

The Little Corporal's Stepchild

"Daughter to Napoleon: A Biography of Hortense, Queen of Holland," by Constance Wright (Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 405 pp. \$6.50), gallops through the turbulent years of Bonaparte and the First French Empire. Robert Halsband wrote *"The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu."*

By Robert Halsband

THIS book's title page requires two qualifications: its subject was Napoleon's stepdaughter, and, although it is true that she was Queen of Holland, she ruled (so to speak) for only four years, an inconsequential period of her life, described here in fifteen pages. Still, it was her relationship to Napoleon that pushed her onto the stage of Europe to play out a drama of unalloyed suspense.

Born six years before the French Revolution, Hortense was the daughter of an aristocrat who joined the revolutionists but was guillotined in the Reign of Terror. Her beautiful and charming mother, Joséphine de Beauharnais, consoled her widowhood as best she could until she met the young, awkward General Bonaparte and conquered him. They were married before he went off to his campaign in Italy. Henceforth the lives of Hortense and her brother were closely intertwined with the fate of Napoleon and his family.

Since he was obsessed with dynastic ambitions—placing members of his family on thrones as though Europe were his private chessboard—Napoleon arranged for Hortense to marry his brother Louis, an intelligent man seriously crippled by neurotic drives. Both did their duty, and Hortense bore Louis three sons whom their childless uncle considered his heirs. (The youngest, in fact, became Napoleon III.) Later, however, wanting a more direct successor, Napoleon divorced Joséphine, by then his empress-consort, to marry the daughter of the Austrian emperor, by whom he had a son in due course. But Hortense remained an important member of his family. She had her own share of private adventure, including a legal separation from her husband and an enduring but fitful love affair which resulted in an illegitimate child.

The collapse of the empire forced her into exile, and she wandered through Europe in search of peace and health, dying in Switzerland sixteen years after Napoleon's death in a remoter exile.

What a rich mine of material there is in these people and their turbulent times! It would be difficult to think of any kind of human excitement that is not abundantly present. The biographer is also fortunate in having so full a record, particularly in memoirs and letters, of the leading actors in the drama. Whatever it is not, this biography is good, galloping reading.

As an epigraph to her book Miss Wright prints a luminous quotation from G. M. Trevelyan, the historian, that "the poetry of history does not consist of imagination roaming at large, but of imagination pursuing the fact and fastening upon it." Although this biography is historically factual, it is so thickly strewn with the clichés of romantic fiction—particularly in the frequent passages of dialogue—that one wonders how much of the detail is fact and how much imagination. In her Foreword Miss Wright claims that



—From the book.

Hortense: Trevelyan would have gulped.

"most of the conversation" quoted is translated from Hortense's own words recorded in her memoirs. But a great deal of conversation is given that does not come from the memoirs. The book's style at its best is flat; at its worst it commits such sentences as, "In the spring of 1833, young Louis was twenty-five, an overripe age in a family geared to early matings." Or this: "Louis, hot-eyed, devoured her nakedness." How Trevelyan would gulp at that!

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

TWO-FACED WORDS

Listed below by Norma Gleason of Emmett, Michigan, are some rather odd pairs of definitions; in each case one word fits both definitions. (Example: *wise man; spice plant* would be SAGE.) Answers on page 34.

1. skin blemish; small animal.....
2. cropped haircut; roofing material.....
3. creamy soup; tennis term.....
4. bird; flag material.....
5. U.S. coins; place of abode.....
6. both a custom and a costume.....
7. tined implement; roué.....
8. bird; chess piece.....
9. amphibious rodent; man's hat.....
10. stretch of grass; fabric.....
11. shoe; snake.....
12. bridge term; overshoe.....
13. Irish accent; comfortable shoe.....
14. musical instrument; plant.....
15. sea nymph; alarm signal.....
16. sovereign; straight edge.....
17. charlatan; duck's cry.....
18. custard-like dish; pleasure excursion.....
19. pipe; thorny plant.....
20. musical tone; suite of rooms.....

Broken Bridges to Literacy

By Alice Dalgliesh

"The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of his mouth and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then."

—LEWIS CARROLL.

THIS brief passage from "Advice from a Caterpillar" in "Alice in Wonderland" is by way of an answer to Mrs. Caroline B. Norwood, who wrote to this magazine last month [SR, Dec. 16] asking about "the logic behind the 'fairy tales' and incredible stories our children have to listen to." "I'm tired," she said, "of telling little children that fish can't really speak English, trains don't really talk, pelicans don't really exchange boots for fish and so on *ad infinitum*. . . . The child's life is happy enough without escapes into the land of make-believe." Just what she means by "little" children is not defined.

