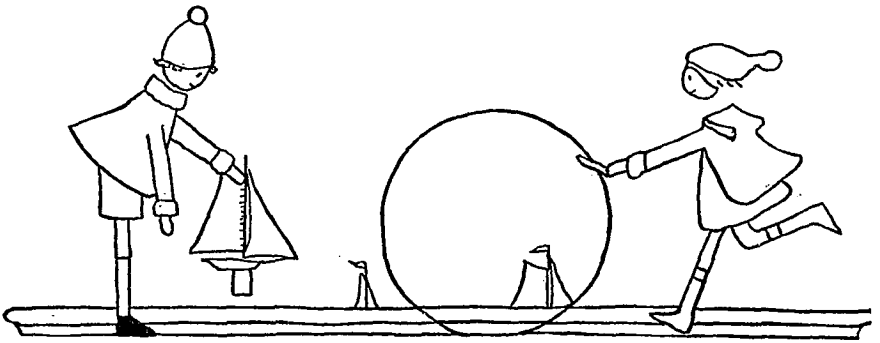

The Luxembourg is a jolly place
To roll your hoop, and to run a race
With a gallant yacht, and win, of course,
Or caper about on a mettled horse!
—From "A Paris Pair"

CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF THE SPRING

By Anne Carroll Moore

THERE is ample precedent this year for the future publication of a fair proportion of children's books in the spring.

The lists of some publishers announce several titles, others two or three, with new editions of such favorites as Eliza Orne White's delightful "Little Girl of Long Ago" and Abbie Farwell Brown's "Lonesomest Doll". One, at least, of these two New England authors is writing a new children's story. The variety and range in the books listed indicates that the claims of boys and girls as readers and purchasers of books, rather than as the mere recipients of them at holiday time, are being considered.

I believe this is one of the most important signs of a time in which a book written for the children of one country may command almost immediate attention in other countries, if it is good enough to justify an effective introduction. But what constitutes an effective introduction to one book may be entirely inappropriate for another. This is understood in considering books for grown ups. It is time to stop pigeonholing children's books, if they are to play the part they seem destined to play in creating and extending genuine international sympathy and understanding. They must be treated less like holiday toys and portable educational equipment, and more like books from the very beginning. Less concentrated seasonal publication, better informed advance announcement of fewer titles,

and a further development of discriminating reviews of individual books are bound to restrict the use of the juvenile tag to the type of book to which it belongs by every inherited right and implication. As a convenient trade distinction it will doubtless persist; that it should continue to stand in the way of fresh creative writing is inconceivable in the face of the crying need all over the world for new forms of beauty, wit, romance, and reality, as well as for the wider distribution of those children's books which have already proved their claim to a high place of their own.

We have a unique and priceless possession in the best of our children's stories of American life. Written for the delight and out of true love of our own children, they have enlightened, cheered, and amused millions of immigrant fathers and mothers of the children of other countries. In translation they have passed to countries so utterly different, in customs and traditions, from our own, that we might wonder by what token the same stories are loved and remembered, if we did not so often hear from the lips of travelers, "I have always loved your children's stories. They are of American life, yet they appeal to the universal heart. Will you be so kind as to show me two or three books by recent writers who are as good as your Louisa Alcott and Mark Twain? I should like to take some of the new books home with me but I feel confused by the numbers I have seen in the shops. They seem so much alike."

I was thinking of such inquiries as this when a promising young writer came to tell me that he could not face writing another children's book. He had published two.

"It's not the children", he explained, "and it's not the form of writing. I've done nothing in which I've felt more satisfaction than in my children's stories. It's what happens to the books and to me personally. It's the silly form of the advertising. It's that column, 'Juvenile', at the end of all the reviews—a regular death trap for a writer, that column! every kind of book jumbled in together with no appraisal of anything. Worst of all, wherever I go, and especially where there are children of any age, I am no longer free to pass along *naturally*. I am singled out and introduced in a way to make me wish I had never been born. There's no escape; I'll soon be tagged 'juvenile author' for a fixed age limit. I'm going to beat it before I begin to hate children."

