

CHILDREN'S BOOKS: A HUNDRED YEARS SINCE "ALICE"

By KATHLEEN M. COMMINS*

THIS is a notable year for anniversaries in children's literature. Two hundred years ago the acknowledged father of children's book publishing, John Newbery, published *Goody Two-Shoes*. One hundred years ago Macmillan published *Alice in Wonderland*. In that same year Walter Crane began illustrating children's books, and Rudyard Kipling was born.

Newbery's first book for children was *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, priced 6d., which when sold with a ball or pincushion was priced 8d. He was meticulous in his attention to details in the preparation of his children's books, just as he was for all his publications.

The earliest extant copy of *Goody Two-Shoes* is one of the third edition bearing the date 1766, the first having been published a year earlier. As a children's book it would be forgotten but for its one-time repute, the praise given it by distinguished men, and because it was almost the first piece of original English fiction written to amuse children only.

As for the fame of *Goody Two-Shoes*, this is what Charles Lamb wrote to Coleridge:

"*Goody Two-Shoes* is almost out of print. Mrs. Barbauld's stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery . . . Science has succeeded to poetry no less in the little walks of children than with men. Is there no possibility of averting this sore evil? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with tales and old wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history!"

It is interesting that *Goody Two-Shoes*, a story of rural England, was unblushingly put forward by Newbery with the statement that it was from a "manuscript found in the Vatican with illustrations by Michael Angelo". The real achievement of the book, often attributed to Oliver Goldsmith, is that Newbery demonstrated with it the high possibilities in publishing for children. He made the first venture and was responsible for a collection of books intended for children. They were cheap, they could be bought for sixpence, they were gay and full of pictures.

To-day his name lives in the annual award in the United States the Newbery medal, given for the "most distinguished contribution to American children's literature".

* The Presidential Address delivered at the Twelfth Annual General Meeting, 30 September, 1965.

The award was established in 1922 by a twentieth century John Newbery in the person of Frederick Melcher.

Goody Two-Shoes is largely forgotten although it was still being produced regularly in England until well into this century as a so-called "children's pantomime" (that odd and typically English entertainment which was neither a true pantomime nor suitable for children). By contrast *Alice in Wonderland* remains one of the indestructible treasures of our literature. The centenary of its publication occurred on 4 July of this year.

"Alice" was created on a summer afternoon in Oxford on 4 July, 1862. Charles Dodgson, a young tutor in mathematics, entertained three little girls at a picnic with a story about one of them. The girls were the daughters of the Dean of Christchurch, George Henry Liddell, and Dodgson had a special affection for Alice Liddell.

That picnic turned out to be one which shook the English speaking world. Quotations from the book are part of everyday conversation. When someone says, "I doubt it", don't you want to add "said the carpenter and shed a bitter tear?"

"Alice" is the story of childhood itself, its wonder, its vigour, its freshness, its wisdom. It is full of nonsense but cleverly logical. "Alice" widened the horizons of children, freed their imaginations and was a refreshing change from the rather gloomy high moral tone of the books they were used to. "Alice" recognized that children should be entertained. It was written to give pleasure to children (particularly Alice herself) and to please the author.

This is Dodgson's recollection of the picnic written twenty-five years after the event:

"Many a day we rowed together on that quiet stream the three little maidens and I—and many a fairytale had been extemporised for their benefit. Yet none of these many tales were written down: they lived and died, like summer midges, each in its own golden afternoon until there came a day when, as it chanced, one of my little listeners petitioned that the tale might be written out for her. That was many years ago, but I distinctly remember now, as I write, how in a desperate attempt to strike out some new line of fairy-lore, I had sent my heroine straight down a rabbit-hole to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards . . ."

And seventy years later Alice herself could still remember that picnic vividly. This is what she said of it:

"Nearly all of *Alice Adventures Underground* was told on that blazing summer afternoon with the heat haze shimmering over the meadows where the party landed to shelter for a while in the shadow cast by haycocks near

Godstow. I think the stories he told us that afternoon must have been better than usual, because I have such a distinct recollection of the expedition, and also, on the next day, I started to pester him to write down the story for me, which I had never done before . . ."

