



# THE BOOK TREE

A Christian Reference  
for Children's Literature

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Moscow, Idaho

ILLUSTRATIONS

previous: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, illustrated by John Tenniel (London: MacMillan & Co., 1898), see page 62.

opposite: *The House at Pooh Corner*, illustrated by Ernest Shepard (New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1928), see page 58. Used by permission.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

*The Magic Fishbone*, illustrated by F.D. Bedford  
(New York: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., 1922), see page 93.





# PREFACE

## TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS PREFACE IS YOUR ROADMAP for using *The Book Tree*. The following paragraphs will show you why this book was written and who can benefit from its information. It will give you some details about the selections we chose, including the layout of the book and our selection criteria. In short, this preface should help you make the best use of the information the book contains.

### **Good Children's Literature Is Essential**

We wrote our book because a book of this sort is greatly needed. *The Book Tree* is a recommended reading list for all ages, from preschool through high school, and it includes several unique features. It contains a selective array of excellent books for each age group. We believe with Walter de la Mare that “only the rarest kind of best of anything can be good enough for the young,” so we have spent many years researching and reading old books and new, classics as well as recent releases. In this book, we provide a recommended list of classic books, as well as books by Christian authors, some little-known books by great writers and poets, and a sizable collection of inspiring biographies. Of course, we do not think that these are the only books worth reading. In fact, we are discovering new favorites all the time. We are simply sharing with you some of the books that we have especially enjoyed.

Another special feature is that each book we recommend is accompanied by a summary that seeks to capture the flavor of each selection in order to spark children's interest in the book. One of the main reasons we wrote *The Book Tree* was to encourage young people to cultivate a life-long love of reading. Cultivating a love of good books enriches our hearts, our minds, and our souls.

The question is sometimes raised, Why should we read *fiction*—shouldn't Christians be more concerned about reading what is *real*? We believe one answer to this question is that good literature can vividly confirm and nurture a knowledge of what is good and true. Good fiction allows us to vicariously experience conflicts between good and evil and thereby grow in wisdom. Jesus used parables not only to confuse the wicked but also to make a profound impact on His disciples.

Futhermore, a good story or an excellent biography inspires, instructs, and opens up new worlds of interest and activity. Children's characters and beliefs are deeply strengthened by the books they read. That is why it is imperative that their books be of high caliber. Good books not only supply excellence in content and literary structure but also provide challenging reading. Quality children's books are written by authors who, in the words of C.S. Lewis, "meet children as equals in that area of our nature where we are their equals. . . . The child as reader is neither to be patronized nor idolized: we talk to him as man to man."<sup>1</sup>

### **This Book Is for You**

*The Book Tree* will be a helpful resource for every member of the family. Thousands of children's books are currently available, and we have done some of the legwork for you: we have narrowed the books down to a recommended selection and given you an interesting taste of each book. *The Book Tree* not only allows young people to browse through a great selection

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 42.

of books but also helps homeschooling parents and teachers look for good books to supplement curriculum.

As you select books for your children, we strongly suggest that you avoid cartoon versions of classic children's stories that water down the story visually and verbally. We also recommend that readers read unabridged books, and we have therefore excluded all abridged editions with the exception of a fine abridgment of *David Copperfield* for young readers that was written by Dickens himself and a truncated version of *Les Misérables*, which would otherwise have extremely limited appeal.

We also warn parents that children's sections of bookstores and the local public libraries are no longer safe places for young children to browse unsupervised. The latest children's literature reflects a tendency to focus upon sordid themes.

### Preschool Children

Parents of little ones will use this book to find good stories to share with their children. Reading at this tender age is such a wonderful thing—for parents and children alike. Unfortunately, many people assume that the quality of children's books is not important, and they are content to allow their little ones to read whatever comes to hand. As a result, sensitive, thoughtful children are fast becoming a rarity. We encourage parents to choose books of the highest caliber for their children and to read to them daily! You will find rich enjoyment and create happy memories as you read great books together. As children cultivate the habit of reading at an early age, they are more likely to be readers all their lives. The time you spend introducing your young ones to reading is a wonderful investment that will yield lifelong fruit.

Preschool children need to be read stories that are beautifully written and beautifully illustrated. Both the sounds and the illustrations in children's books nurture their aesthetic sense. Young children love fairy stories and stories about talking animals and children engaged in simple tasks. They love enchanting rhythms and repetition. They want stories that reassure them about the love of God, love of parents, stability

of home, and orderliness of the world God has made. They need stories that praise good behavior. And, of course, they love to laugh.

