

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and
Pollinger Limited. Copyright © Evensford Productions Limited, 1934.

incarnation of those stock nineteenth-century comic figures, the Old Maid and the Mother-in-Law. Sausages, beer, washing-day, betting and gentlemen-lodgers were the favourite and inexhaustible themes of popular humour, and topical songs with political allusions (always, I fancy, for some mysterious reason with a Conservative bias) were an additional delight. In fact, pantomime had become an entertainment in which music-hall artists give more or less their usual performance, while pretending to be characters in a fairy-tale. (From what I have noticed at music-halls lately, the fairies this Christmas are likely to provide an inexhaustible mine of *double entendres*.) The original pantomime, that is the Harlequinade, is usually omitted altogether or hurried over in a few minutes; but with luck you may get a member of the great Lupino family performing that fascinating feat of theatrical acrobatic, the "trap" act.

Mr. Wilson's book is packed with odd and interesting scraps of information, and the illustrations are fascinating. There is a curious pathos and poetry about the history of the theatre, coming partly from the contrast between the incomparable (because it is as it were tangible) success of the performers, and the quick evanescence of their art: when the clapping and the shouts are over there are left only memories in a few bald or greying heads, and then nothing but the fading scent which clings to the names of those loved and praised by great writers.

RAYMOND MORTIMER

SPECIAL FOR TINY TOTS

Yacki. By GERMAINE DEFLOU and SALBY AVEDIAN. *Chatto and Windus.* 5s.

The Pied Piper. By WALT DISNEY. *Lane.* 2s. 6d.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin. By ROBERT BROWNING. Illustrated by ARTHUR RACKHAM. *Harrap.* 5s.

Tales From Ebony. By HARCOURT WILLIAMS. *Putnam.* 6s.

Polly Who Did As She Was Told. By MARGARET and MARY BAKER. *Blackwell.* 3s. 6d.

The Wood That Came Back. By CLARE LEIGHTON. *Nicholson and Watson.* 5s.

The Youngest Omnibus. Conducted by ROSALIND VALLANCE. *Nelson.* 7s. 6d.

The Runaway Dolls. By ELIZABETH CHERRINGTON. *Hutchinson.* 2s. 6d.

The Adventures of the Three Baby Bunnies. By PATRICIA ROBINS. *Nicholson and Watson.* 5s.

Widdy-Widdy-Wurkey. By ROSE FYLEMAN. *Blackwell.* 3s. 6d.

Master Toby's Hunt. By A. O. FISHER and FRANK HART. *Country Life.* 5s.

The Tale of Kinikot. By DOROTHY M. CROSTHWAITE. *Eyre and Spottiswoode.* 3s. 6d.

It is a long, long way from *Stepping Heavenward*, *Barriers Burned Away* and *Little Eric*, those dreary works given as Sunday School prizes to our parents and left on the whatnot for us, to the fresh, light-hearted books, all gaily illustrated and almost all lacking in Moral Purpose, that form this list. Only those who have sat, or tried to sit, on a velvet cushion on an American leather sofa, trying desperately to turn over the pages of *Sunday at Home* without waking their snoozing parents, can realise what luck attends the children born out of that world of wool-mats and whispers and childish wrong-doing. All of these fine books, comparisons with the past apart, are good and are to be recommended; though I feel inclined to divide them into three classes: the pretty good, the jolly good, and the masterpieces. Unfortunately there is only one masterpiece, and, unfortunately for those with insular notions, it happens to be French.

The masterpiece is *Yacki*. Yacki, who in the pictures resembles more than anything a ventriloquist's doll, is a small boy who lives with his grandpa, his mother, his small brother and his dog Fido, in a pink house with a blue roof, and who cherishes a longing—which we are always given to understand is confined to good British boys—to go to sea. Nobody else has a Navy, of course, except the British, but Yacki somehow manages to be taken as cabin boy on a French ship. Off he goes, then, with his kit-bag, leaving relatives and friends waving from the quay, to begin life on the ocean wave. And what a life! Into the space of about a fortnight Yacki manages to cram a lifetime of astonishing adventures: tries to look at a seal by leaning over the ship's railings and falls into the sea, ties his scarf round the seal's neck, gets

pulled ashore and is stranded. Ice-packs, Laplanders, bears! Yacki's ship sails home and Yacki, all alone, left for dead on the wastes of ice. Dead, my aunt! Yacki feeds the bears with biscuits and waits for the aeroplane to come and rescue him. And an aeroplane does come, and the aeroplane, with Yacki in it, bursts into flame. Incombustible Yacki! He falls into the sea, swims about fifty miles and is picked up by a ship (French again), is filmed by Mr. Flick the camera man, and arrives home with terrific glory and the municipal band playing (I infer) *Believe It If You Like*.

