

Make No Mystique About It

by ZENA SUTHERLAND

The women of the book world are on the march. Articles in mass magazines are warning mothers about the importance of early impressions of sex roles. There are many more books about boys and men than there are about girls and women, says Ann Eliasberg in "Are You Hurting Your Daughter Without Knowing It?" (*Family Circle*, February 1971). The female characters, she adds, are usually vapid and passive.

In the March 1971 *Woman's Day* another concerned mother, Marion Meade, announces, "Miss Muffet Must Go," and notes that picture books almost invariably portray mothers in their role of cook, laundress, and cleaning woman. She does, however, in a bibliography of approved books, cite one picture book: Eve Merriam's *Mommies at Work* (Knopf, \$3.95). Mothers, the book points out, build bridges, direct television programs, and repair radios. They also bake cookies, "... and all mommies [love] best of all to be your very own mommy and [come] home to you!" There's a working mother in *City in Winter*, by Eleanor Schick (Macmillan, \$4.95), and I'd be willing to bet that in the next few years we will see more and more of them in children's books. But I fear that some of them will be pedestrian, turned out to meet the demand.

There's no question about the paucity of picture books with girls as protagonists, and there are certainly so few whose heroines are adventurous that these stand out. We still have a plethora of girls with dolls, girls with kittens, and girls who help with the new baby just like a little mommy. As antidote, there's the Betsy Byars book (reviewed below) in which a boy looks after the baby. Or M. B. Goffstein's *The Two Piano Tuners* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$3.50), whose inflexible heroine is determined to pursue her grandfather's career.

In most books for young children the image of a girl as sedate and home-oriented is subtle, but there are some in which the message is blatant. Whitney Darrow's *I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl!* (Windmill/Simon & Schuster, \$2.95) alternates comments: "Boys have trucks." "Girls have dolls." "Boys are doctors." "Girls are nurses."

"Boys fix things." "Girls need things fixed." "Boys can eat." "Girls can cook." "Boys invent things." "Girls use what boys invent."

One of the most oft-repeated patterns in books for older readers is the tomboy who, at the end of the story, adjusts to her traditional role, conceding that her mother was right and dresses can be pretty, or that it is possible to enjoy a girls' club as much as playing shortstop with the guys.

Let me hasten to say I am not against dolls, dresses, or clubs for girls. I think there is a place for them in children's books, just as there is for mothers who

prefer to (or have to) stay home baking brownies and generally overworking. We need both, so that children can learn that girls will grow up to be women who have a choice. In the present hue and cry about sexism in books let's not lose our perspective. And let's remember that we've had heroines like Harriet, the spy who did not come in from the cold, and like Ellen Grae, the child's Baron Munchausen. Let's not protest the image of Snow White. (Oh, yes, it has been criticized.) I don't think the members of *Feminists on Children's Media*, the active leaders in the publishing field, want aggressive heroines in every single book—at least, I hope they don't. They do want an open door, an equal chance, and female characters who are intelligent and active. More power to them.

Nevertheless, I must share the comment of a friend, Dorothy Gwynn, who, after attending a heated Women's Lib meeting, announced that she had decided to form a Ladies' Auxiliary.

Go and Hush the Baby. By Betsy Byars. Illustrated by Emily A. McCully. Viking. 32 pp. \$3.50. The winner of this year's Newbery Award has written an engaging little book for young children, a story in which not much happens but where there is evidence of the same warmth and understanding that permeate her books for older readers. Will is about to take off for a session of baseball when his mother, busily painting, asks him to "Go and hush the baby. It won't take long." Will cheerfully obliges; the baby is enthralled. Time to go? No, the baby frets again. Patiently Will runs through his repertoire of songs, games, and stories, until the baby is given something even more entertaining: a bottle. Illustrations and text are childlike without being childish. Slight, but very nice. Ages 2-5.

A Road Down in the Sea. By Lorenz Graham. Illustrated by Gregorio Prestopino. Crowell. 46 pp. \$3.95. "The Egypt people hold the Hebrews tight/ And make them slaves/ And make them work the

farm/ And work the road/ And work some kind of hard." Thus begins an African storyteller's version of the Exodus of Moses and his people, first published in the author's *How God Fix Jonah*, a collection of Biblical tales in Liberian dialect. The illustrations are handsome, with jewel tones and dark faces on the color pages, which alternate with pages in stark black-and-white. The style is direct and flavorful. Ages 5-9.

