

# Realities for Children

BY JOSETTE FRANK

IN a world of hard reality—growing every day harder and realer—one cannot stifle a sigh of regret as one watches the deluge of juvenile fact-books\* crowding out the fanciful in each year's output. One wonders when our children (especially those progressively educated) will "holler 'nuff." One wonders, too, what has become of the beautiful, if somewhat old-fashioned, idea that reading is joyous, heavenly escape from a too pressing and too present reality.

Not that one deplores the demise of that sticky sentimentality which marked much of the writing for young children a generation ago. Nor do we mourn the loss of the juvenile morality books of a still earlier day. The swing toward a kind of writing that addresses children as intelligent people, with tastes and interests not unlike our own, is greeted with gladness. But, as often happens, the cure threatens to become as painful as the disease. A long sweep of the pendulum carries us through a boundless and often dreary sea of fact-books: books about things, books about everything, in fact, under the shining sun.

Those of us who still believe in reading for fun have a fierce inclination to condemn the whole of this new literature out of hand. But that we cannot do either. For, like the renowned little girl with the curl, when it is good it is very very good—but when it is bad it is horrid! When Lucy Sprague Mitchell, a decade ago, ushered into the world her thesis of the "here and now" in children's reading, she was, in a way, a prophet; and like most prophets she stirred something the reverberations of which have reached far—perhaps farther than she herself might wish. But probably it is unfair to place at her door the sins of all her disciples.

Certainly Mrs. Mitchell's own stories have a sure appeal to children: to the youngest, her original "Here and Now Story Book" still mirrors their familiar city through her own imaginative view; to the somewhat older child she opens up wider horizons—mountain and plain, harbor and desert, and all the working inhabitants thereof, make a living picture of the far-flung land that is "North America." Here is geographical information, neither flat nor dull, nor yet dressed up and masquerading as sugar candy. It is a selection of significant and related things, seen through a focus of rich imagery. And its appeal is not—or so it seems to this writer—that it deals in realities. Rather it is that the author has seen the familiar in a wholly new way, seen real things and people in their relationship one to another and to the child himself. And, too, not least important, hers is really fine writing.

There is music in Mrs. Mitchell's trains:

Gliding through a valley  
Up the mountain ridge,  
Sliding down a hillside,  
Rushing o'er a bridge,  
In a darksome tunnel,  
In the shiny sun,  
The trains are coming with many a car,  
The trains are coming from near and far,  
North, south, east, west,  
The busy engines run.

This appears in one of three little pamphlets, "Trains," "Streets," "Boats and Bridges," edited by Mrs. Mitchell and containing, besides her own stories, others—some really fine, some not so very—written by her student teachers to be read aloud to children under seven. And children, city children at any rate, do love them. Nevertheless one could wish that Mrs. Mitchell had placed in a foreword somewhere the warning: "Beware of imitations!" Here, for example, are lines from a new book by Dorothy W. Baruch, "I Like Machinery":

Jingle jangle jar  
The street car rattles  
Clickety clack, clickety clack.

It seems to this writer that Mrs. Baruch has missed the whole point of the new approach in children's writing: instead of

making the commonplace thrilling, she makes the thrilling commonplace.

We might better let our children do their own observing and take their environment in their stride—unversified, unsung.

Fortunately, not all of the current fact literature is so sterile. Several recent books have given to the ordinary things of our daily living a glamour and beauty that rival the fairy tale for sheer loveliness, adventure, mysticism. Trains, buildings, steam shovels, even the maligned kitchen sink take on unexpected romance. Common things—potato skins, laundry starch, the water faucet—become objects of surprising interest in M. Ilin's new book, "100,000 Whys." The author of "New Russia's Primer" has a gift for simplicity and economy of language that makes him a master "fact writer" for children. Under his astonishing pen, and with the help of his deft illustrator, N. Lapshin, the most complex laws of chemistry become clear and intelligible to eight-year-olds—and their parents. This is a book to place alongside the family cook book on a handy shelf.

Another device that has found a new use in glorifying the commonplace is modern photography. In "Seeing the Unseen," by Robert Disraeli, the child of inquiring turn of mind will find many small things: a moth's wing, a spot of dust, a particle of milk, a razor blade—magnified into marvels of interest and beauty by the scientist's magic wand: the microscope. Unusual photographs of microscopic detail, and text which describes the processes, suggest to the curious some scientific adventuring of their own.