When Alice was 80, Oxford University conferred on her the degree of Doctor of Letters, with the citation, "awakening with her girlhood's charm the ingenious fancy of a mathematician, the moving cause of this truly noteworthy contribution to English literature . . ."

The story, when written, lay about on a table in the drawing room of the Deanery until Henry Kingsley chanced to see it. He urged Mrs. Liddell to persuade the author to publish it. Dodgson consulted his friend, George Macdonald, who took it home to read to his own children. When his son Greville declared that "there ought to be sixty thousand volumes of it", Macdonald supported Kingsley's suggestion.

Dodgson had made many drawings when he wrote the story. He asked Ruskin whether his own illustrations were good enough. When Ruskin said they weren't, Dodgson engaged Tenniel.

It was on publication on 4 July, 1865, that *Alice's Adventures Underground* became *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the author called himself "Lewis Carroll".

This year, to mark the centenary, a dramatized version of "Alice" was presented in the Christchurch Meadows, Oxford, from 15 to 26 June. The play was directed and adapted by Adrian Benjamin, who described it thus:

"The dramatized version does not follow any of the numerous stage versions, but instead it follows the book faithfully incorporating a narrator, in the person of Lewis Carrol, this preserving the irony, wit and whimsy so easily lost when the classic is diluted into pantomime. Although the story with its mock violence and teasing subtleties cannot fail to amuse children, we have not neglected that side of it intended to exalt the curious to the logical and to reduce morality to madness."

If "Alice" freed the imagination and marked the real beginning of modern literature for children, what has the last 100 years produced?

In the years from 1865 to World War I, almost half a century, some of the great storytellers for children wrote their memorable tales.

Of Dodgson's contemporaries the greatest undoubtedly was George Macdonald, whose fairy tales are gifts of the imagination. They reveal a very different world from that of Dodgson. His books such as *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and The Goblin* (1872), *The Princess and Curdie* (1882) are visionary. Who can forget the North Wind, beautiful with

her flowing hair, blowing in through the knothole in the loft where Diamond slept, to carry the little boy away on wonderful journeys over land and sea. It has magic of spirit as well as of imagination.

Mopsa The Fairy, the tale of a little boy who finds a nest of fairies, puts them in his pocket and flies into fairyland on the back of an albatross, was written by Jean Ingelw in 1869. In the same tradition Oscar Wilde wrote *The Happy Prince* and *A House of Pomegranates* in 1888 and 1891.

Speaking of fairy tales, there are those, of course, who find no merit in them, however excellent their style. It is claimed that they are too brutal, too silly, too unreal. I think G. K. Chesterton demolishes such critics in his *Essay on Fairy Tales*. This, regrettably, is now out of print, but these are some of his thoughts:

"If you kept bogies and goblins away from children they would make them up for themselves. One small child in the dark can invent more hells than Swedenborg. One small child can imagine monsters too big and black to get into any picture and give them names too unearthly and cacophonous to have occurred in the cries of any lunatic. Fairy tales then are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of evil or of the ugly; that is in the child already because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of the bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination . . . What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon . . ."

In the same essay Chesterton adds this personal comment:

"I had just finished looking through a pile of contemporary fiction and had begun to read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* as a natural consequence. The modern novels stood before me in a stack; and you can imagine their titles for yourself. There was *Suburban Sue: A Tale of Psychology*, and also *Psychological Sue: A Tale of Suburbia*; there was *Trixy: A Temperament* and *Man-Hate: A Monochrome* and all those nice things. I read them with real interest but curiously enough I grew tired of them at last, and when I saw *Grimm's Fairy Tales* lying accidentally on the table I gave a cry of indecent joy. Here at last one could find a little common sense. I opened the book and my eyes fell on these splendid and satisfying words: *The Dragon's Grandmother*. That at least was reasonable, that at least was comprehensible; that at least was true."

