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THE USE OF MODERN POETRY WITH CHILDREN

Robert Browning, in "Fra Lippo Lippi," says:

"For, don't you mark? we're
made so that we love
First, when we see them painted,
things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor
cared to see;"

And a bit farther on:

"Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each
other so,
Lending our minds out."

This summarizes so aptly one purpose of the use of modern poetry with children. In modern poetry the vivid imagery, simple direct expression, attractive phrasing, and musical-word selection help the children to an awareness of the beauty that is all about them: The vivid imagery urges the picture upon their minds while the musical, attractive words in which the imagery is so often clothed impel the child to tuck the thought away and enjoy it as his own.

How much beauty James Stephens has added to the children's feeling for the moonlight by his poem:

*Washed in Silver

"Gleaming in silver are the hills!
Blazing in silver is the sea!

And a silvery radiance spills
Where the moon rides royally!

Clad in silver tissue, I
March magnificently by!"

*From "Collected Poems." By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

"Where the moon rides royally!" What a pleasing line both as to the majestic picture it conjures up and the word sequence that causes the image to slide pleasantly and easily into the mind and find lodging.

"Clad in silver tissue, I
March magnificently by!"

makes us all, "kiddies and grownups," royal for the moment while the words, "march magnificently by," seem to impress the idea of our importance in this great panorama of night.

In these two stanzas from "Portobello Bridge," Stephens has made his readers aware of a more delicate beauty of the moonlit night and has greatly delighted the "ear" in the doing:

*Portobello Bridge

"Poplars bear with modest grace
Gossamers of silver lace!

And the turf bank wears with glee
Black and silver filigree!"

*From "Collected Poems." By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

Every line of this catches and holds the children and—best of all—the ideas linger and recur. What a pretty touch there is in:

"And the turf bank wears with glee
Black and silver filigree!"

The poet truly opens our eyes to the rare beauty of moonlight through his exquisite "painting."

The force and savage glee of the wind appear in his:

*And It Was Windy Weather

"Into the sea and air, we go!
To chase the gull! the Moon!
and know
Flying high!
Flying high!
All the freedom of the sky!
All the freedom of the sky!"

*From "Collected Poems." By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

Fannie Stearns Davis, another modern poet, makes the children aware of the gentle beauty of the rain in her poem:

*Rainy Weather

"Up the hill we run together
In the wet and windy weather;
Hair in eyes and dripping cheek;
Oh, how cool, and soft and sleek
Is the hand-touch of the rain.
'Bet' and I bounce up the lane."

*From "Myself and I." By Fannie Stearns Davis. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

Has rain ever seemed more friendly, more gentle, than in the lines:

"Oh, how cool, and soft and sleek
Is the hand-touch of the rain."

Emily Dickinson leaves the children with an awareness of the playfulness and joyousness in a rain while at the same time giving them a delicious sample of her own happy spirit in—

*"A drop fell on the apple trees
Another on the roof;
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,
And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,
Which went to help the sea.
Myself conjectured, Were they pearls
What necklaces could be.

The dust replaced in hoisted roads,
The birds jocoser sung;
The sunshine threw his hat away,
The orchards spangles hung.

The breezes brought dejected lutes,
And bathed them in the glee;
The East put out a single flag,
And signed the fête away."

*From "The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson." Copyrighted. By permission of Little, Brown and Company.

What an eye-opener: "sunshine threw his hat away," "breezes brought dejected lutes, and bathed them in the glee," and "birds jocoser sung." How contagiously happy the lines are! How very much she has given with which to see and enjoy a summer shower. It could scarcely be just *rain* after that burst of beauty.

How completely she revises the traditional ideas of the crescent moon as a boat or a cradle in her—

*"The moon was but a chin of gold
A night or two ago,
And now she turns a perfect face
Upon the world below.

Her lips of amber never part;
But what must be the smile
Upon a friend she could bestow
Were such her royal will!"

*From "The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson." Copyrighted. By permission of Little, Brown and Company.

Here, again, her own pleasant spirit "bestows" upon the hearers something that tends to make the children feel a friendliness in the moon that perhaps they might have missed had it not been for:

"But what must be the smile
Upon a friend she could bestow
Were such her royal will!"

Louise Driscoll has "painted" her moon with a beauty and originality that add zest and creepiness to moonset in these lines:

*Charm

"The moon slid down
Like a coin in a crack;
The hill was humped
With stars on its back.

