

## BUILDING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH BOOKS

By Harriet Love, Oshkosh

The other day I told to a group of children a wonder tale from Hawthorne's collection: the beautiful story of *Bellerophon and Pegasus*. Bellerophon, you remember, was a youth who longed to do some noble deed for which the whole world should honor him. A terrible chimæra was laying waste a certain kingdom of Asia, and Bellerophon determined to put an end to its ravages. To overcome the monster, he must fight from the back of the swiftest steed in all the world. And he knew that Pegasus, the wonderful winged horse of which he had heard so many tales, was that steed. Bellerophon found the winged horse, and killed the chimæra.

As I learned the story, I thought of telling the children that it has a modern parallel in the story of Charles Lindbergh, who, in his flights through the air to other countries, has subdued chimæras of hate and fear, and blazed trails of friendship.

Now there was another figure in the wonder tale—the little boy whose faith that Pegasus would surely come to the spring where Bellerophon waited, so strengthened and encouraged the impatient young man. This child alone, of all the people who came to the fountain, believed in, and was sure that he had seen, the wonder horse. And the story tells us that although he never flew away on Pegasus' back to battle with dragons, he too, flew high and achieved great things, for he became a mighty poet.

Just as his poetry, read in all parts of the world, stirred men with its beauty, gave them hope and courage, awoke in them a sense of brotherhood with all men, so can the books we give our children do those same things for them. The right kind of books can kill fear and hate as surely as the sword of Bellerophon killed the chimæra, and quicken to life sympathy and understanding.

Elizabeth Cleveland Miller has written a beautiful book called *Children of*

*the Mountain Eagle*. Reading it is like breathing the air of the Albanian mountains, where the children, Bor and Marash, live. To Bor and Marash came the opportunity to go to school—to learn to read. Here are Marash's words to a peasant who never had such a chance:

"We had some books," said Marash, "books at first easy to read; after, other ones harder and more interesting. The Friar lent me last year some books that he had got from Skodra and some books written in our Shqyp tongue and printed in Austria."

"And what did they tell about?" asked Beiram.

"That's just it," said Marash, "they told about so much, about so many things—things that you and I have never seen—about far lands and people different from ourselves, who do not live as we live. When I read all those books it made me feel unpeaceful here,"—he touched his chest with one hand. "It made me want to go traveling far away to see what all the world beyond Shqypenia was like. And now today I felt that restlessness so strong inside me that I said to myself, 'I'll climb that Red Mountain where no village is, where people do not go, and I'll go up and reach the very top of it, and looking around me from so high a place maybe I shall see as far as to the edge of Shqypenia—beyond, perhaps, into that strange world different from our own.'" Marash stopped talking suddenly. "I told you, Drishti, that you would not understand, but"—his face flushed with earnestness and he went on—"but you would, Beiram, you would if you had read the things I read about."

And a little later—Marash lay with eyes half closed, seeing the fire through them like blurred streaks of reddish light. The world somehow seemed bigger than it ever had before. Even outside this family of tribes, Shqypenia, were other men with other laws, and customs different from his own, and other words for saying the same things. Perhaps there was a tribe bigger than any he had thought of yet, a tribe that took in all the different men in the whole world—the men of Italy, of Greece, of Serbia even, and all the kingdoms of Europe and far-off America.

I do not know what books those were, that Marash read at that little mountain school. But I think I do know what kind of book will most surely awaken such feelings in a child. Not textbooks, geographies and history books, but imaginative literature, stories of other children, of those other tribes and lands. Just as our Lindbergh may win the heart of a Frenchman or a Mexican, and cause him to feel a stir of friendship for the country from which he flew, so may Genevieve, the French child, or Porfiria, the little Mexican girl, win friends for her country. The history book may tell of thousands of political victims sent off to Siberia under the old regime in Russia, and the child learn it as a fact to be written down on an examination paper. But to read of such a thing happening to Katrinka's father and mother, because they harbored a printing press in their home, and taught ideas of progress and freedom—that is different. It touches the child more closely, and may arouse a real interest in conditions old and new in Russia. In that same book—*Katrinka, the story of a Russian child*—one finds sympathy and understanding for those in high places, as well as for the down-trodden peasants. So it is in another fine story of Russia, Sonia Lustig's *Roses of the winds*. These books have in them a tolerance akin to that found in Bernard Shaw's beautiful play *Saint Joan*, which every one should read sometime.