Of a very different genre is *Little Women* written by Louisa Alcott and published in the United States in 1867. It marked the beginning of realistic

family stories. This was a time when reticence was the fashion, but Louisa Alcott knew that girls wanted truth and reality and so she shared the intimacy of her own family life—and the Marches are amazingly real. It is rather remarkable that a quiet New Englander, nearly a century ago, opened the door to thousands of readers to share a family home, one full of moral earnestness, innate refinement and liberality of thought. Louisa Alcott has many imitators to this day—although sometimes, as you browse among the bookstalls, you might not think so.

When "Alice" banished the belief that instruction was the primary object for the young, abundant tales of adventure appeared. George Alfred Henty told stories of great campaigns designed by him to give English boys a sense of the greatness of the British Empire; Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island* in 1883 and it immediately won acclaim as the best boys' story since *Robinson Crusoe*; Jules Verne took children on vast journeys in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea* (1869) and in *Around The World in Eighty Days* (1872); and Mark Twain gave us *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1871) and *The Adventures of Hucklebury Finn* (1884). These are acknowledged classics.

Earlier I mentioned that this year was the centenary of Rudyard Kipling's birth. He was born on 30 December, 1865. In 1894-95 the *Jungle Books* were written. The world created by Kipling in these stories is one of impelling reality, an elemental world in which the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence, obedience to the law and a high moral code are the outstanding qualities. Kipling is immensely convincing.

The *Just So Stories* published in 1912 are inimitable, perhaps incomparable. Kipling is one of the world's great story tellers and his gift to children's literature is inestimable.

Stalky & Co, the irreverent, amazing story of his own schooldays, at the United Services College, Westward Ho! Devon, perhaps does not fall exactly under the heading of "Children's Literature". There were certainly some headmasters of the time who wished the book had never been written and who condemned it heartily from the pulpit and in letters to the Press as subversive of schoolboy behaviour!

Between 1870 and 1911 that prolific storyteller, Mrs. Molesworth, wrote more than 100 books of which *The Cuckoo Clock*, *The Children of the Castle*, *Carved Lions*, *Peterkin* and *Two Little Waifs* are outstanding. Mrs. Molesworth knew children and she created personalities readily recognized by her readers.

Mrs. Ewing, Kate Greenaway, Rider Haggard and Mrs. Nesbit were all making their considerable contribution in these years. Andrew Lang was retelling the great legends, folk tales and fairy tales. Then there was Grahame.

In 1885 Kenneth Grahame wrote *The Golden Age*. This was followed three years later by *Dream Days*. Ten years elapsed before he gave the world the wealth of beauty, fun, joy and nonsense, and the enduring and endearing characters of *The Wind in The Willows*.

There is another book of these years that needs a special mention. It is *The Secret Garden* published in 1911 by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It made an immediate impact and has continued to do so. An experiment carried out by *The Times*, London, in 1957 proved this.

In collaboration with a world authority on children's books, Miss Kathleen Lines, *The Times* selected the 99 best books for children. The books on the list were restricted to works which could be judged as literature, and excluded instructional and other books whose merits were not primarily literary. It also limited the selection to books written specially for children. The aim was to present as wide a variety of children's books as possible, all of which were still living works, and which could be expected to live in the future. It included only books currently in print.

The Times had the satisfaction of knowing from the response among readers of all ages that the 99 books were well chosen, and that it was justified in its claim that children who read even half of the number listed would have nibbled at world literature, would have some inkling of the variety of books to be sampled, and would acquire some critical sense.

The Times asked its readers to select the 100th book. By an almost overwhelming vote the honour went to *The Secret Garden*. *The Times* had excluded it from its list because it doubted whether its qualities and appeal were as timeless as those of other books. Miss Lines did not want it excluded because she believed in its appeal, and was not surprised when it was an outright "winner"—and remember this was the year 1957, when the Russians first put a satellite into orbit.