Secrets in Stones. By Rose Wyler and Gerald Ames. Photographs by Gerald Ames. Four Winds Press. 64 pp. \$4.75. Black-and-white photographs supplement the text in introducing to young nature students the subject of stones and the kind of rocks they come from. The book is written simply, going into just enough detail to make comprehensible the effects of erosion, pressure, folding, and volcanic eruption, and suggesting some home experiments that show composition or structure. There is also a brief but enticing discussion of fossils. A very good first science book, this can be used with younger children but is primarily for ages 7-8.

The Shoeshine Boys. By George Panetta. Illustrated by Joe Servello. Norton/Grosset & Dunlap. 100 pp. \$4.50. Tony had never seen his father cry until the day he lost his job. What would they do? "*Che disgrazia!*" his mother wailed, and it was indeed a catastrophe. That is why Tony decided he would become a shoeshine boy like the black boy he had seen in Central Park. Stocked with polish and rags, Tony went into business. Success would have been nil except for the help and counsel of the other boy; he generously offered to go into partnership, and so the Black and White Shoeshine Company was formed. There's a wealth of warmth, humor, family affection, and interracial friendship in a nicely told story with urban background. Ages 8-10.



—From "A Road Down in the Sea"

Erec and Enid. Adapted and retold by Barbara Schiller. Illustrated by Ati Forberg. Dutton. 48 pp. \$4.25. **The Joy of the Court.** Retold by Constance Hieatt. Illustrated by Pauline Baynes. Crowell. 72 pp. \$3.95. Two adaptations of a portion of the Arthurian cycle vary in coverage and in some details of the story, but both are distinguished for fluid style and felicity of language. The Schiller version, based on the original French of Chrétien de Troyes, is simpler in treatment, both in the writing and in scope: it describes only that portion of Erec's story in which he woos and wins his host's lovely daughter while pursuing the knight whose dwarf servant has struck one of the Queen's attendants. The Hieatt retelling is more florid, and continues the legend to incorporate Erec's long quest to prove his courage. Here Enid is not the host's daughter but the knight's captive. The illustrations for *Erec and Enid* have the dramatic vigor of early Charles Keeping illustrations, while those in *The Joy of the Court* are ornate and romantic. Ages 9-11.

Illustrated Chess for Children. Written and illustrated by Harvey Kidder. Doubleday. 127 pp. \$4.95. Once upon a time there were real knights and castles, the knights agile on horseback, the castles solid and ponderous. In comparing each of the chess pieces to its medieval counterpart, Harvey Kidder gives color both to the text and the drawings of an admirably lucid book. The moves of each piece are explained, and the diagrams move from simple to comparatively complex chess problems. Ages 9-12.

The First Four Years. By Laura Ingalls Wilder. Illustrated by Garth Williams. Harper & Row. 135 pp. \$4.95. I have a sneaking suspicion that many young adults who doted on the Little House books will read this as avidly as the current crop of Wilder fans. The manuscript was discovered after the author's death in 1957 and has been published without revision. It is the story of Laura and Manly's early years of marriage, their struggle to make a living as farmers in the rugged South Dakota climate, their joy in their first child. Like the other Wilder books, it has a simplicity and honesty that make it much more than just a piece of vintage Americana. Ages 10-14.

Deep Trouble. By Walt Morey. Dutton. 214 pp. \$4.95. Joe had given up any hope of going to college. Since his father's death in a diving accident, Mom needed every penny Joe could earn, and the most lucrative thing he could think of was taking over Dad's job, checking deep-sea salmon traps. "Too young," they said, all except his father's friend Mr. Harmon, who gave Joe his first diving job. *Deep Trouble* is primarily an account of the excitement and danger of diving, but the story is balanced by a mild love interest, the taming of a seal pup, and some realistic family problems. The theme of a young man's acceptance of responsibility is handled convincingly, and the Alaskan setting has flavor. Ages 10-14.

Sunday in Centreville: The Battle of Bull Run, 1861. By G. Allen Foster. Illustrations and maps by Harold Berson. David White.



