CHRISTMAS PACKAGES

A Holiday Review of Children's Books

By Anne Carroll Moore

HALF a century has gone by since the first number of "St. Nicholas" sped merrily on its way from Manhattan Island. East, west, north, south—and across the sea—it traveled, bearing a reminder of the relationship of the good St. Nicholas to the port of New York in a merry challenging greeting from Mary Mapes Dodge to the boys and girls of 1873. Fortunate is the public library or the household which possesses the first volume of "St. Nicholas", for it is rapidly becoming worth its weight in gold.

Never a Christmas draws near that I do not turn back to it and to other early volumes of "St. Nicholas" to recapture their holiday spirit, to refresh my recollection concerning those qualities in story or picture which stay alive longest, to reaffirm that spiritual kinship with Mrs. Dodge which I first felt on reading the St. Nicholas Eve chapter of "Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates".

I was about ten years old when I read it for the first time. Long before that I had a sense of Christmas in the north made vivid by personal experience of the Swedish maids who were the familiar spirits of my childhood. But it was the St. Nicholas Eve chapter of "Hans Brinker" which gave me a new date from which to reckon the beginning of Christmas — a date which for many years I kept secretly, since it was not a New England custom to observe St. Nicholas Eve.

The discovery of Twelfth Night was made about a year later when I decided to read a one volume edition of Shakespeare straight through to see if I could do it and to see what Shakespeare was really like. I may add that this feat was accomplished in secret, and it left me for several years without desire to reread any one of the plays. But it also left me with a new boundary to Christmas and a still unsatisfied passion for seeing festive plays at holiday time. Henceforth masks, mumming, and pantomime were to haunt my dreams for a solid month of Christmas holidays.

I looked for Christmas chapters in every story I read, and most of them were pathetically lacking in any dramatic pictorial interest. I hunted for Christmas carols, poems, and plays, and how few I found in the books of the time!

Above all, I read cook books old and new. Wherever I could find a cook book I read its Christmas recipes, and proceeded to try out those which interested me with an abandon and disregard of consequences not commonly associated with New England kitchens.

With Charlotte, the Swedish maid I remember best, in the offing to keep up the wood fire in the cook stove and lend a hand with the egg beater when my small arms grew tired, no genuine Christmas cake beckoned in vain from a printed page from the time I was seven years old.

Cooking had attracted me long before that — the family tradition is that no one can remember when I first began to cook — but cooking as a dramatic experience and a kind of mystic bond with other lands and other peoples came to me quite unconsciously when I saw the joy with which Charlotte and Matilda and their successors received my special Christmas cakes and candy. I had found a natural way of beginning Christmas with them long beforehand, at the very time it was beginning over in their own country.

Natural ways of extending Christmas beyond New Year's Day to Twelfth Night took longer to find. For years I suffered incommunicable depression after the presents had all been given and received. It wasn't that I wanted more presents. I wanted Christmas itself to last longer than it lasted in New England.

Then, one day, a wonderful thing happened. Mary Mapes Dodge stepped out of an old "St. Nicholas" as a personality, radiating the very spirit and essence of Christmas and giving positive assurance that it lasted on and on in New York and London as well as in the Holland of Hans Brinker.

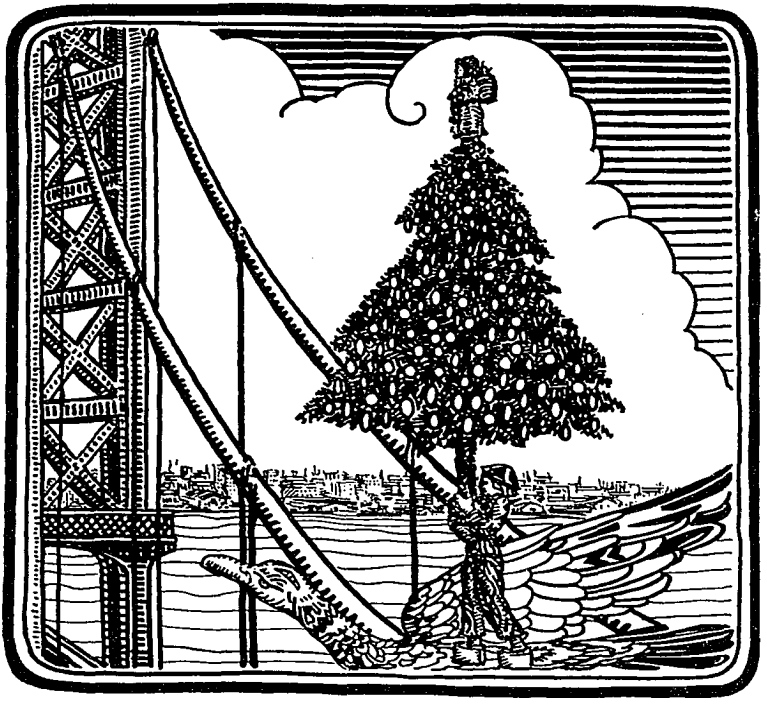
I never knew Mrs. Dodge in the flesh. It never occurred to me as a child to write a letter to her. She had passed from active life long before I ever saw New York, and yet — she has exerted a potent influence over every Christmas since she came alive to me as a child in a Maine village.