Mary of *The Secret Garden* is a sour and nasty little girl with a bad temper. I don't think there is a child anywhere who doesn't have some days like Mary and therefore who does not understand her. Children respond to Mary. They know that something doesn't have to be familiar to be real. That is one reason why they can wander about in time as well as in space, and be as happy and as at home in the nineteenth, eleventh or first centuries as they are in the present.

Because children are demanding, positive in their likes and dislikes and intolerant of condescension and artificiality it is not easy to write for them. It is even more difficult to create a world in which very young children are at home, to make within the limits of a small child's experience a book full of action, interest and joy.

No writer created more genuine classics for these very young children than Beatrix Potter whose *Tale of Peter Rabbit* was published in 1902.

To begin with this wonderful book could not find a publisher. Miss Potter in 1901 printed a small edition for private circulation with only the frontispiece in colour. It was then that Frederic Warne & Co., who had previously rejected the manuscript, decided to publish it with coloured illustrations in 1902.

It is the rare combination of reality and fantasy which gives Beatrix Potter's books their quality. She manages to humanize her animals, but still keeps them animals, and her simple lucid prose sets her stories apart. Remember this small extract from *The Tailor of Gloucester*:

"The moon climbed over the roofs and chimneys, and looked down over the gateway into college court. There were no lights in the windows nor any sound in the houses, all the city of Gloucester was fast asleep under the snow."

This short extract from *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* illustrates the effect she obtains with simple words:

"Once upon a time there was a frog called Mr. Jeremy Fisher; he lived in a little damp house amongst the buttercups at the edge of the pond.

"The water was all slippy-sloppy in the larder and in the back passage.

"But Mr. Jeremy liked getting his feet wet; nobody ever scolded him and he never caught cold!"

To-day the miniature books of Joan Aglund Walsh with their coloured stylized drawings are reminiscent of the Potter magic. Some of Miss Walsh's best are *A Friend Is Someone Who Loves You*, *Love Is a Special Kind of Feeling*, and *A Pocket Full of Proverbs*.

The real development in children's books came after World War I when publishing houses began to establish children's departments. Macmillan, the publisher of "Alice", were the first company to have such a department. To-day there is even greater emphasis on this kind of development and few publishers of consequence have failed to set up children's departments.

To-day far more children's books are published than any one person can read, so that it is useless to complain, as some do, that all the classics have been written. To-day's writers have a bigger audience and a different kind of reader. Television, radio and other activities compete for the child's time, and one might say do the same for his mind. But the books pour forth unendingly from the presses.

In the United States last year more than 3,000 children's books were published. In the United Kingdom the total was 2,469. The figures for January to August of this year in Britain are 1,535 new books.

The years between the world wars are illumined with the names of John Masefield, the poet laureat whose *Midnight Folk* written for children in 1927 is

still a favourite. Hugh Lofting delighted young and old with his Dr. Dolittle books, Arthur Ransome, a colossus of story telling adventures, and a wonderful craftsman began his prolific career with *Swallows and Amazons* (1931); Alison Uttley, a gifted writer, produced *A Traveller in Time*, one of a long succession of fine stories; Walter de la Mare, A. A. Milne and John Buchan gave to children some of the best stories yet written.

These are names as well known in the adult world of fiction as among the juveniles. Agreed. But what is significant is that these writers wanted to communicate with children. They illustrate the truth of what all concerned with children's literature know, and that is that a good book for children is a good book for anyone. A good book for children is not and has never been the sole property of children—think of *Treasure Island*.

C. S. Lewis, author, critic, theologian, who wrote the Narnia books for children is more emphatic about what is a good book for children. "I am prepared to set it as a canon", he wrote, "that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's book."

In the last analysis a writer writes a book because he or she has something to say and enjoys saying it. Sometimes it is something for children, sometimes it is something that deals with ideas beyond a child's experience. It would be an enormous loss if it was believed that writers for children are only capable of speaking to children. So many of them move freely from one field to another.

