

Juveniles in a Changing Culture

By IRMA SIMONTON BLACK

TODAY'S cultural changes are almost as dramatic as scientific advances. If it is difficult even for daily newspapers to keep up to date, small wonder that book publishers are faced with a problem. We in America are moving with increasing speed into an urban, industrial society, which has not yet been adequately reflected in books for children. We are moving into a genuinely mixed racial-cultural-class civilization. This, also, has been far too neglected in juvenile books.

This failure to present to children the way we live may be seen in its most extreme form in the school "reader," which, ironically, is the reading matter to which many children of minority groups and lower economic status are exposed most often. As noted by John H. Niemeyer in his article "Splitting the Social Atom" [SR, Sept. 12], a steady diet of books that portray only upper-middle-class, white families may materially increase the feeling of alienation and insecurity which many minority-group children already feel. Indeed, experienced teachers have sug-



—From "Two Is a Team."

gested that some of these youngsters appear to be slow readers because they are not only not interested but are actively resistant to the content of the books given them to read.

Majority-group children are deprived in a different way by a one-sided view of life. Years ago Lillian Smith remarked in an article in *Common Ground* about segregation in the South:

It would be difficult to decide which character is maimed the more—the white or the Negro—after living a life in the Southern framework of segregation . . . Every illiterate Negro who is shut off from schooling is matched by a white who deliberately shuts him-

self away from knowledge and honest thinking; every sensitive, loving, perceptive Negro's hurt is equaled by the aching conflict between conscience and culture which the civilized Southerner endures all his life.

The reviews following this article reflect the ratio of truly intercultural books to others published by the large trade houses. Yet, blessedly free of the need to pussyfoot on a nationwide scale, trade firms have given children a more accurate picture of American life than textbook publishers. But they have more to do—particularly in the inexpensive book market. The families of the very children who need them most are least likely to have the \$2.50 or \$3 that the average trade book costs. They are also the least likely to know how to search for suitable books for their children.

It is not easy to write stories that offer acceptance rather than "tolerance"; which matter-of-factly present a mixed group without overstressing the point; which are neither moralistic nor patronizing. In early examples of intercultural stories the little Chinese boy became the class hero when the group discovered that the Chinese had invented fireworks, or the little colored boy was invited to join the ball team the day after Jackie Robinson made a home run. These attempts were valiant and utterly sincere, but in their way books of this type contributed as much to unnecessary consciousness of differences as to the understanding of the common human needs of all people.

In stories for children, it is just as important to present different economic groups, with their human quality and equality, as it is to portray children of varying cultures and races. What are youngsters whose fathers work in a factory—or for that matter whose fathers have high-pressure white-collar jobs—to make of the kindly father who has hours and hours to spend with his children? There are an amazing number of fathers of this type in books for older children and teen-agers. While many good books are available about the work that men do—as postman, fireman, policeman—in most of these the man is seen only as a worker in a dramatic role, rather than in a family setting. The farmer is the only working man who has been given a real break in juvenile stories, and even his way of living is remote to the 90 per cent of American children who live in cities



—From "Muggsy."

or suburbs. There are also very few working mothers in stories even though we know that the mothers of many school-age children actually do have jobs outside the home. The present-day cultural picture of America—its work patterns, its leisure patterns, its communities—simply is not being adequately pictured in books for young people. Yet every child enjoys finding a family similar to his own in some of his books.

This is not to suggest that books be written specifically for low-income minority groups of any kind. To do so would merely be a subtle form of literary segregation. What we need are more books for all children about different kinds of children playing and working together, as well as books about different racial, cultural, or socio-economic groups. Many middle-class children, after all, live in relatively crowded conditions. They, too, watch old houses being demolished to make way for a new housing project or a new highway. They must cross streams of traffic on foot and play ball on the sidewalks. They have trouble finding places to live in crowded towns; they move as their fathers (and perhaps their mothers) get new jobs in new places. They have one-parent families. They, like their minority-group friends, need the chance to find children of all social, economic, racial, and cultural groups as legitimate heroes in stories and as subjects for pictures in the books they read in school and at home.

