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poet and one sees his poetry coming in here and there, more in the humorous poems than the nature ones; I like the bit where he goes into a barn:

Where the old Daimler rotted in the gloom.

But at present his verse seems to be W. H. Davies with a dash of A. P. Herbert.

Home Truths is illustrated verse in Hudibrastic metre. This metre must be very good to be readable, and when it is diffuse, as much of it is here, it is dull.

Grandma, by Mabel Constanduros, and well-illustrated by her nephew Denis, is quite a re-awakening of the humour W. W. Jacobs invented for Bob Pretty. I enjoyed it.

Lastly comes one of our most popular humorists, A. P. Herbert, with the annual collection of his contributions to *Punch* called *General Cargo*. The subjects are, of course, Parliament, the law, politics, political procedure, beer, village cricket, the Thames Reaches and sailing. Good, healthy, English stuff. Mr. Herbert has a nice after-dinner wit. "Now too that delicious railway problem arises: *Shall one have lunch just after breakfast or just before tea?*" This is the best of A. P. Herbert. He is good too, just as he is good in Parliament, at showing up abuses. But he carries on a joke far too long. Something which would do well as a paragraph, is a short story. Two sentences in the telephone directory, "Don't say 'Hullo.' Announce your identity," make him write a long, long poem with a repetition of the same joke reshuffled in long words, sixth-form humour, W. S. Gilbert patter which has long ceased to be funny and was never poetical:

Don't say "Hullo." Announce your identity.
Indicate your species. Classify your entity.
Enumerate the marks by which the scientific mind
Can certainly distinguish you from others of your kind;
State your major measurements, and where you were designed—
But don't say "Hullo."

and so on for four stanzas.

Anyone with an ear for metre and a public school accent can write this sort of facetiousness. It is facile and superior. That is the trouble with much modern humour. It is facile and superior. Our great humorists were neither. They were artists and creative writers.

JOHN BETJEMAN

Books for Christmas

The Biography of a Serbian Diplomat

LENA A. YOVITCHITCH 12s. 6d. net

An important contribution, in the light of to-day's events, to Balkan history of 1856 to 1933.

"The book is relieved by glimpses into a world so different from ours that only through the highest art or through a medium such as this can its essence be conveyed to the reader. It is fascinating in its sincerity."—*The Times Literary Supplement*.

The Sieve of Blindness

SYDNEY WALTON 5s. net

It is impossible to characterize this collection of choice essays. They have such delightful charm that we can imagine Robert Louis Stevenson or Sir James Barrie sitting down to read them with great joy.

EPWORTH PRESS, 25 CITY RD., E.C.1

BESTIARY

The Seasons and the Farmer. By F. FRASER DARLING and C. F. TUNNICLIFFE. *Cambridge*. 6s.

Animals and Zoos To-day. By R. BIGALKE. *Cassell*. 8s. 6d.

My Animal Friends. By VERA CHAPLINA. *Routledge*. 6s.

The Under-water Zoo. By THEODORE MCCLINTOCK. *Routledge*. 6s.

Chin-Pao and the Giant Pandas. By CHIANG YEE. *Country Life*. 7s. 6d.

The Youngest Camel. By KAY BOYLE. *Faber*. 3s. 6d.

Animal Stories. By WALTER DE LA MARE. *Faber*. 8s. 6d.

The White Buck. By ALLEN W. SEABY. *Nelson*. 6s.

The Wednesday Pony. By PRIMROSE CUMMING. *Blackie*. 5s.

The Chestnut Pony. By PAMELA PHILLIPS and MYRTLE JERRETT. *Country Life*. 5s.

Hobby Horse Hill. By LAVINIA DAVIS. *Heinemann*. 6s.

A House in the Woods. By PHYLLIS KELWAY. *Blackie*. 3s. 6d.

First Animal Friends. By WILLIAM MCGREAL. *Oxford*. 3s. 6d.

Bunty and Bianco. By VERA ELKAN. *Hamish Hamilton*. 5s.

These fourteen books are mainly about animals, either real or fictional, and with the exception of *First Animal Friends*, *Bunty and Bianco* and *A House in the Woods*, which belong to the category of baby picture-books, they will be mostly suitable for children over seven. The first five are non-fictional and in my view they will be found more alive and more valuable to the imaginative animal-loving child than the six subsequent books in which animals are treated more or less as human characters. These books have also driven me finally to a conclusion I have been slowly approaching ever since a growing family forced me to consider literature, occasionally, from the point of view of the child. This is that the English, with some obvious exceptions, do not excel in the art of devising books for children. The French Classics, *Babar* and *Yacki*, many notable Americans of which *Ferdinand*, *Ezekiel* and the lavish productions of Laura Adams Armer spring instantly to mind—these are only a few examples of foreign creations beside which many English books, notably those for older children, frequently recall the cold suet pudding left over from yesterday. In support of this idea I would indicate the excellence of *The Youngest Camel*, from America, *My Animal Friends*, from Russia, *Chin-Pao*, from China, and Mr. de la Mare's very good international anthology.