—From "The Joy of the Court"

166 pp. \$4.95. After the first Battle of Bull Run many dejected Union officers felt that Abraham Lincoln ought to talk to Jefferson Davis and call the whole thing off. They realized that it might be a long war, that their expectations of a few months' adventure were delusory. A minutely detailed account of the battle is preceded by a thoughtful analysis of the positions of the opponents, their misconceptions about each other, the complex social and economic factors that led to war, and the preparations made by the armies. The record of events prior to secession is lightened by tart humor. The tone is objective, the writing brisk and well documented, the illustrations attractive and informative. Ages 11 up.

Young and Black in America. Compiled by Rae Pace Alexander and Julius Lester. Random House. 139 pp. \$3.95. Excerpts from books by eight black men and women—all contemporary save for Frederick Douglass—give bitter evidence of the oppression and racism the authors suffered as children and young adults. Each story is prefaced by a brief biography, and a list of the volumes, in both hardcover and paperback editions, from which the selections were taken is included. Although the original books are well known, the cumulative effect of these extracts is powerful. Ages 12 up.

Bright Star: A Portrait of Ellen Terry. By Constance Fecher. Illustrated with photographs. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 236 pp. \$4.95. Add to competent writing backed by solid research, the glamour of the theater, a rags-to-riches theme, an appealing subject, and a positive flood of famous names (Ellen Terry's long life encompassed

friendships with Tennyson and Lynn Fontanne), and you have a smasher! Constance Fecher, herself an actress, includes discussions of dramatic interpretation and technique (chiefly in conversations between Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Irving) in a book that is steeped in theatrical history and that portrays with sympathy and perception one of its great stars. Ages 12 up.

The Friendly Air. By Elizabeth Cadell. Morrow. 218 pp. \$5.95. Engaged to solid, respectable Gerald, Emma is feeling strangely reluctant to stay in London and go house-hunting when she is invited to accompany elderly, eccentric Lady Grantly to Portugal. Does the experienced reader suspect that a more dashing suitor will come along? Right. Basically, the plot is that of a thousand other romances, but the characters are amusing, the style light and practiced, and the embroideries of incident (there are several little peripheral ploys afoot) entertaining. For young adults.

A Joyful Noise. By Janet Gillespie. Harper & Row. 273 pp. \$6.95. In a loving piece of nostalgia Janet Gillespie remembers the busy, sun-drenched, and usually peaceful vacations she spent on the New England coast. Although the writing is occasionally repetitive, it has an easy flow and humor. The dialogue, too, is repetitive; but then, members of a family do tend to repeat their favorite jokes to each other. They are sketched with vitality, especially a queenly Victorian grandmother and a beloved retarded cousin. The book should have a special appeal to nature lovers, packed as it is with memories of flower walks, bird-watching, and the wonders of the seashore. For young adults.

**THE GRANDEES:
America's Sephardic Elite**

by **Stephen Birmingham**

Harper & Row, 368 pp., \$10

Reviewed by Allen Churchill

■ Stephen Birmingham's enormously successful *Our Crowd* contained seven references of varying length to Sephardic Jews, that exclusive minority which considers itself the aristocracy of Jewry. Now, in *The Grandees*, the same author devotes an entire book to the Sephardim in America, together with the colorful historical background that created these supersnobs of Judaism. (Incidentally, the word "Sephardim" derives from Sepharad, the land where the Hebrew wanderers are said to have settled after Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians.)

Here and abroad, Sephardim have excellent reasons for feeling superior. They began settling in Spain when it was a Carthaginian colony. While other European Jews were being vilified and immolated (in the fourteenth century thousands were tortured and burned alive on charges of causing the Black Death), the Sephardim moved in the highest circles on the Iberian peninsula. Founders of Toledo, advisers (and even procurers) to royalty, bankers for governments, prominent in philosophy, literature, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and law, for 600 glorious years the Sephardim were aristocrats first and Jews second.

But the forces of bigotry rose in

Iberia as it had in the bulk of Europe, and the Inquisition began. The Sephardim were being driven from Spain as Columbus embarked on his first voyage. It is indicative of their pervasiveness that Columbus himself may have been a hidden Jew, that his navigational and astronomical charts were prepared by Jewish scientists, and that the funds for his venture did not come from the sale of Queen Isabella's jewels, as legend has it, but from the coffers of Jewish financiers.

