CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF THE SPRING

By Annie Carroll Moore

WHEN I saw "Moonshine and Clover" and "A Doorway in Fairyland" clinging to the shelves of their London publisher last November and learned that both books were to be published in New York in early spring, my mind leaped to the delightful prospect of contrasting new stories of Laurence Housman with his tales of a generation ago, in a spring review of children's books for THE BOOKMAN.

So I asked to have the new books sent to the steamer that I might read them for the first time on the homeward voyage. But never "A Doorway in Fairyland" nor a glimmer of "Moonshine and Clover" appeared on the "France" at Plymouth, and I have actually waited four long months to look inside their covers and behold "The Blue Moon" rise from "A Doorway in Fairyland", while "The Field of Clover", "The House of Joy", and "A Farm in Fairyland" yield tribute to both books, neither of which, as a matter of fact, offers any new stories at all.

The publishers have wisely recorded in each volume the titles of the four collections from which the stories are taken and the original dates of publication, but they have not been so careful as one could wish about the form. The paper, the sacrifice of initial letters, and the poor reproductions of the "dear wood engraver", as Clemence Housman is called by her artist brother who made the original designs, lead me to register a strong protest on a tendency to make an ordinary looking book out of an unusual one in the rapid publication of folk and fairy tales.

It is twenty-nine years since "A Farm in Fairyland" appeared as a new book, and I well remember that it found a relatively small number of readers among the children of an American public library during the years it remained in print. Within the past fifteen years, however, changes have been taking place under my direct observation which lead me to predict a large and expectant group of readers for "The Galloping Plough", "The Rooted Lover" (in which a ruddy faced plow boy turns into a red poppy), "The Prince With the Nine Sorrows" (a story blessed with a "family fairy"), "The Luck of the Roses", "The Wishing-Pot", and "A Capful of Moonshine". "How is it that one gets to see a fairy?" Toonie asks the old fagot maker on Drundle Head; and the old man, ignorant of spirit photography, replies: "There are some to whom it comes by nature; but for others three things are needed —a handful of courage, a mouthful of silence, and a capful of moonshine."

To quote from "Rocking-Horse Land" (a delectable birthday story destined to be a favorite in library story hours) is to deprive the reader of the joy of discovery. Girls of high school age, from twelve or thirteen on through the teens, will readily associate several of these stories with their reading of poetry, with old French ro-

mances, with such books as "The Children of the Dawn", Kipling's "Brushwood Boy", "The Happy Prince" of Oscar Wilde", with Barrie, with Laurence Housman's garden play "Prunella", with that more recent out of door fantasy conceived, not by an artist, but by a scientist, "The Treasure of the Isle of Mist"; and, as it becomes better known, with Eleanor Farjeon's "Martin Pippin".

Aline Kilmer loves the Housman tales. She tells me that she came by "The Field of Clover" when she was twelve and "A Farm in Fairyland" a year later, but she waited for "The Blue Moon" until she was nearly eighteen. She has kept on reading the stories ever since she began and is now sharing them with her children.

The story which stands out to me and to all the story tellers in the New York Public Library, because we heard it perfectly told in a setting which gave it something of its own background, is "A Chinese Fairy Tale". Others may ask whether Laurence Housman invented the whole story — it has a very intricate plot — or whether he invested an old Chinese legend with his own experience of an artist's life and aspiration. I shall never seek to know. I am quite content to accept it without speculation as the life story of a true artist to be told only by the rare story teller who is an artist in her own right.

Marie Shedlock told the story of "Tiki-pu", as she calls it, in the art gallery of Pratt Institute Free Library as a tribute to a librarian who, if she was not the first to discover, was the first to make a living connection between the art of reading with appreciation — as distinguished from the mere act of reading a book or seeking information from books in a library — and the other arts, including the art of the story teller. Mary Wright Plummer rarely missed an art exhibition, a dramatic or a musical event of any significance. When she learned that an English story teller was telling dramatic stories in French as well as in English at a series of matinées for children at Sherry's, she knew at once that she wanted to hear the stories and see the children.