All children's authors of any note have from time to time testified that in writing for children they are writing to please themselves. A. A. Milne in an essay on "Children's Books" (included in *By Way of Introduction*) said that many children's authors failed because they approached their task in a mood of relaxation, feeling that they could get away with more or less anything on the plea that they were writing down to the child. But warns Mr. Milne "a children's book must be written not for children but for the author himself. That the book when written should satisfy children must be regarded as a happy accident . . . Whatever fears one has, one need not fear that one is writing too well for a child. It is difficult enough to express oneself with all the words in the dictionary at one's disposal: with none but simple words the difficulty is much greater".

Let me remind you of Mr. Milne's deceptive skill in writing of childish things. Pooh and Piglet are leaving the house at Pooh Corner to look for a house for Eeyore, having found time for a "little something". This is how Milne describes the scene:

"The clock was still saying five minutes to eleven when Pooh and Piglet set out on their way half an hour later. The wind had dropped, and the snow, tired of rushing round in circles trying to catch itself up, now fluttered

gently down until it found a place on which to rest, and sometimes the place was Pooh's nose and sometimes it wasn't, and in a little while Piglet was wearing a white muffler round his neck feeling more snowy behind the ears than he had ever felt before."

In spite of the testimony of great writers, there still lingers in the minds of many a blithe assumption that to work for children is to work at the bottom of the ladder. It is pointless to try to fix the blame for this prejudice common to too many adults.

Distinguished writers, even professors who write for children, have met this attitude from their colleagues. Library systems and teachers' colleges without adequate collections of good children's books to inform and inspire the student teachers share the blame. Newspapers mostly ignore children's books. Some parents, pre-occupied with sophistication, often rush children into adult situations before they are ready.

The general reader tends to lump all children's books together as dull and to regard any adult book as superior. This is manifestly absurd but nevertheless the attitude is disheartening to the writer of children's books.

The author who writes for children creates a young world, a fresh world, and a world as it seems to children. Problems there are, grief and fears, and hurts are felt as keenly as in later life. But in normal childhood the problems are soluble ones, the griefs are brief and usually subject to comfort. The grown ups, however disappointing they may be as individuals, are, on the whole, sources of strength and tenderness. Common things are as wonderful as the rare. It is grown ups who exclaim when a school of porpoises are seen off the beach. To the young the crabs on the shore are just as interesting.

In spite of the avalanche of children's books on the market to-day, many of them could be described as merchandise instead of books, and in spite of the plague of books written to order, there are writers whose integrity as artists is easily recognized.

At the present time our cinemas are crowded at all sessions of *Mary Poppins*. This is a delectable film with Julie Andrews as a very pretty nanny. The books are just as enchanting. They happen to be written by an Australian, Mrs. P. L. Travers, who lives in London. The first *Mary Poppins* appeared in 1934 and the fourth of the saga appeared in 1952. To-day you might be forgiven for thinking that Walt Disney created *Mary Poppins*.

Because the film has received such acclaim editors have discovered Mrs. Travers. In *The New York Times* Book Review Children's Book Section last May, Mrs. Travers was asked to give her views on fantasy. She is a forthright person and wrote that she disliked the word because, through misuse, it had

come to mean something contrived, "far from the truth and untrustworthy". She was then asked how she would foster imagination in children in a technological age.

Her reply is worth recording: "I would just say feed and warm them (the children) and let imagination be—though wonder, I think, is a better word."

It is this sense of wonder that has made her books such a joy.

Now that *Mary Poppins* is so well known from the screen version there is a danger that the original Travers version will be overlooked and not given to children to read. The high quality of Disney's pictures is not to be found in the books he publishes because these are only used to promote his films. Let us compare the opening of the Disney and the Travers' books. This is Disney:

"It was spring—always a proper time for new beginnings and old memories. There were barrows loaded with flowers on every street in London. In the little park near Reeves Hill the children were flying kites. They were laughing and racing against the wind, falling down, some of them dirtying their stockings and scuffing their shoes, but always laughing. Beyond the park railing, on Cherry Tree Lane, the fountain had been released from its long winter silence. It spouted a noisy important stream into a broad stone basin that was pink with the petals dropped from the overhanging cherry trees."