Armed with an almost human camera, Lewis W. Hine gave us last year a book of photographs of people we have all seen: "Men at Work." Not the drill alone but the man who drives it; not the building but the men who build it are here seen in new focus—a magnificent array. This year we have "Skyscraper," wherein Elsa H. Naumburg, Clara Lambert, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell have combined photograph, verse, and exposition in an amazing story. The planning and rearing of this giant city house is a stirring record of human effort and achievement that pales the dreams of Kubla Khan. It is a real wonder story, a city's fairy tale!

But not all modern children live in cities, and even those who do sometimes travel. "The Train Book," by William Clayton Pryor, has photographs of trains and railroading that will thrill any small boy who has travelled by rail, and many who haven't. And whether or not you've travelled by sea, a trip on a big ocean liner can be had vicariously by book: Henry B. Lent has followed last year's "Clear Track Ahead" with a book about boats, "Full Steam Ahead," this time in collaboration with Earle Winslow. Both of Mr. Lent's books offer graphic and very readable presentations to the transportation-minded child, explaining many of the mysteries

and wonders of modern transportation.

The same child may be led to inquire just how modern transportation got that way. The past hundred years of travel in America—by stagecoach, sailboat, steamboat, covered wagon, and train—are pictured by Alice Dalgliesh in "America Travels." The first part of the book, addressed to very young readers, is made up of pleasant little stories. Part II is straight exposition—dramatic in its own right because the historic facts are dramatic—and illustrated with truly fine sketches. These last are not only lovely to look at, but are especially valuable because they make available materials not to be found outside of scholarly source books.

And it may be said here, that children are able to use and enjoy adult source material long before we imagine, provided their interest is already aroused on a particular subject. I know of one nine-year-old for whom access to Dunbar's "History of Travel in America" has made the more attenuated juvenile presentations altogether unalluring. Of course, the child will seek out such materials only when they meet his interest of the moment. But unless there is such an interest, why a book on that subject at all? No fact book will create a specific interest in a given child. Rather its legitimate purpose is to serve and stimulate those interests which are already kindled.

One subject of which this seems particularly true is art. In a most inclusive and handsome volume, "A Child's History of Art," V. M. Hilmyer and E. G. Huey have tried to make classic art palatable to the young. By way of making the process as painless as possible, the authors have concealed the dosage in introducing each subject: "If you get up in the morning at sunrise you might call yourself an early Christian. But early Christian architecture does not mean early in the day." Thus guilefully the child is to be led to an interest in architecture. Similarly he is introduced to landscape painting: "Fire-escapes are part of the scenery in a city. Landscapes are the scenery in the country. Fire-escapes have nothing to do with painting. Landscapes have a great deal to do with painting." Why we should have to feed our children such written-down stuff about the great masters and their masterpieces it is hard to see. The masterpieces will appeal for their own sakes—or not—when the child is ready, and when he has a real contact with them—not just a whisk through a museum. Then, when he has come to love the masterpieces he will want to know something about the masters.

The child with an interest in architecture will find neither sugar-coating nor bitter pill in a new book, "All the Ways of Building," by L. Lamprey. Here is a true story of the development of man's building, from caveman's hut to steel skyscraper; fascinating reading for anyone—that is, anyone interested in the subject. Less mature in style, but no less dignified in content, is "Man's Long Climb," by Marion Lansing—a very readable chronicle of man's discoveries and inventions through the ages. This latter book is addressed to slightly younger children, but neither will insult the intelligence of any reader.



LITTLE ANCESTORS OF THE HORSE  
From "The Story of Earth and Sky"

On one subject there is an almost universal interest, a perpetual question mark. "Facts" about the universe, to ordinary mortals including children, are always in the nature of wonder stories. One little girl, just leaving the fairy tale age—if one ever does—hung in breathless absorption over "The Story of Earth and Sky." "Gosh," she exclaimed in astonishment, "this is just like a fairy tale, except that this might have been true!" In this book Carleton and Heluiz Washburne, in collaboration with Frederick Reed, have done remarkably well in the difficult business of separating fact from conjecture, theory from scientific data, in elucidating the scientist's version of creation for nine-year-olds. The authors manage to talk to children instead of talking down to children, and even the imaginary planetary trips to which they resort as clarifying devices are in the nature of vicarious adventure, almost in the Jules Verne tradition. Furthermore, this book meets well the acid test of the good fact book: it is as absorbing to adults as it is to children.

We have said that the greatest danger in fact-books—even the best of them—is that they will be given to children regardless. Like the father who buys himself an electric train for his three-year-old's Christmas, Uncle James will be thrilled with a train book for his nephew who is at the moment keeping high company with medieval knights! But still more pernicious is the parent who believes that these and these only among children's books are "educational"—that these his child has got to read, come what may. Why isn't "Robinson Crusoe" just as educational, or "Huckleberry Finn"? Or, far that matter, Nick Carter, in his own peculiar way?

