

Songs for Youngsters

PILLOCK HILL. Verses by HERBERT ASQUITH, set to music by ALEC ROWLEY. Illustrated by A. H. WATSON. New York: The Oxford University Press. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by DEEMS TAYLOR

TO the eye, certainly, this book of songs for children leaves nothing to be desired. It was printed in England, which means that the paper stock, ink, and typography are enviably above the average American standard. It is excellently bound in paper boards, with a charming cover design. A. H. Watson's colored frontispiece, illustrations, and decorations have humor and grace of line, and while suggestive of Arthur Rackham, can stand on their own merits.

Mr. Asquith's verses arouse somewhat less unbounded enthusiasm. It is hard to say exactly what is wrong with them. All of them are at least competent. They scan, and they rhyme, and they display a degree of imagination. But they rather lack gusto; their play of fancy is not so much delicate as undernourished.

It is less difficult to say what is wrong with Mr. Rowley's music. He has simply failed to write music for children to sing; has, apparently, never heard a child sing, or tried to teach one to sing.

Children's singing voices are, contrary to the accepted tradition, placed rather low. The "shrill treble piping" beloved of the chroniclers of child life is merely a description (and an accurate criticism) of the agonized efforts of the average child to sing music intended for adult throats. Moreover, as primitive beings, born innocent of the tempered scale, children are likely to have trouble in singing in tune, and are really comfortable only when singing the simpler intervals. As primitive beings again, while they can create the most complicated rhythms impromptu, they can memorize and reproduce only simple ones.

Mr. Rowley's melodies are written for an adult mezzo-soprano voice (that is, nearly a third too high for a child), they bristle with difficult intervals (or with simple intervals over sophisticated chromatic accompaniments, which amounts to the same thing), and indulge in rhythmic complications, such as alternations of duple and triple time, which, however fascinating they may be to invent, are, take it from an exhausted parent, virtually impossible to impart.

It may be that one's assumption of Mr. Rowley's intentions is inaccurate; that he intended these as songs to be sung to, rather than by, children. Even so, they are not successful. They are amiable, well-made little tunes, without a trace of musical vulgarity; but only an adult, I am afraid, would be satisfied with their utter lack of pungency and spontaneity.

The Nucleus of a Library

HOUSEHOLD STORIES FROM THE BROTHERS GRIMM. Illustrated by WALTER CRANE. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1930. \$1.

JOHNNY APPLESEED. By VACHEL LINDSAY. Illustrated by GEORGE RICHARDS. The same.

THE ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO. By C. COLLodi. Illustrated by ATTILIO. The same.

THE PRINCESS AND CURDIE. By GEORGE MACDONALD. Illustrated by Dorothy P. Lathrop. The same.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

THESE are four of the forty volumes which make up the roll of the Macmillan Children's Classics, and are a representative group in that they illustrate the variety, the quality, and the range of the series. Into this library are gathered some of the tales that have been favorites for generations together with others which though of later origin bid fair to hold place in the affections of children for many a year to come. They have been furnished in most instances with new illustrations, though we rejoice to see that in the case of "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking Glass" no contemporary artist has displaced the beloved Tenniel. The books were originally put out at a higher price than the modest dollar apiece which they now cost. The child who can wheedle a parent or relative into presenting him with two or three will doubtless not desist from cajolery until he has built himself a library of forty.

Illogic and the Child



RICHARD HUGHES.

A CERTAIN author took a parcel of children's stories to his publisher. The latter read them, and gave his verdict: "There seems to me only one thing wrong with these children's stories of yours," he said: "Namely, that they are written for children."

The author kept his face a polite, enquiring blank. "We can't publish them. The only children's stories that we or anybody else can publish are those written for adults. I should have thought you would have realized that for yourself."

"I had realized," said the author, "that the majority of so-called stories for children were plainly aimed far more at the parent: but in my innocence I had considered this a defect that I hoped to remedy."

"And who do you think buys children's books?" continued the exasperated publisher: "Do you think the children read the reviews? Do you think the children go to the store and browse about till they find something which takes their fancy? No, a book for children must appeal to adults, first, last, and all the time."

With which, the unfortunate author was put out on his ear.

This little tale is not wholly imaginary: the state of affairs which it depicts is not imaginary at all. That it is the parents' approval which constitutes financial success or failure, nobody is likely to question. And one has only to look at a shelfful of examples to convince oneself that the average children's book is written as much, if not more, for the parents.

But it is much too early in my argument, yet, to say offhand that these hermaphrodites are to be condemned. After all, Shakespeare, that greatest exponent of the club-sandwich in literature, wrote so as to please both the groundlings and the intellectuals. Whoever bit found something to his taste. So why should not an author be able in the same work, sandwich-wise, to please both child and parent? Theoretically it should be possible. And there are in existence a few classics, such as "Alice in Wonderland," which prove that it is possible, even in practice.

