

Children's Books

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reach boys through his baseball experiences. "Do you have the guts not to fight back?" Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers asked when he took Jackie into the club. Jackie had always fought back when attacked. He didn't know how he would be able to discipline himself. It wasn't easy to be the first Negro in Big League baseball. He reports how his wife, Rachel, helped him, "She was superb from the beginning." In the last chapter he tells how he feels about the NAACP and his active work for civil rights. 10 up (14?).

Older Children

The Gull's Way. By Louis Darling. Photographs and illustrations by the author. Morrow. 96 pp. \$6.50. The courting, mating, nesting, and hatching of herring gulls are covered here with extraordinary photographs, many in color.

Among the unusual things about the gulls is the fact that the parent birds have a red spot on the beak, at which the baby birds peck, learning how to take food from it. One of the lovely photographs shows a baby gull pecking, brooded over by the mother. Mr. Darling observed the birds and took his photographs on a small island off the coast of Maine. No age level; adults and young people.

Twenty Tales from Shakespeare. By Irene Buckman. Foreword by Dame Peggy Ashcroft. Random House. 229 pp. \$3.95. A handsome book with extremely well-reproduced photographs of players, this should be popular with those either unable or too lazy to read the plays for themselves. "Any young person," the jacket copy reads, "wants to enjoy the play without puzzling over what it is about. This book is the answer—and if it is a short cut to homework and to passing examinations so much the better." No retelling substitutes for Shakespeare, and I find it hard to take some of the substitutions offered here. It does have the advantage of following the arrangement of the plays. No age level.

The Wreck of the Whaleship Essex: A Narrative Account by Owen Chase, First Mate. Edited by Iola Haverstick and Betty Shepard. Illustrated with reproductions of prints and a map by Kathleen Voute. Harcourt, Brace & World. 124 pp. \$3. Originally published in 1821, this narrative is reprinted by courtesy of the Rare Book Division of the New York Public Library. For some reason, whaling has been one of my great interests, and I found this fascinating as well as a valuable addition to original American narratives. The story of the *Essex* is an extraordinary one—for the ship was wrecked and sunk by an agonized, infuriated whale, and the crew had to take to the boats. There follows a most graphic description of their privations, the terrors of hunger and thirst, leading to cannibalism, about which I admit to being squeamish, but it is a necessary part of this realistic narrative. The attack by the whale inspired the climax of Melville's *Moby Dick*, so, all

in all, the interest would be either adult or teen-age.

The World of Columbus and Sons. By Genevieve Foster. With illustrations by the author. Scribners. 406 pp. \$5.95. A fine contribution to young people's reading has been made over a period of years by this author, who set herself the enormous but joyful task of writing "horizontal history," which would span the life of a man and show what was happening in other parts of the world at that time. This newest of the "World" books gives Ferdinand Columbus, the illegitimate son, his rightful place. In younger books he has sometimes been entirely ignored. Yet Ferdinand wrote the *Historie* of his father, and Mrs. Foster's book opens and closes with him.

It is a richly creative book, which may be read as a continuous narrative or dipped into as occasion arises. The text flows easily, is never dull, and is enlivened by many live drawings. The double-page spreads that sum up the "people who were living when—" are particularly valuable. Ages 12-16.

The Great Adventure of Michelangelo. By Irving Stone. Drawings by Joseph Cellini. Also illustrated with photographs. Doubleday. 298 pp. \$4.95. "[This book] is an edition of *The Agony and the Ecstasy* that has been specially edited and illustrated for young readers." So it is plainly stated on the jacket flap, and so is the "age level," which is quite surprisingly given as "up to 12." The low age placement keeps the book apart from the adult novel, but one wonders how many children under twelve will be able to read it. The adaptation is very readable, but an interest in Michelangelo must already be present to carry the young reader along. Adult readers of historical novels wonder on what the reconstructions of conversations are based, but, generally, young readers are not as critical and will read the book, as many grown-ups did, for pure enjoyment.

With the interest in Michelangelo's *Pietà* and the forthcoming motion picture of *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, this younger biography should be useful.

The Man Who Hated Sherlock Holmes: A Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. By James Playsted Wood. Illustrated by Richard M. Powers. Pantheon. 180 pp. \$3.75. An arresting title leads into an interesting and well-written book. Why the title? "The Strand" was publishing Sherlock Holmes stories. As for Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes was a nuisance. He was sick of Holmes. Every Holmes story needed a plot as carefully contrived and as detailed as a full-length book. . . . Doyle had . . . other and better things to do with his time." He decided to ask so large a price for new Holmes stories that the magazine could not afford it. The magazine did. Finally Holmes decided to have Professor Moriarty kill off Holmes (as he is doing every night now in a Broadway play). "The Hound of the Baskervilles" was a blood-curdling attempt to circumvent Holmes's permanent demise. Finally in ten years he was rescued and returned to life by an American magazine in co-publication with the *Strand*. "Conan Doyle was pleased, with reservations." Ages 12 up.

European Scene

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one could have been more wrong than those Facists who came to Ravenna from Bologna and Ferrara to add their bit to the commemoration of September 1921. They managed to cudgel a few who refused to accept their view of Dante as a precursor of Italian Facism and nationalism. Fortunately, today we can reject this view without running such risks.