It was as inevitable that she should at last step out of the first volume of "St. Nicholas" dragging Frank Stockton and his "Queen's Museum" after her and become a living character in "Brownie's Big Party for Nicholas", as that the Knickerbockers should call out Washington Irving.

Irving lives for me in "Nicholas" for the first time in intimate association with children. I've had untold delight in "Knickerbocker" and "Old Christmas", in "The Sketch Book" and "Tales of a Traveller", but never until I heard John Moon say to Nicholas on Christmas Eve: "Let's keep on down to Bowling Green and look for St. Nicholas where Oloffe the Dreamer saw him!" have I felt the full beauty and power of his story of the coming of St. Nicholas as a story for children. The fifth chapter of "Nicholas" is by honest confession "fished out of 'Knickerbocker'" by John Moon and retold in Irving's own memorable words to the strange little Dutch boy who came to New York looking for Christmas.

John Moon is no elderly uncle, he is a young newspaper man about the age Washington Irving was when he began to write "Knickerbocker" (he was twenty-six when it was published), about the age of that "Young Gentleman of Yale" to whom William McFee addressed a remarkable letter in THE BOOKMAN for October, the letter in which he shares the riches of his own "acquired memories".

How daring a thing it was to set Nicholas marching down Fifth Avenue to the flashing orange lights of the new traffic towers in one chapter and transport him to a Chelsea fireside to listen "without tears" to "'Twas the Night before Christmas" in its native environment in another, I realized only after the story had gone beyond recall. Would Nicholas be submerged by the wealth and timeliness of Manhattan Christmas tradition? One may well ask the question, for it chances to be the century year of the publication of Clement C. Moore's "Visit from St. Nicholas" as well as the half century birthday of St. Nicholas, and nearly the three hundredth of New York it-



From "Nicholas"

self — a staggering succession of anniversaries.

Fortunately Nicholas had the support from the beginning of a Norwegian Troll, who could and did turn into a bear whenever he felt like it, and casting off all tradition he has finally mounted a Golden Goose with his Treasure Tree just in time to allow me to open a few Christmas Packages with new light and understanding.

Every critic should try to create something once in a lifetime, regardless of consequences. It's more difficult than praising or finding fault with the work of other people; it's more fun; it heightens appreciation of all that is admirable in any sincere attempt to tell something new and different in story or pictures; and it enlarges one's sympathies for things which do not "come off".

Kate Greenaway's "A Apple Pie" is in print once more in delightful contrast to C. B. Fall's "A B C Book" which contains no deep dish, delectable, apple pie, but from Antelope to Zebra lives up to its promise. Nancy Barnhart's pictures in color and black and white for the new edition of Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows" place this book in the hands of children for the first time with a full sense of the intimacy, the domesticity of the story. Paul Bransom drew excellent pictures of the animals but animals they remained, always remote and distinct from the story.

Nancy Barnhart seems to have taken her pictures out of Kenneth Grahame's

mind — all except the barge woman — she surely grew on the Mississippi or the Missouri River. I am not surprised therefore to learn that the artist lives in St. Louis and that she made the drawings for her own pleasure. They were first published in England. The caroling Field Mice, Rat scribbling poetry from an easy chair, his red slippered feet on top of the desk, Toad "unhappy and forsaken" in checked suit and red vest, with a little bird singing at the window of his dungeon, are inimitable and unforgetable and give pleasure akin to that given by some of A. B. Frost's pictures for "Uncle Remus".

