

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND THE TAYLOR SISTERS

"Though I am young, yet I may die
And hasten to Eternity."

THESE doleful sentiments, labelled on the title-page "Some excellent verses for the education of youth", are not an unfair sample of printed children's literature in England before the middle 18th century. The tone and title of such a well-known work as Isaac Watts' *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (London, 1715) repeats the dominant "good and godly" approach. A Morals Report in those days would find nothing to complain of in the publishing trade for children.

But the children were wiser than the grown men. They never hesitated to steal their elders' reading. *Æsop's Fables*, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*—one after another they stole the plums from the adults' pantry. And their ears were always open to nursery jingles, oldwives' tales, rhymes, songs, games, ballads, romances, legends, nurse's fables of "the Robin Goodfellows, elves, fairies, hobgoblins, of our latter age". All these, potted in print, were brought to the doorstep up and down the land stuffed in pedlars' packs crammed tight with laces, pins, combs, tapes, all the gew-gaws of Autolycus, and "Chapmens' Books, Broadsides, or Half-Sheets, and Lottery Pictures, as Birds, Beasts, London Crys, etc., by the Gross or Dozen". The "running stationers", or "flying", or just "walking" carried these rough little booklets, sometimes with a few crude cuts, under such titles as *Tom Thumb*, *The Babes in the Wood*, *The History of Sir Richard Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London*, *Don Quixote*, *Jack and the Giant*, and so on.

In 1774 John Newbery published "A little pretty pocket book . . . intended for the instruction and amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly", sold by itself for 6d. or "with a Ball or Pin-Cushion" for 8d. This was