It is, however, impossible not to believe it. For *Yacki* is a masterpiece not simply by virtue of its story, astonishing enough, but by the way its story is presented. The book is rather an unusual shape: very long, about fifteen inches by about nine inches deep. This unusual length is explained by the fact that *Yacki* has not only to be read, but to be cut out. (All I was ever allowed to cut out were ancient pictures of ladies in bandeau-hats and hobble-skirts, though it seems likely that I shall very soon be putting in a good deal of work on *Yacki*.) And the method of cutting-up the book is ingenious, for only the right half of the book has to be cut, leaving the left half intact, a complete record of Yacki's adventures. I imagine that the cut-out models will be first-rate. Certainly the pictures altogether are the best I have ever had the fortune to see in a child's book. They are extremely French: very gay, slightly fantastic and at the same time both realistic and absurd. The large double picture showing the aeroplane setting off to rescue Yacki is a gem: the mechanics rushing about with spanners, the pilot having his picture taken, the typically French youth with racing bike and thick red lips, and so on, the whole scene fantastically brilliant and animated. The text and the cutting-out directions are throughout, in English. The rest is sublimely French. In short, *Yacki* is unique, and parents who neglect to obtain it ought to be summarily spanked.

After *Yacki* the rest of these books appear rather like dog biscuits after Christmas cake. But at least five of them belong to the jolly good class, and one, Walt Disney's *Pied Piper*, comes very near to being a masterpiece. Thanks to Disney, it has been a great year for pigs, but it now seems likely that it will be an astonishing Christmas for rats. Disney's full genius can hardly be expected to appear in static pictures in books. The wonderful scene in which the rats catapult bananas out of their skins is glorious in movement, and can only be a tenth as good on paper. And the silly symphonic variations, alas, are naturally missing. Even so, some of the electric absurdity which has made little pigs so famous has undoubtedly found its way into this book, and it stands next to *Yacki*, far outshining Mr. Rackham's very different version of the same story.

Mr. Harcourt Williams' *Tales From Ebony* runs the Disney very close, and more by reason of its illustrations than its text, good though the text is. A child's first question about a book is always, "Are there any pictures?" and I can only liken the thirty-two illustrations by C. F. Tunnicliffe to Persian MS. paintings. They have something of the same brilliant colouring and odd humour and animation. The stories they illustrate must already be famous among children, for the author has told them for some years at the Jean Sterling Mackinlay matinees and in the Children's Hour at Broadcasting House. Many of them, such as *The Golden Goose*, *The Tinder Box*, and *Snow White and Rose Red* are retold tales. There is also, I may say, a chapter on young pork. And the stories are all charmingly told. They read aloud smoothly and easily, and the extreme simplicity of the narrative gives any imaginative reader a fine chance. The title, *Tales From Ebony*, seems to indicate Ethiopia. But *Ebony* is, as the map will show, in Kent.

Both *Polly Who Did As She Was Told* and *The Wood That Came Back* might seem to belong to the Moral Purpose category. Actually there is hardly so much as a grain of mustard seed of any purpose, except enchantment, in either of them. More so even than *Tales From Ebony*, they rely on pictures for most of that enchantment and its success. The silhouettes in *Polly* are extraordinarily alive, and the story comes very near in its naivety and delight to Andersen. In Miss Clare Leighton's book the mustard seed of Purpose is just evident, but the Purpose is good, and it is pretty clear that Miss Leighton hopes to see the seed planted in the minds of all children who read her book, a hope which I endorse. For this is the story of the Man Who Cut Down a Wood and Suffered For It. And suffer he did; and, as James Stephens said, a jolly good job, too.

