

# Books For Young Readers

A Reminder of Young Canada's Book Week, Nov. 15 to 22

By Joyce Boniwell

WHEN POOH BEAR found himself doomed to spend a week wedged in Rabbit's front door while he waited to grow thin enough to extract himself, he appealed to his friend Christopher Robin. "Would you read a Sustaining Book, such as would help and comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Tightness?" All families need a few Sustaining Books, tried favourites to which they can turn whenever they like—books with the perennial appeal of **Peter Rabbit** and **Alice in Wonderland**, stories of ancient gods and heroes, and poetry.

Reading at home can give an immense amount of pleasure and satisfaction to all participants, adults and children, readers and listeners. Adults sometimes exclaim in astonishment, after reading a book to a child, "You know, I enjoyed that book as much as he did." There is really no reason why they should be surprised, or suspect themselves of childishness. A book for children should be judged by the same literary standards as a book for adults. C. S. Lewis, the author, says, "No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty." And if you are inclined to think this remark a little far-fetched, re-read the story of Alice's adventures underground, and see if you don't find more fun and wisdom in it than you remember finding before. An honest writer for children says what he has to say in the best language at his command, and trusts the child to understand. More than likely the child will not understand everything at the first reading, but the charm of a truly good book lies in the fact that it will stand any number of readings.

On the other hand, the well-intentioned but misguided writer who condescends to the child's "mutual level" by over-simplifying any ideas the book contains, and by using anaemic "tested" vocabulary, invariably produces a listless, soulless piece of writing. There are a great many mediocre books of this kind, an array which may well overwhelm any parent, unless he remembers that such books give themselves away as soon as anyone takes the trouble to begin reading them.

One educational authority, writing on the trends of modern education, comments that the tendency seems to be to imagine that we can learn by passively allowing knowledge to "drip on us like rain from heaven." In matters of education, we are inclined to lavish upon our children almost too much attention and care, for, by making things easy, and,

as we hope, happy for them, we are often encouraging them to take the course of least resistance. We curb their natural curiosity and wonder, and forget that, in order to grow in spirit, children must strengthen their minds by continual exercise. This is why reading is important, for a child who reads widely grows towards maturity realising that wisdom comes slowly through one's own exertion and experience. Naturally some children will take to reading much more readily than others, but with encouragement almost all children will receive pleasure and imaginative stimulation from books.

"To learn to love books and reading is one of the very best things that can happen to anybody," remarks Walter de la Mare. "Poetry in particular wears well. The longer you care for it in itself the better it gets . . . And so with old rhymes and all the old tales and poems one cares for most. Love them once, you love them always."

For the very young child the familiar nursery rhymes and lullabies are a good introduction to stories and poetry. Their rhythm and quaint nonsense are invigorating to the senses and pleasing to the ear. An excellent comprehensive collection of Mother Goose rhymes, song and jingles is **Lavender's Blue** by Kathleen Lines. Kenneth Grahame, the author of **The Wind in the Willows**, has compiled an anthology called **The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children**, which he calls a "Wicket-Gate" to English poetry, a glimpse through which, he hopes, will make his readers want to experience "the joy, light and fresh air in that delectable country."

Few children are not stirred by the rhythm and romance of the ballad which begins—  
"O young Lochinvar is come out of the west,  
Through all the wide Border his steed was  
the best . . ."

nor fail to respond to the spring beauty in A. A. Milne's poem,

"Where am I going? I don't quite know.  
Down to the stream where the king-cups  
grow.

Up on the hill where the pine-trees blow—  
Anywhere, anywhere. I don't know."

One sure way for a family to enjoy poetry together is to laugh with it. Edward Lear's ridiculous nonsense verses and limericks are good laughter material, **The Moon is Shining Bright As Day**.

"Love them once, love them always" is certainly true, too, of the old tales such as **The Three Bears**, **Hansel and Gretel** and **Cinderella**, which have given pleasure to genera-