Now listen to the original:

"If you want to find Cherry Tree Lane all you have to do is ask a policeman at the crossroads. He will push his helmet slightly to one side, scratch his head thoughtfully, and then he will point his huge white gloved finger and say 'First to your right, second to your left, sharp right again, and you're there. Good morning.'

"And sure enough if you follow his directions exactly you will be there—right in the middle of Cherry Tree Lane, where the houses run down one side, and the Park runs down the other, and the cherry trees go dancing right down the middle."

This sort of experience can be repeated again and again. *Peter Pan* as a film suffered a worse fate than *Mary Poppins*. If I remember rightly the name of Sir James Barrie was not even to be found in the small print.

To-day's books look pretty. They are well packaged—most of them are passable. The thing is to find those which will delight. We cannot wait for the verdict of history, but in your search you can eliminate the pleasant little stories of childish adventures, those filled with good photographs surrounded by texts that too often are dull; eliminate most of the cloak and dagger themes, many of the information books, many biographies and fictionalized history. When you

have done that you will, by comparison, have reduced the mountains to small hillocks—just as you do in the world of adult books.

Among those which have been rescued from the mountainous heaps you could find a rich and convincing novel about Alfred the Great by C. Walter Hodges called *The Namesake*; Lucy Boston's eerie, imaginative and subtle *An Enemy at Green Knowe*; and the exciting novel *Save The Khan*, by B. Bartos Hoppner. Rosemary Sutcliff's vivid stories of early Britain, particularly Roman Britain, such as *Eagle of The Ninth*, *Warrior Scarlet* and her most recent one about the Picts and Scots, *The Mark of The Horse Lord*, are stirring, exciting, and informative.

For exquisite artistry in unfolding tales of miniature people, Mary Norton's stories of *The Borrowers* are an inspiration. The idea of a tribe of miniature people living under floorboards, behind the wainscoting in old houses, battenning on human beings, borrowing for their needs from pantry, parlour, bedroom and kitchen, afraid only of the awful fate of being "seen", is marvellous.

We all know these people exist. Well, don't we? As Kate the chronicler worked it out:

"How else to explain the steady inexplicable disappearance of certain small objects about the house? Not only safety pins, needles, blotting paper, match boxes, and those sort of things, but even in Kate's short life she had noticed that if you did not open a drawer for any length of time you never found it quite as you left it—something was always missing—your best handkerchief, your lucky sixpence."

These people are not fairies, elves or leprechauns. In Miss Norton's remarkable fantasy, Pod, Arriety, and Homily are drawn as tough, struggling, delightful folk like the nicest families of our own world. They have characters we can all recognize, their troubles are so near our own that we can sympathise immediately, their joys, particularly the joys of young Arriety, somehow represent the true joys of life. Not only the Tom Thumb detail grips the reader, there is high drama and a beautiful excitement made up of secrets and mystery.

Among the elite of to-day's writers are William Mayne, whose stories are easy reading but are infinitely rewarding, especially those like *A Swarm In May*; Edward Ardizzone, whose illustrations are as distinctive as his stories; Noel Streatfield who is infinitely successful in telling a story packed with information about careers; Eleanor Farjeon, whose many gifts to children include *Martin Pippin in The Daisy Field*, *Italian Peepshow* and her poetry. She died at the age of 84 this year.

There is tremendous emphasis to-day on books of information about complicated subjects. I suppose there is so much to be explained and to be related to common experience such as rockets, spacecraft, radar, television, etc.

These non-fiction books appear in attractive formats and are popular, but too many of them make things appear too easy. One cannot escape hard work in the search of true knowledge. Foolishly, I think, some adults encourage children to concentrate on non-fiction books. They think this is more meritorious. It is getting dangerously close to the old idea that children's books are meant to instruct.

