

The Gossip Shop

By RACHEL FIELD

ALTHOUGH a winter coat still feels very comfortable to the back, Spring arrived officially for us two weeks ago. We always date this event not by an early robin or swelling lilac buds, but by the appearance of the first flower cart man on Third Avenue and East Tenth Street. We doubt if even Mr. Wordsworth's daffodils could have been more exciting to see than the tulips, hyacinths, and scarlet geraniums in these open wagons. But we could not indulge ourselves in any, being about to set off for a short trip to New England.

First there was New Bedford, which we hadn't seen for seven long years. We were overjoyed to find that Johnny-Cake Hill and the Whaling Museum and neighboring antique shops were all there as we remembered them. But the Whaler Bookshop was new to us, it having been established some three or four years ago by Miss Helen Ellis and Miss Imogene Weeks. Their interest in New England coast traditions and their discriminating taste have made it a real center for both summer and winter residents in that part of the world, and we enjoyed our stay with them and Patsy, the bookshop wire-haired fox terrier.

After that came Boston and the Bookshop for Boys and Girls to which these feet would, we believe, march of themselves should we be set down blindfold in that town. Although it was too early for green grass and swan boats to be out in the Public Gardens, and although the rain came down as it only can in seaport cities, this gave us all the more time for talks with Bertha Mahony and the Whitney sisters, who are all three not only responsible for the charm of the shop itself, but for the lately issued volume with the Bookshop imprint, "Contemporary Illustrators of Children's Books." This appeared soon after Christmas in a large and fine format and has been hailed by libraries and those seriously interested in the juvenile book field ever since. It is the first time that an entire book has been devoted to those who have been, and are, responsible for the decoration of children's books. There are chapters on such famous artists as Thomas Bewick and his woodcuts, by Wilbur Macey Stone, the authority on early juveniles; Cruikshank, Caldicott, Crane, and Greenaway, by Miss Jacqueline Overton of the Bacon Memorial Library on Long Island; and Wyeth, Pyle, and the Brandywine School by Dudley Lunt. Like its forerunner, "Realms of Gold," it is a pioneer volume and some of the most interesting bits are the brief accounts of themselves and their work sent in by contemporary illustrators.

The May number of *St. Nicholas* magazine will be the first to appear under the editorship of May Lamberton Becker, and after a talk with her some weeks ago we have come to the conclusion that the magazine ought to be twice its size to take in all the ideas she has for bringing it back to its old prestige as the one piece of reading matter no child could afford to be without. Among other innovations Mrs. Becker plans to revive stories, verses, and articles appealing to the younger child. This seems to us an excellent plan since the average boy or girl of twelve is beginning to turn to adult magazines and fiction, and while the child of five to ten has a galaxy of good books, there has been no first-rate periodical of late years.

And speaking of the younger group of readers, three brand new Spring picture books are already lying on our desk. Of these, "Blackface," text by Thelma Harrington Bell and pictures by Corydon Bell, published by Doubleday, Doran at one-fifty, takes first place. It will be hard indeed to find a more pictorially satisfying book. The story is charming in its gay simplicity, with its French scenes of the day before yesterday period. Corydon Bell has quite surpassed himself in his colorful and dramatic picturings of the adventures of the curious blackfaced lamb. Nothing would induce us to part with our own copy.

"Andy and Polly," with text and pictures by Rhea Wells, from the same firm, was rather disappointing to us. The color seemed far more crude and undistinguished than in Mr. Wells's earlier books. "The Picture Book of Robinson Crusoe" comes from the Macmillan Company. The pictures are by E. A. Verpillieux, and the simplified rendering of the famous story is by Elizabeth Moore. To our way of thinking it is wiser to wait till young readers are of an age to read the tale in its original form; still, for what was intended, the book is excellent in recapturing the spirit both in the colored illustrations and in Mrs. Moore's clear,



Conducted by MARION PONSONBY

well-written version. The price is two-fifty.

Some months back we received from the Woman's Press a group of children's verse by Katharine Ellis Barrett. The character of a little boy figures in most of them, and there is a simple naturalness that is appealing throughout. "Red Shoes" is the title, and the pictures are by the tallest of the three Fuller sisters who so enchanted American audiences ten or twelve years ago by their singing of old ballads.

