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**A Critical History of Children's Literature:
A Survey of Children's Books in English
from Earliest Times to the Present
by Cornelia Meigs, Elizabeth Nesbitt, Anne Eaton, Ruth Hill Viguers**

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expression of an artist and the heart of a poet. These gifts he used to the fullest in writing this truly sublime story of the Earth which he studied so carefully.

JAMES W. SKEHAN

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE. A Survey of Children's Books in English from Earliest Times to the Present. By Cornelia Meigs, Elizabeth Nesbitt, Anne Eaton, Ruth Hill Viguers. Decorations by Vera Bock. The Macmillan Co., New York. 1953. Pp. xxiv-624. \$7.50.

Some day, the over-serious students of literature will re-discover the great classics that have delighted the children of many ages; and Miss Meigs and her associates will be partly responsible for the rediscovery. Theirs is a charming book: solid in its scholarship, yet written with a heart. It is a rare thing to find an authoritative work of reference that can be used, on occasion, for bed-side reading. Perhaps the secret is that this book is written by ladies who, besides being painstaking in their scholarship, also love children and good reading.

To appreciate this fact, one needs only compare Miss Eaton's treatment of *Alice in Wonderland* with the more learned, more clever, but hardly more helpful dissertation of Mr. William Empson upon the same work. Mr. Empson, of course, is a literary philosopher, Miss Eaton a literary historian; yet it should be possible to philosophize without destroying the magic that holds the twigs of Wonderland together.

For that is the essence of children's classics: magic. It is the presence of this magical element which explains the curious fact that books, written for adults (like *Gulliver's Travels*), have been taken to their hearts by the children; and books, written for children (like Lewis Carroll's), have been enjoyed just as much by adults. And on the other hand, the absence of this magical element explains the failure of many a well-meant book (written in most cases by overserious ladies), too full of admonitions to please the children. In this, as in many other points of art, the test of excellence is a pragmatic one. The children seem to be the best judges of their own literature. Which, after all, is the old Horatian test of a classic: *decies repetita placebit*, one enjoys it even in the tenth reading.

Robinson Crusoe, Hans Brinker, Heidi, Alice, the Five Little Peppers, Tom Brown, Long John Silver, Tom Sawyer, the Wind in the Willows, Peter Rabbit, Peter Pan—they are all here, critically evaluated, historically pigeon-holed. The scholarship is sometimes not profound (as in the evaluation of Comenius); but in a work of such amplitude, such defects are hardly noticeable.

This is only one of several recent studies of children's literature. Eventually, the savants will be reading *Alice in Wonderland* again. When that happens, we can hope that our modern writers will give us less painful prose and less turgid poetry.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

Foreword to the Old Testament Books. By Frederick L. Moriarty, S.J. Weston College Press, Weston, Mass. 1954. Pp. 118. \$1.00.

The 1953 convention of the Catholic Biblical Association of America devoted one of its meetings to a discussion session on the methods of teaching Sacred Scripture. From this discussion it became clear that the teacher's task in explaining the Bible is rendered doubly difficult by the lack of a manageable, up-to-date textbook which would aid the student in his reading of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. The present book by Father Moriarty, intended primarily for students on the college level, is an answer to that need and will serve as a trustworthy guide to those who undertake the study of the Old Testament. The established results of modern biblical scholarship are set forth in a clear, readable form; it may be said that one of the finest features of this book is the combination of clarity and accuracy with which complex problems are presented and solutions offered.

Since many of the difficulties which Catholics meet in reading the Old Testament arise from a failure to determine the literary form of the biblical book they are reading, the student would be well advised carefully to note the observations made in the five-page *Introduction*. "Since the Old Testament contains such a rich variety of literary forms, many of which are peculiar to the ancient oriental world, the student must take into careful consideration the character of these forms under penalty of misinterpreting their message" (pp. 4-5). Following the *Introduction* are summaries of the contents, genre, date, and authorship of each book of the Old Testament. These summaries contain the essential facts which