

the Savannah News, the Raleigh Observer, and the Tulsa World, among others. "Now it is a real best seller!" she reports.

Mrs. Colby is also feeling pressure from those who deplore a story that shows the Negro as a slave, a servant, a railroad porter. "Slavery has been practically taboo for many years now a subject for children's literature," she writes, "and depicting the Negro as anything but perfect is not welcome either. White children and adults can be bad, but Negroes cannot. So my job has been to tone down or eliminate such people and situations. . . . But when can we lift the shroud from the truth?"

Not all editors speak as frankly as Mrs. Colby. One, who asks to remain anonymous, says it took her two years to get permission to bring out a book about children in a minority group. Another reports a leading children's book club rejected a 1961 book "especially because Southern subscribers would not like the way this heroine tackled the problem of prejudice." Although no other publisher commented on bookclub selection, this is undoubtedly an important influence in editorial decisions.

When the directors of eight children's book clubs were questioned about the books they have distributed since September 1962, they listed only a tiny fraction that includes Negroes. Four hard-cover book clubs offered 230 books of which only six mention Negroes. Four paperback book clubs distributed 1,345 titles with Negroes included in fifty-three.

Not one of the fourteen Negro books on the ALA list of Notable Children's Books in 1962, 1963, and 1964 won the more lucrative award of book-club selection.

In the two Negro books distributed by the Weekly Reader Children's Book Club—*Long Lonesome Train*, by Virginia Ormsby (Lippincott), and *Skinny*, by Robert Burch (Viking)—the Negro characters are Aunt Susan, her son, Matt, a fireman, and the handyman, Roman. Richard R. RePass, director of this hard-cover book club says, "These I would consider neither germane to the plot, nor particularly flattering to our Negro citizens. The main reason why there are not more books with Negro characters among our book club selections is the general dearth of good candidates."

It should be explained that the hardcover book clubs send the same book to every child while the paperback book clubs ask each member to choose one title from a list of ten to a dozen. Perhaps for this reason the paperback clubs have distributed certain titles which the hard-cover book clubs would not take a chance on. One of these is *Mary Jane*, by Dorothy Sterling, published by Doubleday in hard cover and given a two-star rating by *School Library Journal*. It also received the Nancy Bloch Award for 1959. This is the realistic story of a Negro girl who is the first to enter an all-white junior high school that bristles with prejudice.

Mary Jane has not been selected for hard-cover book club distribution. But after several years of deliberation, the Arrow Book Club, one of the paperback clubs, offered *Mary Jane* to its fifth- and sixth-grade members. By December 1964, 159,895 copies had been sold. "Only six letters of complaint were received," reports Lilian Moore, Arrow Book Club editor, "all from adults in the South." And many warm comments have come in from the children who read *Mary Jane*.

By March 1965, *Mary Jane* had been published in Swedish, Dutch, Czech, German, and Russian editions. According to *Publisher's Weekly*, the Children's Literature House of Moscow reports 100,000 copies of *Mary Jane* have been printed there and are stirring up "lively interest."

Obviously not all children's books can or should include Negroes. The story of a family in Plymouth Colony or in modern Sweden would be distorted if Negro faces were shown. Certainly no author or artist should be required to follow any formula for integration.

But, consciously or unconsciously, most writers and artists have long been following the formula for pure white books. Some of the distortions caused by this formula are ludicrous. For example, *We Live in the City*, a simple picture-book by Bert Ray (Childrens Press, 1963), tells of Laurie and Gregg looking over the city of Chicago—a city that apparently has no Negroes.

Only white people appear in *Your Brain*, by Margaret O. Hyde (McGraw-Hill, 1964). In books of science experiments, it is usually a white hand that holds the thermometer, a white arm reaching for a test tube, white children feeding the guinea pig. In books of poetry it is a white face smiling over the first stanza.

While making a survey of G. P. Putnam's books of the past three years, Putnam's juvenile editor Tom MacPherson came upon an illustrated novel about professional football, with not a single Negro player among the professionals. "That embarrassed us considerably," he wrote.