In recent years there have been some pioneer efforts made to present our society more realistically. "Two Is a Team," by Jerrold Beim (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50), tells the story of a couple of small boys engaged in a joint enterprise—and there is no mention except in the illustrations of the fact that one is white and the other colored. In "Twenty-One Children," by Virginia Ormsby (Lippincott, \$2.25), the entrance of a Puerto Rican child into a kindergarten is handled with the utmost simplicity. "On Wednesday our

bird got out! . . . On Thursday a new girl came to our room. Her name was Emmelina. When we said, 'Good morning, she said, 'Buenos días.' On Friday the group took a trip around the school. In "Where Are the Mothers," a new book by Dorothy Marino (Lippincott, \$2.50), mothers are shown at work in school, store, office and home.

As in all other areas of knowledge and understanding, the approach to this problem of intergroup relations must be geared to the level of the child reader. For the picture-book age, the best method is indirect, casual, often only evident in the illustrations. Children in their early years are usually so unaware of differences that it is unfortunate to stress them. In one kindergarten group a small blond boy and a very dark little Negro boy became fast friends. One day the blond child said to their teacher, "Hey look, we're different." The teacher waited resignedly to hear the expected comment on color. She heard it. "Tommy's sweater is red and mine's green!"

However, the school-age child of eight or nine or older, may be mature enough so that some of the themes relevant to the intercultural, interracial, interclass community may be handled directly both in fact and in fiction. A pioneer effort in this direction was "All About Us," by Eva Knox Evans (Capitol, \$2.50). It is written with simplicity and a touch of humor. "Wouldn't it be silly if we all looked alike? . . . Of course, teachers would not be able to tell any of the children in their classes apart, and you might get blamed for something you hadn't done at all." "Captain of the Planter," by Dorothy Sterling (Doubleday, \$2.95), is the true, exciting, and sometimes sad story of the remarkable Robert Smalls, who was born a slave, later went to Congress, and lived to see his people denied the vote. Older children and teen-agers of all races can identify with the book's hero. In "The Hundred Dresses," by Eleanor Estes (Harcourt, Brace, \$3), the ten-year-old heroine is much less privileged than her classmates, yet their eventual sympathetic understanding of her is convincingly presented.

Each year there are a number of



—From "The Happy Birthday Umbrella."

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My name is HUBERT

my publishers are

Houghton Mifflin, of course

The haughtiest of lions snatches triumph from disaster in **HUBERT'S HAIR-RAISING ADVENTURE** by Walt Disney artist Bill Peet (9/8, \$3.00). Two other funny bits of nonsense are **BOO** by Robert Barry (9/22, \$1.75), about a true heroine among cows, and **THE HUNGRY SEA MONSTER** by Barbara Hobbs (9/8, \$2.75), which solves the rather unusual problem of what sea monsters eat. **WHISTLE FOR A PILOT** by Laura Bannon (8/25, \$3.00) and **VOYAGE OF THE SEA WIND** by Hetty Burlingame Beatty (8/25, \$3.00) are exciting stories of boys and boats — one set in the Bay of Fundy, the other in not always sunny Bermuda. And in **THE BABY DRAGON** by Witold T. Mars (10/22, \$2.75) things are set right by a lovely Christmas Eve miracle.*

There is lots of plot in **TREASURES OF RATTLESNAKE HILL** by Elizabeth Baker (9/22, \$2.75), a mystery set in the Berkshires, **ALASKAN HUNTER** by Florence Hayes (9/22, \$3.00), about two boys in the remote Arctic regions, and **EMMY AND THE BLUE DOOR** by Florence Crannell Means (10/22, \$3.00), romance in Mexico. The dry wit and Old World atmosphere of Mount Athos pervade the stories of a Greek village in **AGAIN CHRISTOPHILOS** by Joice NanKivell (9/22, \$2.25), and the spirit of the first century A.D. is magnificently recaptured by Olivia Coolidge in **ROMAN PEOPLE** (9/15, \$3.00).

For scientists, both amateur and professional (and anyone who is just plain curious), we have two books by Isaac Asimov. **WORDS OF SCIENCE** (8/25, \$5.00) is a fascinating exploration into the roots and histories of scientific terms, and **REALM OF NUMBERS** (10/15, \$2.75) is a clear and imaginative approach to mathematics.