### **Elementary Children**

Parents, keep reading to your children throughout their growing up years. If you develop the consistent habit of reading good stories to them on a daily basis, they will *always* love hearing good stories. Elementary children are beginning readers and should be given character-building stories as well as stories that celebrate the simple joys of childhood. Their books should be those that reward the good and punish the wicked, that never condone or gloss over sinful behaviors, and that depict authority figures—such as parents, teachers, and pastors—in a positive light. Children of this age love animal adventure stories, mythology, Arthurian legends, fables, and books about the heroes of our faith and our American heritage. Also realize that when children are read to, they can comprehend at a higher reading level than when they read to themselves.

### **Middle School Children**

*The Book Tree* will be helpful for middle school students looking for good books for reports or extra reading for pure enjoyment! Middle schoolers should be voracious readers. They should read an unabridged *Pilgrim's Progress* and every other good book they can get their hands on. The key at this age is to introduce children to a great deal of variety in their reading. Make sure that the books they read are worth reading. So much “junk food” juvenile fiction is available, and because these books are so easy to read, they are addictive. Children's creative imagination should be cultivated with lots of well-written fantasies. Middle schoolers love narratives about growing up, as well as thrillers, mysteries, and science fiction. They should also be given a steady diet of biography and historical fiction. Parents, keep reading to your older children. They need those special family times as much as you do, and they will love having you read the books that are sure to become some of their own favorites.



### High School Students

The older we get, the more our tastes are defined, and the more help we need to find the books we like. If high schoolers can find their fiction niche, they will love to read. They should be encouraged to read old books—great classic novels, plays, and poems—as soon as, and not before, they are old enough or ready to relish them. And they often relish them far earlier than we tend to think. They should not make the mistake of shying away from old books, assuming that they won't understand them. In his essay "On the Reading of Old Books," C.S. Lewis comments that classics are often easier to understand than modern books, and that "the only palliative (for the mistakes of our age) is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books."<sup>2</sup>

Young people who develop this love of good books are building the kind of character that will lead the future. The vast majority of people reach adulthood as non-readers. However, those who cultivate the life-long practice of reading good books will be characterized by a sharp intellect, an analytical mind, and a well-tuned sense of humor.

### Homeschooling Parents and School Teachers

Teachers (both traditional and homeschool) will find *The Book Tree* a valuable resource. Standard literature textbooks do not adequately represent the classics, and teachers must constantly supplement their curriculum with great literature. *The Book Tree* will help teachers select books that are worth teaching and that students will enjoy. In addition, students routinely question teachers about books to read, or they want to know about the content of certain books. *The Book Tree* will allow them to browse, pick out a book that sounds good, and keep them coming back for more. Many young people become discouraged when they stumble upon books that do not interest them. After all, we all have different tastes and

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 202.

interests. Hopefully, *The Book Tree* will aid the book selection process and guide children to the kind of books they will read and reread.

### **Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, and Friends**

*The Book Tree* is also a useful resource for anyone giving books to grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or young friends. One of the best presents you can give anyone, for any occasion, is a great book, and this guide will help you pick out just the right one. Not only will our book save you time looking at the endless titles on the bookstore shelves or browsing online bookstores, but it will also help you make a thoughtful choice—"I picked this out for you because it's about . . . and I thought it sounded like something you would enjoy."

### **An Overview of What's Inside**

We have placed our selections in broad categories in order to indicate general levels of reading. These categories are as follows:

- Preschool Literature
- Elementary Fiction (generally for readers in grades 1–5)
- Middle School Fiction (generally for readers in grades 6–8)
- Elementary and Middle School Biography
- High School Fiction (generally for readers in grades 9–12, and up!)
- High School Biography

Obviously, these categories will not apply to all readers alike. We encourage you to browse through all the categories to make sure you are not missing any treasures. C.S. Lewis wisely stated that "a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story. The good ones last."<sup>3</sup> Do not avoid "harder" selections simply because of the age or grade label; young people should be constantly challenged by more difficult books. Some students have even shifted their reading level up one full category (middle schoolers reading

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, 33.

from High School Fiction; elementary students reading from Middle School Fiction).

We have also included four indexes at the end of the book. These will allow you to look for books by title, by author, by illustrator, or by subject.

## Our Criteria

Our criteria include the following:

**1. Well-written literature.** We looked for well-written literature because excellence in language pleases our Creator. Of course, the books we have included reflect a range of literary skill.

**2. Reader-friendly literature.** We avoided complex books that need formal instruction and guidance in order to thoroughly understand and enjoy the text. We wanted to make our list as user-friendly as possible.

**3. Ethical standards.** We recommend books that uphold Christian morality. We therefore did our best to select wholesome books and to eliminate those with blatantly objectionable content, language, or perspective. This is not necessarily to say that such books should be avoided altogether; however, they generally require critical, Christian analysis provided by mature readers, such as parents or teachers. Although we have omitted obviously objectionable books, we have included important texts by non-Christian authors, such as London, Conrad, Hardy, Crane, and Twain, whose books belittle Christian thinking in subtle ways. Readers must approach these books as they should read all literature—with the discernment of biblical faith.