A book that is a real treasure-chest for a young reader of high school age is May Lamberton Becker's *Adventures in reading*. In the chapter on "Reading for companionship", she speaks of the reality of book friends:

You may ask me if you would not get better companionship from biography than in a novel, as biography is the record of a real life and the people in fiction are imaginary. Now there are many reasons why I hope you will develop a taste for biography, and I am coming to some of them later on, but for this particular purpose, companionship while one is growing up, I think most of us in our teens are helped less by biography than by fiction.

What are "real people," anyway, so far as really knowing them goes? Think a moment, if you live in a large city, about the "real" people you passed this morning as you went downtown. You never saw one of them before nor will ever see them again. They went by in the crowd like figures in a Pathé film, and you know them no better. Now take some of the people with whom you are on terms of acquaintance—the woman next door, for instance. She is a friend of yours, you "know her," but all you can possibly know is what she says—not what she thinks, what she does—not why she does it. This is not because she is trying to conceal anything from you or you from her; it is because we cannot always get our thoughts into language and our motives clear even to ourselves. How often you must have tried to explain yourself to your best friend, or to express to some older person that you trust, some idea you have about life. You talk and talk, until at last you say, "I hope you understand what I mean"—knowing all the time that they don't. Now the art of the true novelist is such that you really do know what the people in his novel are thinking, feeling, dreaming, wishing; you can get back of their eyes and see the world as they do. In real life I must guess what Mrs. Jones next door thinks, but I know what Becky Sharp thinks. I am in the secret of all her secrets; she is more real to me than Mrs. Jones on whom I call once a year.

As for another girl in this same *Vanity Fair*, I lately had amusing proof that she is more alive than some people in the London telephone book. My mother and I were rolling through Bloomsbury on top of a bus, looking for the house where we used to live when we were last in London, twenty years before. It was 13 Upper Woburn Place—and all those years we had remembered that number because we had been happy there; it was as if we had an address in London. But as we passed St. Pancras Church and leaned out to count the house numbers we saw, on the spot where ours should be, a huge hotel, and not a new-looking one either. We pulled in our necks and sat back quite cast down and set adrift; all this time we had not had an address in London after all; time and change had been at their deadly work even in Bloomsbury. Just then we turned a corner and tall old trees came in sight in a great enclosure with an iron fence through which we could see garden paths. "It's Russell Square!" we cried, "where Amelia Sedley used to walk! She must have stood about here to look across for the light in George's

window, after she had to give him up to his grandfather!" We breathed great sighs of relief: it was all right after all; nothing important had changed, and it was not until some minutes later that we realized that Amelia Sedley could not have leaned against that railing or any other railing, for she was a girl in a book. But that made no difference to her being a real girl. Most Americans know little and care less for the actual nobleman who gave the square its name—he has been dead a long while—but the gentle girl goes on living there, in her white muslin with blue ribbons as Dobbin first saw her, in her wedding bonnet, in her widow's veil, on Russell Square.

In similar fashion will the children brought up on such books as *Katrinka*, *Hans Brinker*, *Children of the moor*, *Heidi*, *Merrylips*, associate their book friends with the places which they see or read about. And when the whole world is peopled with their friends, against what country can they hold ugly prejudices

I spoke just now of Heidi, the Swiss child. Her reality was proved anew in an article by Edward K. Robinson in last November's "Hornbook," on the new Centennial edition of Johanna Spyri's well-loved book. The pictures for this edition were done by Miss Marguerite Davis, who spent the larger part of a summer in Heidi's native village of Maienfeld, steeping herself in the atmosphere of the place, and making innumerable sketches. The actual drawing of the pictures consumed nearly a year. Wrote Miss Davis in one of her letters, after describing some of her experiences:

"And so the days sped by! Long wonderful days of not only putting down on paper—but far more—of really living Heidi, Peter, and all! I could have cried my eyes out the day I left—when that train curved into a new valley and blotted out my pasture from view!

Up on *Guscha*, the morning we arrived, and while we were drinking some milk in Andreas Just's house, little Hans, the goat boy—a native of Pfäfers—came in with Gretl Just—the three-year-old daughter—all flushed and hot from the steep climb up from *Guscha* village, and I felt almost as if Heidi herself were before me—she was so lovely and her cheeks were so red! And Hans was one of the nicest looking boys I had come

across. I wanted to put him in my pocket and take him back home with me. And as for Andreas Just, himself, with his young fine features, white teeth, and long black beard! I took pictures of him, with the white homespun pointed hood they wear to carry hay on their heads, and he looked like some youthful prophet out of the Bible.

It is such an anticlimax to have lived Heidi and then to become a tourist again and see only "sights" and fellow passengers; I can't bear it . . . I am really an enthusiast over the Swiss people . . .