The creeping wind
Made dry leaves hiss;
And the dark was the edge
Of a precipice.

So I didn't move
But I said a charm—
To keep myself from any harm.
Barred owl,
Acorn,
Cockleburr;
Locust thorn,
Dead leaf,
Bee tree
Make a circle
Around me.
And the things that I had
seen and liked
Touched my skirts, and at
my side
Were friends that slipped out
from the still
Places where they hide."

*By permission of the author.

Lizette Woodworth Reese has given a lovely conception of the lark's song in the midst of a charming out-of-doors scene in her poem:

*The Lark

"A close gray sky
And poplars gray and high
The country side along;
The steeple bold
Across the acres old—
And then a song!

O far, far, far
As any spire or star,
Beyond the cloistered wall!
Oh, high, high, high,
A heart throb in the sky—
Then not at all."

*By permission of Thomas Bird Mosher, publisher of "A Wayside Lute" by Lizette Woodworth Reese.

How the beauty and mystery of the lark's song as well as the quiet charm of the country side are brought to the hearts and minds of the children through the poem.

John Moreland "paints" his birches together with the moonlight in such simple delicate phrases in the following poem that one finds himself looking, looking at birches in moonlight to see if perchance his eye may catch some of the quiet beauty so lightly and so charmingly expressed:

*Birch Trees

"The night is white;
The moon is high
The birch trees lean
Against the sky.

The cruel winds
Have blown away
Each little leaf
Of silver gray.

Oh, lonely trees,
As white as wool,
That moonlight makes
So beautiful."

*By permission of Virginia McCormick, Editor of *The Lyric.*

Children get genuine satisfaction from the revelation that comes with:

"The birch trees lean
Against the sky."

And the last stanza makes them *see* trees in moonlight as almost no other poem does:

"Oh, lonely trees,
As white as wool,
That moonlight makes
So beautiful."

Children will say this stanza over and over and over. Which are they enjoying most: the imagery "as white as wool," the smooth vowel charm of the words, or the fact that such everyday words can conjure up such a lovely picture? One doesn't exactly know. He only knows that they have genuine pleasure in the lines.

The steady downpour of the rain becomes an interesting happening when the children listen to it through the "sound" imagery of Anne Robinson. How she sensitizes their ears in this lovely poem:

*Those Old Songs

"Pitter, patter, tip-toe light!
Silver rain awakes the night—
Weaving songs whose lilt will bring
A thirsty world rich comforting.

Pitter, patter, tip-toe light!
Music filters through the night—
Wake and listen, tinkling brook
Rain is publishing a book!"

*By permission of the *New York Sun.*

Thus, by "lending their minds out," the modern poets open up new beauties in the world about the children—beauties that they express so delightfully that both the imagery and its particular expression stay with the hearers—so that the object when it appears revives the beautiful expressions of the poet and the expression recalled brings the object in its beauty to mind.

Thus Browning's words:

"We're made so that we love
First, when we see them painted,
things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times
nor cared to see,"

find fulfillment in the poem "paintings" of the poets: Children with some native feeling for the beautiful have this feeling made more sensitive, and broader in scope, while those with little feeling are gradually roused to at least some beginnings of awareness through the poems.

Poems in a sense are like strong glasses—not so much magnifying the things near at hand—but rather enhancing, enriching, even to a degree bewitching the common things in the children's environment until finally "birch trees lean against the sky," "the moon is but a chin of gold," "the turf bank wears with glee black and silver filigree," and the rain has a "cool soft handtouch."

Another purpose of the use of modern poetry with children is expressed in these words of Froebel's:

"Whatever the child feels in his heart, whatever lives in his soul, whatever he cannot express in his own words, he would fain have others express for him."

Children give deep sighs of satisfaction, chuckles of delight, and come very near to smacking their lips over certain poems or bits of poems that are brought to them.

It is as if they said, "Those are exactly the things I've been thinking and feeling regarding the yellow-throat, the lark's song, the song of the thrush, dawn, the moon, the sea, and snow—all these several years. I haven't gotten around to put the thoughts and feelings into words as yet but I recognize the way they should be expressed once the poets put them so clearly and attractively."

Henry Van Dyke's "Maryland Yellow-throat" brings that sort of satisfaction to children:

*"There's magic in that small bird's note—
See, there he flits—the Yellow-throat;
A living sunbeam, tipped with wings,
A spark of light that shines and sings
'Witchery—witchery—witchery!'"

