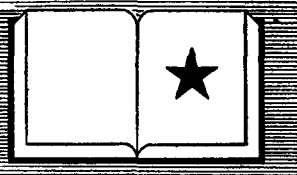


NEW EDITIONS



FRANZ KAFKA, who not so long ago was one of the cherished private possessions of *avant-garde* readers and critics, has now come into the market place, dressed in the neat, popular binding of the Modern Library. What the populace will make of him remains to be seen, but "Selected Stories of Franz Kafka" (\$1.25), edited and introduced by Philip Rahv, will give new readers of this extraordinary writer a chance to experience his peculiar qualities. And Mr. Rahv's introduction, fruit of long study, will help them to find their bearings in an unfamiliar world. This collection is a good one. It contains the best of the short stories—"In the Penal Colony," "The Metamorphosis," "The Great Wall of China," "A Report to an Academy"—and ten other finished and unfinished tales that only Kafka could have written. In them all, as in the novels, we find a unique blend of Defoesque factuality, symbolical imagination, and myth-making power. Thanks to the first element, Kafka is the easiest writer in the world to read, so long as one is content to understand his words and sentences and paragraphs, without understanding his meaning.

Every single reader will penetrate that, as far as he can, by his own route. And most of us, like Mr. Rahv, will find ourselves returning from successive penetrations with various and even contradictory findings, as we re-read Kafka through a period of years. Gourmont has said that every great writer is always in the process of becoming, even after his death, and especially after his death. We are never done with him; his fate develops through generations. Perhaps Kafka will, as time passes, prove himself worthy of that description.

Three volumes have recently furnished me with entertaining reading. They are "Twenty-eight Science Fiction Stories of H. G. Wells" (Dover, \$3.95); "Beyond Human Ken" (Random House, \$2.95), edited by Judith Merrill; and "Intrigue" (Knopf, \$3.95) by Eric Ambler. The first reminds us, if we need reminding, that Wells was

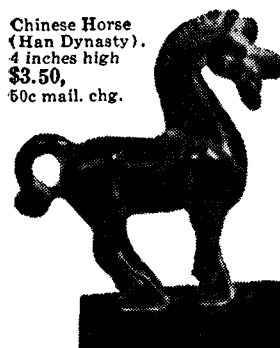
a pioneer with amazing gifts and an amazing range in the field of what is now called science fiction. He anticipated his successors with a full bag of tricks. Every one of his fantastic stories has begotten scores of offspring; and the best of these tales—including the novel, "Men Like Gods," and the novelette, "Star Begotten"—are in this collection. Miss Merrill's anthology of "Twenty-one Startling Stories of Science Fiction and Fantasy" contains specimens of the work of some of Wells's most ingenious followers. Their powers of invention are sometimes startling, sometimes amusing; and dullness is the one deadly sin that does not exist in their world. Lewis Padgett's "A Gnome There Was," like many of the old master's yarns, is crammed with "social significance" as well as fantasy. Robert A. Heinlein's "Our Fair City" tells with remarkable charm the story of the most attractive little whirlwind I have ever met. Arthur Porges, in "The Fly," jolts the reader with a last-line punch. And Anthony Boucher turns in a star performance with one of the most entertaining werewolves in the annals of lycanthropy. The Ambler omnibus contains "Background to Danger," "Cause for Alarm," "A Coffin for Demetrios," and "Journey into Fear." These are the spy novels that made their author's reputation. They will take a lot of beating and have raised up many imitators. Ambler has a great gift of playing variations on sinister themes. Some readers may find the Leftist eloquence of some of his characters less appealing than they found it in the Thirties, but if they let it spoil the stories for them they will be four-time losers.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawling's best seller, "The Yearling," with its plethora of short affirmative sentences, is back in print (Scribner's, \$3.50). So is Margery Sharp's "The Flowering Thorn" (Little, Brown, \$3). Part I of "1000 years of Irish Prose" (Devindair, \$6), edited by Vivian Mercier and David H. Greene, is a rich anthology of writings that made the "Irish Renaissance." Random House's "William Shakespeare: The Complete Works" (\$3.75), edited by Prof. Peter Alexander, does not compare in readability with the G. B. Harrison "Shakespeare"—but neither does it cost ten dollars.

