

VALUE FOR MONEY THE POSSIBILITIES OF PICTURE BOOKS

WHEN CHOOSING PRESENTS for the under-elevene few of us can afford to be quite indifferent to the matter of price, however much we would like to be able "to give and not to count the cost". A hard-back picture book is not a cheap gift, but if well chosen it will open a child's eyes, stimulate his imagination and give endless delight. It is well worth while to by-pass the piles of glossy annuals which disfigure so many bookshelves' displays like a multi-coloured rash and to demand to see some of the really beautiful books now available, the work of first-class writers and artists splendidly produced by discerning publishers.

Outstanding among these new picture books is *Hans and Peter*, written and illustrated with infectious gusto by fifteen-year-old Heidrun Petrides as a present for a young friend. He

America, though he is better known for his unquestionably adult novel, *The Blackboard Jungle*. But *The Wonderful Button* is disappointing. It is a sentimental tale of a small boy and a king "long long ago, in a land in the East". Intelligent children would find this hazy setting unsatisfactory, for in it there is no point of contact with the kind of life they know. The king's magnificent, jewelled button on his gold cape was the cause of envy and unhappiness "for everyone wanted the button. Nobody wanted him." Only one small boy was unaffected by the general greed and treated the king as a human being and the button as a "fishing lure". Practical children will be sceptical about the button's efficacy as bait, and the happy ending seems unacceptably contrived. Quentin Blake's illustrations are

Philippa Pearce, and again in *The Secret of the Shed* his vitality and humour make a tall story convincingly credible.

Animal lovers are again well catered for this season. *The Bear and his Brothers* by Hans Baumann is an unusual book of great charm, superbly illustrated by Ulrik Schramm. When Mischa comes home to his four brothers they are puzzled by the strange mark on his nose and are intrigued by his account of the world outside the forest, a haunting and moving tale of his wandering life with an old man and a little girl and the chain from which he eventually breaks free. His contact with humans has brought him both sorrow and joy; sensitive children will be distressed by his suffering, but they will be comforted by the end of the book and the possibility that Mischa

of the biblical authority for it in Isaiah, Chapter 11. It is all very idealistic, this make-believe world in which all the animals live harmoniously together, and if the reader is young enough he will readily accept the notion that "a little child shall lead them". But most children are realists from an early age and will see certain practical snags in such an arrangement. However, with a little "willing suspension of disbelief" the tale will satisfy those who enjoy beautifully-drawn pictures of animals.

The illustrations, again, are the main attraction of *Limping Ginger of London Town*, by Erik Hutchinson, a light-hearted frolic about a stage-struck cat who "catapults to stardom" inadvertently and so puts puffed-up Freda Pigeon's beak out of joint. The pictures are by Alan Howard and are exciting variations on the London theme in orange, grey, black and white.

When H. E. Bates saw Carol Barker's pictures telling the enchanting tale of *Achilles the Donkey* he readily agreed to write the text. The result is an outstanding book of rare charm and distinction. The Greek peasants and their animals are lovingly depicted with bold, sure lines and glowing colours, with meticulous attention to detail—nothing vague or wishy-washy here. The appliquéd work cover design is a joy, irresistibly inviting children to open the book and discover the treasures within.



From *The Bear and his Brothers*

is mildly amusing but not sufficiently distinguished to redeem the book.

Pugwash and the Ghost Ship will be greeted with joy by the television pirates' fans. John Ryan is a master of the art of caricature, and his famous pirates well deserve their wide renown. In his latest adventure Captain Pugwash, who cannot resist a bargain, buys a large quantity of cut-price paint. Only when he has fallen into it and been mistaken for a ghost by his timorous crew does he realize that it must be luminous paint. The drawings are full of comic invention, and children will love the pirates' sleeping quarters, with the "Duty Roster" nailed to a post, a half-written letter to "Dear Mum" beside a china piggy-bank and one of the pirates asleep in

his hammock with his teddy-bear tucked in beside him.

