REVIEWS


Of the making of books about children there is no end, and if by now we do not know everything that is to be known about them, the fault does not lie with the authors who so indefatigably look to our wants. And yet all this plenty and to spare somehow leaves us unsatisfied, replete and yet hungry as after meat but no bread. Take any other class of humanity—deep-sea fishermen, Buddhists, chiefs-of-staff—are we content to read only what others write about them without wanting their own account of themselves? Always it is first-hand experience that we value most, and when the other day a deep-sea fisherman for the first time in history wrote a book about his class, was not his work read eagerly by thousands, and did not an astonished and grateful country forthwith elevate him to be Chief Deep-sea Fisherman in Whitehall?

But with the children how great is this difficulty. The very immaturity which is their characteristic, and which we want to understand from their inside point of view, excludes them from enlightening us. Ex hypothesi, as it were, they are doomed to silence, fated to be sentenced unheard by any self-appointed judge, whose first claim to office, be it noted, must always be that time has made him a stranger and an alien in the happy fields of childhood.

But suppose the difficulty removed—it is, of course, manifestly impossible; but let that pass—suppose the publication of an autobiography of a two-year-old, and picture the electrical effect in the psychological schools which are at present contending even as to the fundamentals of child-psychology. The confessions of but one suckling would still the disputants for ever, and nine-tenths of their fine theories would crumble to dust.

Mercifully, perhaps, this disaster is never likely to overtake them. At the worst some older child, apter with ink and pen than most of its age, might set down a true record of its life; but few such records would be free from the sophistication and convention which almost inevitably hamper the adult writer who undertakes the literary expression of his vie intime.

English literature possesses one and only one such child-record—Pet Marjorie's, the little friend of Sir Walter Scott—and no more dismal proof could be found of how quickly and completely a child's mind can be
swamped and suffocated by its elders and betters. Marjorie, it will be
recalled, lived but seven years; this short life she spent in the orthodox
atmosphere of middle-class Edinburgh of a hundred years ago; and she
left behind some literary remains which were edited by the author of Rab
and his Friends. "As this is Sunday," writes this mite, "I will meditate
upon sensible and religious subjects. First I should be very thankful I
am not a beggar." On another occasion her own choice of a piece for
recitation lay between "Few are thy days and full of woe"; and "Why
am I loth to leave this earthly scene?"

Sentiments of this kind issuing from a child were very precious to
our great-grandparents, who did not stop to consider that what came
forth was only what had been poured in. But nowadays we neither
value our children as parrots, nor try to crush their spontaneity by
neglect if not worse.

Or at least we are tending that way, and must have made some
progress in the century since Marjorie died, else A Young Girl's Diary
could never have been written, still less published. Here is a child who
began keeping a diary when she was 11, and carried it on till she was over
14, and even if she had achieved nothing more than the transparent honesty
and truthfulness of her entries the result would have been remarkable.
But she reveals much more than this. She is a child whose naturally keen
observation has been blunted not at all by any clumsy handling by grown-
ups; and though the round of her life included nothing but her home, her
school, and her holidays, she seemed to find in everybody and everything
scope for her alert senses and warm sympathies. Especially was this the
case within her own family circle and among her classroom friends. Not
that for a moment did she consciously lay herself out to study them, not
once does she show that she is aware that she is studying them, but always
her account is of how she was affected by the happenings around her, what
she thought and felt about them, surmised and discovered.

In this way we see everything through her glasses, and some delightful
(as well as some objectionable) characters we have to recognize. Most
charming of all, however, is the little girl herself with her loving and
lovable ways, her enthusiasms and antipathies, her frankness and deceits,
and her insatiable thirst for knowing and getting to know.

Everyone who is familiar with children as they are, or who cherishes
any affectionate interest in them, will hasten to give himself the pleasure
and instruction of reading this book.

The diary comes from the publishers with a prefatory letter from
Professor Freud, who speaks of it as a gem. Even apart from his recom-
dendation, it contains hardly a page without some entry of special interest
to students of Freudian literature. For this very young lady was not only
busily occupied with falling in and out of love with people of either sex,
but she presents a convincing picture of her own Oedipus-complex, and
shows herself struggling to achieve emancipation from her parental ties.
And more than this. In the honesty of her mind she reveals with all
simplicity her consuming curiosity in sexual matters, and the disappoint-
ments and successes which met her efforts to gain forbidden knowledge.
Here, too, it is impossible to doubt her sincerity, with the result that all-unwittingly she has made a significant contribution to psycho-analytical literature. Pet Marjorie's parents would have been shocked by this twentieth-century young girl; but of the two children, who can hesitate between them?

D. F.

The Form and Functions of the Central Nervous System: an Introduction to the Study of Nervous Diseases. By Tilney and Riley.

The Review of this volume which appeared in our May issue was from a copy sent us direct from the American publishing house in New York, before concluding an arrangement with Messrs. H. K. Lewis and Co. Ltd., Gower Street, London, by which the English distribution is left in their hands. The price in England is £3 10s. net. Our readers will be glad to learn this.
A Young Girl's Diary

D. F.

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