But they are very, very few. It is their scarcity which is the most eloquent witness to the almost unparalleled difficulty of the task.

This difficulty, to my mind, springs from a fundamental difference of kind between writing for children, and writing for adults: a difference far greater than that between writing for the groundlings and writing for the intellectuals: a difference so wide that it can never be bridged—one can only build on both sides of the gap at once, so that at least to the distant or casual observer the edifice shall appear to be a single, undivided whole.

For the moment let us take it for granted that we know what we mean by writing for adults, and that we are in happy agreement on all points concerning it. We can then concern ourselves entirely with that

more alien architecture on the far side of the gap, with writing for children only.

But allow me a parenthesis first. On almost any subject one is prone to generalize too readily and too casually: but one is especially ready to say children this, and children that, as if "children" was a definite natural term like manganese dioxide. One forgets, in the excitement of argument, if not the truism itself, at least the truth of the truism that they are a parcel of individuals as unlike one another as adults. They may be as unlike as Julius Caesar and Bottom the Weaver. It is highly dangerous to use the phenomena of a single example as the basis of a general law. It is as rash to affirm that, because one child (your own, perhaps,) likes this or that, "children" do, as to affirm that because your iceman reads the tabloids so do all Democrats.

But the pitfalls of generalization are even more cunningly hidden than that. The term "childhood" itself we use with an unholy looseness, to cover every age from babyhood to full adolescence, as if we supposed that every human life was neatly divided into two halves. Whereas it would be far truer to represent childhood itself as a series of successive periods so dissimilar that the changes from one to another are at least as drastic as those of adolescence (which is only the last of them): periods which have little in common except their unfamiliarity to the adult, their uniform opacity to the mature eye.

So, if I appear to make any definite statement about "children," I make it, be it understood, with the utmost diffidence. So far from claiming it to be true of all children, I hardly even claim it to be true of most children—I only suspect it to be. Further, by "childhood" I mean a fairly limited stage, which it is difficult to confine to any particular age but which is generally at its most characteristic between five and eight.

At any rate, this is the age to which the majority of books for children purport to be addressed.

Now, the strange things about this stage of mental development—strange to the adult human eye, at least, though perhaps not so strange to the eye of God—is its very democratic attitude towards Reason.

We all know, of course, that the logical system is only one of a great many possible systems of thought-association. But the Aristotelian hegemony of the last twenty-five hundred years has taught us to suppress and vilify all others, to deny them any validity. It is only with the advent of psycho-analysis that they have at last come in for serious consideration. But even psycho-analysis, though it may use illogical thought for its material, draws its conclusions from that material in a logical manner—as any science, in the present state of the meaning of the word science, is bound to do. Psycho-analysis, though recognizing for the first time their empirical importance, and the enormous extent of the dissident thinking which they govern, has done nothing yet to question the ultimate sovereignty of logic. It still retains its absolute validity, it still remains the system to which all other systems must finally be referred.

The new physics tells us that all possible "frames of space," though contradictory, are equally valid—that any search for a frame of ultimate, sovereign validity is not only impossible but also downright nonsense. The substitution of "systems of thought-association" for "frames of space" in this statement will give us, I think, a picture not too far-fetched to be of value in understanding one at least of the essential differences between the childish and the adult mind. For the latter, while recognizing the existence of other systems, looks upon one of them—logic—as having an especial, sovereign validity. But to the child, reason has no such peculiar validity, is hedged by no divinity. At most it is *primus inter pares*: and frequently its position is a humbler one even than that.

Now art is (to use a mathematical idiom) a function of mentality. It is perfectly true that a piece of literature even for adults which employed no system of thought-connection in its texture other than the purely logical would hardly deserve the name of literature at all. But it is equally true (except in the case of pure ecstatic poetry) that it is bound to take logic for the backbone, to relate all other systems to it. Especially is this true in the case of fiction: the skeleton, the main progression must be acceptable to reason (which, of course, is not at all the same thing

by Richard Hughes

as saying it must necessarily be probable in nature) whatever the superstructure. But in writing for children, this is not necessary—not even desirable!

What logical connection of thought enters into a story for children enters there only on equal terms. It certainly has no patent to give itself airs.

WHAT books did you like as a child? How difficult it is to remember . . . at least, it is difficult to remember with absolute honesty. But try to compile a list: and then compare it with what your friends liked in their time—friends of your own age, friends of an older generation, and also those children that you are in contact with now.