"The Green Door," by Eliza Orne White, arrived just too late for us to mention in our earlier notes. We have been a firm admirer of Miss White ever since we received a copy of "When Molly Was Six" on our own sixth birthday. These directly told, charming stories of children, past and present, are as refreshing to find as a little bunch of arbutus in some gorgeously cluttered florist's window. We were overjoyed to find Lisl Hummel had once more made the silhouette pictures, for no fingers are quite so deft with black paper and scissors to our way of thinking.

May Massee, of Junior Books, sailed for Europe a fortnight or so ago. She will celebrate her first May birthday in far parts, along with the Petershams, Maud and Mishka, who are responsible for some of her most riotously colored and successful picture books. Of course we are envious. Who wouldn't be?

And now we come to Flush of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," who has nothing whatsoever to do with children's books, but who deserves more than a whole paragraph to himself. In case there are those unfortunate enough not to have seen him going through his part as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's pet spaniel in the play now at the Empire Theatre, we would say that his performance leaves nothing to be desired, and he has practically owned the Empire since his debut last February. Criticism there has been, and we heard it loudly spoken behind our seat the other night, that he is too docile and easily handled. It has even been hinted—with indignant denials by his mistress, Miss Katharine Cornell—that he has been drugged nightly. But anyone who heard him whine gently during the reading of the passage from "Sordello" would know that there was plenty of life under his shining coat. As an answer to such critics we quote from an old child's book upon animals. It is called "Harrison's Natural History of the most remarkable beasts" and is adorned with quaint cuts in the manner of Mr. Thomas Bewick.

"The Spaniel," it explains,

is somewhat similar in make to the setter, but much smaller. . . . They are of various colors, but mostly spotted, with long curled hair on the ears, and are deemed the most handsome, the most affectionate, and submissive of the canine race.

But we must cease lest our own Scottie grow jealous.

Reviews

THE STORY OF SIEGFRIED. Arranged by ANGELA DILLER. New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith. 1931.

Reviewed by ERNEST SCHELLING

ADMIRABLE in its directness, simplicity, and charm is Miss Diller's "Story of Siegfried." Only a past master of child psychology could have devised this most subtle, complete, and painless initiation into the intricacies of the story of Wagner's Siegfried.

The themes, their significance, and relation to the story are so clearly set forth in such admirably concise graphic form that no child can fail to grasp them.

And I am sure many an adult will surreptitiously have a copy of this book on hand in order not to be shamefaced by his children.

Let us hope that Miss Diller will continue and give us this first aid for all the descendants of Wagner's genealogical operatic tree. This for the enlightenment of all those who are baffled and a little frightened by the dark mysteries of the operatic form in general, and Wagner in particular.

TINKA, MINKA, AND LINKA. Text by MAY MCNEER. Illustrations by CHARLOTTE LEDERER. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1931. \$1.75.

Reviewed by LOIS LENSKE

TINKA, Minka, and Linka were the daughters of Auntie and Uncle Woodcarver, and they lived in a little house in the country, in Hungary. One day, Katoka, a little girl from the city of Budapest, just their own age, came to pay them a visit. With eight stiff petticoats, a tight velvet bodice, a little silk apron, and her hair in a long braid straight out from the top of her head, she soon felt very much at home with her new friends.

Then began days of delight for the four little girls, with dancing and singing and processions and candles alight. The Easter festivities were at hand with church bells ringing and flowers to carry and songs to sing. On Easter Monday morning there was a wonderful surprise for Katoka from her three little friends—a large basket of eggs in gaily painted designs and colors, beside her bed. The day after, they all rode to the Fair in a rumbling cart and bought toys and sweets and gingerbread hearts.

This is a gay picture book, as gay as the gayest of Easter eggs, a perfect Easter gift (or birthday, or Christmas) which the child will love. Every turn of the page brings a picture, each a sparkling design in blue and green and pink and yellow. The absence of black throughout (the text is printed in blue) seems to make the pages unusually festive. Truly Hungarian in spirit, both in the text and the illustrations, the book is charming. Mrs. Lederer's drawings are beautifully composed in a simple, refreshing, unhackneyed manner. There is not a trite or stereotyped line on any page. Instead, a beautiful naïveté and childlike feeling pervade the drawing. Hungarian ornament is always pleasing, but never more so than when interpreted without the aid of too much facility and sophistication.