And talking of James Stephens, here he is in *The Youngest Omnibus*, sitting next to Hans Andersen and the author of *Polly*

Who Did As She Was Told. The bus is crammed full, standing room only: John Keats squashed between Ouida and A. A. Milne; Coleridge treading on S. G. Hulme Beaman's toes; Marcia St. John Webb sitting on Richard Hughes' lap; Arthur Ransome arm in arm with Rosalind Vallance; people standing on the stairs and sitting with the driver. Nearly a hundred people in all; the time-table seven hundred pages long; and the bus going anywhere just to see how far it is. At seven-and-six this is a dirt-cheap ride. And without doubt, if it comes to a question (and it *does* come to a question) of price and value for money, this is the bargain book.

Like almost all these books *The Runaway Dolls* owes a large part of its success to its illustrations; and here, as in *Yacki*, they are by a continental artist. The title tells the story for itself and puts the book just into the Moral Purpose class, though nothing can persuade me that any child, of whatever sex or whatever age, even after reading this book, will do anything but leave its dolls and toys scattered over the drawing-room floor as though a tornado had just passed. So much indeed for the Moral Purpose.

The Runaway Dolls ends the jolly goods. The rest are good, but not so good. Even so, I am enchanted to welcome the first publication of Miss Patricia Robins, aged 12, who is assisted in the act by Miss Grizel Maxwell, aged 14. Miss Robins, realising her debt to those who reared her, has dedicated her book to "My Darling Mummy and Daddy, who are Paying Sevenpence a week to keep my White Rat." (I was right, it seems, in thinking that it was going to be a good Christmas for rats. Sevenpence a week! There's luxury for you.) Miss Robins, as reviewers used to say, should go far. Though it seems likely that her friend, Miss Maxwell, whose illustrations are excellent, may very well go farther.

The remaining three books are excursions into verse; the most difficult of all mediums, to my mind, where children are concerned. In this respect, Miss Fyleman knows her job, and she has here selected and translated about fifty very brief nursery rhymes from the Italian, Czech, Dutch, Norwegian, German, French, Welsh, Austrian, Chinese, and so on. These are good, but the illustrations by Valery Carrick are better. The pictures, on page seven, showing the Fond Parents (a) patting their son on the head, (b) patting him on the bottom, all inside a couple of seconds, are not only good artistically, but, in my experience, sadly true to life.

The main fault with both *Master Toby's Hunt* and *The Tale of Kinikot* is not that they lack originality or charm but that their verses can only be scanned at times after great gymnastical effort. And if a parent can't scan them what is a child to do—and think? The eighth deadly sin is a rhyme which is supposed to scare but won't. It comes even before the sin of the parent who neglects to buy *Yacki*.

H. E. BATES

FOR THE LARGER INFANTS

The Fairies Return. By VARIOUS AUTHORS. *Davies*. 8s. 6d.

Heath Robinson's Book of Goblins. *Hutchinson*. 6s.

Æsop's Fables. Illustrated by HARRY ROWNTREE. *Ward Lock*. 3s. 6d.

Sergeant Poppett and Policeman James. By ALGERNON BLACKWOOD. *Blackwell*. 1s. 3d.

Broody. By MABEL MARLOWE. *Blackwell*. 1s. 3d.

The Enchanted Blanket. By COMPTON MACKENZIE. *Blackwell*. 1s. 3d.

The Enchanted Island. By COMPTON MACKENZIE. *Blackwell*. 1s. 3d.

The Clumber Pup. By ELEANOR FARJEON. *Blackwell*. 1s. 3d.

Jim at the Corner. By ELEANOR FARJEON. *Blackwell*. 5s.

Joc Colette and the Animals. By VERA BARCLAY. *Burns Oates*. 3s. 6d.

Mimed Ballads and Stories. By GERTRUDE PICKERSGILL. *Pitman*. 2s. 6d.

Balderdash Ballads. By J. R. MONSELL. *Heinemann*. 5s.

One feature common to all these books is that they are inexpensive; the dearest of them, which happens also to be a dear book in another sense, costs only a fraction of the price of a speed-boat—always presuming that there still exist chance infants who prefer books to machines—and the cheapest of them, belonging to the well-established series by Mr. Blackwell, are cheaper than boxes of chocolates—always presuming, I fear, that there exist odd children who don't prefer sweets to the written word. But,

fortunately perhaps, the choice of things is not always left to the child; and I think that if by some chance I happened to be Mr. Edgar Tiddle, of Hendon Green, a harassed business man with twelve nieces and nephews, and Christmas three weeks off, I would be profoundly glad of the opportunity, offered by these twelve books, of polishing off the kids' present problem for less than a couple of pounds and with neither fuss nor embarrassment.

