



From "The Panjandrum Picture Book" by Randolph Caldecott (Frederick Warne)

THE REVIEWING OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

By Anne Carroll Moore

*The children come, the children go,
Today grows quickly yesterday;
And we, who quiz quaint fashions so,
We soon shall seem as quaint as they.*
—From *Old Fashioned Tales*
Selected by E. V. Lucas

THE formation of a special literature for children has been going on ever since the appearance of "Goody Two Shoes" in London in 1765 and in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1787. But the recognition of this special literature as a subject worthy of sustained attention the year round — worthy of such continuity of presentation from year to year as would keep its challenge fresh and vigorous — has been long delayed, far too long delayed, for the encouragement of original work of definite quality.

Children's books fall very readily into two main classes: *creative*, belonging to the very essence of literature,

timeless and ageless in its appeal, and *informative*, belonging to the social period for which the books are written.

To miss the joy of reading and re-reading outstanding books of the first class in childhood means irreparable loss, for no grown up ever brings to story or poem what a child brings to his first reading. To miss books of the second class is a matter of minor importance, since their essential content is as bound to reappear at regular intervals as are the hardy annuals and perennials of a well tended New England garden.

Now that we are assured that all departments of knowledge are going to be preserved in outlines of generous proportions for the benefit of the fathers and mothers, the uncles and aunts, the teachers and lecturers who have been accustomed to buy children's

books with the idea of forestalling any possible yearning after the unknown, we may well pause at the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century to ask: How fares it now with the imagination? Who is concerned with its need? Is it being better nourished and cherished, more wisely exercised in our own time, or is it being taken for granted, or forcibly fed with theoretical and commonplace substitutes for the dreams and visions of childhood?

Clear memory of childhood is as rare as it is un-selfconscious. That it cannot be recovered by the questionnaire method has been fully demonstrated in recent novels no less than in the textbooks on child study of an earlier day. It was indeed the futility of the child study methods of the 1890's as applied to children's reading, and a keen interest in eighteenth century literature for its own sake, which drove me backward

and forward over the history of the writing, illustrating, and publishing of children's books until it took hold on my mind as a subject of fascinating interest and limitless possibilities. I found myself continually wondering why it was not given its true place in the curriculum of the colleges and universities from which so many reviewers and publishers have been recruited.

I had, it may be noted, from the first a different type of interest than the collector brings to this subject, for I was learning about the lives the children lived in different centuries as well as about their books, learning a great many things which I have found pointedly suggestive in personal relationships with present day parents, teachers, librarians, publishers, and booksellers. Moreover, I believe it was much reading of the old children's books in contrast to the new that developed and strengthened my powers of appraisal. I keenly enjoyed both text and pictures and I discovered that certain stories had not lost their hold upon children; lively incident, dramatic climax, even when obviously employed for moral ends, clarity of meaning, and sincere interest in children may take to stilts but they never fail to reach a goal in any century.

It was reassuring to find that I had been exploring my chosen field in good company. I well remember the delight with which I welcomed E. V. Lucas's "Old Fashioned Tales" (1905) and "Forgotten Tales of Long Ago" (1906) to the story-book shelves of a children's library. Charming books they were, and still are, for the children have not allowed them to go out of print. Francis Bedford did not merely decorate them in the spirit of their time, his illustrations are a direct challenge to the children of another age to read



Little Goody Two Shoes.

*Frontispiece from one of the First Worcester Edition,
printed by Isaiah Thomas in 1787*

genuinely interesting stories of children strangely like themselves.

Story writers and reviewers might well read them also, and, going behind Mr. Lucas's illuminating introductory comments to his volumes with their modern drawings, search for copies of Andrew Tuer's "Pages and Pictures from Forgotten Children's Books" and "Stories from Old Fashioned Children's Books", with their wealth of fascinating cuts and facsimiles of old title pages. These books are the most satisfactory substitute I know for the freedom of such a fine collection of early children's books as Wilbur Macy Stone possesses. At the time of their publication (1899-1900) they fairly represented Mr. Tuer's own collection on the subject. But one does not need to be a collector to find them interesting and amusing today. I have made such constant use of both books in speaking upon the general subject of children's books to parents, as well as to students, that I feel very strongly that they should be taken from the limbo of out-of-print and made available for the wider circulation they might now have.