As a piece of bookmaking, "Tinka, Minka, and Linka" is all that could be desired. Its gay Easter egg jacket, yellow binding with blue letters, and brilliant endpaper, form an attractive setting for the brilliant pages within.

These simple scenes of Hungarian child life are presented with genuine beauty. It is the kind of book which some of us who are not children will take delight in adding to our shelves. Fortunate the child who loves and cherishes it for his own.

A BOY SCOUT WITH BYRD. By PAUL SIPLE. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1931. \$1.75.

Reviewed by MORRIS LONGSTRETH

WHEN Commander Byrd, adding imagination to his belief in the value of Boy Scout training, announced that he would take a Scout with him to Antarctica, he set nearly a million hearts to thumping. Here was a colossal opportunity; who would secure it? Here was the equivalent of setting forth with Columbus, in the year of supposedly prosaic grace 1928, cost-free, in company with a boatload of scientist-adventurers—if you were the boy in a million.

The requirements for such a perilous and exacting enterprise were rigorous. After the first flush of the announcement, just to read the eleven qualifications must have given the expectant Scouts a chill. The weeding out went on until seventeen candidates with impressive records remained. The seventeen were boiled down to six. The six, invited to New York, underwent a week of vivisection by interview and public dining and mutual inspection. By every test Paul Siple, of Erie, Pennsylvania, won. He went. He measured up to the honor of it, not to mention the hardships, and he returned to become the author of an extremely interesting book.

In this book we get a fresh point of view. Siple, having had no experience with either Pole, records things which escape older men, and if his perspective is smaller, it is more human.

We sympathize with pups and penguins. We hear a little—and would like to hear so much more—of the intimate life in Little America. We enjoy the entire sequence of

sensations from farewell to New York to welcome home. The chapter on erecting Little America, and dog-driving, on the winter night and the feelings of those left behind on the day of Byrd's great flight, are vivid and without one word inserted for mere effect. We, as a reviewer, have sadly lost our taste for blubber and distressing distances, but this book is different; it is Siple talking of everyday matters in Ultima Thule.

Every Scout troop should have this book to see what one of them has done; and every school should chain a copy to the desk in the English department to show—as in the admirable chapters on "Seals" and "Penguins"—what an observant, thoughtful, self-effacing boy can do, probably without much forethought, in the way of natural, picture-making prose.

PLAYING THEATRE. Six Plays for Children. By CLARE TREE MAJOR. Introduction by MARGARET ANGLIN. Illustrations by GRACE ALLEN. New York: Oxford University Press. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JANE DRANSFIELD

IN the Square Marigny on the Champs-Élysées under a cluster of chestnut trees whose foliage is so thick as to be impervious to rain, is the Théâtre du Vrai Guignolet, which for over a century has been run by the Guentleus. And now as I read Mrs. Major's "Playing Theatre" my mind runs back to a rainy Paris afternoon when, caught in a sudden downpour, I dashed for refuge under the dense Marigny trees, and there discovered for myself this, "le plus ancien Guignol—organization du Fêtes Enfantines." For Mrs. Major understands as have the immortal Guentleus that the royal road in the theatre to the child's heart is through gaiety of spirit and magic of illusion.

Eight years ago Mrs. Major began producing plays for children in New York, and such marked success has attended her work that she now stands as a widely recognized leader in this field. For the past four years her "Children's Theatre" has gone traveling, as once did the famous Portmanteau Theatre of Stuart Walker, with scenery consisting of folded, painted screens, and an adult professional company. These six plays which she has written for her repertory are not, therefore, so much intended for children to act, as to be acted by professionals, or well trained amateurs for the entertainment of children. Entertainment is not, however, their sole aim. As Mrs. Major says:

The most important factor in the value of plays for children lies, in my mind, not in the amusement they afford—though to the children themselves this must be paramount—but in the educational uses made of the complete receptivity which children bring to this form of recreation. . . . It is this point of view which is responsible for my choice of plays of six different nations each year in my traveling theatre, and which demands that these plays shall, as faithfully as possible, reflect the customs and ideas prevalent in such countries.