**4. Visual appeal.** In the case of preschool and elementary books that include illustrations, we recommend books that are visually appealing, because pictures have perhaps as profound an impact on young minds as the stories they illustrate. When such books have multiple editions, we selected the edition that we feel best illustrates the story.

**5. Accessibility.** Except for books that were too good to pass by, we kept our selection of books as current as possible. We have also worked hard to provide up-to-date publication

information on each book. You have several options for obtaining a book that is hard to find. Don't stop your search at the local bookstore. Out-of-print book search services are available, especially online. In addition, public libraries are filled with books that are currently out of print. If you continue to come up empty-handed, we encourage you to contact us, and we will be glad to help.

We hope that you will find our recommendations useful as you look for favorites of your own. May you find our selections delicious and return often to *The Book Tree* to pick yourself a good book!

*Soli Deo gloria,*  
ELIZABETH MCCALLUM & JANE SCOTT



## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS SECOND edition of *The Book Tree*, we have made some exciting discoveries and included many new titles. We hope this new expanded edition will help families as they browse for more books to enjoy. We suggest that readers look through titles in several categories because taste and reading competence vary widely with every child.

Although we are delighted with the new good books we were able to find, we must warn our readers that the caliber of contemporary children's books has declined alarmingly. Many book stores and libraries offer increasingly objectionable material; for example, one major chain has added a teen section that contains books dealing almost exclusively with pre-marital sex, homosexuality, the occult, and dysfunctional families. Such books reverse the distinction between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, integrity and depraved behavior, and they subtly, sometimes blatantly, encourage teenagers to embrace corrupt values. In addition to immoral themes, many new children's books are tastelessly illustrated, and a number are downright ugly. The Bible sets the standard for all we do, including our reading habits. In order to select books for our children that inspire, encourage, and uplift, we must consider God's standards of beauty and order: "Whatsoever things are true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . and of good report, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Illustration: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, illustrated by John Tenniel (London: MacMillan & Co., 1898), see page 62.



Another concern is the increasing prevalence of rewritten or abridged books. It seems as though every classic book has been retold in order to accommodate the rising national illiteracy. These retold versions are usually poorly written and trite; they fail to capture the beauty and depth of the original. Children should read unabridged editions of the classics. If they are not old enough to enjoy a particular book, let them wait a few years. It is counterproductive to introduce a child to a retold classic before he or she is sufficiently mature to enjoy the original.

A tragic consequence of the poor quality of children's literature is that young people who love reading are a rare breed, which is heartbreaking because reading stimulates the imagination and develops a taste for reflection and evaluation. More than ever, concerned parents need good reference books to help them and their children make informed choices about reading.

Finally, parents should be aware that the literary canon—books that are most excellent and most representative of their particular culture—is under attack. Books once considered classics are rapidly being replaced by books that are worthless and often harmful. As a result, the search for good children's literature has become increasingly difficult. We would like to challenge parents, teachers, and everyone who cares about good books to reverse this alarming trend by insisting on classic literature in your libraries and book stores and by passing on to your children a love for great literature.

Please email us at [TheBookTree@canonpress.com](mailto:TheBookTree@canonpress.com) if you want suggestions about a particular author or book, or if you have any other questions about our favorite subject—reading!

*Soli Deo gloria,*  
ELIZABETH MCCALLUM & JANE SCOTT





ILLUSTRATIONS

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, illustrated by Beatrix Potter  
(London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1902), see page 54.



# 1

## PRESCHOOL LITERATURE

### ADVENTURES OF LITTLE BEAR

*written by Else Holmelund Minarik, illustrated by Maurice Sendak*

When Little Bear plays outside in the snow, he is cold, so he asks his mother for a coat, a hat, and finally snow pants, but when he discovers that he already has a fur coat of his own, he suddenly isn't cold at all! You will also enjoy *Little Bear's Friend* and the other stories in the Little Bear series of easy readers. [HarperCollins]

### THE ADVENTURES OF THE BRAVE COWBOY

*written and illustrated by Joan Walsh Anglund*

This little cowboy has all sorts of exciting adventures. He rounds up cattle rustlers and bank robbers. He kills mountain lions and bears, he drives covered wagons across the prairie, and he lassoes bulls at the rodeo. The book includes several stories about the brave cowboy as well as pictures of his imaginary adventures. [MJF Books]

### ALLIGATORS ALL AROUND

*written and illustrated by Maurice Sendak*

This book will teach you your alphabet while you laugh at green alligators doing funny things. [HarperCollins]

### ALL THE PLACES TO LOVE

*written by Patricia MacLachlan, illustrated by Mike Wimmer*

When Eli is born, his grandmother wraps him in a soft wool blanket and holds him before an open window, so what he hears first in the