*Copyright 1921 by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

"A living sunbeam tipped with wings." How the child seems to sense the fitness of the phrase. It is so complete, so satisfying.

The lark's song so beautifully described in Van Dyke's poem *"The Veery" wins the sigh of satisfaction that is, in a sense, the highest praise:

"The laverock sings a bonnie lay
Above the Scottish heather;
It sprinkles down from far away
Like light and love together;
He drops the golden notes to greet
His brooding mate, his dearie;
I only know one song more sweet,—
The vespers of the veery."

*Copyright 1921 by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

"It sprinkles down from far away:" As one little child expressed it, "It's just pouring down, isn't it?" She may have missed something of the delicacy of the song as Mr. Van Dyke expressed it, but she caught the profusion of sound and beauty, and enjoyed that to the full.

The children feel that Henry Van Dyke says so delightfully just what needs to be said of the thrush's song in his *"Angler's Reveille":

"This is the song the Brown Thrush flings
Out of his thicket of roses;
Hark how it bubbles and rings,
Mark how it closes:
Luck, luck,
What luck?
Good enough for me,
I'm alive, you see!
Sun shining,
No repining;
Never borrow,
Idle sorrow;
Drop it!
Cover it up!
Hold your cup!
Joy will fill it,
Don't spill it,
Steady, be ready,
Good luck."

*Copyright 1921 by Charles Scribner's Sons. By permission of the publishers.

Children ask again and again for the lines:

"This is the song the Brown Thrush flings
Out of his thicket of roses;
Hark how it bubbles and rings,
Mark how it closes."

The words, "bubbles and rings," delight them; the word "flings" startles and pleases; and the quaint words, "Mark how it closes," strike them as so "just right."

What genuine satisfaction Mr. Van Dyke gave to children when he wrote these lovely lines describing the coming of morning in the "Angler's Reveille":

"What time the rose of dawn is laid
Across the lips of night,
And all the little watchman stars
Have fallen asleep in light,
'Tis then a merry wind awakes
And runs from tree to tree
And borrows words from all the birds
To sound the reveille."

"All the little watchman stars have fallen asleep in light" meets their approval with the hearing. It is as though they had always felt this way about early morning when twilight and dawn meet, but had never been able to say it. "The merry wind awakes and runs from tree to tree" catches their fancy and gives such satisfaction—it is so exactly what happens in the very early morning after the hush of night.

This little poem by Abigail Cresson voices a fancy that wins instant acceptance:

*"The moon is a bowl
Turned upside down:
A silver bowl
Spilling silver stars."

*"Sacrilege," by B. Wardell, has imagery that pleases through its novelty as well as its fitness. Children appear to feel that this is so exactly the thing that does happen at sunset that they relish hearing it said so attractively:

"I don't blame you, God—
I'd be a miser, too,
If I had a sun-penny like yours
To slip into my pocket each night
And look at in the morning."

*By permission of Harriet Monroe. From *Poetry*, Chicago.

One wishes that those who doubt whether the modern poems are enjoyed by children could hear the chuckle of approval that comes from a group of youngsters hearing this poem for the first time.

The children love the sea—even the inland children feel much of its beauty, capriciousness, and power. They like the way in which W. Torgownik has expressed these qualities in his poem—

*I Love the Sea

"I love the sea—
When it is wild.
It flings such beautiful silver laces
In its mad white tossings.

I love the sea—
When it is still.
It mirrors the silver laces of the sky
And winds and weaves them
Into insane liquid patterns
that fade and come again.
I love the many silvers of the sea."

* By permission of Harriet Monroe. From *Poetry,* Chicago.

Children have such keen ears for musical and quaint less-every-day words. When this stanza from Richard Le Gallienne's *"A Ballade—Catalogue of Lovely Things," was read to some children, one small boy who was not much given to spontaneous remarks said, "My, but I like that!"

"Imperial sunsets that in crimson blaze
Along the hills, and, fairer still to me,
The fireflies dancing in a netted maze
Woven of twilight and tranquility."

*By permission of Dodd, Mead and Company, publishers.

Asked what particular thing in it he liked, he replied, "The last line sounds so pretty." He was right. It does. He had caught and approved a very real beauty of the poem.

Much of the charm of Walter de la Mare's poetry lies in his use of unusual words. His fairy with her "niminy" fingers, the witches who dance "lissomely," fingers that "preen" the fairy's hair, and the "steeple-hats" of the witches delight the children.

