A CRITICAL HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
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For

Anne Carroll Moore
Bertha Mahony Miller
Frederic G. Melcher

Three great leaders
in the knowledge and understanding
of children's literature.
Here is something new and enchanting, a history of children's literature. But what, after all, do we mean by that term? Is it that literature written especially for the young—the fairy and wonder tales, the nursery rhymes and songs, the dull books of etiquette and admonition and moral persuasion, the stories of school or playing field or of far-flung adventure? It is all of this, to be sure, but it is far more. It is the whole vast body of literature that children have adopted, commonly to share with their elders, but sometimes to monopolize. It is, quite literally, their literature. For it is, in the end, not the parents, the teachers, the preachers, not even the authors, but the children themselves who determine what their literature is to be. Over the years they have followed their own rules or, better yet, their instincts; they have rejected most of what was deliberately concocted for them, and embraced what was not; and over the years their judgment has been vindicated. It is because the writers of this book have accepted, and even concurred in, this judgment, that they have given us our first critical and comprehensive history of children's literature.

They begin their chronicle with Celtic legends and tales, with the Arthurian legend so wonderfully recreated by Sir Thomas Malory, with Plutarch's Lives, with the stirring history of distant voyages retold by Hakluyt, and with Pilgrim's Progress. Now all of these stories and books have this in common, that they were not designed for the young at all. But very early the children took them over and made them their own, forced their elders, indeed, to revise and recast them in suitable form. This set the pattern for later generations, the pattern for almost the whole of English and American literature down to our own day. For, with important exceptions, that literature has not consciously recognized a divid-