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good books for children presenting interesting information about other lands and other ways of living, either in stories or exposition. These books may catch the imagination, awaken the interest, and increase the knowledge of children in the middle and older years. They begin to understand that people's ways of meeting universal human problems may differ in many respects and still be valid.

Books about different ways of living are needed, of course, but they are not

the complete answer to the American child in his search for his cultural identity. Just as a young child cannot move outside his own family group with confidence until he feels truly a part of it, so the older child cannot meet other ways of living and other kinds of people with true understanding until he feels an accepted part of the group to which he belongs. In order to feel that sense of belonging, every child needs the opportunity to see his increasingly mixed society reflected in his books.

Other Peoples, Other Places

THE HAPPY BIRTHDAY UMBRELLA. By David Cornel DeJong. Illustrated by Harvey Weiss. Atlantic-Little, Brown. 50 pp. \$2.75. Spontaneous fun with a castoff umbrella makes a marvelous frolic of one boy's birthday. The inclusion of a gay, able-bodied grandmother is a refreshing touch. And the many secondary figures which suggest varied national types without caricature are welcome and worthy of note. Ages 5-8.

MUGGSY. By Marion Holland. Illustrated by Theresa Sherman. Knopf. Unpaged. \$2.50. Everyone is afraid of the big, ugly dog except Peter, who learns that looks don't matter when you want a pal. The story is valid and appealing in itself, and its theme is amplified by the artist's friendly drawings of an interracial neighborhood. Ages 5-9.

FOUR LEAF CLOVER. By William Lipkind. Illustrated by Nicholas Mordvinoff. Harcourt, Brace. Unpaged. \$3. This story resembles a comic book in its straight, stripped tale of the fantastic adventures of two small boys on a summer's day. The illustrator has made a praiseworthy attempt to introduce an interracial note by making one of the boys a Negro. However, this reviewer doubts whether children will recognize this since in one picture the boy's face is red, in another green, and in still another gray or half-gray. Ages 5-9.

WHISTLE FOR A PILOT. Written and Illustrated by Laura Bannon. 48 pp. \$3. An unusually well-plotted and sympathetic story about a boat-loving boy on the Nova Scotia coast. Interesting and apparently authentic information is an integral part of the fast-moving narrative. Distinctive typography and fine illustrations. Ages 6-9.

BIANCA. By Lillian K. Gorfinkle. Illustrated by Silvia O. Rosenberg. Rand McNally. 61 pp. \$2.75. A smoothly written story set in rural Italy. How Bianca's problem of getting to school across a flooded stream is solved with the unexpected help of movie-makers provides a warm story in an interesting locale. Ages 7-9.

CANDITA'S CHOICE. By Mina Lewiton. Illustrated by Howard Simon. Harper. 185 pp. \$2.95. An honest and interesting por-

trayal of a little Puerto Rican girl's gradual adjustment to life in chilly, crowded New York. There is no glossing-over of difficult conditions, children unsupervised after school, and other problems faced by new Puerto Rican arrivals. The pictures are skilfully and sympathetically drawn. Ages 8-11.

GETTING TO KNOW HAWAII. By Barnett D. Laschever. Illustrated by Haris Petie. Coward-McCann. 64 pp. \$2.50. This workmanlike book by the travel editor of the *New York Herald Tribune* is one of a series about other lands and peoples. The geography, history, and customs of our newest state are well presented, along with the point that Hawaii is living evidence of the fact that people of different origins can live peacefully together. Ages 8-12.

TROUBLE FOR TOMAS. By Franz Hutterer. Translated from the German by Joyce Emerson. Illustrated by Irene Schreiber. Harcourt, Brace. 121 pp. \$2.50. When his mother is forced to sell Jascha, the donkey, Tomás loses his pet. Then after a series of events that children will find not only exciting but heartwarming, Jascha is back with Tomás. The story is set in a Yugoslav fishing village, and very successfully conveys the flavor of the locale and its people. Ages 8-12.

COAL CAMP GIRL. Written and illustrated by Lois Lenski. Lippincott. 173 pp. \$3.95.



—From "The Promised Year."