

Magical Grown-Up

KINGDOM OF INNOCENTS. By Mildred Cram. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1940. 296 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROSEMARY C. BENÉT

ALTHOUGH the two books are unlike in method and setting, the idea back of "Kingdom of Innocents" is like Christopher Morley's remarkable "Thunder on the Left." In each, a spell enables a child to move in the world of adults, looking like a grownup, yet keeping the spirit of a child. A birthday wish kept Mr. Morley's Martin from growing up; Miss Cram's children manage by means of magic.

Mildred Cram puts her story against a fairy-book background, one of the oldest forests in England, a forest that goes back to the time of the Druids.

Here we find two children, heirs to two great houses, Joan Martin of Caldicot and Richard Gayle of Oak House. Since their parents are very unhappy, and there is emotional turmoil about them, they long to escape from the problems of adult life. When they are thirteen years old, and the shadow of growth is upon them, Joan and Richard decide to evoke a magic spell which will keep them childlike. They will grow older physically but not emotionally. They do this with the aid of a gardener, a timeless spirit named Timothy who has been clipping the magnificent box hedges at Oak House into the shape of chessmen from time immemorial. His memory goes back more than six hundred years. He can speak the language of animals, and he has both earthly and unearthly

wisdom. Joan and Richard get their wish. They are perfectly happy together, at home, but when they are thrown into conventional society, they suffer. Their very simplicity makes their friends think they are mad. There is an amusing scene where Joan at her debut party in London, leaves to help a cat who is about to kiten, to the horror of her guests. Their problems came, as the author says, because "they remained as cruel, as indifferent, as self-absorbed as children." Therefore, they were misunderstood and criticized, and they, in turn, hated their sophisticated contemporaries. Richard once summed up his hate and distrust of grown people by saying "they were afraid to be alone and of silence and of the dark. They laughed at animals. They dreaded death and avoided the sick and the old." In the end, our two immortals have to compromise and retract their spell, to get on in this modern world at all.

The magic part of "Kingdom of Innocents" is very effective. The spell works. The animals, for instance, talk amusingly and naturally . . . "Horses have only a few words. Dogs, of course, are masters of sentiment and of anecdote. But cats have a philosophic turn of mind and a habit of analyzing everything and everybody." The only criticism of the book as a whole, is that the beginning is slow. We are rather long in getting to the magic part. There is an involved and unnecessary frame for the story, like a long-winded preamble, before we arrive at our spell in the druidic circle. But once we are there, we escape from the sorrows of this modern world into a fine, fantastic kingdom. This is an unusual book which manages to capture for grown-ups the curious, unforgettable charm—that mixture of reality and unreality—which children find in fairy tales.



Mildred Cram

VIRGINIBUS PUERISQUE — RAYMOND HOLDEN:

Title and Author	Age and Sex	What It's About	Our Opinion
AMERICAN SONGBIRDS Maitland A. Edey (Random House: \$1.)	Boys and Girls to 14	Color plates (more than 25) of common song birds, with adequate, simple descriptions. The color work is ambitious but uneven.	Good hand-book
AMERICAN WILD FLOWERS Cecile Hulse Matschat (Random House: 50¢)	Any age up to 12 or 14 Both	Pictures in color and brief description of 17 common wild flowers. The color-printing is poor, but the book is well worth the price.	Useful, inexpensive
PECOS BILL AND LIGHTNING Leigh Peck (Houghton Mifflin: \$1.75)	10 up to 14 or 16 Boys	A variant of the Paul Bunyan type of legend. All about a miraculous and industrious cowboy. Incidentally, Paul Bunyan turns up now and then.	A good idea not so well done
MEN WITHOUT FEAR John J. Floherty (Lippincott: \$2.)	Old and Young Boys	A modern version of another addition to Cleveland Moffet's classic "Careers of Danger and Daring." Deals with test pilots, lightship crews, sandhogs, line men, divers, news-reel cameramen, oil-well drillers, medical research, etc.	Well-written romance of the unsung
OUR AIRLINERS Irving Crump and Norman Maul (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Older Boys	One of a series of which others are, "Our Police," "Our G-Men," "Our Firemen," "Our Airmen," etc. This is a detailed encyclopedia of the standard planes in use on U. S. commercial airways.	None better
BOB WAKEFIELD'S FLIGHT LOG Blaine and Dupont Miller (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Older Boys	One of a series about a young naval aviator. This time about adventures in line of duty up and down the Pacific Coast and in Alaska and doing preliminary work routing foreign agents who don't want to see an American airline running from the U. S. to Australia. The author is a Lieut. Commander in the Navy.	Solid heroics with real background
WONDERS OF THE HEAVENS Arthur Draper (Random House: 50¢)	8-14 Both	A primer of astronomy illustrated in color. (28 pp.)	Attractive
ON SAFARI Theodore J. Waldeck Ill. by Kurt Wiese (Viking: \$2.50)	Older Boys	The story of a boy who made up his mind to be an explorer and who became one. Good matter-of-fact but interesting account of a career in Africa.	Good reading in an old field

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Books of Foreign Background

FAY GILLIS WELLS

IT should be a very simple matter to give children books for Christmas this year. The authors have written, most considerably, on such a variety of subjects for every age, that there is a book for even the most precocious child.