In this volume, then, "Cinderella," representing France, reminds us that Madame D'Aulnoy wrote her version of this far eastern tale some two hundred years ago. From Arabia comes "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp"; a Spanish atmosphere is given to "The Prince's Secret," a mystery play; Egypt is represented by "A Maid of the Nile," Japan by "Michio," and England by a version of the Robin Hood legend. While in general it may be said of these plays that they evince excellent theatrical invention rather than dramatic, or poetic, reality, children will love them for their romance, their gay costumes, and for their fun. They have refinement of feeling, and as Mrs. Major intends, they focus, though not too obviously, on some virtue, as courage, kindness, or generosity. Careful attention has been given the scenic and costume effects that they may be beautiful and accurate. An addenda carries explicit directions for setting the stage, for lighting, and for making the costumes. To schools and little theatres who wish to add to their knowledge of how to produce plays for children with finesse and charm "Playing Theatre" should prove of inestimable value—indeed, an inspiration.

GAO OF THE IVORY COAST. By KATIE SEABROOK. New York: Coward-McCann. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by BEVERLEY BENSON

MRS. SEABROOK'S little book is a well-told tale for children and gives a good picture of the life and folklore of the Ivory Coast. I am afraid that the vocabulary and style are somewhat beyond the age for which the narrative is obviously written. Many children, however, will enjoy having it read aloud.

Books of the Spring

By AMY LOVEMAN

IT'S all very well for the poet to sing of "the sweet serenity of books," but what of the serenity of the poor scribe who, confronted by the Spring outpouring of them, must report upon the new volumes? Lost, lost in despair that "there are men that will make you books, and turn them loose into the world." And still so in a season when they are less numerous than in other recent Springtimes as they are less numerous in this April of 1931 than they have been for some years past. The book trade, as a matter of fact, like the rest of the industrial world is still in the trough of depression, and reflects the general slackness in a caution and precaution that have their visible manifestation in a decreased number of publications. This might be to the great benefit of the reading world were it not for the fact that there is evident a tendency to publish what holds the seeds of best sellerdom rather than what is of more sterling merit, and to pass up more solid studies for what promises interest to a curious rather than a discriminating public. Certain it is that the current season on the whole shows little of high distinction, but rather a good run-of-the-mill product, a staple designed to find a market even in a year when purse strings are tightly drawn.

One of the striking features of the present publishing season is the concentration of interest upon Russia and things Russian, an interest that extends alike to the physical achievements of the Soviet régime, its plans for the future, and the literature which reflects them. The American reader who would gain insight into the Five Year Plan which so constantly intrudes on journalistic writing could do no better than to secure, when it comes out at the beginning of May, a little book by M. Ilin, which Houghton Mifflin is to publish, entitled "New Russia's Primer." This small volume, to be sent out by the Book-of-the-Month Club in conjunction with Denis Mackail's pleasant novel of quiet English life, "The Square Circle" (Houghton Mifflin), is designed not for foreign consumption but for the schoolboys and schoolgirls of Russia. It is frankly propagandist in intention, lavishly illustrated, and the most clever presentation of a vast national program in text-book form that it has been our fortune to see. Reading it, one understands something of the manner in which Russia has instilled into the youth of a nation technically at peace a wartime psychology that questions nothing which the state demands for its own advancement.

With it, and further to supplement his knowledge of the Soviet state and its makers and leaders, the searcher for information can turn to Calvin B. Hoover's "The Economic Life of Soviet Russia" (Macmillan), "These Russians" (Scribners), by William C. White, "Making Bolsheviks" (University of Chicago Press), by Samuel W. Harper, Maurice Hindus's "Red Bread" (Cape-Smith), which has not yet been issued but through advance sheets of which we have rambled with constant interest in its accounts of agricultural Russia; H. R. Knickerbocker's "The Red Trade Menace" (Dodd, Mead), "The Russian Experiment," by Arthur Feiler (Harcourt, Brace), and Edmund A. Walsh's "The Last Stand" (Little Brown). There are no less than three lives of Lenin which have appeared within the last few weeks, one by G. Vernadsky (Yale University Press), another by D. S. Mirsky (Little, Brown), and a third by Ferdinand Ossendowski (Dutton). The last is a fictionalized biography in the characteristic manner of its author, highly spiced and romantic, the other two scholarly studies. Isaac Don Levine has just published a life of Stalin (Cosmopolitan), and the Yale University Press is issuing "The End of the Russian Empire," by Michael Florinsky. Certainly there's no excuse for unawareness of the stupendous experiment that is being carried on in the Soviet States, even though reports as to its workings may be conflicting. Nor is there any reason why the person who prefers to get his contemporary history through its reflection in fiction rather than from its direct portrayal should have difficulty in satisfying his interest. There has been a long train of Russian novels appearing in recent months to which not long ago was added "City of White Night" (Norton), by Nikolai Gubsky, a romance which has the distinction of having

been written in English, and which in due time is to be followed by the second in Maxim Gorki's series of novels portraying revolution in Russia, a volume entitled "The Magnet" (Cape-Smith).