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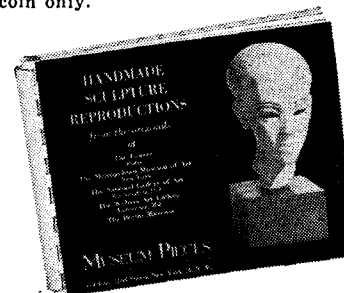
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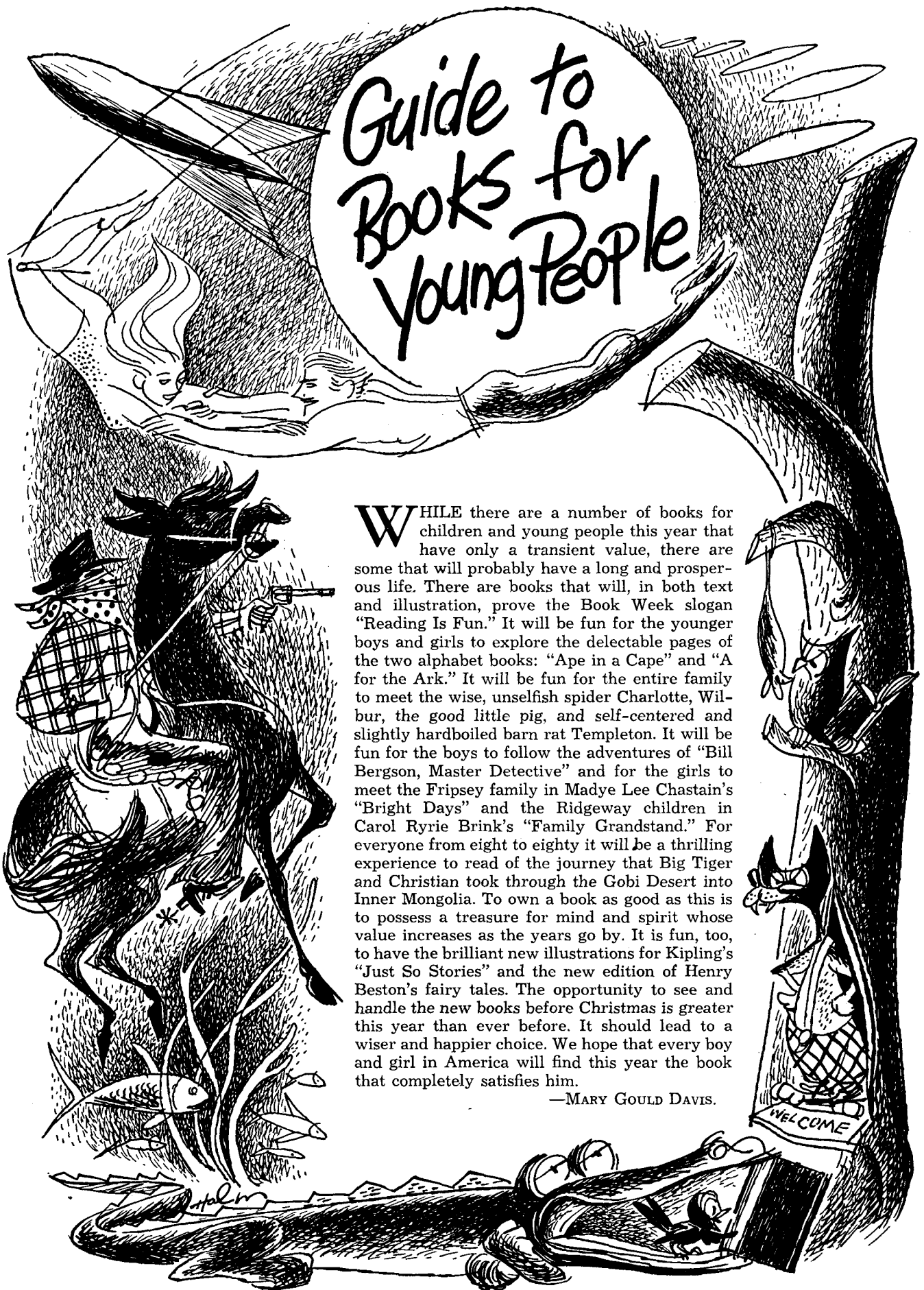
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WHILE there are a number of books for children and young people this year that have only a transient value, there are some that will probably have a long and prosperous life. There are books that will, in both text and illustration, prove the Book Week slogan "Reading Is Fun." It will be fun for the younger boys and girls to explore the delectable pages of the two alphabet books: "Ape in a Cape" and "A for the Ark." It will be fun for the entire family to meet the wise, unselfish spider Charlotte, Wilbur, the good little pig, and self-centered and slightly hardboiled barn rat Templeton. It will be fun for the boys to follow the adventures of "Bill Bergson, Master Detective" and for the girls to meet the Fripsey family in Madye Lee Chastain's "Bright Days" and the Ridgeway children in Carol Ryrie Brink's "Family Grandstand." For everyone from eight to eighty it will be a thrilling experience to read of the journey that Big Tiger and Christian took through the Gobi Desert into Inner Mongolia. To own a book as good as this is to possess a treasure for mind and spirit whose value increases as the years go by. It is fun, too, to have the brilliant new illustrations for Kipling's "Just So Stories" and the new edition of Henry Beston's fairy tales. The opportunity to see and handle the new books before Christmas is greater this year than ever before. It should lead to a wiser and happier choice. We hope that every boy and girl in America will find this year the book that completely satisfies him.

—MARY GOULD DAVIS.