

The "Golden Age" for Children?

By ALICE DALGLIESH

FRANK STOCKTON, assistant editor of the most noble of children's magazines, *St. Nicholas*, would smile if he could see *The Griffin and the Minor Canon* as a leading picture book on the Holt, Rinehart & Winston spring list and hailed as "a story from the golden age of children's books." It is handsomely and appropriately illustrated by Maurice Sendak, and Stockton would, I think, have approved it as "neat and elegant," his own description of one of his early books.

Stockton's stories, which have meaning for adults as well as for children, were not, as the jacket copy states, almost forgotten after his death in 1902. The particular collection of stories that includes the one under discussion had an honorable life as *The Queen's Museum and Other Fanciful Tales* in the Scribner Classics until 1942. At that time the book went out of print, possibly because the stories were allegories, or perhaps because the children lacked the background or vocabulary to read them, and parents had not the time or patience to read them aloud. Stockton's *Ting-a-Ling Tales* were given a new format in 1955, in the Scribner Willow Leaf Library, in which there is a preface giving material about the author. His stories were also kept alive for New York children by Mary Gould Davis when she was supervisor of library storytelling.

Making one of them into a picture book was a fine idea, and the physical appearance of the book is delightful and striking. Time will tell whether good illustration can bring to life a story that has been lying fallow; in this case it might happen. Children will enjoy the way in which the griffin attaches himself to the minor canon, helps him to keep order in his school, and visits the sick—one of whom is leaving hastily by way of the window. This story has never before had quite the humor that these pictures provide.

But it is the "golden age" that we are discussing. There seems to be a great nostalgia through the land for this mysterious golden age when stories were theoretically full of great truths and, in theory, better written than the book of today.

The golden age cannot be confined



—From "The Griffin and the Minor Canon."

to a period; used in this way it is a static term. It began when children sat among the adults who listened to the telling of the great myths and hero tales. It continued when myths, legends, and fairy tales were written down; through the time of John Newbery's first bookshop for children, through the days of England's Victorian writers, and, in this country, through the period of *St. Nicholas*. It was followed by the establishment in publishing houses of special departments for children's books, when many fine books were published. Each person living today remembers with special affection a highly individual golden age. There is no one period, but only good books that have come out singly or grouped together in time. Some of these have held their values in a new age, some have not. *The Griffin and the Minor Canon* now belongs to both past and present. The pictures reintroduce the story; its truths and its humor have been there through the years. We can continue in our search for books written today that will be read ten, twenty, fifty years from now, and we can re-evaluate those written in the preceding years.

Each year the children's and school librarians of the American Library Association make diligent search for the outstanding books of the preceding year, those worthy of the Newbery and Caldecott Medals. On March 11, 1963, the medals were awarded at the Harvard Club, an occasion saddened for all of us present by the death, on March 8, of Frederic Melcher, chairman of the board of *Publishers' Weekly*, and the originator and donor of the awards. Always a friend of publishing, with a special feeling for children's books,

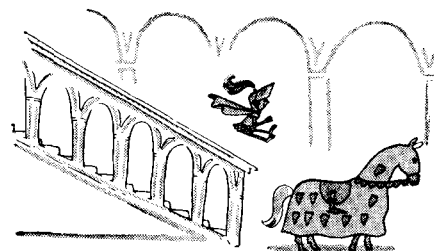
Mr. Melcher will be much missed.

The medals were presented and a tribute to Mr. Melcher given by Ruth Gagliardo of Kansas. The Newbery was awarded to Madeleine L'Engle for *A Wrinkle in Time* (Farrar, Straus), a space-age fantasy-allegory that, we were told, is proving popular with today's children. The Caldecott Medal went to Ezra Jack Keats for his charming picture book, *The Snowy Day* (Viking). It is always interesting to watch the faces of the winners as the shining bronze medals are put into their hands for the first time. (The medals will be formally presented at the annual ALA meeting in Chicago.)