The recent publication of Florence V. Barry's "A Century of Children's Books" is a strong bit of evidence of what may come of making children's books a subject of study during a university course. Miss Barry began her book while a student in Sir Walter Raleigh's class, receiving much encouragement from his interest in the subject. The chief value of her contribution lies in her own fresh discovery of the fact that the history of children's books holds a record of childhood, and in the spontaneity with which she links up her quotations and conclusions with modern associations, both human and literary. She brings her "Century" to a close with fine appreciation of the dramatic realism of Maria Edgeworth

and reminds us that she was the "pioneer of plot in children's books" as well as a writer of moral tales to fit "scientific" theories. But it is a good thing to remember just now that it is her



Foot Ball

*Copper plate illustration from "Youthful Recreations"
(J. and J. Cruikshank, Philadelphia, 1800)*

first hand knowledge of real children and her art as a novelist that keep Miss Edgeworth's stories alive, not her theories or her disbelief in the supernatural. The supernatural has a way of surviving from age to age.

"If she never understood the 'fairy way of writing'," says Miss Barry, "it was because she had built a school upon the fairy circles of her village green. Her children were so happy in and about the village that they never discovered an enchanted wood. They planted trees instead of climbing them; they knew all the roads to Market, but nobody showed them the way to Fairyland."

Schools are still being built on the fairy circles of village greens and city streets and some of them have voted the fairies down in the twentieth century—not the children, oh dear no! only those grown ups who fear the unknown and do not yet know Christopher Robin, Ernest Shepard, and “Hoo”.

Much browsing among early children's books, companioned by both children and fairies, leaves one with quite another set of fears—of being dull or commonplace, of boring or being bored, of missing the point, of being earnest or facetious, condescending, theoretical, academic, or artificial.

One sees so clearly the inevitable result of being any of these things—your work simply isn't *read* any more. How good it must be, then, for a reviewer of children's books—of any books—to rouse such a set of fears in time to scare the writers and the artists, and even the publishers and booksellers of his own day, into a study of the survival of the fittest among children's books since “Goody Two Shoes”.

“But we haven't time for anything like that. Leave such investigations to the specialists in education. The publication of children's books, although an attractive item, is a very uncertain one in our business. How can they be made to pay even the cost of production?” It was the publisher of the '90's and early 1900's who argued thus—the publisher who regarded librarians as theoretical folk with strong personal prejudices governing the selection of books for their readers. It was before librarians and publishers began really to know each other and to vision a public as yet unreached by either.

That a librarian even in the '80's, the golden age of American children's books,

could read from a child's standpoint and act with the courage of her own conviction, there is a fine bit of evidence in a list of books with an introduction and annotations by Caroline Hewins, librarian of the Hartford Public Library. This list was published for the use of American libraries in 1882. It was out of print before my time, but I look upon the discovery of a stray copy of it as a milestone on the long path leading up to the appraisal of children's books.

Miss Hewins dared place “Tom Sawyer” on her list and leave it there. The unsuitability of the book for the reading of boys and girls had been pointed out by such literary mentors of the day as the New York “Evening Post”. There was a violent prejudice against it in many libraries. But Miss Hewins heeded not. She merely continued to place “Tom Sawyer” on lists distinguished for their selective judgment and genuine literary association until the book became known for what it is.

From her first list and from John F. Sargent's more comprehensive “Reading for the Young”, I gained a fair outlook over the field of children's books in the nineteenth century; and when I began to supervise the work with children in the New York Public Library early in the present century I had the unusual experience of seeing a fair proportion of all the children's books I had ever heard condemned, circulating side by side with the classics, old and new.

“What are you doing about the selection of children's books?” asked Dr. John S. Billings, the late director of the New York Public Library. “I am letting everybody's favorites circulate until they wear out”, was my reply. “There are more than six thousand titles of story books alone,



The Merry Friar carrieth Robin across the Water:

H.P.:

From Howard Pyle's "Robin Hood" (Scribner, 1883)

many of which I never heard of. I am asking Miss Hewins if she knows them, and if she doesn't I think we'll give them to the reference department."

