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Christmas Books for Children—I

By H. E. BATES

If you are excusably tired of the aeroplane composed of three wafers of wood and a square foot of painted paper, or the shaped lump of wood painted one coat that calls itself a tank, or the grey match-wood slivers stuck with pins and rigged with cotton that pass for anything from a sloop to the Rodney—if, in fact, you have had enough of trying to amuse your child with the very things that fail to make the world amusing, then this list of selected books, the least of which shames all your tuppenny weapons of war, will be a godsend. Comparatively, they are all winners.

Starting with the over-twelves and going down: two excellent real-animal books by Phyllis Kellway, "The Otter Book" and "The Squirrel Book" (Collins. 5s. and 4s.). Cut out the letterpress and leave only the photographs of moorhen chicks, voles, birds' nests, birds, rivers, and the most astounding picture of an otter swimming at speed, and you still have, I think, a bargain to beat all-comers. I find them both enchanting. In the happy simplicity of their approach, in their unselfish intimacy with animal life, in attitude and narrative zest, they will give children two things at the same time: knowledge and story. They will excite and enrich their pictures, their facts, and their beauty. At five shillings, and therefore ridiculously cheap, is "Country Scrap Book for Boys and Girls," by Malcolm Saville (National Magazine Co. 5s.). On the analogy that in our family the luxury of a boiled egg is known as a dip-in egg, I should call this a dip-in book. No story, only a mass of well-antologised, well-dippable facts about birds, animals, trees, flowers, crops, seasons: don'ts about the farm; facts about the village. If you have no child of your own, give it to the nearest town evacuee. All his life he will treasure it as the record of a lovelier world.

If the boy has a young sister, give her "The Farmyard Book" (Collins. 6s.), and if he has two young sisters, give the other "An Animal Tour" (Collins. 6s.). The one is at least the next best thing to a visit to a farmyard; the other is infinitely better than a visit to that chamber



From "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," by R. Rostron. (Collins. 6s.)

of horrors, a zoo. The farmyard colour photographs, in which the turkey seems a shade redder and the baby yak a shade whiter than in real life, are by Zoltan Wegner, Paul Henning, C. W. Newberry, and Douglas Glass. Last in the real animal section comes the author of Bambi with "Good Comrades" (Transatlantic Arts, Ltd. 7s. 6d.). It is evident that Felix Salten has no better opinion of zoos than I have, and he has even harder things to say of the pet-shop. If your child shows the latent germs of social conscience, if not of social anger, give him this.

In fiction—and practically all of this section is for over-twelves—the Russians run away with the entire biscuit ration in "The Wild Geese," collected by M. Bulatov and V. de S. Pinto (Transatlantic Arts Ltd. 9s. 6d.). Is it a sign of better times that the appeal to children grows international? These eighteen fables, all deliciously illustrated, concern all those animals of which European and especially Russian folk-lore has always been full: wolves, foxes, frogs, cockerels, cats, cranes, herons. "The Wild Geese" has all over it like a frosty Christmas tree, the light sparkle of imagination.

Its international appeal is carried on, I am glad to note, by Dr. Julius Lips, one-time head of the Department of Anthropology of Cologne, who resigned from that post because his anthropological classification of the Fuehrer was evidently not complimentary. He is now an American citizen and gives us a tale of Labrador, "Tents in the Wilderness" (Harrap. 7s. 6d.). Cologne—America—Labrador—England: a grain of European decency travels a long way. Two brothers of twelve and thirteen might well share Dr. Lips's tale of canoes and rivers, snow-deep forests with "Brendon Chase" by B. B. (Hollis and Carter. 12s. 6d.), which is practically its English counterpart: both of them high in their own class. And if any parents have achieved, and survived, the singular honour of having four boys, they might do worse than "Star-buck Valley Winter," by R. L. Haig-Brown (Collins. 8s. 6d.) and "The Woods of Windri," by Violet Needham (Collins. 8s. 6d.). For the other two. The one is all trapping, salmon-fishing, forestry and adventure in the Canadian open air; the flavour rather that of Jack London for juveniles. If indeed, that author was ever intended for anything else; the other is all

making it clear that he was ambitious for nothing more than was necessary to his purpose.

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But in the very conditions which made his success possible lay the germs of decay. The people resigned their responsibilities to the Emperor with a sigh of relief, ready to do what they were told but not to do anything for themselves. Not, perhaps, without a side-glance at our own times, Professor Salmon traces the growth of paternalism and of the "bureaucratic machine, whose efficient red tape stretched its tentacles into the farthest corners of the Empire and finally squeezed out its very life's blood." The history of the Roman Empire has a peculiar interest for us to-day, for, as Mr. E. L. Woodward has so pertinently reminded us, "history does not repeat itself, but historical situations recur."

Conway Days

New Chum. By John Masefield. (Heinemann. 9s. 6d.)

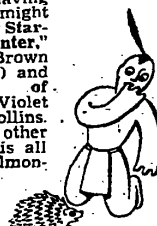
By HAROLD HOBSON

Mr. Masefield continues with grave patience to pursue the memories of his early life. In "New Chum," the latest instalment of his autobiography, he describes his first term on board H.M.S. Conway more than half a century ago. It was a fine sunny morning when he joined the crew, and he had just escaped chicken-pox. Every detail in those fresh and early days now seems to stand out sharp and distinct in Mr. Masefield's memory. He remembers plainly even the pattern of his trouser buttons: sail drill and his experiences in school, where he met with some very unpromising companions, Sunday dinner and going aloft, reefing topsails and the morning-rush are as clear to him to-day, as keenly actual, as the events in the current news bulletins. He writes of them in a style happily and unostentatiously appropriate: sober and factual when talking of common things, and rising to a controlled emotion in considering the more poetic aspect of ships and the sea. It is all charmingly and beautifully done. Only occasionally does one doubt whether the author's particularity is not a little too loving, and his patience too inexhaustible.

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knights, monks, bandits, and warriors in what we vaguely know as the Middle Ages. From these sturdy and soundly conventional works we drop down the age-scale to "The Nightingale," by Margaret and Mary Baker (Shakespeare Head Press. 5s.), from whose pleasant fairy-tale pages of birds, rabbits and woodlands I shall evidently be reading to my youngest, aged five, for at least the next six months, until whenever I try to skip three words he says, "You missed a bit out." In the same way I shall be devoted to "Little Ficky Goes to School," by Henry Phelps and Bruno Frost (Conrad Press), but I shall like it more because (a) it has verses, and after three readings I can do it with my eyes shut, and (b) because whenever I do open my eyes I shall find Mr. Frost's delicious blue-tits winking back at me. Happy book!



From "More Jungle Town," by Sylvia Nelson. (Sylvan Press. 7s. 6d.)



From "Redskin Morning," by Joan Grant. (Methuen. 10s. 6d.)

FOR YOUR LIBRARY LIST

NEW CHUM. By John Masefield. (Heinemann. 9s. 6d.)

BATTLE FOR HEALTH. By Stephen Taylor. (Nicholson and Watson. 5s.)

SERVICE PAY. By Captain Russell Grenfell. (Eyre and Spottiswoode. 10s. 6d.)

YOUNG BESS. By Margaret Irwin. (Chatto and Windus. 9s. 6d.)

THE WHOLE HEART. By Helen House. (Hammond 8s. 6d.)

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