The runners-up are also important. For the Newbery, Sorche Nic Leodhas for her group of Scottish folk tales, *Thistle and Thyme* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston), and Olivia Coolidge for *Men of Athens* (Houghton Mifflin). For the Caldecott, runners-up were: *The Sun Is a Golden Earring*, with illustrations by Bernarda Bryson (Holt), and *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*, by Charlotte Zolotow, illustrated by Maurice Sendak (Harper & Row). All of these books except *Men of Athens* were reviewed in SR. *Men of Athens* is a series of stories about the golden age of Pericles and reads most easily.

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The editor apologizes to Evelyn Stefansson and to *Compton's Encyclopedia* for an error in last month's review: the article on "The Northmen" was written by Mrs. Stefansson, not by her husband, as was stated. We should also like to correct the price given for the fifteen-volume *Britannica Junior*; with a small book rack, it is \$149.90. The 1963 revised edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* costs \$398.



—From "The Little Knight's Dragon."

THE LITTLE KNIGHT'S DRAGON. Story and pictures by Denise and Alain Trez. World. 32 pp. \$3. We seem to be having a revival of knights and chivalry—with humor in the younger field, more serious treatment for the older children. This small knight, who prefers playing marbles to fighting, and the dragon, which also prefers playing marbles, are delightful. The pictures show spacious sweeps of castle, and of the dragon as he follows the little knight across the drawbridge, plays marbles in the courtyard, and acts as central

heating for the castle. The ending is happy for everyone. Ages 4-8.

THE BARON'S BOOTY. Written and illustrated by Virginia Kahl. Scribners. 32 pp. \$3.25 Virginia Kahl's stories about the Duke and Duchess and their children have been most popular. This book, with its bright red jacket and cover, tells how those thirteen daughters (all, mysteriously, about the same age) were spirited away by a robber baron, who wished to hold them for ransom. But his life was hard, indeed:

When he'd tucked them into their little
beds,
Heard thirteen prayers,
Kissed thirteen heads,
Told thirteen tales,
Fetched thirteen drinks,
Dried thirteen tears,
Winked thirteen winks,
Did other chores we need not mention,
There still was one who'd need at-
tention.

What finally happened to the baron—and the girls—makes a lively tale in pictures and verse. Ages 4-8. (Better 6-9.)

CASTLE, ABBEY AND TOWN: How People Lived in the Middle Ages. By Irma Simonton Black. Illustrated by W. T. Mars. Holiday House. 101 pp. \$2.95. Mrs. Black puts her emphasis on the daily life of the Middle Ages, and, while she takes up the training of a knight, she makes it plain that he was a professional fighting man and does not overromanticize. Part of the book is in factual form, with stories interspersed to bring it closer to the reader. The combination should give young people some background (which they lack) for reading books set in this period. I question the song sung by the troubadour, which isn't an old one, but that is minor. Attractively illustrated, the book was checked by an expert. Ages 9-12.

CHIVALRY AND THE MAILED KNIGHT. By Walter Buehr. Illustrations by the author. Putnam. 93 pp. \$3. "This," the author states, "is the story of the Age of Chivalry and of its leaders, the armored mounted knights, who reigned supreme on the battlefield for over four centuries." It is just that. We do learn how the castle grew, and why the nobles had vassals. A castle is explained and diagrammed, the life of the knight is followed and the tournament realistically treated: "Many good warriors were killed or crippled for life." Armor is explained with more attention to small details than seems necessary; it is necessary to know how a knight in plate armor got on his horse, but there seems to be no graphic proof of any crane being used, as shown here. The text is sometimes rather heavy, but the book provides good background material for the period. Ages 9-12.