There is no need for parents to bewail the fact that they are unable to take Jr. and Sister abroad because of the horrible world situation. The authors, obligingly and vividly, have brought "Abroad" to the children of America through their books. And the locals reach to the four corners of the world, from Alberta to the Argentine, to China and Siam.

One of the best of these travel books for children, and one of the most timely, is "The Cedar Deer" (Coward-McCann: \$2), by Addison Burbank, author of "Guatemala Profile." Mr. Burbank reveals the life and customs of the Guatemalan people through the bright eyes of Tomas, a Maya boy who is a slave on a coffee plantation. This is not only a book for children, but for students of Guatemala as well. There is a pronouncing glossary which tells you how to say Chichicastenango without stumbling, and Mr. Burbank has cleverly numbered his chapters with Mayan numerals—a combination of dots and dashes—so by the time you have finished "The Cedar Deer," you also know how to count in Mayan. The book is profusely illustrated with characteristic sketches by the author.

A delightful book of Faraway Lands for little girls is "The Story of Lee Ling" (Harcourt, Brace: \$2), by Eleanor Francis Lattimore, who spent part of her childhood in the Far East and therefore knows the children about whom she writes with sympathy and real understanding. The story of Lee Ling, her baby sister, Mei Mei, and the two mischievous boys, Gogo and Shungdi, who are fascinated by the "Big Noses," their nickname for Americans, is simply told, and the unadorned illustrations by the author are as Chinese as the peasants themselves.

For older children who are delighted by strange lands, "My Boyhood in Siam" (Day: \$2), by Kumut Chandruang, should prove interesting and illuminating. This is said to be the first book written in English by a Siamese,

but having studied in America since 1934, Mr. Chandruang writes like an American. With quiet humor he reveals the too-little known customs of Siam, the nation now known as Thailand.

The cloth-animal-stage of childhood should love "Alexander's Birthday" (Dutton: \$1.50), the adventures of Alexander the blue-spotted, cotton horse with his beautiful, blue silk tail and mane, who had to get to the North Pole by November 12, to celebrate his first birthday with Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus.

A book for everyone who believes in fairies is "Piskey Folk," a beautiful collection of Cornish legends by Enys Tregarthen. The stories are told with the lightness of a legend against the moorish background of that country

"where the westernmost corner of England dips off to the sea."

Good, meaty adventure, with a background of solid historical facts which should appeal to readers of the high school age is Frederic Arnold Kummer's "Courage over the Andes" (Winston: \$2).

It is the story of a young boy's colorful experiences in South America during the War of 1812. Dick Weatherby ships aboard a whaler for Buenos Aires. On the voyage south he encounters danger and excitement aplenty in a first-hand experience at the hazards of whaling. Later he meets up with Peruvian pirates, escapes their clutches, and travels three hundred miles through unknown and war-torn Chile to find the United States Consul. There further adventures await him, before he is instrumental in freeing his fellow whalers.

All in all, Mr. Kummer's book is representative of adolescent adventure at its best—it is robust and vigorous, despite its adherence to accurate detail.

VIRGINIBUS PUERISQUE — FAY GILLIS WELLS:

Title and Author	Age and Sex	What It's About	Our Opinion
MARIO AND THE CHUMA <i>Esther Greenacre Hall</i> (Random House: \$1.75)	8-12 Boys	The story of Mario, a twelve-year-old Argentine boy whose only pet is the chuma, "one of the strangest birds in the world . . . which uses its long beak to throw rocks with amazing accuracy."	Simple and appealing
PISKEY FOLK <i>Enys Tregarthen</i> (Day: \$2.25)	For All Boys & Girls Interested in Folklore	A delightful collection of legends about Cornwall, "where the westernmost corner of England dips off to the sea." The Piskeys are the fairy folk of Cornwall, and stories tell why and how some mortals were privileged to see them. Dramatically illustrated with photographs.	A story for all who believe in fairies
LUCK OF SCOTLAND <i>Ivy Bolton</i> (Longmans: \$2.)	Boys & Girls of High School Age	The story of Constance Clume and James Moray from rival castles and clans, who plotted and fought for their fugitive king, the Bruce, against the English invasion, and through their loyalty and daring, not only brought unity and peace to Scotland but united their warring families.	Good action and background
MARUSIA <i>Florence Randal Livesay</i> (Dutton: \$2.)	For Girls of High School Age	A translation from the Ukrainian of Hrihory Kvitka's tragic story of first love.	Authentic but tearful
THE SECRET OF THE LODGE <i>Noel Streetfeild</i> (Random House: \$2.)	9-13	The exciting adventures of the young Chandlers who start off to visit one aunt and uncle and end up with another who turns out to be an international agent who helped to kidnap a young king for whom the police of the entire world are looking.	Good exciting story
A SON OF THE FIRST PEOPLE <i>Adelaide Wilson Arnold</i> (Macmillan: \$2.)	8-12 Boys	The struggle of an eight-year-old Indian boy who is sent to the government school to learn the ways of the white man. He goes back to his people with a love of drawing which he learned at the white man's school.	Rather inconclusive
THE KEEPERS OF ELEPHANT VALLEY <i>Reginald Campbell</i> (Random House: \$2.)	8-13 Both	The adventures of three children in the Elephant Valley in Siam where their father runs an elephant farm. The climax is the final capture of the rare white elephant.	Invitation to adventure

Drawing from "Alexander's Birthday," by Mariorite Knight.



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