

# **A CENTURY OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

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A century of children's books by Florence V. Barry

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**FLORENCE V. BARRY**

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OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BY  
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ABSTRACTS

## PREFACE

**T**HIS book was begun at Oxford before the War, when I had the great privilege of being a student in Sir Walter Raleigh's class. Through his generous encouragement, it was continued at intervals and under many difficulties; and if he had not found some things to like in it, I should hardly venture to put it forth in its present shape.

It is true that the interest of great men in little books (a token of romance since the eighteenth century) is no gauge of public favour; but the history of children's books is in some sort a record of childhood. Lovers of children may be willing to look through the shelves of old nurseries, if only for the portraits.

The farther one goes upon such small business, the more intricate it seems; and although I began with some knowledge of the treasures that Mrs. Field had unearthed in her study of *The Child and His Book*, I had no idea there were so many of these books, or that I should find it so difficult to choose. In this I was helped by the older reprints, by the collections of Mr. E. V. Lucas, and later by Mr. Harvey Darton's chapter in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.

The book itself is a poor acknowledgment of my gratitude to Oxford: to Sir Charles Firth and Mr. Nichol Smith for their advice and criticism; to the late Mr. R. J. E. Tiddy and Mr. Percy Simpson for help in the early stages; to Miss Helen Darbishire, Miss Janet Spens, and not least to my fellow students at Somerville who, in the midst of serious things, found time to be amused.

F. V. B.





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## A CENTURY OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

### INTRODUCTION

**T**O open a child's book nowadays is to discover some part of that unknown world which touches experience at so many points. The city beyond the clouds, the underground country, all the enchantments of woods and islands are open to the little traveller. From *The Water Babies* to *Peter Pan* there has been little else in nursery tales but the stuff of dreams.

It is hard to believe that the child who read the story of Rosamond and the Purple Jar, less than a hundred years ago, had no curiosity about dream countries, no sense of poetry in nature; yet the first sign of a romantic movement in children's books was the printing of unknown or forgotten fairy tales under the title of *The Court of Oberon*, in 1823. The actual awakening came later, with the nature stories of the Howitts and the imaginative nonsense of Edward Lear.

A century of little books had passed before a child could read fairy tales without shame, and the taste for true "histories" prevailed long after Miss Edgeworth had written her last sequel.

For although there were eighteenth century chap-books that kept alive old tales of chivalry, these had no proper place on the nursery shelves. Books written for children were always designed to instruct as well as to amuse, and it was only because the human interests of the eighteenth