Alliteration finds a ready-made audience with children. It seems their ears are all attuned and waiting for the music to arrive. Quaint, unusual words seem to find the same ready reception. They can't make these lovely sound effects that alliteration brings, nor can they name the quaint words that they delight to hear the poets use, but how happy they are when others express the pretty sounds for them.

Fannie Stearns Davis gets such pleasing results through alliteration. This, from her "Hill Fantasy" in which an old satyr of the mountains attempts to teach a human being the art of piping, always delights the ears of the children:

*"So blow, and so. Thou!
Move thy fingers faster, look!
Move them like the little leaves and whirling
midges. So!
"Soon 'twill twist like tendrils and out-twinkle
like the lost brook.
Move thy fingers merrily, and blow! blow! blow!"

*From "Myself and I." By Fannie Stearns Davis. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

Asked to select the prettiest sounding line, regardless of the picture the words make, children almost invariably choose:

"Soon 'twill twist like tendrils and out-twinkle
like the lost brook."

Count the t's and the l's and the source of the music is apparent. The poet here is doing for the children a thing they fain would do, as suggested by Froebel's words, but are not yet able. What a long way they have gone toward it, however, in being quick to recognize the "sound" beauty when it comes! Their "receiving set" is ready and eager to receive these things that the children somehow, "feel in their hearts."

Children feel the beauty in the falling snow; its silent, rhythmical descent and the almost purposeful way in which it proceeds to cover over familiar things bit by bit; they revel in the heaped up masses that gradually assume such fantastic shapes. Yet, somehow, their appreciation and enjoyment remain inarticulate for the most part save for the squeals of delight and sighs of satisfaction with which they greet a heavy snow.

How they approve Emily Dickinson's expression of all that they feel and cannot say in her poem *"The Snow":

"It sifts from leaden sieves,
It powders all the wood,
It fills with alabaster wool
The wrinkles of the road.

It makes an even face
Of mountain and of plain,—
Unbroken forehead from the east
Unto the east again.

It reaches to the fence,
It wraps it rail by rail,
Till it is lost in fleeces,
It flings a silvery veil

On stump and stack and stem,—
The summer's empty room—
Acres of seams where harvests were
Recordless but for them.

It ruffles wrists of posts,
As ankles of a queen—
Then stills its artisans like ghosts
Denying they have been."

*From "The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson." Copyrighted. By permission of Little, Brown and Company.

"The wrinkles of the road" charms through its happy figure and its pleasing alliteration. The soft, steady music of the s, r, l, and t continue to pile up "sound" beauty for the ear even as the snow storm without piles up attractions for the eye: "ruffles wrists of posts," "sifts from leaden sieves," "stills its artisans like ghosts."

What delicate figures for the snow in: "powders all the wood," "alabaster wool," "lost in fleeces," and "flings a silvery veil." Another than the snow artist is at work here!

Sara Teasdale's *"Winter Dusk" gives children satisfaction through the "pretty" words selected and the vowel words so effectively used:

"I watch the great clear twilight
Veiling the ice-bound trees;
Their branches tinkle faintly
With crystal melodies;
The larches bend their silver,
Over the hush of snow;
One star is lighted in the west—
Two in the zenith glow."

*By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

"Their branches tinkle faintly with crystal melodies" touches the ear pleasantly: "crystal melodies" are pretty words and "tinkle faintly" has musical sequence as well as musical suggestion.

"The larches bend their silver
Over the hush of snow—"

suggests such a "pretty picture" and "such a quiet sound" to many children. They are pleased that some one has expressed this lovely winter twilight so beautifully.

Children have thoughts that they keep largely to themselves lest they meet with unsympathetic audiences. They accept so readily and so whole-heartedly the pretty sky fancy in this poem by Betty Phipps that it is as if they had always known that the sky is just what she says it is but had been loath to reveal the fancy:

*Sky

"Last night
Some one took a thin blue teacup
And set it gently down over the city
Upside down—to keep the wind out.
Clouds? Oh, no!
Those were the shadows of his fingers
Holding the cup down."

And this lovely fancy by C. Silvay regarding the snow finds a happy acceptance:

*White Music

"Snowflakes
Little frozen grace-notes
Straying
From the symphony of the sky;
And beating
A soft tattoo on the drums
Of a white winter's night."

*By permission of Harriet Monroe. From *Poetry*, Chicago.