There will be a few classics that will crop up in almost every list, perhaps: but hardly any that you will not find someone anxious to blackball, sooner or later—why, there are even plenty of children, otherwise normal little protanthropies, who detest "Alice in Wonderland." Probably almost the only noticeable feature of any such collection of lists will be their unlimited variety. Dickens, mythology, Scott, popular science, purple passion, Hans Andersen satire, nature study, adventure, Kipling, and sheer unadulterated uplift—all may be expected to find their places. And poetry. I know one little girl who detested reading of every kind until one day she happened to overhear a grown-up reading aloud a poem of Edith Sitwell's. "Read that again!" she demanded, for the first time in her life: and presently commandeered the book by force.

In short, such lists will be almost as varied as would be similar lists of the likes of adults. To consider them all would require the windy length of an encyclopedia, rather than the constriction of a periodical-article. And so, if I confine myself to the class which seems to me in some ways the most characteristic—namely, illogical fiction—it is not through bigotry, Gentle Reader.

It may be objected that if the mind of the adult is essentially logical, how can it possibly produce fiction that is truly illogical: fiction for children can only be written by children: and indeed, there is something in the objection. In a normal state it is, if not impossible, at least very difficult. And yet we all of us compose illogical fiction, reams of it, in our sleep. But that we do for our own purposes, not to order. The insistent "Tell us a story!" has proved the knell of many an otherwise fertile imagination. The power may be there, but it is dormant: it lacks the impulse.

But it is possible. Especially if one lives for a time in close companionship with children towards whom one is in no kind of a position of responsibility, even the bigoted adult mind slips surprisingly quickly into habits of purely associative thinking. Then, all that one needs to be able to tell stories as readily as dreaming is a slight initial impulse. My own recipe for that initial impulse is a simple one, but I have never known it to fail—and I suppose I must have told upwards of a thousand such stories, at one time or another. Ask each child in your audience for one, or perhaps two, ingredients for the story. One chooses an elephant, let us say, and one an aeroplane and one a lobster-trap and one a man with a luminous green face and one a prime minister. Immediately the imagination is off, starting from one, spinning its web to the next, and so on to the next and back again—one can hardly tell it fast enough. Of course, it is rather like tight-rope walking: one may easily be upset *en route*. For me, the presence of an adult in my audience is often enough to set me floundering hopelessly. And as might be expected, one seldom remembers afterwards much of what one has said. It passes, like the waves of the sea that leave no mark on the wind which produced them.

Yet even the waves of the sea mark the shore: and what the teller forgets the audience often remember with an almost verbal fidelity. I cannot "write" children's stories, I can only tell them in the way I have described. Such stories for children as I have published (mostly in English magazines) have been retold to me, sometimes as late as six months afterwards, by the children to whom they were told, and so taken down. Sometimes, when they were retold to me in this way, I recalled them: at other times they were as strange as if I had never heard them before. But I generally found, where it was possible to check up by having them told to me by two of the audience separately, that the form in

which they came back to me must have been almost word for word the form in which they were first told.

I hasten to add that I do not necessarily claim any great merit for these stories of mine, other than what was inherent in their nature. Many of them were undoubtedly, even as illogic, sheer piffle, which might hold the audience at the time but were not remembered by them afterwards and did not deserve to be. At the same time, it would be highly interesting to know how the great masterpieces of illogical fiction came to be written. How came the story of the "Three Bears," which is imbedded in the amiable but surely not immortal bulk of "The Doctor," somewhat as the story of "Cupid and Psyche" is embedded in "The Golden Asse," into the mind of Laureate Southey? How did the White Rabbit first come to hurry across the imagination of that pains-taking mathematician, the Rev. C. L. Dodgson? Had "Alice" herself perhaps some part in its genesis? Or must one look for it entirely in the imagery of the author's own sub-conscious?

There is another problem too, in connection with "Alice," that is no less interesting, and more possible of investigation. How comes it that of all the works of illogical fiction this particular one should receive the almost universal approbation of adults? It is easy to discount it, of course, by pointing to the hidden satire, the parodies of well-known poems, and so on: in short, to regard it as a supreme example of the sandwich. But there is more in it than that. "Alice" seems actually to appeal to adults *in the same way* that it appeals to children. There is a power, a vividness in its imagery that is not shared by its weaker brethren: so powerful, that it can upset for a time the very throne of logic itself: can turn the mind of an adult for the time being into the mind of a child. Just in what this superior force lies it is hard to say: but that it works in this way, there can be little doubt.

I was recently at the sick bed of a friend, a man in his forties, an eminent and enthusiastic architect who practically never read a book and certainly had no unusual liking for children. He was very ill, and most of the time delirious. In his delirium he was pestered by a horde of clients, demanding plaques, belvederes, heating-plants—but chiefly plaques. We tried every obvious means of routing them: notices

NO PLAQUES REQUIRED

and so on, were posted all over the room. For a time they worked: but the moment he took his eyes off them, back came the insistent horde. Then someone thought of reading him "Alice" and we read it for hours and hours. It worked. The imagery was so powerful, that although coming from without it was able to banish the imagery of his own delirium.