Reading for its own sake, for pure enjoyment must never be set aside as a waste of time in favour of reading as a means for acquiring information.

The child who has access to the excellent books drawn from the great body of traditional literature, folk and fairy tales, legends and hero stories, as well as the best writing of authors of yesterday and to-day, will pick up all kinds of information, will broaden his background, will develop imagination and a sense of humour, and will grow naturally and deeply in humanity and understanding.

In conclusion I want to say something of our Australian writers. They are highly competent and the best of them are as well known overseas as they are here. They bring to the young reader a knowledge of their own background and heritage. No longer is the setting of every children's book somewhere on the other side of the world.

Norman Lindsay's *Magic Pudding* won world recognition long ago and in any company finds its place for its lusty good humour, nonsense and spontaneity. This wonderful tale was first published in 1918 and has been through about 20 editions. A most elegant new edition was published in 1963. It also appears in the Penguin paperbacks. Some people, indeed, think it is the best Lindsay ever put onto paper in any form—but this is neither the time nor the place to go into *that*.

Ethel Turner in *Seven Little Australians* touched as many hearts as Louisa Alcott did in *Little Women*. Mary Grant Bruce enchanted generations of children with her Billabong books. Mrs. Aeneas Gunn with *We of The Never Never* and May Gibbs with *The Adventures of Snugglepoot and Cuddle Pie* are among others who delighted the young.

To-day Nan Chauncy, Joan Phipson, Eve Pownall, Betty Roland, Fay Brinsmead, Eleanor Spence, Patricia Wrightson, Mary Durack, Judith Wright, Elyne Mitchell, Ruth Park, Nuri Mass, Elisabeth Macintyre, Carol Odell, and Noela Young command attention. Their work is known and admired beyond this country. Their contribution to our national literature must await the verdict of time. Meanwhile the quality of their writing is high and they are an effective voice for Australia in their field.

In this year's June issue of *The Junior Bookshelf*, this authoritative review of children's books published by the British Library Association, there is an

article by Marcus Crouch on Nan Chauncy. Although she was born in England all her writing has been done in Tasmania. Three times she has won the Australian "Best Book of The Year" award, and one of her books, *They Found a Cave*, has been made into a film. Mr. Crouch pays this tribute to Mrs. Chauncy:

"In Nan Chauncy we have a writer with a rare and exciting scene, a vision and a philosophy. With increasing power and mastery of her medium and its technique, she has drawn a picture of a satisfying and sane way of life, 'shut in and secret' indeed, but nevertheless sharply relevant to those who are bound by the wheel of an urban society."

You will notice that in that list there are no men. It seems the women are more prolific. But Ivan Southall, George Finkel, John Gunn, R. S. Porteous and Len Evers are most successful. When Len Evers shared the "Book of The Year" award some years ago with his *Racketty Street Gang* he told me he had written it because he wanted to write "a rattling good yarn" for boys which was realistic. He thought that there were too many women about with a namby-pamby attitude to children. I suggest that too many Australian men think it "namby-pamby" to write for children.

I have not tried to give you a critical evaluation of children's literature in the last 100 years, but rather to outline some of its splended achievements since "Alice". There is no time to tell you of the spectacular development in picture books. In the creation of picture books Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott and Kate Greenaway were the great originators. They set standards of excellence in technique, storytelling details, gaiety and perceptive insight. It is a field in which, regrettably, we have not done well in Australia to date.

What I hope I might have done tonight is to persuade you that children's books are not just something you think about as Christmas and birthday presents for the young of your families. Children's books deserve to be considered as part of our literary heritage and their authors and artists treated seriously. At this point I feel rather like Huck Finn, except that he wrote a classic book and I have given a pedestrian address, but this is what he said on his last page:

"There ain't nothing more to write about and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what trouble it was to write a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't going to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilise me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."