The fault of the fact books, then, lies not so much in the books themselves as in our distorted view of their place in the child's reading. Let us insist, if we will, that the books we give our children shall be beautiful, good, and true. But let us not define "true" as "factual." Let us not be misled into confusing information with education, nor delimiting education as a deluge of facts. Rather let us make use of the excellent fact-books that are at hand for the legitimate purpose of meeting the child's special interests. And for the rest, let us recognize the child's right to take his reading as he finds it—to read for reading's own sweet sake.

\* HERE AND NOW STORY BOOK. By Lucy Sprague Mitchell. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$2.

NORTH AMERICA. By Lucy Sprague Mitchell. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$3.

TRAINS — STREETS — BOATS AND BRIDGES. Edited by Lucy Sprague Mitchell. New York: The John Day Co. 20 cents each.

I LIKE MACHINERY. By Dorothy W. Baruch. New York: Harper & Bros. 75 cents.

100,000 WHYS—A TRIP AROUND THE ROOM. By M. Ilin. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. \$1.50.

SEEING THE UNSEEN. By Robert Disraeli. New York: The John Day Co. \$2.

MEN AT WORK. By Lewis W. Hine. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.75.

SKYSCRAPER. By Elsa H. Naumburg, Clara Lambert, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell. New York: The John Day Co. \$2.

THE TRAIN BOOK. By William Clayton Pryor. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$1.

CLEAR TRACK AHEAD! By Henry B. Lent. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$2.

FULL STEAM AHEAD! The same.

AMERICA TRAVELS. By Alice Dalgliesh. The same. \$2.

A CHILD'S HISTORY OF ART. By V. M. Hilmyer and E. G. Huey. New York: Appleton-Century Co. \$3.50.

ALL THE WAYS OF BUILDING. By L. Lamprey. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$3.50.

MAN'S LONG CLIMB. By Marion Lansing. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$1.75.

THE STORY OF EARTH AND SKY. By Carleton and Heluiz Washburne. New York: Appleton-Century Co. \$3.50.



A PHOTOGRAPH FROM "THE TRAIN BOOK"



HARRY HANSEN

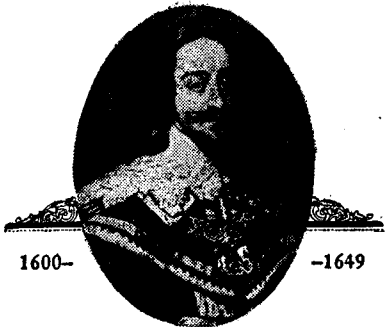
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An Ornithologist  
Tells His Own Story

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BIRD-LOVER.  
By Frank M. Chapman. New York: Appleton-Century Company. 1933. \$3.75.

Reviewed by H. E. DOUNCE

As a kid, this bird-lover (b. 1864) went shooting doves, bobolinks, and robins around his native Englewood, New Jersey. Just what else gave his future its direction is more than he knows; he thinks an ear for music may have had something to do with it. At sixteen he got through school and became a New York bank clerk, commuting, so that between 7:30 in the morning and 6 or later in the evening, his time was not his own. He met a few bird students, learned a little taxidermy, collected. He met and won the good opinion of old John Bell—and, in Lytton Strachey's phrase, two ages touched, for Bell had been a campmate of Audubon. He read such bird books as he could come by and, one memorable day, discovered Coues's "Key." He was not yet twenty when he "ventured to offer" his services in a study of migration that was projected by the American Ornithologists' (then fledgling) Union. They were accepted, and for seventy-five days the not too robust young bank clerk nearly, as he does not put it, killed himself doing spare-time work afield, skinning specimens, and writing up notes. He sent in his report. When the acknowledgment came, he had to take it out into the orchard and nerve himself to open it—to learn that they considered his the best report received from the Atlantic division.

Two years later the inevitable happened. With his mother's approval he got out of that bank to devote his life to bird study. It was a bank of which his father, some years dead, had been counsel. "I had not been unhappy in it," he maintains staunchly—for you do not have a career like his without a very special bump of loyalty; in the next breath he owns that "for years after resigning my most vivid bad dreams were connected with a return to the bank." He birded on his own hook in Florida a year or so, but meanwhile he had, sick with stage fright until he began, read a paper before the exalted A. O. U., and he had been encouraged to make himself at home and helpful in the then still little more than embryonic American Museum of Natural History. He was in Florida when, out of a clear sky as it seemed to him, there came an offer from Dr. Allen, the museum's curator of birds, of the position of his assistant. It is manifest that each honor that has since been done this bird-lover—and he has received about all that could be done a man in his professional field—has seemed to him to come in the same way.

