

FALL GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S BOOKS



—By Roger Duvoison,
for "The Happy Lion."

EDITED BY FRANCES LANDER SPAIN

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THE third week in November has been celebrated as Children's Book Week now for thirty-six years, and each year the idea behind it remains refreshingly new and valid. Throughout the country book fairs are held, lists of best books issued, programs presented, and attention called to children and their books: new books and old ones, books that answer the countless questions that children ask, books that quicken the imagination, books that set their feet solidly on the real ground of contemporary problems, and books that send them off to a fairyland where the impossible is the order of the day.

Those of us who work with children and their reading are glad for this annual Book Week. We try, however to make every week a book week for the children. For this special celebration should be but the underlining of, the emphasis on, the accentuation of the constant, careful introduction of children to books that goes on all the year in children's rooms and school libraries, in classrooms and home reading throughout the land.

—FRANCES LANDER SPAIN,
Supervisor, Children's Services,
The New York Public Library

But Children Do Read Nowadays!

By NANCY LARRICK, *educational director of the children's department at Random House.*

YOU can't mention children's reading these days without someone heaving a great sigh and saying, "But children nowadays don't read!" And if you raise a skeptical eyebrow they say, "Well, how can they when they spend all their time devouring comic books and watching television?" That may sound like an argument to end all arguments, but if you've had any dealings with children and children's books in the past decade you can produce convincing evidence that more children are reading more books than ever before.

Certainly publishers' reports show an amazing growth in the number of children's books sold. According to a statement in *Publishers' Weekly* by Curtis P. Benjamin of McGraw-Hill, the annual sale of children's books industry-wide has increased 100 per cent in the past six years—a period,

by the way, in which the school population increased only 8 per cent! And within publishing houses the juvenile departments have stepped out of their early position of genteel obscurity to that of family breadwinner. At William Morrow, for example, where juvenile sales have risen 25 per cent in the past year, the well-known Morrow Junior Books account for 65 per cent of the company's gross sales. And at Simon and Schuster children's books totaled 75 per cent of the 1953 gross.

If we take a look title by title and author by author we find even more persuasive figures. By and large a successful children's book gets off to a larger initial printing, lasts longer, and runs up a bigger total than a successful adult book. One publisher felt pretty smug over the nineteen-week best-seller listing that one of his adult books achieved in *The New York Times Book Review* with a total sale of 35,000 copies. But in the same period one of his new juveniles had an initial printing of 90,000 copies and a reprint order of 40,000. Now, two years later, the adult book is barely

breathing, but the juvenile is sprinting briskly along.

In fact, the authors of children's books are reaping bigger royalties in many cases than the authors of adult books. Take Marguerite Henry, for example. Her horse stories ("Misty of Chincoteague," "King of the Wind," and "Brighty of Grand Canyon," to name only a few) have totaled close to 750,000 copies. And each of Walter Farley's "Black Stallion" books has sold a good solid 100,000 copies with no sign of slackening.

But it's not just the horse stories that have rung up such sales records. Even as whimsical a series as the Babar books have sold over a million copies. And each of E. B. White's delightfully fanciful juveniles—"Stuart Little" and "Charlotte's Web"—has



—By Tasha Tudor, for "Anna Is for Annabelle."

long since passed the 100,000 mark.

Sales figures for the twenty-five-cent children's books are even more staggering. Since their first appearance in the fall of 1942 nearly 320 million Little Golden Books have been sold to the nation's small fry. By this time Wonder Books and Book Elf Books are making spectacular records in the twenty-five-cent department.

GO INTO any five-and-ten, drug store, or supermarket, pause at any railroad-station newsstand, and there you find a rack of children's books doing a flourishing business. Most of their wares are the twenty-five-centers, but an increasing number are pushing their price bracket upward to include books at \$1, \$1.50, and \$1.95. Retail sales managers are learning that the rack of children's books yields a big return for the space invested. And busy mothers are finding that their moppets demand a book on every trip to the supermarket. "If I don't get a book," said one mother recently, "Chris picks one out anyway and drops it in the cart with the groceries. I can be hardboiled when it comes to buying bubblegum. But with books it's different."

