

BOOKS

for Children

By DICK MILLER
Highland School Librarian

AN ARTICLE in the Sept. 11 issue of the SATURDAY REVIEW should prove interesting to VOICE readers. "The All-White World of Children's Books" is by Nancy Larrick, a well-known authority in the field of children's literature and education.

Miss Larrick made a survey of more than 5,000 books published for children in the last four years. She uncovered some startling facts. For example, only six per cent of the books included one or more Negro characters, and among the four publishing houses that produced the largest number of children's books, the figure was closer to four per cent.

This disclosure is astounding when one considers that in the District of Columbia, 70 per cent of the children in kindergarten through high school are Negro. In St. Louis, Mo., Negroes account for 57 per cent of the school population and the figure is 53 per cent in Cleveland, Ohio. All told, almost six and one-half million non-white children in this country are being "brought up" on books that ignore their race.



DICK MILLER

Any psychologist probably would agree that such a situation tends to create resentment or a feeling of inferiority in the non-white child. And imagine the subtle impact of this situation on our forty million white children. The white child is unconsciously led to believe that he is "king of the universe," so to speak, when in reality he is a member of one of the world's minorities--racially and color-wise.

Why does this trouble-breeding situation exist? According to the sales manager of one large publishing house, it just isn't "good business" to jeopardize sales in southern states by publishing books with Negro characters--especially if they are presented in a favorable light. For example, Miss Larrick cites a book in which a Negro child from the city visits a white family in the country. Salesmen ran into so much resistance that the book was re-written with an all-white cast.

Fortunately, there is ample evidence that such opposition can be overcome. For instance, there is a book on the second-third grade level about a Negro boy who goes to a new school and is the only non-white child in his class. His beautiful rendition of a song on a school program gains him many admiring white friends and he is accepted by his classmates as an equal in all respects. This book was a dead item in the South and jobbers refused to stock it. But when complimentary reviews began to appear in newspapers and literary periodicals, the book suddenly "caught on" and eventually became a best-seller--even in the South!

Then again, there is an excellent book for older children by Dorothy Sterling entitled MARY JANE (Doubleday). It received a major literary prize, the Nancy Bloch Award for 1959. In this book, a Negro girl is the first of her race to be enrolled in a previously all-white junior high school, where she encounters bitter prejudice. Through Christmas of last year, nearly 160,000 copies of MARY JANE had been distributed by book clubs and only six letters of complaint were received in as many years, all from adults in the South. MARY JANE has now been published in half a dozen foreign countries and according to PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY, 100,000 copies have been "stirring up lively interest" in Russia.

Here is one instance where a really well-written book with a prominent Negro character has scored a big triumph, as it should. Unfortunately, not many books about Negroes are as good as MARY JANE.

Incidentally, children's book clubs wield a

Prayer House Church Honors Pastor, Wife

CONCLUDING PROGRAMS commemorating the fourth anniversary of Elder and Mrs. William Shaw at Prayer House Church of God in Christ, 1341 Blankenship St., are scheduled daily for tonight, Sept. 23, through Sept. 26, with all services at 7:30 p.m. except on Sept. 26, when the time will be 2:30 p.m.

Elder Selix Roberson is anniversary conductor and Sister Bertha Roberson serves as mistress of ceremonies.

Others with prominent roles in the six-day celebration that started Tuesday are Bishop C. C. Cox, Supts. J. W. Logan and Coruth Hall,

big stick in the publishing business and can often "make or break" a book. Sales naturally zoom when a book is selected by a book club for distribution to thousands of young subscribers. Therefore, possible rejection by southern readers heavily influences editorial selection policies. As a result, many a good book is lost to the very children who most "need" to read it. Among 230 books offered by clubs, only six so much as mentioned Negroes.

Books of fiction are not the only ones to suffer from the lily-white complex. Illustrations in most text books usually portray smiling white youngsters. Few Negroes are depicted, if any. A notable exception to this rule is a series of "integrated" books produced by the Detroit Board of Education and published by Follet. These uncomplicated readers are profusely illustrated with pictures of colored and white children playing together. The Highland School Library has samples of these readers and they are available in book stores in paperback form.

It is gratifying to note that the number of books with Negro characters is increasing. About nine per cent of the books being published this year include one or more Negro characters. This amounts to a 1.5 per cent increase over 1964. Nothing startling, to be sure, but certainly a step in the right direction.

The rate of increase is bound to jump as the Negro economy expands. According to EBONY magazine, the Negro consumer now commands a purchasing power of at least 25 billion dollars. Better jobs at higher pay are being made available to Negroes. The Negro school population and the number of Negro teachers are growing rapidly. A huge economic force is building up for "integrated" reading material.

Remember that old Mother Goose rhyme?
"Three babes in a basket,
And hardly room for two,
One was yellow and one was black,
And one had eyes of blue."

Mrs. Goose may have been a little off on her racial percentages, but at least she had an integrated basket.

Mothers Sweetie A. Porter, Helen White, Daisy Head and assistant Willie Ottey; Sisters Mary Pullum, Deanna Sanders, Fannie Morgan, Alberta Davis, Carlene Perkins and Manning; Elders George Ward, J. W. Washington, O. L. Jefferson, C. J. Johnson, Willie Rawls and J. L. Morgan; Deacons Alonzo McGhee, Luther White, Calvin McClay and J. D. Davis, and Brother E. D. Sanders.

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