They love their big things—their mountains, their freedom, their flowers, their herds, so much that there is no room, for anything bad. I never once heard a voice raised in anger or retort, or ill-will. I never saw children being naughty—or quarrelling. There was always that sense of content, work to fill the day, and—as on *Guscha*—singing and yodelling on the Justs' steps in the evening, and so much cooperation among the natives in their hay making or vineyard labour. A happy life, and certainly Heidi breathes it from every page."

Is it not worth while to give our children such a book? Happily, this new edition is one that every one can afford to buy. It is published by Ginn, and costs only eighty-four cents.

There is, in my mind, a certain very vivid picture. It is Founder's Day at college, and Lita, from Czecho-Slovakia, is in native dress for the occasion. Several of us see her from the window, and call her in, to admire her costume. She fairly bubbles over with excitement and delight. "There is something about my country that you like!" she cries. "I'm so glad! I'm so glad!"—and with shining eyes, pours out stories of her life at home.

In these books about children of foreign lands, children of America will find many things to like about those countries. What fun to spend a Christmas with Tamara, in Finland: to help the village people make paths of pine boughs on which the Christ Child shall walk from house to house, to listen for the bleating of the Yule Goat who comes on Christmas Eve to ask if the children have been good; or to visit little Peep-in-the-world, living like a little Princess in the high tower room of her Uncle's

old, old German castle. And the bazaar at Skodra, where Bor's mother sells her woven cloth! How gay and fascinating a place! The beauty of India is made vivid in the brilliant words of Dhan Gopal Mukerji, in such books as his *Gay-Neck*.

What a rich book that is, beautifully written, and beautifully illustrated by the Russian artist, Boris Artzybasheff, who has also made wonderful pictures and decorations for *Roses of the winds*, *Siberian gold*, by T. A. and Winifred Harper, *The wonder smith and his son*, by Ella Young, and *The forge in the forest*, by Padraic Colum. His illustrations add to the Russian flavor of *Siberian gold*, and *Roses of the winds*, as do Anne Casserly's drawings of the delightful Flanagan pig to her whimsical *Michael of Ireland*.

*Gay-neck* is the story of a carrier pigeon, who served in the World War. He went with Ghond, a Hindu soldier, on reconnaissance trip behind the German lines. When Ghond discovered the location of the underground munition dump he had been sent to find, he released Gay-neck to carry the message back to British Army Headquarters. Pursued by enemy planes, wounded, ter-

rified,—Gay-neck refused to fly again, even after his wounds had healed. Ghond too, was wounded and frightened. Together they were sent back to India, sick with fear and hate. There they found healing among the Lamas of a monastery. Said the Abbot:

"Here in the monastery we have prayed to Infinite Compassion twice every day for the healing of the nations of the earth. Yet the war goes on, infecting even birds and beasts with fear and hate. Diseases of the emotions spread faster than the ills of the body. Mankind is going to be so loaded with fear, hate, suspicion and malice that it will take a whole generation before a new set of people can be reared completely free from them."

And so, I want to fill the children's shelves in the library with books that shall help to overpower those chimæras of hate and fear; to urge teachers to recommend such books, and parents to buy them for their children's own bookshelves. I would give them to the children with these words of the dedication of *Roses of the winds*:

"To those who love their native land and through that love learn to respect and cherish the good and beauty in the countries not their own."

### THE PARENTS' PROBLEMS\*

**Baker, S. Josephine.** Child hygiene. 1925. Harper, \$5.00.

A comprehensive survey of the fundamental features of child hygiene.

**Bryant, Sara Cone.** How to tell stories to children. 1924. Houghton, \$2.00.

Discusses the aim and art of story telling.

**Blanton, Smiley & Blanton, Margaret.** Child guidance. 1927. Century, \$2.25.

Their handbook is a model of up-to-date, sensible guidance for normal children between birth and adolescence. There are chapters on heredity, adjustment to surroundings, learning, discipline, nervousness, the awakening of sex instincts, and kindred subjects.

**Chapin, Henry Dwight.** Heredity and child culture. 1922. Dutton, \$2.50.

A plea for the conservation of child life as the most important of all social

and humanitarian movements. Treats of heredity and the modification of its effects by environment.

**Cope, Henry Frederick.** Religious education in the family. 1915. University of Chicago, \$1.50.

Discusses child's religious ideas, use of the Bible; Sunday in the home, needs of youth.

**Crawley, John.** Reveries of a father. 1924. Appleton, \$1.00.

The experiences of one father in living with and training his three children.

**Emerson, William Robie Patten.** Nutrition and growth in children. 1922. Appleton, \$2.50.

Study of the causes of malnutrition in children and their reactions to proper

\* Prepared by the Traveling Library Department, Wisconsin Free Library Commission.