Small boys will readily identify themselves with *Paul, the Hero of the Fire*, for they are always ready to visualize themselves as making newspaper headlines through their brave exploits, and saving the family fortunes into the bargain. Edward Ardizzone illustrates with enchanting new drawings one of his early stories—a tall tale of captivating charm. Paul gets a job with a circus to earn money to help his parents to keep their house which they fear they have to sell. He makes many new friends, including the Lion Tamer, the Dwarf, and the Fat Woman, but his happiest times are spent with Mike, who is in charge of the merry-go-round. On balance, the circus people are less clearly defined as individuals than the memorable characters in *Tim and Charlotte* or *Titus in Trouble*, but *Paul, the Hero of the Fire*, though less good than Ardizzone's best, is so far above the average run of present-day children's books that it seems churlish to qualify one's praise in any way. Children will not make odious comparisons and will undoubtedly enjoy Paul's stirring adventures culled from his gallantry during the fire, and Paul may very likely introduce them to Tim, Ginger, Charlotte, Titus and company.

Nicola Simbari is a fine artist of international renown, and his first book for children, *Gennarino*, is a beautiful production. In the glorious colours of the Mediterranean scene the tale of Gennarino, the orphan boy of Ischia, comes vividly to life. It is an exciting tale of courage and adventure, but the fascination of the book lies mainly in the astonishingly lovely illustrations. This is a book to cherish, for it opens the eyes and kindles the imagination.

The Secret of the Shed is a far-fetched tale of improbable adventure which will please young space-age armchair travellers. Written and illustrated by Antony Maitland, it is a fast-moving fantasy packed with thrills. The author was awarded the 1961 Kate Greenaway Medal for his illustrations in *Mrs. Cockle's Cat* by

HEIDRUN PETRIDES: *Hans and Peter*. Oxford University Press. 15s.

ELIZABETH and GERALD ROSE: *Punch and Judy Carry On*. Faber and Faber. 13s. 6d.

EVAN HUNTER: *The Wonderful Button*. Illustrated by Quentin Blake. Abelard-Schuman. 12s. 6d.

JOHN RYAN: *Pugwash and the Ghost Ship*. Bodley Head. 9s. 6d.

EDWARD ARDIZZONE: *Paul, the Hero of the Fire*. Constable. 10s. 6d.

NICOLA SIMBARI: *Gennarino*. Oxford University Press. 12s. 6d.

ANTHONY MAITLAND: *The Secret of the Shed*. Constable. 11s. 6d.

HANS BAUMANN: *The Bear and his Brothers*. Translated by Katharine Potts. Illustrated by Ulrik Schramm. Oxford University Press. 12s.

CLIFFORD WEAR: *The Friendly Place*. Warne. 12s. 6d.

ERIK HUTCHINSON: *Limping Ginger of London Town*. Illustrated by Alan Howard. Faber and Faber. 12s. 6d.

H. E. BATES and CAROL BARKER: *Achilles the Donkey*. Dennis Dobson. 15s.

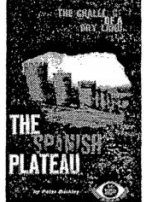
must have been thrilled by this exceptional gift, for the author knows exactly what small boys enjoy—secret plans, do-it-yourself private enterprise with builders' materials, and the final bliss of astonishing parents by the splendour of their achievement. Hans and Peter have nowhere to play but a dingy backyard. They long for the dream house they plan to build when they are grown up, but meanwhile Hans lives in an attic room and Peter in a basement and the future seems impossibly remote. Then the discovery of an abandoned builders' hut brings exciting possibilities much nearer, for they get the owner's permission to convert the hut for their own use. This they carry out with considerable ingenuity and vigour, enlisting the help of Mr. Painter and Mr. Chimney-sweep, but keeping the project a secret from their parents until the great moment when the hut is decorated and furnished to the best of their ability and they are ready to give a grand house-warming party. The illustrations glow with colour and vitality, making the child reader feel he is actually sharing in the absorbing business of papering with old newspaper then painting the walls and ceiling or knocking nails into orange boxes to make furniture.

In *Punch and Judy Carry On* Elizabeth and Gerald Rose magnificently succeed in capturing the holiday spirit and conveying it with verve. Punch is indignant when Judy hits back for once and he decides to take himself off and seek fame and fortune elsewhere. But his pride is soon punctured, for he falls to make the grade as a donkeyman and is kicked into an ice-cream cart. His brief trip in charge of a boat ends in seasickness. He recovers sufficiently to enjoy the funfair, but after trouble at the winkle stall and with Gypsy Rose Smith, the fortune-teller, he rushes off and falls from the end of the pier. He is glad enough to be rescued from the sea by Dog Toby and restored to his joyful wife, whom he promises not to beat so hard again. "Not for a little while, anyway." The book sparkles with gaiety and good humour.

Evan Hunter is a children's books writer of considerable success in

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