

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and
Pollinger Limited. Copyright © Evensford Productions Limited, 1941.

A GOOD BOOK FOR CHILDREN

The Open Book of Wild Life. By
Richard Morse. (Black. 8s. 6d.)

By H. E. BATES

This book is another example of the new standard by which children's books teach by the straightforward presentation of scientific and biological facts rather than by a mixture of half-fact, half-sentimentalism. It is an attitude particularly valuable in books on wild life and the countryside, where there is a strong tendency to humanise anything from rabbits to fungi. The classification of plants and animals; the scientific mysteries (why a stag has antlers, why it periodically sheds those antlers and grows them again); the apparent mysteries (why the scarlet pimpernel closes its flowers in dull or rainy weather, why goats-beard shuts its flowers at noon); the curiosities (the plant that eats insects, the plant that is a pigmy survivor of the giant trees of coal forests); the charm of experiment (the case of the snail which attacked the arum lily, was thrown over the garden wall, and came back, and was thrown over again and again, and still came back); above all, perhaps, the honest admission, so important to a child, that the cause of a particular thing is not yet known, that science is not omniscient; all this is part of the principle behind Mr. Morse's book.

The photographs and drawings in the text are admirable; the colour-plates perhaps less satisfactory. The book is not, and does not aim to be, complete; but there is no doubt about its sound, simple excellence. It is a book I should be glad to give to my children; it is also a book I should be glad for my children to give to me.