"Oh, no you're not", was my reply, for he was by no means the first to come with a similar tale. "You are going to stay and play St. George. 'Juvenile' is a somewhat scaly but not an invulnerable dragon. The publishers' spring announcements prove that. Have a look at their headings and take heart: Books for Boys and Girls, Fiction for Men and Boys, Books for Young People, Children's Books. One publisher even announces two important children's books under no specific heading and gives each of

Morning and May
—From "Come Hither"

them an adequate descriptive note. Other publishers have been doing it for some time."

"For well known poets, novelists, historians, or scientists", said he; "but what possible chance has a free lance writer who has not arrived at distinction in any field if he or she happens to write a successful children's book first? Answer me that after you've told me the names of the authors of the two books listed without a heading."

I handed him the list and he read: " 'Peacock Pie' by Walter de la Mare, with forty pictures in color and line by Claud Lovat Fraser. I might have known it!" he exclaimed. "One has absolutely no chance, of course."

"I think you have the biggest chance in the world", I said, "if you keep straight on working and appraising everything you do on the basis of sound criticism. Writing for children, like daily living with them, requires the constant sharpening of all one's faculties, the fresh discovery of new heights and depths in one's own emotions, the saving conviction that children have as many and as varied tastes in reading as grown ups. Kenneth Grahame says they have just as much 'sense', that it is only 'experience' they lack. In the matter of their reading, I think they have more sense since they are entirely unconcerned with other people's opinions of books. When they are bored they stop reading the book. 'I didn't like that book', is reason enough and it admits of no arguments.

"You probably need an entirely new lead for your next book. Why not surprise even yourself and try something nobody associates with you?"

"There's one thing I've always wanted to do", he began hesitatingly, "but I've never seen my way clear to trying it out. What would you think of . . . ?"

"I don't need to think about that", I replied. "I've been waiting at least ten years to see somebody do it. If you feel it's in you, begin it today. That's the first step to clearing the way.

"And now, since it seems to you and to many others so very easy for a well known poet or novelist to publish a children's book, let's come back to 'Peacock Pie' and Walter de la Mare. Do you realize how long it was before he became known in England and America?

"Some day the story will be written of how a new poet stepped into the twentieth century — 'the century of the child' — with a little book of children's songs in his hand, and how, thanks to a welcoming word from Andrew Lang, de la Mare's 'Songs of Childhood' was published and became known and cherished by the fortunate few who possessed it before the first edition went out of print and became a collector's find.

"The reader of this future bit of literary history may wonder why, in an age of much publishing of children's books, of poetry societies, and children's libraries, a true poet's gift to the children of his time was not passed along to the children at once. We have always been a little too fearful of giving new poetry to children, even if it is clearly addressed to them. 'Isn't it more *about* children than for them?' we often say, without making any effort to find out. The children alone can tell.

"In this instance we have waited twenty one years for a new edition of 'Songs of Childhood'. I think children will like the colored pictures and the black and white drawings Estelle Canziani has made for it, although

Feasts: Fairs: Beggars: Gipsies
—From "Come Hither"

the book appears in a form more attractive to grown people than to children and was designed for the double appeal. 'Peacock Pie', first published in 1913, was hailed by the critics as 'the flowering of an exquisite genius for writing quaint nursery rhymes, fairy lyrics and ballads that can fascinate the mind of a child'.

"Then came the war, and a children's edition of 'Peacock Pie' with pictures by W. Heath Robinson did not appear until 1916. In that same year Walter de la Mare came to America to receive the prize awarded to his friend, Rupert Brooke. You doubtless read his address at the time it was given, but you had not then begun to write books for children. Get a copy of 'Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination' and read it again after you've made sure of a copy of the first edition of 'Come Hither'.