"To the old boys", said the wise doctor with a smile, for he knew children's books, as he knew all books, with a great knowledge. "We may want a few of them back, to place with a collection of still older books for children in the children's room of the new library", I said. The central library was still in process of building and we were sitting by the fire in Dr. Billings's cozy office in the old Astor Library.

"I want the old boys to feel like coming to that room as well as the children and I want the children to see what books used to be like. All sorts of people like seeing them and they have always been locked away at the Lenox." It was characteristic of Dr. Billings that he made no comment at the time. He just sat there, looking into the fire, but not long afterward a little package of treasures among old books came to my office marked: "I found these at an auction the other day. Would you like them for that collection?"

No single feature of the children's room has excited so much personal interest as the cases of little old children's books presided over by a portrait of an eighteenth century duchess and replicas of the "Cries of London", and surrounded by modern picture books bridged by those eighteenth century lovers of the 1880's, Kate Greenaway and Randolph Caldecott.

Much water has passed under and over many bridges since the first of these books were placed there at the opening of the Library in May, 1911; and because I have had the good fortune to see many dreams come true within this period, I have ventured to postpone any consideration of the pub-

lications of the spring of 1925 to open up the subject of round-the-year reviews of children's books. It is the easier to do so because no copy of "The Scarlet Cockerel", the Charles Boardman Hawes prize story, nor of "Sweet Time and the Blue Policeman", a book of children's plays by Stark Young, has yet been received.

If it be true, as a leading publisher states, that "the quality of books for children has increased out of proportion to other classes of books with the possible exception of biography and one other, that there is an increased sale of well selected books, that this is truer of children's books in America than in England today", is it not about time to rate them in terms of their importance to the public libraries, the school libraries, and the households to which they go?

Certain publishers have so decided, and, by a departmental organization of their work corresponding to that made by libraries many years earlier, are rendering valuable and varied service including well selected and annotated lists, intelligent advertising, and better informed salesmen. These publishers have done much, but vastly more needs to be done; for the Trade is still far too much of a bugaboo, not to librarians — since they are in daily contact with a public of potential book buyers — but to those who have not yet discovered the secret of choosing children's books for their vitality and standing by until they find their market. American librarians have done yeoman service here.

Children's Book Week has been of inestimable value in calling out timely articles on children's books and children's reading, but far too many of these articles, like the children's books themselves, are crowded into a busy holiday season. It has not yet become an

established custom to find something worth reading about children's books and their authors in every literary review.

"But what is there to write about?" asks someone. "Is anything ever known about the writers of children's books unless they become very famous?" More might be known if more writers would do what Hugh Walpole did in "Jeremy" when he paid his tribute to Mrs. Ewing as an influence in his writing. I wonder if even Hugh Walpole knows that Mrs. Ewing liked to have "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" read aloud to her in her last illness.

"Her appreciation of fun remained as keen as ever, and strange as it may seem", wrote her sister — but it doesn't seem strange to me — "one of the very few books she liked to have read aloud was Mark Twain's 'Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'; the dry humor of it, — the natural way in which everything is told from a boy's point of view, — and the vivid and beautiful descriptions of river scenery all charmed her."

Reread "Jackanapes", and if you've never read it, "Reka Dom", a story full of pictures of Mrs. Ewing's own

home by the St. John River during the years she spent in New Brunswick. You will not think it strange either, and it will set you wondering how many are the ties that bind writers and artists in the same age, and in distant ages, although they may live in different countries.

Yes, there is much to be said, once we have taken children's books to our heads as well as our hearts. Perhaps I cannot do better than quote from a recent letter of the editor of THE BOOKMAN, since it was in THE BOOKMAN that the first sustained reviewing of children's books appeared: "Why it is that children's books have received so little careful attention in the past is a mystery. Surely, no class of books is so important in the development of the reading habits of a nation. If for this reason alone, they should be studied, criticized, appreciated. Yet they are worthy of attention in themselves. Classics of beauty and romance are numbered among them. The great authors turn to the child mind in moods of gaiety and of fantasy and, in those moods, create a very special type of book that often springs from the deepest inspiration."



"Not pipes," urged Jackanapes; "upon my honor, aunty, not pipes. Only cigars like Mr. Johnson's!"
— From "Jackanapes", illustrated by Randolph Caldecott (Roberts Brothers, Boston, 1891)