Many of the Sephardim found refuge in Holland, then the most civilized country in Europe. Others went to England, some to Turkey, a few to Portuguese Brazil. The Inquisition raged on, and in 1654 a handful of Jews fleeing it in Brazil arrived in the harbor of New Amsterdam on a French privateer. These "twenty-three souls, big and little" comprised six families, and their ship has been called the "Jewish Mayflower." Their descendants—among them such names as Nathan, Hendricks, Solis, Gratz, da Silva, Piexotto, Seixas, and Franks—cherish their American lineage as do no other Jews, and indeed few gentiles.

The Sephardim had a rough time in New Amsterdam. Peter Stuyvesant, who was no libertarian, considered them heathens. But they remained proud and haughty, and when the English took over in 1664 they began to prosper. A synagogue was built, and at least two families were rich enough to contribute toward the construction of Trinity Church. Other Sephardim arrived from England and the Netherlands, and some left Manhattan to settle in Philadelphia, Newport, and New Orleans. One became an outstanding New England slave trader; another took as an apprentice in his fur trade a young German immigrant named John Jacob Astor. Sephardim married into the First Families of the New World, even eventually a Rockefeller.

Mr. Birmingham deflates a few legends. Haym Solomon did not lend as much money to the Revolutionary cause as many would like to believe. Nor is it certain that Sir Walter Scott based Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* on Rebecca Gratz of Manhattan, whom he never met. (She was a devoted friend of Washington Irving's fiancée, who died before their wedding, and Irving told Scott of Rebecca's beauty and nobility of character.) In Uriah P. Levy (1792-1862) the author finds a character worthy of his exceptional writing gifts. Diminutive, cocky, and wealthy, Uriah was a magnificent eccentric who joined the Navy as cabin boy at the age of fourteen and set out to become its first Jewish officer. He finally attained the rank of captain, having survived half a dozen courts-martial in the process.

A devout admirer of Thomas Jefferson, Uriah commissioned and paid for the massive bronze statue of him that stands in the Capitol Rotunda. On a visit to Monticello after Jefferson's death Uriah found the estate in disrepair, bought it for \$2,700, and set about restoring its former beauty. At sixty-one, Uriah was off to sea again, in command of his own ship. With him went an eighteen-year-old Sephardic bride; he was the first and only American naval commander ever to sail with wife aboard.

A few male Sephardim were gay blades, but most were dignified, family-conscious, and industrious. One of the rare weaklings in the proud line was Albert Cardozo, father of Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Nathan Cardozo. As a state jurist, the elder Car-



dozo "disgraced" himself by catering to Boss Tweed and Jay Gould. Among New York City's famous unsolved crimes was the murder of Benjamin Nathan, a myopic millionaire who was not known to have an enemy. Annie Nathan Meyer, the first girl in the city to ride a bicycle, single-handedly founded Barnard College, which ought to have been named for her but for diplomatic reasons was called after a one-time president of Columbia.

Mr. Birmingham seems in a hurry to end his book: The only modern figure he treats in any depth is Justice Benjamin Cardozo, who, impelled in part by his father's disgrace, devoted his life diligently to law. The author finds him "lonely, tortured, obsessed." Emma Lazarus and Bernard Baruch are mentioned briefly. Baruch claimed to be Sephardic and is so listed in *Americans of Jewish Descent*, by Malcolm Stern, a book Mr. Birmingham uses as a guide, but the author has doubts. Songstress Eydie Gorme is Sephardic, if not top-echelon. Tennis star Vic Seixas does not answer letters of genealogical inquiry from Nathans, Hendrickses, and other blood-conscious Sephardim.

Those who relished *Our Crowd* will find *The Grandees* a more serious work; the titles underscore the difference. There may be less bounce here, but Mr. Birmingham has written a straightforward, engrossing, and rewarding book about a group that added subtle flavoring to the American melting pot.

Allen Churchill is the author of fifteen books, most recently "The Upper Crust: An Informal History of New York's Highest Society." His next will be "The Literary Decade: Writers and Writing in the Nineteen Twenties."

**FRASER YOUNG
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1442**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1442 will be found in the next issue.

ABYS CASHFSF XBVS JTHZ

XHVVOHES, DBV JTS VSHFBZ

JTHJ VBXHZMS OF XBVS OZ-

JSVSFJOZE JTHZ TOFJBVR.

—ZOMBAHF MTHXDBVJ

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1441

By despising himself too much a man becomes worthy of his own contempt.

—FREDERIC AMIEL.