The library story was unknown in 1900, but these miniature dramas — "The Tin Soldier", "The Swineherd", "The Princess and the Pea" — seemed to belong naturally among the resources of a children's room. Why should not they be given a chance there? No one who heard a story told as these stories are told could possibly forget it. Hans Andersen's "Fairy Tales" might live forever, not merely in the *hearts* of children, as was said when he died, but in their *minds*. Everything about children interested Miss Plummer, but she was always concerned with their minds. Characteristically and courageously (for the story telling of the time was laden with information, elocution, and propaganda), Miss Plummer invited Miss Shedlock to come over Brooklyn Bridge and tell her stories first to the trustees, directors, and teachers in various departments of Pratt Institute, which at that time included a kindergarten and a high school so far in advance of the time as to anticipate in practice many things strongly urged by Quiller-Couch in "The Art of Writing" and "The Art of Reading". Story telling for the grown people soon led to a memorable story hour for children. The circulation of books was stopped one Saturday morning and the children came to their room to listen to stories while the books stood listening also.

There was never any doubt in my

mind after that morning that a children's library should have a regular story hour, but finding a story teller of the right sort was not an easy matter. Poor story telling is more disastrous than poor story writing, which can be skipped or left entirely alone without affecting anyone else. I had been conscious from the first months of my personal work in a children's room of the need for investing reading with dramatic interest and pictorial tradition, if it were to have any real meaning in the daily lives of hundreds of children who were coming to the library — many of them from very sordid homes — with all the freedom of voluntary and familiar association.

For a year I carried on an experimental story hour, inviting different people to come to tell stories while I listened with the children. I learned a very great deal from listening. In the spring of that year Miss Shedlock came back again and told Hans Andersen's "Nightingale". It woke the story teller for whom I had been waiting so long, and on May Eve, a Robin Hood story from Howard Pyle and a true story out of her own childhood marked the first of Anna Cogswell Tyler's distinctive contributions to story telling. Two years later she was appointed to assist in an organization of the work with children in the New York Public Library which called for a projection of the library story hour and reading club to meet the varying needs and desires of children from the picture book age on through a continuous range of old and new fairy and folk tales, myths and legends, poetry and romance, mystery and drama, history and biography. Miss Tyler's natural gift of understanding adolescent boys and girls in their relationship to the theatre and to other forms of recreation, as well as to the schools, the museums, and their own homes, has contributed much to the fund of actual knowledge of those associative tastes in which appreciation takes root. Her direction of the work has been continuous for nearly the entire period of fifteen years to which I have referred, and the impact from her groups of readers may be traced all over Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island. Miss Tyler's selection of "Twenty-four Unusual Stories" is an admirable book to include among the books of a summer camp for boys or girls.

While the library story hour has been under my immediate observation as registering fresh powers of appreciation and a vastly extended range of interest in reading among the youth of the time, I am conscious that the schools, notably the English departments of private schools and high schools, have enlivened their courses and are giving more attention to those interests in reading which spring from the love of the thing itself rather than as a means to an end. The same thing is true in the placing of exhibits, in the Museums of Art and Natural History, and the more humanized lectures and stories for small groups given in connection with them. The tendency here is still too strong to give more information than exposure to the subject warrants. I know of no better antidote for too much museum at one time than reading out of such a book as W. H. Hudson's "A Traveller in Little Things". There are some half dozen short chapters about little girls, including "A Little Girl Lost", which are more revealing of Hudson's understanding and love of children than a whole book on the subject by somebody else.

That reading has been coming into even closer association with the drama

in the experience of boys and girls in their teens than in that of their elders, must have been observed by all who are having any opportunity to talk with them. The boys and girls seem to me to have the signal advantage of a more informed approach to dramatic stories and plays as well as a clearer sense of beauty and form.

Investing books and reading with a dramatic quality and pictorial appeal may well be thought of as promising something for the theatre audiences of the future, as well as for the writer and reader of stories and plays. The circumstances which determined the writing and the first production of Walter de la Mare's "Crossings" should make other boys eager to read this play and to act it as soon as it becomes available.