Far into the future scholars will foregather, and the same question will be posed. What does Dante mean to us in 2064, 2121, 2164, and after? We have been assuming that with the broadening bridge of time Dante will become more and more an outsider to the brave new world of the coming centuries. Could the opposite prove true? As man changes, as taste and morals evolve, as science careens on, might there be social attitudes, ethic convictions, and personal prejudices which—according to the Nietzschean theory of cyclical history—may bring Dante closer to posterity than he is to us? Even that major difficulty of Dante of which Voltaire complained—the wealth of local references and historical figures—will diminish as figures on the stage of history and literature become crowded almost beyond recognition, and Dante's Boniface VIII and Ezzelino III will be no more unfamiliar to new readers of future centuries than will be Shakespeare's Richard III, Tolstoy's Alexander I, or Hugo's Napoleon III.

In sum, what is the value of Dante to us today? It is as an artist, a poet, a visionary, and a man. Eliot and others have so viewed him in our time. He is not just a medieval theologian, as a modern trend of American scholarship has tended to see him. We now know that the greatest value of Dante is rather a personal than a social one. Ask just as easily, what is the value of a medieval cathedral, with its stone demons threatening hell and its rose windows promising heaven? I do not of course invent the analogy, but I find it satisfying and relevant. One can say of a cathedral what Quinon has said of Dante, that his influence on society was nil, but his influence on individuals was immense. The tremendous personal impact of the *Comedy* can be compared best with the feeling which overpowers one as he stands alone in the glowing gloom of a Chartres Cathedral. It was Longfellow who captured in Dantean tercets this experience offered alike by Dante's book and a medieval basilica:

The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait.

—ROBERT J. CLEMENTS.

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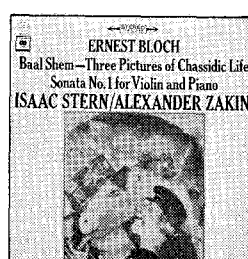
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"THE CRADLE" STILL ROCKS



—Alfredo Valente.

Marc Blitzstein at the piano during the original (1937) presentation of *The Cradle Will Rock*. At left is Charles Niemeyer as Rev. Salvation.

OF THE various forms in which Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* has appeared since it was new in 1937—with a narrator and piano accompaniment, but no action; with a narrator and an orchestra but no scenery; and as a fully staged "opera"—one of the most satisfactory has always been as a recording. For the scenery is easily imaginable and the action no more than rudimentary. Thus the coincidence of two recorded versions (MGM E-4289-2 OC, \$9.98; stereo \$11.98 and American Legacy Records T 1001, \$5.95) is the amplest assist to understanding this work has had in its nearly thirty years of existence.

As the useful résumé of "production information" in the Legacy reissue documents, there have been major opportunities to review the impressions of June 16, 1937—when the work was first given publicly at the bygone Venice Theater—over the decades since. The first was a revival in November 1947 under the direction of Leonard Bernstein, at the New York City Center; the next was again at the City Center in 1960, this time with Lehman Engel in musical charge; and the most recent was at Theater Four, off Broadway.

Some of the satire has lost its pungency, and its glorification of unionism as a shining light of hope in a world of corruption and deceit tends to provoke indulgent smiles rather than indignant endorsement, but there is no question of the service they performed in fueling Blitzstein's feelings to the boiling point. It is not necessary to share his devotion to Freemasonry to appreciate what Mozart

did with it in *Die Zauberflöte* (or, perhaps, what it did for him), nor is enthusiasm for necrophilia an inherent part of the appeal of Strauss's *Salome*. What is essentially remarkable about *The Cradle Will Rock* are the range and variety of results that Blitzstein derived from his parodies of popular songs. Virtually everything in his score, musically, is derived from that idiom, taking sources as varied as Cole Porter and Tin Pan Alley, blues and the musical comedy choruses of Sigmund Romberg, crooners, and authentic jazz. How it all sounds to one not acquainted with his sources would be difficult to say; but for one who is, the effect, at this distance, is a startling testimony to the vitality in his impulse and the swift power of characterization he commanded.

As to the philosophic premise on which it was based, something of real illumination is provided by a commentary of George Avakian in the MGM item. It reads: "Marc Blitzstein, in 1936, had written a song 'Nickel Under my Foot,' about a prostitute. He played and sang it for Bert Brecht, who was delighted by both the song and its philosophy. Brecht suggested that Blitzstein write a whole opera exposing the various kinds of figurative prostitution. Inspired, Blitzstein wrote the entire *The Cradle Will Rock* in six blazing weeks."

What that explains is some of the blatant imbalance of the scenario for *The Cradle Will Rock*, which has always struck me as being at variance with a mind of Blitzstein's flexibility and sharpness. Judges are bought and sold, the church is corrupt, the press is venal, the

medical profession can be suborned to perjure itself, professors and college presidents are no better, musicians and artists live by the bounty of people they despise—only the laboring man and his high-minded representative are cut from a different kind of cloth, which is, naturally, all wool and a yard wide. But if Blitzstein was motivated by Brecht's suggestion and proceeded to implement it in every way he could—well, then, that explains a lot about *The Cradle Will Rock*, and why it might be described (in contrast to some classical predecessors) as a modern immorality play.

Additionally, it explains more about its weaknesses than its strengths. The former were plainly an outgrowth of the method and the journalistic means Blitzstein employed to make it work. Since "journalistic" means, in a real sense, here today and gone tomorrow, the premise has proven equally ephemeral. But its strengths are an outgrowth of a very real compulsion to musical expression. The compulsion had existed in Blitzstein for a decade or more previously; but it had not been directed into really productive channels until he encountered in Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson* the first songs written in this country by Kurt Weill (in 1935).

A good deal of this can be heard in the MGM album, whose two discs reproduce the off-Broadway performance noted above. It was staged by Howard da Silva, who created the role of Larry Foreman nearly thirty years ago, with Gershon Kingsley as musical director. It embraces, so Avakian's note assures us, "The entire show (including the