Francis Ledwidge says so much that finds ready response from children. He writes of common things in such uncommon ways. Hear his blackbird:

*"And wondrous impudently sweet
Half of him passion, half conceit,
The blackbird calls adown the street
Like the piper of Hamelin."

Was the sunset ever more daintily sketched in so few lines than in his *"Evening in England"?

"From its blue vase the rose of evening drops.
Upon the stream its petals float away.
The hills all blue with distance hide their tops
In the dim silence falling on the grey."

This stanza from his "Spring" has in it something of the feeling children have for the new out-of-doors in spring time:

*"The primrose and the daffodil
Surprise the valleys, and wild thyme
Is sweet on every little hill
When lambs come down at folding time."

*From "The Complete Poems" of Francis Ledwidge. By permission of Brentano's, publishers.

"Whatever the child feels in his heart—he would fain have others express for him." Children feel so deeply the beauty and stillness of evening, the "impudent" sweetness of the blackbird's song, the way the flowers "surprise the valleys" in the spring, and the sweetness of the perfume "on every little hill." And because they do, they enjoy hearing the poet express these feelings so beautifully.

James Stephens, Emily Dickinson, Elinor Wylie, Henry Van Dyke, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sara Teasdale, Fannie Stearns Davis, Walter de la Mare, Amy Lowell, Francis Ledwidge, Richard Le Gallienne, A. Milne, Helen Hoyt, Rebecca McManus, Louise Driscoll, Dorothy Aldis, Rachel Field, Rose Pyleman, Hilda Conk-

ling together with many, many others one might mention have written much that answers to these longings expressed by Froebel.

"Poetry: A Magazine of Verse" and "The Anthology of Magazine Verse" keep us in touch with the best efforts of the modern poets from day to day and year by year.

The modern poets supply the material; the children are ready and eager to receive what the poets have expressed for them; and we, as teachers, have the genuine pleasure of bringing these two factors together.

A third purpose of the use of modern poetry with children is to stimulate in them a desire to create poems of their own, and to encourage this creativeness by according their smallest productions appreciation and respect.

The children are led through the hearing of many modern poems to a realization of the kinds of subjects poets write about, some appreciation of the various patterns or forms which their fancies take, and glimpses of the sort of fancies that seem legitimate and pleasing. Their attention is not formally directed to these points but exposure to many poems gradually makes the children aware of them.

They do little copying of ideas and patterns but rather, through the general notions they derive from the poems they hear, they gain an ability to see new phases of things for themselves and to feel freedom in saying these things in their own ways. They gain, also, the assurance that whatever is said sincerely and spontaneously, with the desire to say a "pretty" thing is legitimate poetic expression.

Perhaps one of the finest contributions of the modern poets to the field of poetry is the freeing of the mind from the idea that poetry must have rhyme and rhythm and that the ideas must be expressed in language somewhat above the simple, sincere language of prose.

Experience with children reveals that whenever the child attempts to have rhyme his thought is sacrificed; and when he is led to believe that a line in his poem is too long or too short, he immediately begins juggling with words, and the spontaneity and sincerity of his ideas are lost in the struggle.

A somewhat recent article by Herbert Read in "The Saturday Review of Literature" entitled "Is It Prose or Poetry?" contained these interesting statements:

"In poetry words are born or reborn in the act of thinking."

"The thought is the word and the word is the thought, and both the thought and the word are poetry."

"Poetry may inhere in a single word, in a single syllable, and may therefore be without rhyme."

The points that have close application to poetry-making by children are these: the emphasis on the spontaneity of the expression, and the freedom from the necessity of rhyme. Left to themselves children write "pretty" thoughts with disregard of

rhythm and rhyme. Both may be present in their productions but are as likely not to be. The thought's "the thing" with the children.

"None genuine without this label" applies to poetic creations by children—"this label" being: a lack of regular rhyme, somewhat erratic rhythm, and rather abrupt endings to the poems. These, together with childish fancies, childishly expressed, constitute the test of genuineness.

*"Edge of Morning" by Hilda Conkling glows with sincerity and spontaneity. One feels that "night-pink" is truly a word "born in the act of thinking." At the same time rhythm is lacking in places and the ending is most abrupt—as if the poet stopped suddenly and turned to look back upon her own creation.

"Gray slate roof of a house near by
Turned silvery by the sun.
Clouds keeping their grayish night-pink . . .
Then suddenly
Sunlight poured through the windows;
Sunlight sang as it came;
Clouds dashed by singing;
The blue sky coming opened its eyes to the sun.
This is a picture-poem
But it is my thoughts, too."