The quality of tenderness without sentimentality, of humor without vulgarity, appeals alike to child or grown up. While we have had notable examples of it in this country, we have had far too little of it in American books for children. A recent example of the union of these two qualities in text and pictures is to be found in Maynard Dixon's "Injun Babies" with its charming end papers of an Indian village full of life and motion.

Mr. Dixon told the stories and made the pictures for his own little girl out of his "acquired memories" as a painter of what he has seen and felt, and with the desire to illumine and interpret for her the human life of our western plains. Because they have the quality and charm of the folk tales of older countries these stories are bound to have a universal and direct appeal to children to read for themselves. Parents, teachers, and story tellers will appreciate their truth to the life depicted and will find in the book a unique contribution to American Indian lore for young children. The color reproductions would possibly gain by some elimination of process, but the make up of the book in general is so attractive and so adapted to its content as to forestall any other point of criticism. The story about "Medicine Rock" should be read by every parent who seeks in unnatural ways to eliminate fear as an element in the life of his child. It is a story that will delight boys of any age.

From the western plains of North America to the coast of Cornwall, to the land where Jack-the-Giant-Killer was born, where men are pisky-led and mermaids guard the harbors, may seem a very long leap to take to those who have not yet read the enchanting fairy romance called "Billy Barnicoat". Of all the Christmas Packages I've opened it is the most significant and the most compelling in interest as a story for young or old — as genuine *boy psychology*. Billy's mother was drowned in that "splendid Spanish ship the Maria Santissima, wrecked on the Trannion Rocks more than a hundred years ago". Billy was found, we are told, wrapped up in seaweed with a little gold ring on his left thumb, by Mistress Rachel Hornisyde, the childless wife of a fisherman and master of the lugger "The Heavenly Home", who took him to Primrose Cottage to live and taught him to say Aunt and Uncle after the Cornish custom. "They all loved the black haired little thing with his brown wide-set almond eyes, his little pointed chin and ears and his smile 'so sweet as mischief could make it' . . . Billy was taught everything children learned about the Bible a hundred years ago as well as about piskies, spriggans, merrymaids and giants." He learned above all not to be "down-daunted", which is Cornish for sad, in any circumstances; and when at last he came into full possession of the Treasure Chest which held his "Rights" he made his own terms with life.

From "Haroun Er Raschid"

Francis Bedford's pictures not only light up the story of Billy's romantic adventures, they assist in preserving the pictorial authenticity of the Cornish background. When I had finished reading the book I looked up Greville MacDonald in "Who's Who" and I am not surprised to find that he is the son of George MacDonald, a physician with both feet planted firmly in a world he's lived in for many years. Humor, philosophy of everyday life, beauty, and genuine Cornish folk talk set the book apart and give it a place of its own, independent of any talent for story telling which may have been handed on from a giftèd father. "Billy Barnicoat" bears all the marks of a genuine classic for children in its own right. It should be remembered, however, that like many another classic it must make its way slowly and according to its own nature.

With a listening ear to many Christmas Packages I hear Eleanor Farjeon's "Tom Cobble" inviting everybody to explore "Number One Joy Street" with Walter de la Mare, Rose Fyleman, the Nightingales, and the others who have contributed to the "Medley of Verse and Prose" which makes up this attractive new Holiday Annual; and I hear Henry Beston's irresistible "Enchanted Baby" crying from one of the jolliest of all holiday stories in "The Starlight Wonder Book". I listen for the "Clop-Clop Shoes" of William Bowen's "Merrimeg", the little girl who helps her mother about the house, and for that jolly original boy "Snythergen" who grows fat on round foods — oranges, pumpkins, tomatoes, and thin on long ones—asparagus, celery, macaroni. Hal Garrott and Dugald Walker have made him the fascinating character that he is.

And then from far out on the prairie comes a noisy reminder from the twins Googler and Gaggler growing up in Carl Sandburg's "Rootabaga Pigeons", that while all big boys are little inside at Christmas time, they will love such

a fine true story as "The Dark Frigate", whose young author has now gone forth on his final quest. Charles Boardman Hawes will be long remembered for "The Mutineers" and "The Great Quest", and his last book carries the reader to a point beyond either of the earlier ones.