It is a far cry from a work like this, which can capture the adult by the sheer strength of its childishness to the sandwich proper, to the story which is continually gesticulating to the parent behind the child's back. I repeat that I mean no disrespect to these latter: a typical example of which is the "Christopher Robin" series, a more delicate one the lovely stories of Margery Williams Bianco. It is a churlish criticism, that the story pleases too many. But all the same I cannot help wishing that there were a larger body of literature for children only—the reservation being not due to any lack of merit, but only to its specialization.

Richard Hughes, author of the foregoing article, is a Welsh poet and novelist. His "The Innocent Voyage," a novel in which the life of young people is presented with much vivacity and skill, won much favor and praise upon its appearance last year. It was published in England under the title "High wind in Jamaica," and reissued in America this year with the same title. The portrait of Mr. Hughes which heads his article is by Pamela Bianco, who a few seasons ago was the sensation of a London writer as a child prodigy.



Illustration from Grimm's Tales (Macmillan).

And Still They Dig

DOUBLOONS: A story of Buried Treasure. By CHARLES B. DRISCOLL. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1930. \$5.

Reviewed by ALFRED F. LOOMIS

WHAT a difference a certain verb makes. Read this and yawn:

Some of the jugs and bowls of glazed pottery have silver inlaid into the designs in lumps as big as the end of a man's thumb. There are six or eight gold wine jugs, many gold and silver drinking cups, somewhat resembling loving cups, and forty-five silver spoons.

Sounds like a prosaic museum catalogue.

And then read this, also from Mr. Driscoll's fascinating volume:

A candlestick of curious design and ingenious workmanship was found in the tunnel leading to the bishop's house. . . . A handsomely wrought gold pitcher, with a gold bowl to match, were found near the skeletons.

See those italics and stop yawning! We're off for Spanish gold.

It is a beauty of this book of buried treasure that the author does not hurl this breath-taking information at you in the first chapter. You begin with the amazing tale of the treasure of Oak Island and learn that over a period of a century and a quarter shovels, drills, and good hard cash have been sunk in a pit in which almost nothing has been found. You chafe and fret. Why did the early diggers go at the treasure so haphazardly as to let in the sea and ruin the chances of the later, more scientific excavators?

You turn on to the treasure of Tobermory Bay and learn that millions in gold lie in a Scottish harbor beneath the rotted ribs of a Spanish galleon—that earls have fought over this treasure and found a few paltry doubloons and lost their heads, and that the millions still lie there in no more than sixty feet of water. And your own gold fever rises to the steaming point so that you ask, "But hasn't anybody found any treasure anywhere? Give me an instance of buried treasure actually recovered before I blow up."

So you read on, more and more feverish and frustrated, and at length, artistically tucked away in the middle of the book, you learn about Lt. George Williams and his radio gold locating machine. There is nothing haphazard about Lieutenant Williams. He has a machine—the only one of its kind, and no helpers wanted—and he finds gold. He finds it in old Panama City, digging it up from the tunnels in which it was hidden from the pirate Harry Morgan, and he finds it on the Cruces Trail, and in prehistoric caves in the state of Cocle and in the Chiriqui country. He has a concession from the Panama government, and though he was poor when he began digging for treasure in 1926 he is rich now—a thoroughly satisfactory figure to read about.

The rest of the book will be colored by your knowledge of this successful treasure retriever. The loot of the fabulously wealthy city of Lima and its disposal on Cocos Island—lives and fortunes have been spent in vain search for it. But you feel that when Lieutenant Williams has dug up the solid gold statue of the Virgin Mary and a few other unclaimed valuables mentioned in Panamanian history he will go to Cocos Island and find the loot of Lima. And the \$150,000,000 cargo of gold and silver of the Spanish plate fleet sunk by the English in Vigo Bay in 1703 need no longer baffle treasure seekers. The owner of the one infallible machine will go there and find the precious metal when he has time or needs the money—and we'll read all about it in the news.

Although this record of lost treasure is not written particularly for children (the bloody pirates who buried it being handed you without sugar coating) I doubt if any child of reading years could set it down after turning the third page. And I don't see, for that matter, how any person of maturity could fail to find out all that the author has to tell about treasure trove. He gives truth where he has found it, admits the presence of romance where truth has been thinned by too frequent repetition, and writes often with his tongue in his cheek. Having chosen a glamorous subject, his pen gives it a further glamor which is irresistible.

Plans for the erection of a memorial to Francis Thompson are being discussed by the Ashton Town Council. The poet lived with his father, Dr. Thompson, for some years, and it is suggested that the memorial should take the form of a tablet in the wall of the house.