Caterpillars don't really talk. Mice don't sing carols, a steadfast tin soldier don't love a dancer, an owl and a pussy cat don't go to sea. I have never been an advocate of giving *very* little children elaborate, fanciful tales. But somewhere in fairly early experience children need to find out that besides reality there is make-believe.

If they do not, they will miss a great deal of literature and much that is a part of our culture. They may throw aside, from lack of appreciation, the noble procession of folk tale, legend, myth, and hero story. Even able readers may not meet the unusual characters in "Alice," "Just So Stories," "The Wind in the Willows." And as they grow a little older young people may not have the ability to enjoy "The Nutcracker" or Shakespeare's "The Tempest." Somewhere a bridge that leads to these will not have been built.

Just when a child crosses that mysterious bridge between reality and fancy depends entirely on his individual interests and capabilities. Some may



Drawing by Tenniel from "Alice in Wonderland."

never cross it. I taught four-to-five-year-old children for a number of years, and never was asked if animals talked. Children know they don't, but isn't it fun if in stories they sometimes do?

It is perfectly true that little children need few of the elaborate present-day attempts at fantasy, and that our "young" books have had too many thin, sophisticated, and unconvincing adult fancies. These may or may not be escape for the adults who write the books and make the pictures. But Wanda Gág's "Millions of Cats," in which the words and pictures flow along like music, and many other favorite books, are pleasure reading for children, not escape, as Mrs. Norwood suggests. Certainly, talking-beast stories go back a long way in time.

Strangely enough, or logically enough, the Russians, who, as we well know, are proficient in science, have in their first school readers "The Three Bears, A Fairy Tale by Leo Tolstoy." This makes me wish I could read Russian, just to see what goes on! And in Soviet readers from grade to grade, through the gray warp of "How Lenin Learned" and "The Pond on the Collective Farm," run the brighter threads of fables, fairy tales, and other stories. A number of the fables are also "by Leo Tolstoy," which still leaves some of them with a resemblance to the fables we know. Many of the stories "by Tolstoy" used in present-day Rus-

sian readers are those published as "Stories for Children" and were probably told by him in his struggle to teach reading in his school for peasant children. Pushkin does well in readers also; he happened to have quite a way with poems and fairy tales. As for Chekhov, the realist—beginning with "Kashtanka" in fifth or sixth grade the children are led up grade by grade through his short stories to "The Cherry Orchard." Is it possible that Ivan, or any European child, might find the text of our readers lacking in content? Ivan's readers, by the way, are called "Native Language," and in fifth grade the title changes to "Native Literature."

As you may guess, I have been reading "What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn't," by Arthur Trace, Jr. (Random House, \$3.95), in spite of its title and its rather unfavorable review in SR/EDUCATION November 18. It may be a frustrating book with its page after page of contrasted tables of contents, and impractical in its final cure for reading ills: a first-grade reader with 2,000 words, a sixth-grade reader with 10,000. After all, it is not quantity but quality of words that counts, though vocabulary needs enlarging.

However, if Dr. Trace's book does nothing more than reaffirm the fact that both the U. S. and the USSR are "text-book oriented," it may have accomplished something. He also states flatly that our present "basal readers" contain "nothing of literary merit." This is true, and we have known it for some time. Words are changed to conform with a graded vocabulary, sentences are shortened and tidied up, style is tidied out. And that is why some of us who write for children do not like to give permission for our stories to be used in basal readers. We know what will happen.

Dr. Trace also indicates that Ivan's stories are presented in their original form. In the first grade the Russian child is given two of the tools that will help him with new words, the alphabet and phonics. Another book, "Tomorrow's Illiterates," a collection of articles by the Council for Basic Education, edited by Charles C. Walcott (Little, Brown, \$3.95), makes even more emphatic critical remarks about "the look and say" method of teaching reading [SR/EDUCATION, Nov. 18]. The preface is by Jacques Barzun, who hopes that reading instruction will be reformed by "these quiet but deadly chapters." Whatever our new "method" or methods may be, it is to be hoped we try them out soon.

Why do many schools continue to use "readers" even from fifth to eighth grades? Why not read *books*? Schools fortunate enough to have libraries are