

STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

BUSH HOLIDAY, by Dale Collins; Heinemann. Australian price, 6/6.
SIX TALES OF SAM PIG AND THE WEATHERCOCK, by Alison Uttley; Faber. English price, 4/6.
A BOOK OF HEDGEROW BERRIES, by Dorothy Ward; Oxford University Press. English price, 3/-.
SONGS ON THE WIND, by Eileen A. Soper; Museum Press. English price, 7/6.

AUSTRALIAN children's stories follow some unwritten law that their characters must rush out to the outback and the never-never. What's bred on the billabong comes out in the books. *Red Heifer, Greentree Downs, Hunted Piccaninnies*, whichever way you turn there's no metropolis in sight, although the city is where 70 per cent. of Australians make their beds. *Bush Holiday*, by Dale Collins, is faithful to this tradition. Martin, described as a "pommy nipper," goes to stay at Tangari up in the Great Divide and makes good after trial by fire and water. Quite literally. Item, one tumble in river; item, one homestead saved from worse than

death. (If all the flames in children's fiction burned together, how warm we could all be.) Dale Collins, then, uses some of the standard episodes and characters of children's fiction, including the strong silent uncle and the girl heroine with the virtues of both sexes. Nevertheless, *Bush Holiday* must be recommended for intermediate school age. To use an old-fashioned expression, it is a wholesome satisfying story, and the staple ingredients I mentioned are after all staples because of a well-proven popularity with younger readers. Good marks, too, for a couple of comic characters, a dotty gold prospector, and Mr. Jo Creasey, who never stops eating. Alison Uttley's stories for young children belong to a type of fiction which

I think owes something to both Kenneth Grahame and Beatrix Potter. *Six Tales of Sam Pig* were stories originally told over the BBC in the Children's Hour, and the narrative and dialogue, like genuine folk-tales, have, even in print, a flavour about them of the spoken word. Alison Uttley uses a decent tasty vocabulary. She is not afraid to use a good fat word like "conglomeration" when it's needed, and contrariwise she is aware of the virtues of simplicity, e.g., "Sam Pig was always hard on his trousers." This is for reading aloud to primer children, or for standards two to three or thereabouts to read themselves. *The Weathercock and Other Tales* by the same author are stories rather more limited in their appeal than the adven-



tures of Sam Pig, and are intended for slightly older children.

A Book of Hedgerow Berries, by Dorothy Ward, is number 29 in the Oxford Chameleons, a series of pocket size books, with a general air of good taste about them. In subject matter the Chameleons run to anthologies of verse, folk lore and natural history. Books like *Modern Verse for Little Children* (No. 1), and *A Book of Sea Verse*, are popular in our children's libraries here, but the nature books planned for an English market have a limited use in New Zealand. *A Book of Hedgerow Berries*, with its combination of fact and legend about bryony, rowan and crab-apple could have an appeal only to the adult who has made the pilgrimage "home."

The blurb on the book jacket of *Songs on the Wind* says this is a collection of 40 poems written and illustrated by Eileen A. Soper. Poems? I think not—or if they are, there should be another word for what you find in old Eliot's book of practical cats, and Seraillier's *Thomas and the Sparrow*, and all the books edited or written by Walter de la Mare. *Songs on the Wind* is verse, no better and no worse than much that is taught to the defenceless lower standards. It rhymes, and it's largely concerned with nature. Birds



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