SEA SO BIG, SHIP SO SMALL. Written and illustrated by Jeanne Bendick. Rand McNally. 80 pp. \$2.95. A thoroughly shipshape book, this tells clearly in text and

many two-color pictures exactly how to take care of a boat, and to handle it, with emphasis on safety and first aid, and effective navigation aids. With all the boats that will be taking to the water this spring, families should welcome it. And it might be just the thing for that eight-year-old boy on the West Coast whose mother wrote that he brought home three books on boating from the library and could read only one. The pictures should help. Ages 10 up (a younger enthusiast may be able to handle it).

THE CONGRESS. By Gerald W. Johnson. Illustrated by Leonard Everett Fisher. Morrow. 128 pp. \$2.95. With the current book Gerald Johnson's trilogy on government is complete. The other two of the group are *The Presidency* and *The Supreme Court*.

Here the origin and duties of the House and the Senate are clearly explained, as is the procedure of voting for Congressmen and Senators. Most important, we see how the three branches of the federal government act as checks and balances on each other. Together the three books should explain our government clearly to any interested young person. Ages 10-14.

AUTOMATION. By Andrew Blumle. Illustrated with photographs and diagrams. World. 142 pp. \$3.95. Young people cannot understand what is going on in their world, without some knowledge of computers, their work, and the results of it. This is an efficient book, fully illustrated, which starts with the beginnings of automation and, after explaining the digital and analog computers, goes on to demonstrate what they mean to industry. The last section of the book, "The Social Challenge of Automation," shows the decrease in need for unskilled workers. "Highly skilled social workers will be faced with the task of helping individuals adjust to the rapid social changes we can predict, psychiatrists and psychologists will be kept busy with the emotional disturbances that are even now characteristic of our society. Artists, musicians and writers will be in greater demand as level of education and spendable income rises throughout the country." The book, however, does not really come to grips with the problem of what happens to those with limited mental equipment. Fortunately, perhaps, they will not be able to read the book; for them the future looks gloomy. Older boys and girls.

THIS IS A FLOWER. By Ross E. Hutchins. Photographs by the author. Dodd, Mead. 152 pp. \$3.50. This will delight plant lovers, as did its companion volume, *A Leaf*. Perhaps the best chapter, with regard to both information and pictures, is the one explaining the part played by insect and flower in pollination. "In all the world of plants there is probably nothing more remarkable than the tricks used by many plants to secure the help of insects in carrying pollen." Dutchman's pipe actually traps the insects and holds them prisoner until they pollinate the flower. Ages over 12—possibly adults.

Miscellanies

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was not a writer of genres and his work does not break down into neat categories. He was always a newspaperman, and his writings, long or short, were the typical chats with his readers that the columnist has always delighted in. Sometimes they lean in the direction of fiction and become tales, short stories, and novels (if they run on from one episode to another, like *Tom Sawyer*); sometimes they are just one-sided conversations and remain essays, sketches, speeches, articles, or travel books like *Innocents Abroad*; sometimes they are composed of a bit of everything, like *Life on the Mississippi*. Mark Twain had about as little sense of structure and form as a writer can get along without, and the critics who try to impose such qualities on his work are merely rewriting it to suit their own ideas. The long argument about the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* can be dismissed in a few words: the story wasn't long enough to make a book without the rescue episode.

But that is not the point here. These pieces in Mr. Neider's latest collection are neither "essays," nor is the book "complete"; they are simply some more miscellaneous writings that deserve republication and that didn't get into the two earlier volumes. There is a lively introduction, then a few early editorials, some leftover travel pieces of the Nineties, and a substantial offering—mostly speeches and controversial newspaper articles—from the last sad and sour decade. The Mark Twain we are coming to know better through the release by Bernard DeVoto and Henry Nash Smith of the "suppressed" later work—the cynical, unlaughing Mark Twain—is here well represented by "What Is Man?" defenses of Harriet Shelley, Joan of Arc, Satan, and some of the author's friends, such as W. D. Howells; and attacks on Shakespeare, Adam, the missionaries, and others whom history and human hypocrisy have, in his judgment, overestimated.

