



Editorial ? March 1983

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News and comment from the Editor.

The problem with moveable feasts is that you never know where they are going to turn up next. The timing of the Easter holidays this year means that most of you will get your March **Books for Keeps** at the beginning of April. We hope it doesn't find you feeling too much like the rather woebegone little chicken on our cover (more about him later). The summer term may well seem endless but look on the bright side; there will be three **Books for Keeps** to help you along and this Picture Books edition is specially bright, colourful and full of good ideas and things to cheer you up, like John Mason's first newsy despatch from the USA (see p. 23).

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Star Cast

Children's picture books in this country have what sports commentators refer to as strength in depth. There is a great deal of talent around and artists are constantly pushing out the boundaries and being genuinely innovative in content and techniques. The last twenty years has produced a dazzling sequence of picture books with exciting young artists arriving regularly. But it's easy to become blasé and still the dismissive 'It's only for children' dies hard on the lips of the ignorant. So we thought we'd take a closer look at the work of a few of our younger artists.

Anthony Browne and Jeannie Baker (see p. 4), Tony Ross and Errol le Cain (see p. 24) are all very different but they share an approach to children that refuses to patronise or make concessions. They pay children the compliment of taking them seriously as receivers of visual experiences. They deserve serious attention from us in return.

Michael Foreman (see Authorgraph p. 14) is someone else who believes that only the best is good enough for children. There is a lot of Foreman illustration around at the moment and more on the way. (**Christmas Carol** is going to solve a lot of Christmas present problems this year.) But there's not much early Foreman available - although Michael told us there are still some of the first edition of **The General** left; better get moving it could become a collectors' item. So it's good to see that the first four titles in Hodder and Stoughton's large-size picture paperback venture include **The Two Giants** (0 340 33197 6 £1.50) a gentle moral tale in collage, pen and bright water colour (no expanses of blue in sight!) Also in the series is **Black Dolly** (0 340 331992 2, £1.50) an early Charles Keeping story of a junk cart pony.

Cover Story

While Hodder are branching out Evans are disappearing (see News p. 28) and the publishing merry-go-round continues. One new arrival which deserves everyone's support is Patrick Hardy Books (see p. 20). This new imprint is a demonstration of faith in good fiction and new writers, a beacon in the gloom of cuts and closures.

The chicken on our cover is from **The Chicken Book** by Garth Williams, Patrick Hardy's first picture book. The self help, on-your-bike moral of this little tale may increase its appeal as a fable for our time with some buyers. There is a certain similarity between the looming, brisk and bossy mother hen and the PM. Not that Garth Williams could have envisaged that when he did the book in 1946 (see p. 21). It is a jolly traditional counting rhyme, asking to be learned by heart, with delightfully amusing pictures, from a very talented artist.

Guides to a Magic World

Moves like Patrick Hardy's are considered brave in the face of falling sales. The Dwindling Market Bogey stalks the book trade's dreams (see News p. 28). In fact they all know that there *is* a market out there; they are not sure how to reach it. The Book Marketing Council had a go at Easter at getting across to parents the idea that books are good value for money. The slogan 'Introduce your Child to the Magic World of Picture Books' was tied to the promotion of twenty titles with a maximum price of £2.50. It's an idea and a slogan that might well be borrowed for a Parents Evening. Which twenty titles would you pick to represent some of the best of contemporary picture books? And what would be your price limit?

That's one sort of promotion. The other end of the scale involves a steady, persistent attempt to make more people book conscious and better informed. That's where magazines like **BfK** come in. We look upon everyone working in this area as allies not competitors so we are delighted to welcome two new publications also dedicated to spreading the word. (Their originators write about them on p. 17.) **The Good Book Guide to Children's Books** is essentially a list of about 500 tried and tested titles. A third of them, very usefully, are non-fiction. It offers invaluable guidance for beginners in the area and is just the thing for a teacher to have on hand when giving advice to a parent. Full colour illustrations of the covers of all the books give essential information and make the guide look very attractive. Quentin Blake's drawings, a brief introduction about books and reading, and some useful addresses completes the package.

The Signal Review confines itself to a retrospective look at 1982's books. The layout and design are disastrous and it is easy to get lost; but don't let that put you off. Dive in and enjoy a varied range of ideas and opinions, many gathered from working teachers. In there somewhere is a thoughtful and thought provoking piece by Margaret Meek which should give most teachers something to chew on until the next Review. There is also a brave attempt at covering non-fiction - nearly 100 books, just under a third of the whole - with negative inclusions to demonstrate general points. This is not a **Children's Books of the Year** - type selection. It is an interesting survey of a year's publishing, produced with admirable speed after its close.

A Bood Gook?

Meanwhile back at our own ranch. Misprint of the BfK year so far had Robert Westall writing an award-winning gook in the last issue, and Anne Thwaite was quick to point out our R L. Stevenson slip on the News page: 1883 is the centenary of the publication of **Treasure Island**, not its author's birth. Anne writes, 'I'm particularly aware of this as I've just finished a biography of Edmund Gosse who listened to the story (then called **The Sea Cook**) as it was being written chapter by chapter in the cold Scottish summer of 1881. Long after Stevenson's death Gosse used to hear his voice in his dreams.' As Anne comments, an appropriate thought for the Federation of Children's Book Groups' National Tell a Story Week which we were reporting on. It runs from May 7-14. Why not tingle a few spines yourselves that week me hearties'

Pat

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