Books from Crib to College

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Children’s books are attractive and simple, says Kay Monson

Peter Rabbit, the Dutch Twins, Pinocchio and Heidi surely recall thrilling experiences of childhood bookland. There was Little Lame Prince soaring from his tower on the magic carpet. And remember stepping through the looking glass with Alice? The tears shed for the Dog of Flanders were forgotten only in those breathless moments with Marcella when she found Raggedy Ann in the old barrel in grandmother’s attic.

Unfortunately there are probably a few unpleasant experiences lurking in everyone’s book memory. On the lower bookshelf was an ugly old book with coarse yellow pages. The eagle that carried away little babies and the dark pictures of it caused more than one nightmare. Fortunately the best of the old have survived and the best of the new are stepping into place beside them.

In the past 10 years many of the old writing techniques have been discarded. The characters of modern children’s books live in healthy, normal everyday situations. Morals are no longer taught by preaching. We don’t expect the seven-year-old to understand about a farmer planting seeds of kindness; it’s much more practical and interesting to read of him being kind to his animals.

The bright books which are decked the children’s counter today have been written by clever, imaginative people who are well informed. Children are quick to see humor, often much quicker than adults. Their appreciation of laughable situations is unique. The language of these books is correct. A child doesn’t expect an adult to “talk down” to him.

Simplicity is a refreshing feature. There is no need to invent wonders for a child while the clock still ticks, or sunbeams make slashes on the wall, while the kitten is soft, or mother sings. Children don’t crave the unnatural but rather they appreciate the usual wonders written in a new and charming manner. Books help children to orient themselves. Even adults linger on that which makes a pleasing pattern of their scattered thoughts. Children grasp what they see and read in books and make it their own.

Let’s trace Johnny’s book life from crib to high school.

Books can make their debut when Johnny is still an infant. Picture dictionaries help him to learn correct language. As Johnny grows, picture books with gay, artistic coloring and husky, manageable pages can tell many a story with the help of his fertile imagination.

The panorama book is an innovation for young children. The pages unfold to make a story with clever continuity. This panel can be preserved as a frieze on a nursery wall. The new spiral bindings are appreciated by little hands that can’t make a book lie flat.

Mother Goose keeps her place among the perennial favorites. Johnny has often heard the rhymes before they are introduced in book fashion. The proof of a child’s book is in the “read it again” value. A worthwhile book stands that test admirably and should grow better with age.

Animals are a ready medium for children’s yarns. A familiar and popular book is the well-read “Black Beauty”. Some modern books begin with tales of stuffed animals in the nursery; a year later Johnny is reading about household pets and finally about the little deer in the forest.

Boys of today are fortunate to find such a storehouse of knowledge in books of adventure and travel. Information is presented authentically and attractively.
Colorful adventure and mystery lurk in the enchanted woods depicted by Donald E. Cooke in his design on the end paper of *THE FIREBIRD*, a book of Russian folklore for 12 to 16 year olds. This design was used by Marshall Field and Company for their recent Juvenile Book Catalog by permission of the publisher, John C. Winston Company.

in books of ships, railways, polar explorers, steel and farming.

Surprisingly enough, children have very definite ideas concerning their preferences. Simplicity is first with special attachments to flowers and animals. Children love color, but expect it clear, bright and authentic. Blue grass, green sunbeams or pink elephants aren't satisfactory unless, of course, they have a definite story basis.

Maud and Miska Petersham, Berta and Elmer Hader are among the best author-illustrators. The Petershams, American wife and Hungarian-born husband, are known for their color and young figures full of action. Kurt Wiese and Munro Leaf are names that have achieved significance. The Pooh books by A. A. Milne offer subtle humor, with hidden significances found in the little boy character, Christopher Robin, Wot, the wise old owl, and Tigger, the tiger.

*April, 1940*