"Better than any magic carpet is the power of this lovely book to transport you from wherever you are at any hour of day or night to the place where the poet dwells apart. At first I felt disappointed that Mr. de la Mare included no poems of his own in an anthology which seems their native heath, but I now realize it is better so. He lives in the book, a gracious host to those who cannot follow him to Tishnar as well as to those who can.

"You may choose to read 'The

Story of This Book' first, and a fascinating story de la Mare makes of his introduction; or you may prefer to lose all sense of time and space and personal identity among old rhymes and ballads, new songs and lyrics which follow one another in melodious order. But wherever you begin, don't fail at some time to read straight through 'About and Roundabout' — those pages and pages of fascinating notes — read as you might read a book about poetry if there was a book like it."

"Isn't this a book for lovers of poetry rather than for children? Will children read introductions and notes?"

"Children are the greatest of all lovers of poetry", I said. "They will read whatever interests them wherever they find it. Dr. Watts's 'Sluggard' completely fascinated me. I too peeped into his garden and saw 'the wild brier'. When I found him as one of the first selections and read the amusing note about him I realized how charmed I should have been had I come upon this book unexpectedly in childhood. It isn't an anthology to look up poems in, although it has an excellent index. It's a book to look yourself up in to see how far you've come. It is more than a book. It is the testimony of a living poet of childhood to the reality of his own experience of the continuity of the life of the imagination. I think 'Come Hither' belongs in every reference and school library in the country. It holds the key to so many other books.

"Take 'Crossings' for instance, de la Mare's own fairy play. None of the critics have understood or appreciated the significance of this play. They have said of it:

"'It's not producible.' 'Not de la Mare at his best.' 'Not the kind of play I expected of him.' Admitting the fairies in it are the poet's own fairies, they deny the reality of a child like little Ann and deplore the language in which she speaks and the unnatural circumstances in which the children are placed.

"Well then, these are the exact circumstances in which many of the children of today are placed and Walter de la Mare is saying in his way and in his time very much the same thing that Charles Lamb said to Coleridge about Mrs. Barbauld and the Didactic School. It's time we all realized that de la Mare is profoundly concerned with education. Not as a theorist but as a poet who has tried and proved his philosophy of life.

"'Crossings' not producible! It was produced several years before it was published. Armstrong Gibbs tells a moving story of the origin of this play and its first production in 'The Sackbut' for January, 1922. Mr. Gibbs, who is one of the younger English composers, was in 1918 in charge of the music at a boys' school at Brighton. Although he knew de la Mare very slightly at the time, he conceived the idea of asking him to write a play to be given by boys varying in age from eight to fourteen years. 'Never was impudence more richly rewarded', says Mr. Gibbs. 'Early in the new year, Walter de la Mare came down to the school with this lovely fantasy in his pocket.' The play, with its accompanying music, took the school by storm and during the eight weeks of rehearsal and in the final performance the boys were absolutely given over to its beauty, its hominess, and its jollity. Mr. de la Mare, with other men from outside the school, superintended the

production, which was given under the poorest of physical conditions in an old schoolroom. The music, scored for flute, string quintet, and piano, was composed by Armstrong Gibbs and formed an inseparable part of the whole conception.

"Something of the joy that went into this very unusual production still lingers about the play in the printed book. As a play to read I know that many boys, as well as girls, will like it. As a human document on bringing up children it is unique. Aunt Agatha is never converted to fairies, not even when she visits Crossings herself. When all her gloomy predictions fail, she is driven away in the same rickety old cab which brought the four children there to find their freedom."

"I like the idea of the play and its variety — the Ghost and the Fairy Wine — the Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick Maker — the Eskimo tea party in the snow. It's got rollicking good humor and touches of genuine pathos", said the young writer as he turned the pages of "Crossings". "The pictures are pleasant but lifeless. De la Mare must be difficult to illustrate, he's so pictorial himself."