The dearest book, in, as I say, both senses of the word, is *The Fairies Return*, a collection of traditional and famous stories retold by contemporary authors, which seems to me to set a new standard in books for children of middle-age. Undoubtedly the standard in children's books, so strongly challenged already by Disney's symphonies and Mickey Mouse, will have to rise. Children's books have far too long been written in the misguided—I might almost say insane—assumption that children are angels, whereas it is painfully evident to those who are parents that they really are devils untied. Disney has recognised this, I think, and there is a spirit of devilry and mischief in his work that finds instantaneous response in children of all ages, including parents who never grow up. The stories in *The Fairies Return* have been written on this same refreshing assumption that children are perfect devils and on the further assumption that the children of to-day are so many worldly wise's who know a good deal more about things in general than their parents would like to think. This, it seems to me, is all to the good. To some it may appear heretical to Americanise *Big Claus and Little Claus*, as the authors of *1066 and All That* have done, but there is ample room for this new version as well as for the original Andersen, and he will be a pretty dull dog who doesn't burst a waistcoat button or two over this gangster version of one of Andersen's finest tales. Indeed I am not so sure that the child who receives this book is going to have, for a time at any rate, much fun with it. I fear that there will be a good deal of "Just a minute, my boy, I'm just looking at this story. You shall have it in a minute," going to "Just a minute, just a minute. Don't interrupt! I'm reading," growing to "Didn't I tell you not to interrupt! Can't you see I'm reading! Do you want me to put the book away? Well then!" developing finally to "Another word from you, young man, and upstairs you go!"

If this happens, as I am sure it will, the whole experiment will be amply justified. For the greatest children's creations, *Alice, Andersen's Tales*, Mickey, and so on, all appeal powerfully to the grown up too. And such is the array of contemporary talent in *The Fairies Return* that there may even be misguided parents who will appropriate the book as a collector's item. For the following writers, apart from the malicious authors of *1066 and All That*, have contributed, rewriting tales from Andersen, Grimm, *The Thousand and One Nights* and traditional sources: A. E. Coppard, whose version of *Jack the Giant Killer* is a killer itself, Clemence Dane, E. M. Delafield, Lord Dunsany, Anna Gordon Keown, Eric Linklater, A. G. Macdonnell (whose *Ali Baba*, an author, was so rich that his novel was bound to be good, and who in consequence was made an honorary LL.D., awarded the Hawthornden Prize, and elected Vice-President of the P.E.N.), E. Arnot Robertson, Helen Simpson, Lady Eleanor Smith, E. O. Somerville, Robert Speaight, Christina Stead, and G. B. Stern. These authors have, together, made a bumping book, and one to which I hope the publishers will contrive to issue a yearly successor.

In comparison with this book the rest of them, with the notable exception of Mr. Heath Robinson's *Book of Goblins* and the two books of ballads, appear rather like flat sherbert. But perhaps only by comparison, for Æsop is never dull, though I sometimes wonder if he is not lost on children, and Mr. Harry Rowntree's coloured illustrations are full of humour and gaiety, and the re-telling by Miss Blanche Winder is brief and succinct, though neither the illustrations nor the text seem to me nearly so fresh and lively as the work in Mr. Robinson's *Book of Goblins*. This is a fat book, containing about fifty folk-lore and fairy tales collected from Central Europe by Mr. A. E. Johnson, whose light is so hidden under Mr. Robinson's bushel that he ought to be picked out for special mention. He deserves better luck and greater honour for his research; and still greater honour if he is responsible for the writing of these delightful tales.

There are already fifty-six titles in the Blackwell series and this number includes the new stories by Miss Marlowe, with her story of the moon-struck rabbit, Mr. Blackwood and the scorching business of the Flying Squad and the maiden in distress, Miss Farjeon's romantic dog-story, and Mr. Compton Mackenzie's two excellent tales of enchantment, with the geography—trust Mr. Mackenzie—all as correct and neat as a council plan. And here one may revert to Mr. Edgar Tiddle; for Mr. Blackwell's