The rest is ornithological and conservation history, surely known in outline to every North American bird student worthy of the name, but till now known in intimate detail only to his best friends. All such bird students are heavily indebted to him, as are his science and bird life itself; and those of us who, thirty years ago, more or less, shoveled sidewalks and ran errands to earn the money for our copies of his "Bird Life" and his classic "Handbook"—the latter written nights and Sundays before he was thirty-one—are, in respect to this everlasting interest and pleasure, his godchildren. Something might be said here of the bounteousness and variety of the feast, spiced with mild, kindly humor, that his autobiography affords; for instance, of the delightful glimpses of Coues, William Brewster, Robert Ridgway, A. K. Fisher, and other famous scientific bird men of yesterday and today. Or of the glimpses of personages: T. R., Walter Page, Grey of Fallodon, and the American Museum's apparently rather awesome patron saint, Morris K. Jesup. Mention might be made of the first adequate public appreciation of the remarkable and lovable personality of the artist-ornithologist, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, who to this friend and campmate of his was "both son and brother"; with it goes a due appreciation of Fuertes's work that is slightly—and how humanly!—qualified out of loyalty to a still older friend, Ernest Seton. And since a vociferously favorable review ought in decency to make at least one reservation, it might be whispered that the fore part of the autobiography, telling of the bird-lover's earlier phases, is a trifle better reading than the latter part—somewhat as is the case with Mark Twain's golden

"Life on the Mississippi." It should be added at once, though, that an inveterate bird-hater, if there is such a creature, might well enjoy every page, if only in contemplating that rarity, a completely unassuming distinguished man, and that greater rarity, a completely happy man.

But for practical purposes description of this book is lost motion. The true bird-lovers, and there are tens of thousands of them now, no more need to be told that its author writes engagingly than they need to be told who he is—or what the A. O. U. is, or the bird part of the American Museum, or the Audubon Society, or Bird-Lore. Just tell them his own story of his life has appeared, and then watch them make tracks toward a bookstore; leaving nothing to be noted but the amusing impossibility of telling even as little as that about "Autobiography of a Bird-Lover" without paying a superfluous tribute to Frank M. Chapman.

The "Autobiography" is illustrated with photographs by the author and drawings and color plates by Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

Parisian Sketches

PARIS TO THE LIFE. By Paul Morand and Doris Spiegel. New York: Oxford University Press. 1933. \$3.

THE authors call this a sketch-book, and the publishers call it a substitute for a trip to Paris. If Paul Morand had given his sketches more glamor, the publishers' description would be better justified. M. Morand conducts the reader to the markets, the cafés, the parks, yawning in his face at every turn. Doris Spiegel, who provides a drawing for every page, has an original talent; she isolates detail in drawings which seem to have no detail—an accomplishment remarkable in itself, but focussing attention on her style rather than on the Parisian subject-matter. The publishers have done a marvellous job of design and reproduction, and we only wish that it could have been applied to Miss Spiegel's drawings alone, or that the commentary could have been undertaken by a writer less inclined to blasé exhibitionism.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

| Title and Author  | Crime, Place, and Sleuth   | Summing Up  | Verdict   |
|---|--|---|-----------|
| DEATH OVER NEW-ARK<br>Alexander Williams<br>(Payson: \$2.)                      | Plane drops corpse in Newark street, and Tonelli of New York police goes over to help Macedonians.           | Drugs, rum-runners, roving aircraft, all mixed up in fast moving but rather confusing yarn.     | 48-52     |
| BLIND MAN'S BUFF<br>Florence Ryerson and Colin Clements<br>(Long & Smith: \$2.) | Conroy family, all nasty, gathered on storm-bound islet, expire one-by-one 'til Jimmy Lane stops holocaust.  | A bit too lurid, but eerie scenery, creepy plot, literate dialog, and good detection redeem it. | Excellent |
| THE MONKEY WRENCH<br>Jason Griffith<br>(Stratford: \$2.)                        | Purported search for man with synthetic rubber formula leads to Egypt and French chateau full of odd people. | Much talking and running around, with trick ending that caused your judge to coise wiciously.   | Dumm      |
| THE PURPLE BALL<br>Frank L. Packard<br>(Crime Club: \$2.)                       | Mystery-adventure on yacht and island in South Seas.   | Outside of Jimmie Dale's absence, this is Packard's usual.                                      | O.K.      |



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... by KAY BOYLE

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