John Kenlon's "Fourteen Years a Sailor" tells a thrilling true story of the sea by the Chief of the Fire Department of New York City, and William Heyliger's "The Spirit of the Leader" calls out a vivid everyday reminder of the claims of American citizenship.

If it's hard to stop listening to Christmas Packages, it's still harder to stop looking inside, for the artists

From "The Wind in the Willows"

have done themselves proud this year. "The Velveteen Rabbit" has come back in time for Christmas and all who've forgotten how to fill a Christmas stocking should look at William Nicholson's.

Willy Pogany's spirited line drawings and colored frontispiece for Haroun Er Raschid stories from the "Arabian Nights", edited by Frances Jenkins Olcott, rank with his best work. Da Loria Norman, who is well known as a mural painter and illuminator, has done some highly imaginative and original illustrations in color and black and white for "Fairy Tales from Far Away". Frederick H. Martens's rendering of these stories, as of others, is lacking in color and dramatic form. Jay Van Everen's drawings for "The Wizard of the North", drawn from the "Kalevala" by Parker Fillmore with the sure touch of the story teller, take one straight into a pictorial north. But the power to make us live there continuously rests alone with the artists of the northern countries.

It is significant that the last Christmas Package opened reveals five Russian picture books, printed in Moscow in 1923, and sent as a gift to the Children's Room of the New York Public Library by a Russian visitor of the summer of 1914. The books are all charming. One of them would delight Oliver Herford, another is a Christmas picture book with a lovely cover on which these words appear:

Moposko
Ckaska

My own free rendering of these strange words is Merry Christmas to Everybody from the Children of Moscow. Never have I been more deeply touched than I was when I took this Christmas greeting from a torn yellow paper wrapper, covered back and front with strange postage stamps. This Christmas Package comes to the children of New York not to keep, but to share,

when Christmas breaks over the world again on St. Nicholas Eve.

Hans Brinker. By Mary Mapes Dodge. Illustrated by George Wharton Edwards. Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Queen's Museum. By Frank Stockton. Illustrated by Frederic Richardson. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Knickerbocker's History of New York. By Washington Irving. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Nicholas, a Manhattan Christmas Story. By Anne Carroll Moore. With drawings by Jay Van Everen. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

A Visit from St. Nicholas. By Clement C. Moore. Illustrated by Florence Wyman Ivins. The Atlantic Monthly Press. Illustrated by Jessie Willcox Smith. Houghton Mifflin Co.

The Golden Goose Book. Illustrated by L. Leslie Brooke. Frederick Warne and Co.

A Apple Pie. By Kate Greenaway. Frederick Warne and Co.

A B C Book. By C. B. Falls. Doubleday, Page and Co.

The Wind in the Willows. By Kenneth Grahame. Illustrated by Nancy Barnhart. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Injun Babies. By Maynard Dixon. Illustrated by the author. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Billy Barnicoat. By Greville MacDonald. Illustrated by Francis Bedford. E. P. Dutton and Co. London: Allen and Unwin.

Number One Joy Street, a Medley of Verse and Prose. D. Appleton and Co. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

The Starlight Wonder Book. By Henry B. Beston. Illustrated by Maurice Day. The Atlantic Monthly Press.

Merrimeg. By William Bowen. Illustrated by Emma Brock. The Macmillan Co.

Snythergen. By Hal Garrott. Illustrated by Dugald Walker. Robert M. McBride and Co.

Rootabaga Pigeons. By Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

The Dark Frigate. By Charles Boardman Hawes. The Atlantic Monthly Press.

Fourteen Years a Sailor. By John Kenyon. George H. Doran Company.

The Spirit of the Leader. By William Heyliger. D. Appleton and Co.

The Velveteen Rabbit. By Margery Williams. With drawings in color by William Nicholson. George H. Doran Company.

Haroun Er Raschid. Edited from the Lane translation by Frances Jenkins Olcott. Illustrated by Willy Pogany. Henry Holt and Co.

Fairy Tales from Far Away. Retold by Frederick H. Martens. Illustrated in full color and in black and white by da Loria Norman. Robert M. McBride and Co.

The Wizard of the North. By Parker Fillmore. With drawings by Jay Van Everen. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

From "Injun Babies"