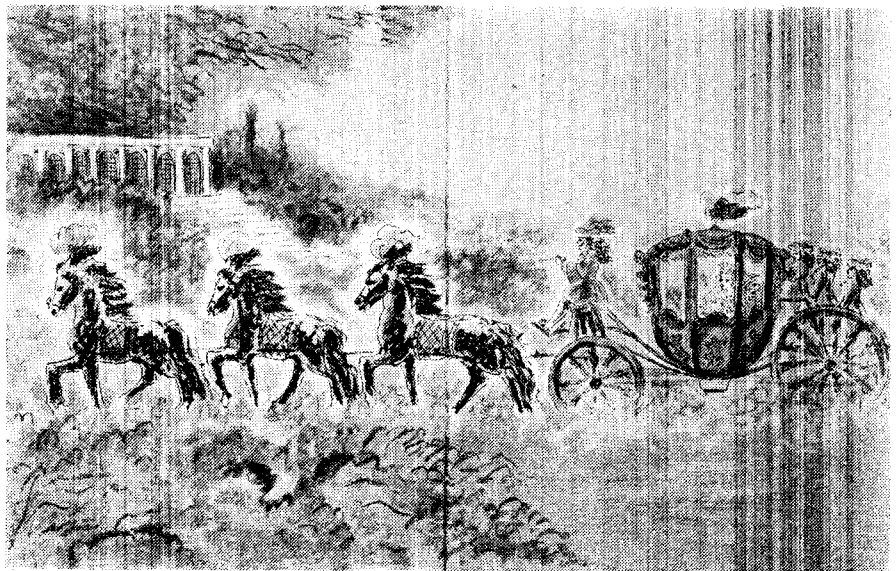
The result is that the number of outlets for children's books has increased to an incredible total of 120,000 points of sale throughout the country. Some of these sell twenty-four hours a day every day; all sell the year round.

Yet there was a time, not so far back, when children's books in this country were sold in only 800 book and department stores. And fifty years ago, recalls Frederic G. Melcher, editor of *Publishers' Weekly*, those sales were limited to the weeks before Christmas. "At that time I was a clerk in Lauriat's in Boston," he says. "We brought out our children's books just before Thanksgiving as a sort of Christmas special. But right after the holidays we packed away the unsold stock of juveniles. They just weren't sold at any other season."

Today even the most isolated family can pick up a Sear Roebuck catalogue and find a goodly array of children's books from which to order. The 1954 Christmas catalogue pictures and describes such widely-acclaimed books at the Marguerite Henry horse stories, the Walter Farley Black Stallion books, the First Books, the Landmark Books, and the Allabout Books.

And while the number of retail outlets for children's books has been growing like Jack's beanstalk the distribution of juveniles through children's book clubs has made spec-

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—End-papers for "Cinderella," by the author.

PICTURE BOOKS

CINDERELLA; OR, THE LITTLE GLASS SLIPPER.

A free translation from the French by Charles Perrault. With pictures by Marcia Brown. Scribner's. \$2. The storyhour was being televised with the usual undercurrent of busyness off-camera but as the librarian opened the pages of this new picture book and began to tell its age-old story those dashing about became still; those whispering were quiet; and the crew, sound-bound by earphones, stopped watching the production and looked instead at Marcia Brown's lovely illustrations for the Perrault fairytale.

It was a perfect storyhour and, to our mind, this "Cinderella" is a perfect picture book. The text is relaxed and easy, with the simple theme of goodness rewarded running through it like a shining thread. Yet it never becomes cloying or saccharine, for phrases such as "chitter chatter," "puff their ruffles," "the young miss," and "paid them a thousand courtesies" give it a pertness, a kind of sauciness, that refreshes and at the same time reflects its French origin.

Miss Brown has managed in her illustrations also not only to recreate the court of Louis XIV with its velvets and laces, beauty patches and horn-curved coiffures but to give an imaginative interpretation to a fairytale that in its essence knows no barriers of nation or time. Text and pictures are in complete harmony and each well-known moment of magic is satisfyingly illustrated, mostly in French blue and soft rose.

A good picture book of "Cinderella" has long been needed since the Helen Sewell interpretation was allowed to go out of print. That this need should be met so perfectly is a cause of rejoicing by the children and by those

who provide them with books at schools, in the public libraries, and at home. —EULALIE STEINMETZ ROSS.

THE HAPPY LION. By Louise Fatio. Illustrated by Roger Duvoisin. Whitteley. \$1.95. Story and illustrations combine to make this an engaging picture book. In rhythmic prose, which makes skilled use of repetition, word sounds, and humor, the wife of Roger Duvoisin tells the tale of an amiable lion who lives in a zoo in a little French town. Conditioned to friendliness on the part of the townspeople, he is hurt by their change of attitude when he strolls through the town one day to return their visits. Had it not been for a small boy his happy nature might have been permanently warped.

The illustrations, broad in scope and large in perspective, have delightful detail and a quality of humor as ingratiating as that of the story.

—ELIZABETH NESBITT.

THE BIRTHDAY. By Hans Fischer. Harcourt, Brace. \$3. It is a pleasure to welcome another picture book by the gifted Swiss illustrator whose "Pitschi" was so warmly received in an American version last year. This is an earlier book than "Pitschi," simpler in story, and with a personal quality which suggests that it was written for some particular children. It is as distinguished in design, with the same sensitivity in drawing and skilful handling of bright color, with the same persuasive humor and warmth of feeling. Mr. Fischer's animals are always delightful, and especially here, in their pranks during the birthday celebration they have arranged for their friend and mistress, Lisette, on her seventy-sixth birthday. An altogether endearing picture book.

—MARIA CIMINO.