Horror engulfs us. We are rigidly limited in the space at our disposal (our dilatoriness having reduced us to writing this survey after the rest of the paper is in the forms), and we have already spent too large a fraction of it on Russia. Our only consolation is that no other single matter looms so large on the horizon.

Not at present, at least. There's the war, from which present-day Russia derives, but that is now fortunately in the past, though it is next week, with the issuance of General Pershing's "My Experiences in the World War" (Stokes), to be revived through the memories of the man who played the prime part in America's military conduct of it. The character of General Pershing's book is already familiar to the public through the portions of the narrative which have had nationwide syndication; the two stout volumes which include them contain, it should go without saying, an immense amount of detail which the exigencies of newspaper publication necessitated excising. For the reader who, having perused Pershing, wishes to get not only the American official point of view upon military events but a similarly authoritative account of the war from the French angle there is just the work he wants in Marshal Foch's "Memoirs" (Doubleday, Doran), a detailed and scientific record of events. And while we're on the subject of wars (and after hearing a Russian nobleman direct from Paris predict another European conflict in

fifty years, as we did last night, we wonder whether we are ever going to be off the subject of wars), we might as well mention here instead of later Walter Millis's very lively and many-faceted chronicle of America's war with Spain, entitled "The Martial Spirit," which is to be issued by Houghton Mifflin and sent out by the Literary Guild as its June selection. Here is a book that Americans of the generation which lived through that dubious and momentous episode of national history will read with admiration for its well-rounded exposition of events and influences, and which their younger contemporaries will find holds something of the fascination for them which a work such as Mr. Mark Sullivan's "Our Times" provides.

But we must not tarry. From wars and arms we fly (we can't at the moment decide how to punctuate our quotation in view of its change of pronoun so calmly appropriate it without the marks of our theft) to fair ladies and gallant gentlemen (again we steal)—or, in other words, to fiction. And now troubles multiply. For here is a grist that defies compression unless we ruthlessly quote titles and append no comment on them. Well, at any rate, we'll make a beginning by telescoping into one long sentence the translations which constitute one of the major categories of this Spring's fiction offerings. Here they are. Alas! before we begin we are lost, for we simply can't mention Franz Werfel's "The Pure in Heart" (Simon & Schuster) without saying that this two-volume romance is an impressive work reflecting the Central Europe of the last forty years, or "The Past Recaptured" (Boni), by Marcel Proust, without

noting that it is the final part of "Remembrance of Things Past," or Andreas Latzko's "Seven Days" (Viking) without adding that here is a really enthralling tale with dramatic interest and psychological subtlety to boot, or "The Weigher of Souls" (Appleton), without remarking that in his brief book André Maurois is both graceful and,—well, we give it up, there is no other word for it but that detestable one, "intriguing." But we cannot go on thus. Now, truly, we'll pass a self-denying ordinance and list the rest of our translations with never a single by-remark. "If at first"—"Samson and Delilah" (Simon & Schuster), by Felix Salten; "Flight into Darkness" (Simon & Schuster), by Arthur Schnitzler; "From Day to Day" (Viking), by Ferdinand Goettel; "The Road Back" (Little, Brown), by Erich Maria Remarque (virtue fairly oozes from us that we do not even stop to tell you the very day on which this book by the author of "All Quiet on the Western Front" is to appear); "The Dogs" (Lippincott), by Ivan Nashivin (which we didn't include in our earlier Russian group because it is a story not of men of affairs but of animals); "The Blind Man" (Knopf), by Olav Duun; "Doctor Kerkhoven" (Liveright), by Jacob Wassermann; "Herm Wulf: a Peasant Chronicle" (Minton, Balch), by Hermann Löns (that time the publisher helped us in our resolution to be silent by putting the characterization of his book into its title); "No Surrender" (Dutton), by Jo van Ammers-Kuller (well, we surrender,—it's a political epic of woman); "Lacemaker Lekholm" (Dial), by Gustav Hellstrom; "A Man's Life" (Holt),

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