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Children's Books

By H. E. BATES

The books mentioned here are all novels for children: a fact not realised, or at least not mentioned, by their publishers. The starting age for them would be, perhaps, about seven; the upper limit, for girls, at any rate, about fourteen. But the whole tendency, in production, manner, and appeal, is towards an adult standard. Observe how, in all of them except one, there is no appeal through animals, fairies, magic carpets. In the year 1942 the horns of Elfland are faintly, faintly blowing.

To the statement that the publishers call none of these books novels, Miss M. E. Atkinson is an exception. Boldly and quite rightly she calls "CHALLENGE TO ADVENTURE" (John Lane, 7s. 6d.) a novel for boys and girls, and in its realism, its construction, its way of moving the story through thought and action, this is exactly what it is. Give it to a girl of ten or over. It is clear, exciting, realistic in appeal; it never writes down; and it will be practically the last book a girl will throw out in the great adolescent spring-cleaning that clears shelf-space for Rupert Brooke and "The Oxford Book of English Verse."

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If you have sisters to cater for, give Miss Elizabeth Kyle's "VANISHING ISLAND" (Peter Davies, 7s. 6d.) with it. Also a novel, by a novelist, it is written on the assumption that children have a slight feeling, even at twelve, for their native tongue. It exploits the universal love of islands by choosing an island off the Scottish coast and then wrapping it in exciting cloud-canopies of mystery. The sea, in fact, is the surest bet for a child. If you find yourself, troubled W.A.A.F. aunt or subaltern uncle, in a strange bookshop in a strange town, trying to pick a winner for a niece or nephew you haven't seen since your last forty-eight in May, remember the sea. Anything with a ship, an island, or a rope-ladder in it is bound to romp home.

Into this category fall "RUN-AWAY BOY" (Marjorie Dixon, Faber, 7s. 6d.), "BUNKLE BEGAN IT" (M. Pardoe, Routledge, 6s.), and two American books, "THE BOY WHO WAS AFRAID" (Armstrong Sperry, Bodley Head, 6s.) and "SAILOR IN THE SUN" (Robb

White, Bodley Head, 7s. 6d.). The first is a long Irish tale of caves and boys and disappearances and, if you please, a little honeyed Irish nationalism. If you have to satisfy three sisters, give this with Miss Atkinson and Miss Kyle. "Bunkle Began It" is a good book with a bad title, and is interesting as being the only book in the list which recognises the existence of the war. M. Pardoe's story is a breezy little Devonshire spy story, which even goes so far as to have a chapter called "Achtung Schpittfuer!"

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Of the two American books, "The Boy Who Was Afraid" is a Polynesian story based on folk-legend; it has received a high American award, and is, perhaps, not surprisingly, a trifle heavy with cliché. It reads, rather pretentiously at times beside Robb White's "Sailor in the Sun," which exploits the bad aunt and the wicked uncle, and running away and white sails and the skipper, without a trace of literariness. This is an excellent little thing.

Letters to the Editor

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This presumably was to bring emergency officers on a par with regular officers, in that pensions are provided for regular officers but not for non-regulars.

In the Royal Warrant for pay, etc., 1940, which is now operative, no provision whatsoever is made for the payment of a gratuity to non-regular officers employed in an emergency.

To my mind this is a most deplorable state of affairs.

Surrey MAJOR.

Creative Musicians

Sir,—I was very glad to see Mr. Newman's attack upon the present-day tendency to exalt the purely executive artist at the expense of the creative musician. Everyone who knows anything about music must know that one even third or fourth rate composer is of immeasurably greater value to any nation than a cluster of the most brilliant executants.

Could one imagine a lower level of taste than was shown by the inane worship of conductors (especially foreign ones) in the years immediately preceding the present war in this country?