

DO children still read the old favourite authors, or have their books been replaced by radio serials? Do their tastes change, or do children's books not date? What is available for children to read and what they do read will be brought before the notice of the public during Children's Book Week, which will be held from November 13 to 18.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago the United States of America held its first Children's Book Week, and this has now developed into an annual international event, usually celebrated in November. This year the slogan adopted for the week is "United Through Books."

The Newberry Medal, commemorating John Newberry, who published the first children's book, *Little Pretty Pocket Book*, in England in 1744, is awarded to the book which is considered by the Children's Section of the American Library Association to be the best published children's book of the year. More recently established, the Caldecott Medal is given to the illustrator whose work is particularly deserving of honour. The results of these two awards are announced at a special function during Children's Book Week in the United States, and broadcast in a nation-wide link-up.

This year New Zealand is celebrating its first Children's Book Week on a national scale, and libraries, schools, training colleges, booksellers, the Press and the radio are combining to emphasise the international slogan and to direct the attention of the public to the better types of books that are being produced for children. The Wellington Library Association's aims and objects are: to encourage a love of books, and develop a broader field of reading among children; to increase public interest in, and foster appreciation of, children's books; to increase support for book facilities, and thus make better children's books more widely available; and to encourage home companionship through books.

As books are in such short supply in New Zealand, it has been thought wiser to direct the publicity with more intensity at adults than at the children, in order to ensure greater public support when the books are in more plentiful supply again.

Very few adults are aware of the new type of literature for children that has

When A Child Wants To Read



Photograph by courtesy of Kodak (N.Z.) Ltd.

grown up during the last quarter of a century, when authors are no longer writing children's stories as "pot-boilers," but studying modern educational trends, and employing the best artists to illustrate their work. That this type of literature is appealing to children is shown by the tremendous demand for it at children's libraries.

On the whole, we were told, the most universally popular books are those which deal with the lives of other children — up-to-date stories like those of Elizabeth Foreman Lewis, with adventures such as could happen to any child. This type of story is replacing the older kind of sensational story, such as those by Westerman, with very little anchor in real life, wherein lads of 18 or so outwit spies and Admirals of the Fleet. Fenimore Cooper, with his *Last of the Mohicans*, is still widely read by boys, but the older schoolboy stories, such as *The Adventures of the Three-Guinea Watch*, by T. B. Reed, and the G. A. Henty and G. M. Fenn books are losing their popularity.

On the girls' side, Angela Brazil, with her stories of the Girls' Crystal type, is rapidly taking a back seat, and even L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series is disappearing from the average girl's reading list, as is the classic *Little Women*.

The new favourites are authors like the English family writer, Arthur Ransome, who has written eight or nine books in his series *Swallows and Amazons*. He has an amazingly wide age-appeal, we were assured, is read by both girls and boys, and is especially popular with only children. As one small boy said to a librarian, "Haven't you any more Ransomes? They make you feel you're one of the children in the story."

Folk Tales, Yes—Comics, No

Folk-tales of the nations, as distinct from fairy tales, are very much in demand, and are now being translated by people who have studied the countries and their problems, and are illustrated by artists who know the landscape and the people and create the correct atmosphere. For instance, the folk-tales of Poland are no longer idealised, but reflect the hardship and suffering of the people from which they grew. Through stories like these, it is hoped that children will grow up in the post-war years with a better understanding of the characteristics and problems of other lands, and will be less easily swayed by biased propaganda.

With a view to directing children's reading to the better types of books early in life, libraries are trying with all the power at their command to discourage the reading of comics, which give such a false idea of life with their unnatural settings, ungrammatical and monotonously stereotyped language, unreal behaviour, and the emphasis they place on cruel humour. It has been found that when other types of books are available, children do not ask to nearly the same extent for the inferior kind of reading matter.

"Lives of Great Men Oft Remind Us"

Biographies still fill a large place in young people's lives, but to-day they are asking for the life stories of those who have lived nearer their own time, such as Marie Curie in *The Radium Woman*, and Albert Schweitzer. The demand for biographies, perhaps more than for any other type of literature, depends on the way they are written. The recent development in the presentation and in the illustration of children's literature probably accounts to a large

(continued on next page)