Those who have indifferent knowledge of boys and young men are often surprised that they care so much for beauty and romance. Not so the story teller, nor the writer of the books boys care most about. All sorts of vacuous impressions prevail concerning boys and girls of high school age, most of which can be replaced with finer and truer ones by forming a genuine friendship or two. "Barrie Marvell" is Charles Vince's search through childhood, and he remains always a little boy hearing the night winds blowing and trying to get the smell of the sea in his far off garden. The chapter on "Words and Words" is a perfect account of a child's discovery that he could make words of his own. I walked out from Quality Court with this book under my arm, only to lose it in Paris before I had finished reading it. It is a very nice book to read aloud and holds admirable child psychology. I could say much more in praise of this book and also of Mr. Vince's "Street of Faces" which deserved an appreciation it failed to get at the hands of American reviewers. Both books are so well made that it is a pleasure to turn their pages.

"Wizards and Enchanters" is the title of an absorbing chapter in Edmund L. Pearson's "Books in Black and Red". In it he pays tribute to "Davy and the Goblin", and the other stories he still cherishes in "St. Nicholas" of the 1880's. The well chosen familiar illustrations in this book reinforce Mr. Pearson's reminiscence.

"A Century of Children's Books" ends with the Edgeworths. Florence Barry began the book before the war while a student in Sir Walter Raleigh's class. Her appreciation of the subject in its relation to children and childhood is fresh and unstudied. It is a pity the footnotes and parentheses which so persistently pursue the text were not relegated to the back of the book, for the comment and the selection chosen for quotation are in the main excellent. Such a book should always have some pictorial accompaniment to stay the mind of the reader.

To quote a whole galley of "A Child's Day" is almost irresistible, for I find that Walter de la Mare's verses which were first published with photographs are very little known. Winifred Bromhall is making the pictures for it and the book bids fair to find its place quickly with American children.

> Softly, drowsily,
> Out of sleep
> Into the world again
> Ann's eyes peep.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And all that my song is meant to say
> Is just what she did one long, long day
> With her own little self to play with only
> Yet never once felt the least bit lonely.

"Fifty New Poems for Children" is an attractive little book. The poems have been carefully chosen from books recently published by Basil Blackwell

and there is an index and bibliography of the authors — Robert Graves, Eleanor Farjeon, the Nightingales, and child verses of E. Wyndham Tennant are to be found in it. After seeing the woodcuts of Charles T. Nightingale which illustrate Madeline Nightingale's "Ring a Ring o' Fairies" it seems a thousand pities to have used but one, and that on the outer cover of "Fifty New Poems", where it will be quickly defaced. These delicate woodcuts are so much a part of the verses that they should be regarded as inseparable from them.

A new edition of "The Wind in the Willows" is said to have brought joy to Kenneth Grahame, since Nancy Barnhart's pictures in color and line have caught the very spirit of his fantasy. That "The Talking Thrush", a volume of East Indian stories, retold by W. H. D. Rouse and illustrated by W. H. Robinson, is again in print will be welcome news to story tellers.

"Three to Make Ready", a book of plays by Louise Ayres Garnett, includes a dramatization of her "Muffin Shop" and appears just in time to be included among the books for girls' summer camps.

Moonshine and Clover. By Laurence Housman. Harcourt, Brace and Co. London: Jonathan Cape.

A Doorway in Fairyland. By Laurence Housman. Harcourt, Brace and Co. London: Jonathan Cape.

Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard. By Eleanor Farjeon. Frederick A. Stokes Co.

Twenty-four Unusual Stories. Arranged and retold by Anna Cogswell Tyler. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

A Traveller in Little Things. By W. H. Hudson. E. P. Dutton and Co.

Barrie Marvell. By Charles Vince. E. P. Dutton and Co. London: Philip Allan and Co.

Books in Black and Red. By Edmund L. Pearson. The Macmillan Co.

A Century of Children's Books. By Florence V. Barry. George H. Doran Company. London: Methuen and Co.

A Child's Day. By Walter de la Mare. Henry Holt and Co.

Fifty New Poems for Children. Brentano's. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

The Wind in the Willows. By Kenneth Grahame. Illustrated by Nancy Barnhart. London: Methuen and Co.

The Talking Thrush. By W. H. D. Rouse. Illustrated by W. H. Robinson. E. P. Dutton and Co. London: J. M. Dent and Sons.

Three to Make Ready — Hilltop: Muffins: The Pig Prince. By Louise Ayres Garnett. George H. Doran Company.