
Half-metal she stayed.

Her Ladyship, the Cat

THE CAT WHO WENT TO HEAVEN. By ELIZABETH COATSWORTH. Pictures by LYND WARD. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by MARCIA DALPHIN

THE discriminating name of Elizabeth Coatsworth signed to a piece of writing brings always a premonitory thrill of pure delight. They know that they may confidently expect from her delicacy and sureness of touch combined with deep feeling, and an originality and freshness all too seldom found. She is, moreover, one of the rare persons who really understands—not cats, but—the Cat.

Miss Coatsworth has mastered the fact, oddly contradictory, that cats are not only all alike but all different, each one an individual yet possessing all the characteristics of the race. In "The Cat Who Went to Heaven" we have a demure, on-her-best-behavior creature, devout, devoted to her master, self-effacing yet tenacious of her rights. And, like all her tribe, a perfect actress with the artist's feeling for the right moment. To the cat lover it is such fine points as are brought out in the first appearance of the cat on the scene that show Miss Coatsworth to be one of the understanding.

She is a darling little thing, really, this Good Fortune, eldest daughter of the fisherman's chief cat, and from the first moment irresistible. We are not told with what wiles she works upon the feelings of the old Japanese housekeeper who has gone to market to buy food for her starving master, the artist, but we can imagine them as the little old woman stands bowing apologetically before him on her return. She makes one excuse after the other for not opening that covered basket toward which he casts hungry looks. First it is loneliness she pleads, then rats in the house. Dreadful suspicion comes over the artist, he guesses what has happened and is sunk in despair. But he is curious, too. "Let us see the creature," he says.

So the old woman put down the basket and opened the lid. Nothing happened for a moment. Then a round pretty white head came slowly above the bamboo, and two big yellow eyes looked about the room, and a little white paw appeared on the rim. Suddenly, without moving the basket at all, a little white cat jumped out on the mats and stood there as a person might stand who hardly knew if she were welcome.

"Nothing happened for a moment." That is the phrase that betrays the master hand. Cats, like the finest actresses, know the value of a pause and its dramatic possibilities.

The purposes of the story require, one concedes, that Good Fortune die, but even though a miracle is worked to reward her it is scarcely endurable. One would wish her to go on walking forever through these pages, cautiously putting one little white paw before the other as, not yet sure of her welcome, she enters a room; keeping her eyes politely in another direction as the soup is brought in; breaking into rapid sneezes to cover up her giggles at things that amuse small cats; pulling at her master's sleeve with her little paw, and looking up reproachfully into his face because with all his drawing of animals he does not draw a cat.

This is most decidedly a book for grown-ups to enjoy with children and read aloud to them. And it should be said that the drawings of animals that Lynd Ward has done for the volume really illustrate the story in the full meaning of the word.