"The sense of a living child and humor would work wonders for his 'Three Mulla-Mulgars' ", I said. "Five years ago, when it was first published in America, I felt doubtful of its success as a children's book. Now that I know how much it is liked by a few children and remember that Walter de la Mare first told the story to his own children, I feel confident that it would be liked by many more if we could have a less expensive edition with more childlike pictures. There's nothing distinguished about the illustrations for 'A Child's Day', but inside of a year they have made a popular book of one that was scarcely known before, although it had been in print for some years. This book is an unconscious challenge to the bedtime story, for it's a getting-up-in-the-morning story in verse for little children and is already claimed by the children of the libraries as an 'Easy Book'."

"I hadn't realized the extent and the variety of work de la Mare has been doing for children", said the hesitating writer of children's stories. "Nursery rhymes, ballads and songs, lovely lyrics, stories in verse, this delightful fantastic story of the three monkeys, a play, an anthology that's a genuine creation — and he's scattered them all along the way with novels in between. He seems to have had no special period for his children's things."

"No," I agreed, "he hasn't; and that may be one of the reasons why 'The Memoirs of a Midget' came to be just as it is — so different from all the other novels of the time. It's worth thinking about."

"Tell me the name of the other writer who is listed without any special heading."

"Charskaya is her name and she is well known in Russia as a writer of children's stories. This one, 'Little Princess Nina', must have been written before the war. It's the most refreshingly real and highminded story for girls that I've read in years. Princess Nina is an individual character with a vivid and lovable personality. She's quite different from the made up heroines of most girls' books. She has some thrilling adventures in her native Caucasus, and when at the age of twelve she goes to school in Petrograd, one realizes what may be made of a school story for girls. The translation by Hana Muskova glows with beauty and dramatic

quality from beginning to end. The text is independent of illustrations, and I hope it will have no pictures when it is first introduced here. Nina will then take her place as a character of individual appeal to girls of the early teens.

"Translations are getting better and better. Mrs. Mokrejs, who has done a little book of Devil Stories from Adolf Wenig's 'Tales from Bohemia', has rendered these stories with utter simplicity and sincerity after years of mellowing work upon them. The illustrations and make up of the book, designed by Josef Wenig, give it the appearance of an attractive book printed in Prague rather than in Boston. This seems to me as it should be, and makes of it a distinct contribution to international folk literature for children.

" 'Poum, The Adventures of a Little Boy', written out of the combined child memories of Paul and Victor Margueritte, you have doubtless read in French. It is well known in France, both as a child story and an unusual bit of autobiography of two distinguished novelists. The recent translation of 'Poum' into English by Bérengère Drilliers is a delightful book to read aloud at any time and invaluable to associate with the reading and study of modern French history. Children will like to know that the two brothers were the sons of the famous General Margueritte of the War of 1870, and that all the characters and the setting are drawn from life. Although Poum's environment is French, certain of his adventures make him kin to children living anywhere. Far more effective than any books obviously written to promote friendship between nations is the simple record of experiences of universal human appeal, such as Poum's adventure with the hats of the distinguished guests of the dinner party. Every American child knows how fascinating it is to steal into the room where the hats of visitors have been left and secretly try them on. That

Evening and Dream
—From "Come Hither"

Poum should find the cook, the coachman, the butler, and other servants there before him, having their fun with the General's white plumed hat and the Bishop's beaver, lends a touch of unexpected comedy to his own adventure.

"And here is 'Monsieur and Madame', at one and the same time a new and amusing picture book for any child and a series of unforgetable visual impressions of the genders which are the Waterloo of most English students of the French language. Louis Glackens has contributed a gay stream of laughter to international understanding by these original and excellent drawings. Edwin Dimock wrote the short verses in easy French which accompany the pictures.

"There is a chapter called 'The

Truth about the French', which will illuminate the minds of many English speaking grown ups, as well as children, in Sidney Dark's 'Book of France for Young People'. Mr. Dark's companion volume about England also rings true with a new spirit of getting better acquainted with other countries, as well as with one's own. These two books are up to date in their information and more readable than similar histories have been, and they come at a moment when libraries and schools are feeling the need of new histories.