Mr. Neider's books are well printed, well bound, and well indexed, and they fill in the gaps for the Mark Twain enthusiast who hasn't room on his shelf for more than a half-dozen of the best known works, and who couldn't find a complete set of the Stormfield Edition even if he did have room for it. Finally, a handy composite index of titles for the three volumes makes this a set in itself, even though there are annoying elements of misrepresentation that the honest Mark Twain himself would deplore.

—ROBERT E. SPILLER.



WORKSHOPS FOR WRITERS

By GORHAM MUNSON, *who has been identified with the summer writers' conference movement almost from its inception at Bread Loaf in 1926. Mr. Munson is currently director of the Florham Park-Madison Writers Conference at Fairleigh Dickinson University.*

TO THE many tributes to Robert Frost in recent memorial addresses and essays should be added one that recognizes the creative stimulus he contributed to the origin of the summer writers' conference movement. Frost was an educator as well as poet, and in the first role he showed nearly as great originality as in the second, in "old ways to be new." He was consulted before the Bread Loaf experiment was started in 1926, and hovered hopefully over its early years of trial and error. As this pioneer conference grew up, it matured in the noncommercial, literary direction that Frost desired, and for a number of years he was "on campus" for the entire session, although he never assumed any direct teaching chores. Frost's idea was that a writers' conference should be a place where writers came together to see what they could get out of meeting each other. This is a perfect definition of the unacademic spirit of the true writers' conference. The staff should be writers and the students should be writers, and they should rub minds together to see what they can learn from each other. As simple as that; no academic trimmings.

The Frost-Bread Loaf idea spread. Edward Davison carried it to the Uni-

versity of Colorado, which had launched a writers' conference in 1930; and in 1938 Carroll Towle planted it at the University of New Hampshire and led a writers' conference there for twenty-three years. Too ill to organize a session in 1962, Dr. Towle sent his blessing to the Florham Park-Madison Writers Conference, which had engaged several of his regular staff and attracted a number of his perennial conferees. The University of New Hampshire Writers Conference will be missing again this year from our preview, for during the winter Dr. Towle died, the first of the first generation of conference leaders to leave the scene.

The older conferences continue to flourish. With the departure of New Hampshire, Indiana University Writers' Conference, founded in 1940, is now the third oldest, and is finding it difficult to avoid becoming too successful. Although its enrollment limit is 100, it has been forced in recent years, in spite of screening procedures, to take about 125. Robert Mitchner, the director, writes that he is determined to remain "student-centered" and will resist pressure to expand. "We—myself and my assistants and hostesses—know each student personally and so do our staff members; it is not much of an exaggeration to say that everyone at the conference knows everyone else. . . . Many opportunities are provided for students and staff to relax together socially. The atmosphere of congeniality encompasses staff as well as students; the large number of professional writers who come as students (and who are warmly helpful to other stu-

dents) perhaps serves as a link uniting the world-famous staff member and the not-yet-published beginner." This informal association is very much within the meaning of a conference as sketched by Frost when I visited him at Amherst in 1927.

I think it may also be claimed that the fourth oldest writers' conference (of the one- to three-week model) is "student-centered" in the Frost conception, although it does not seem to have received his influence directly. The Sixteenth Annual Writers Conference at the University of Utah "offers to writers and readers a course of concentrated study with men and women of wide experience and high accomplishment in *various fields of writing and publishing* [italics added], and adopts "the basic procedure . . . of the studio and workshop" supplemented by "opportunities to meet and talk with the leaders and registered members."

AMONG the younger conferences, spectacular progress has been made by the New York City Writers Conference sponsored by Wagner College. Organized in 1956 on the Frost-Bread Loaf model, this conference deviated in 1961 into a cluster of three intensive seminars. Although applicants are rigorously screened for ability, enrollment regularly exceeded the registration limit of fifteen per seminar—last year it had a total registration of fifty-two—and prospects are high for this summer. The reason is that Edward Albee will return to lead the Playwriting Workshop. Many conferences have failed to attract would-be playwrights, but the au-