To these remarks Dr. Fraser Darling's *The Seasons and the Farmer* is a splendid exception. The idea of writing a truthful, unselfish, informative account of the daily life of the English countryside and the men who farm it is apparently so ridiculously simple that no one, hitherto, seems to have thought it worth enlarging into a book. Between the child's alphabet of the farm and the rather heavy-handed nature-excursion catalogue ("If we look closely we shall observe, etc."), there has been little to give the child a basically sound picture of country life that would at once educate and fascinate him. *The Seasons and the Farmer* is dedicated to the proposition that for a child "facts about real things are his master passion." Thus it does not talk in terms of vague pride of England's green and pleasant land, but explains, in an admirable chapter on grasses, on what that traditional greenness scientifically depends; it explains why and how hay is made and when it is best made and for what reasons; it does not accept the English countryside as something naturally and originally beautiful in which the part of man has been desecrative and parasitic, but as something owing almost all its peculiar beauty to man's ceaseless contact. In this way, never sentimental, never exuberant or preaching, it evolves a picture of England and the English farmer which has at once the soundness of an encyclopaedia and the beauty of a poem. Hay-making, harvest, ploughing, hoeing, soils, grasses, animals, poultry—all are treated with the same admirable balance of fact and enchantment. Further enriched by some excellent black and white drawings by C. F. Tunnicliffe this book is, I think, the perfect thing of its kind.

Both *My Animal Friends* and *Animals and Zoos To-day* are zoo books, the first from Russia, the second from South Africa, based on real and intimate experience with animals in captivity. Their authors refuse to make the commonest mistake of animal lovers—the tendency to humanise the actions of their charges—and of not judging animal behaviour with consistent objectivity, and the result is that they have produced two excellent books. *My Animal Friends* is simply a collection of little stories of the animals, sick

or orphaned, which the author sometimes took home to her flat from the Moscow Zoo. They included a couple of bears, a wolf, a young elk, a walrus, a hyena, a lynx and finally a lion-cub, to which the whole of the second part of the book is devoted. I find the book full of the enchantment of reality. *Animals and Zoos To-day*, dealing largely with the immense fauna of South Africa and in particular of the Kruger National Park, is much wider in scope. From its index of fourteen columns I select, at random, the following names: aard-wolf, antbear, bloubok, erd vark, oorbietjie, Klipspringer, inyala, Kudu, Gompah; from its meaty pages the following chance facts: that the gestation period of the Virginian opossum is eleven days and that the young, when born, are so small that sixteen can lie in a teaspoon; that the South African lion is increasing so rapidly that it may in time exterminate the herbivorous species on which it preys; that there is not the slightest evidence that snakes suck milk from cows; that there are at least 330 zoological gardens in the world to-day, as compared with eleven in 1850. This is, perhaps, not exclusively a child's book: I should recommend it on the sly to parents, as a very present reference book in time of trouble. *The Under-Water Zoo* is a lively little diary of the happenings in a home aquarium: a gay pageant-drama of water-boatmen, snails, dragonfly nymphs, tadpoles, minnows—all the creatures which any child can net for himself from the nearest pond. A lovely and specialised little book, informative and simple: a clear case for choosing the child for the book, and not the book for the child. I have included *Chin-Pao and the Giant Pandas* among the non-fictional works partly because, although a fictional story, it deals with the pandas in an informative way, and indeed there is no need to go any farther for a panda story than this delicious little Chinese tale, grave and lovely and adventurous, with its jade and gold and pink illustrations in the traditional Chinese manner: the most poetical book on the list.

Among the fiction Miss Kay Boyle's *The Youngest Camel* is, with the possible exception of Mr. de la Mare's volume, the most distinguished creation. In a class where every other book appears to be a middle-class romance of a girl and a pony it is a pleasure to travel across the desert with this small camel, who did not smell nice, asked the wrong questions, was obstinate and fell into

temptation. This book has all the style, intelligence and beauty to be expected of a writer of Miss Boyle's class. Mr. de la Mare's volume is a double-decker: downstairs are crammed animal stories of all nations and periods, partly rewritten by Mr. de la Mare himself and choicely illustrated by some cuts from Topsell's seventeenth-century *Historie of Foure-Fotted Beastes*; on top there reposes a huge and, I feel, rather superfluous preface, a little ponderous in its explanations and detracting from the proper value of an otherwise excellent book. *The White Buck* I should also recommend warmly; its accuracy of observation and fact, by which the creatures of the New Forest are described authentically and without sentimentality, makes it a safe bet for the imaginative child of ten who likes its facts served with sensibility and beauty. *The Wednesday Pony*, *The Chestnut Pony* and *Hobby Horse Hill* are all in some way concerned with horses, riding, and children appropriately dressed; they tell chatty, straightforward and to me rather ordinary stories in which the horses are heroes. As a parent I find them dull: an opinion completely nullified by the quarrelsome avidity with which my two small daughters struggle to share them. By contrast *A House in the Woods*, *Bunty and Bianco* and *First Animal Friends* enchant me by their unaffected simplicity, their fidelity to very simple truths, their charming portraiture of nestlings, squirrels, dogs, penguins, lambs, dormice, butterflies, and by their knack of capturing on the page just those things, in the right attitude and at the right moment, which inspire the small child to wonder.

H. E. BATES

THE DOORSTEP OF SCIENCE

Science in Industry. By PROFESSOR A. M. LOW. *Oxford*. 3s. 6d.

Modern Armaments. By PROFESSOR A. M. LOW. *Gifford*. 8s. 6d.

The threshold of science, which divides the long labour of scientific knowledge from the "romance" of it, is a peculiarly intoxicating place. How difficult it is for the layman to pass from that doorstep into the forbidding mansions beyond; how easy and how stimulating to linger there in the hands of the right conductor, under the spell of his persuasive voice, peering with an access of power into the immense complications of the dimly lighted interior. Professor Low is an excellent scientific showman, as these two examples of his art very well show. Whatever else may be said about these books, however roughly they might be handled beyond the doorstep, they pass the first test of literature at whatever level. It does one good to read them; having read them, one feels better.

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THE HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS

By H. F. WITHERBY (Editor), F. C. R. JOURDAIN,