"'A Traveler's Letters to Boys and Girls', by Caroline M. Hewins, forms another connecting link. To English speaking children traveling in Italy, England, and Scotland, the book will reveal many golden secrets.

"'Billy Barnicoat', the romantic tale of a strange baby boy who was washed up from the wreck of a Spanish ship on the Cornish coast, contributes something not to be found in any of the other books."

"How about 'Nicholas' with his letters from France and his adventures in England as well as New York and New England? Doesn't he belong with such books as these?" asked the writer of children's stories.

"There's no telling where Nicholas belongs until he's published", said I.

"And when is 'Nicholas' coming out of drydock?" he asked.

"Since many other people are also asking the whereabouts of 'Nicholas', I may say that his publication was delayed until spring by the unfortunate circumstance that his author proved a too relentless critic.

"Katharine Adams's 'Redcaps and Lilies' was also delayed in publication. Miss Adams writes her stories for girls against a background of life in the countries she has lived in. Her new story, which is of France at the time of the Revolution, will find many waiting readers among girls who already know her 'Mehitable', 'Midsummer', and 'Wisp'.

"I'm glad this story of two chick-

A Little Girl of Long Ago. By Eliza Orne White. Houghton Mifflin Co.

The Lonesomest Doll. By Abbie Farwell Brown. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Peacock Pie. By Walter de la Mare. With pictures by Claud Lovat Fraser. Henry Holt and Co.

Songs of Childhood. By Walter de la Mare. Illustrated by Estelle Canziani. Longmans, Green and Co.

Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination. By Walter de la Mare. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

Come Hither: A Collection of Rhymes and Poems Made for the Young of All Ages. Edited by Walter de la Mare and Embellished by Alec Buckels. Alfred A. Knopf.

Crossings, A Fairy Play. By Walter de la Mare. Illustrated by Dorothy Lathrop. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Three Mulla-Mulgars. By Walter de la Mare. Illustrated by Dorothy Lathrop. Alfred A. Knopf.

A Child's Day. By Walter de la Mare. Illustrated by Winifred Bromhall. Henry Holt and Co.

Little Princess Nina. By L. A. Charskaya. Translated by Hana Muskova. Henry Holt and Co.

Beyond the Giant Mountains. By Adolf Wenig. Translated by Mrs. John Mokrejs. Houghton Mifflin Co.

Poum, The Adventures of a Little Boy. By Paul and Victor Margueritte. Translated by Bérengère Drilliers. Alfred A. Knopf.

Monsieur and Madame. By Edwin Dimock. With drawings by Louis Glackens. Harper and Bros.

The Book of France for Young People. By Sidney Dark. George H. Doran Company.

The Book of England for Young People. By Sidney Dark. George H. Doran Company.

A Traveler's Letters to Boys and Girls. By Caroline M. Hewins. The Macmillan Co.

Billy Barnicoat. By Greville MacDonald. Illustrated by Francis Bedford. E. P. Dutton and Co.

Nicholas. By Anne Carroll Moore. With drawings by Jay Van Everen. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Redcaps and Lilies. By Katharine Adams. With drawings by Jay Van Everen. The Macmillan Co.

Silky Buff and Dotty Jack. By Flavia Canfield. Harcourt, Brace and Co.

ens, 'Silky Buff and Dotty Jack', was not held over until fall. It seems to belong to the spring when chickens are coming out of the shell and it has both an out and out country flavor and an international touch, for the chickens go to England. Flavia Canfield, who is Dorothy Canfield's mother, knows both chickens and children, and she tells a grandmother's story with the charm of naturalness and not a little humor. You may not care to read about chickens but those who do will like it."

"I know nothing at all about chickens", said this writer of children's stories, "but you've made me want to try my luck again." And then he added, "To write of what you know, in fact or fancy, and know so well that it shines clear when the searchlight of a child's imagination is turned upon it — that's about what it all comes to, isn't it?"