*From "Poems by a Little Girl." Copyrighted 1920. By permission of Frederick A. Stokes Company, publishers.

Her poem *"The Sea Is Gray" bears the same evidences of being truly a child's creation:

"The sea is gray with a golden rim of moonlight:
Foam is the lace binding the golden rim.
Only a little while ago
The sea was an opal box."

Spontaneity, sincerity, little thought of rhythm, none of rhyme, and a rare touch of beauty—and the result—a lovely poem.

In so many of Hilda Conkling's poems one notices that the poems take the form of direct address to the subject of the poem: In "Laugh at Me, Sky" she tells the sky of her pleasure at the coming of morning. In her many flower poems, she tells the flowers of her pretty thoughts about them.

As children listen to her poems they catch the outstanding spirit of them: pretty thoughts prompted by her love for things; they catch also her fashion of speaking directly to the subjects of her poem. So in their early creative bits they adopt the same spirit and the same fashion, only, unfortunately, they are not "Hilda Conklings" and their results fall far below the patterns.

The poems that follow are called "poems" simply because they are sincere, spontaneous attempts by the children to say something "pretty" to or about the subjects of their poems with little attention to rhyme, rhythm or form.

One child had this very pleasing experience with one of her poems. She had made this little poem "Moonlight" and the class had accorded it the high praise it seems to deserve:

"The golden threads of the moon above
Move in and out among the trees.
Oh;—how rich she must be!"

Ellen

An adult reading a Wilbur Steele story in a recent Harper's happened across this:

"The moonlight was another thing now—cords of silk and silver to swing on up to heaven." When the little poet's attention was called to the excerpt, she said: "Well, he had almost the same pretty thought I did. I think his is just a little prettier, though." Unconsciously she placed her creation beside that of Wilbur Steele! And why not? The sincerity, simplicity, spontaneity and beauty of hers entitled her to the privilege; and her gracious acknowledgment "his is just a little prettier, though" squared the matter.

After hearing many poems about the moon, some rather small children gave these bits of their own: they sat quietly a while, planned out their poems, and then said them to the group. An onlooker copied them down as they came from the lips of the "poets":

Betty's

Oh, moon!
Big round moon!
You are the witch's lantern.
She carries you around at night
And sprinkles down the soft moonlight.

Ellen's

Oh, moon bowl!
Who has tossed you up into the sky
And made you spill all your lovely golden milk?

Helen's

The moon is but a golden ball.
It rolls across the sky at night.
Oh, pretty moon, won't you come down
And let me roll away with you?

Ruth's

What a queer thing I saw
Up in the sky!
A golden platter—
It must have served the fairies.

Wilson's

Oh, moon! Oh, moon!
How do you hold the stars so tight
And let them come out again at night?

Billy's

I saw Fairyland
Go sailing by.
I never knew where it was
Till now—
Up in the sky!

Jack's

As I am playing out at night
I see the moon roll by;
It smiles at me—
Then rolls behind a cloud.

Paul's

Oh, moon!
Have you lost your golden gown?
It has slipped down over the trees and grass.

Lois's

My lovely moon—
It seems to me
Your radiance spreads
O'er land and sea
And everywhere—
You shine for me!

Betty's

The night is dull
But the moon cheers it up
As she says:
"Cheer up—cheer up—
For me!"

Jack's

The fairies have lost their gold;
It fell on tree and hill;
It is the moonlight.

Billy's

Oh, moon!
Where did you get the shoe polish
To polish my shoes?

A talk about fire-flies ended in these poems by the children:

Mary Margaret's

The sky is a great big jewel box
With pretty jewels dropping out of it.

Margaret's

Pretty little fire-flies
Lighting here and there,
You are fairy street lights
High up in the air!

Margaret's

The Queen of the Night
Has broken her beads;
They're falling
Everywhere!

Betty's

Last night before I went to sleep
I saw the fire-flies' sewing circle.
What fun they were having!
I know that they were weaving
The fairies' lovely robes.

The common dandelion in its yellow and gray stages prompted these pretty thoughts:

Lois's

There are little old men on my lawn
With wee gray caps on.
They bend and talk,
Bend and talk,
All day long.

Margaret C.

Frowsy top! Frowsy top!
I'd hate to be you!
You'll soon be baldheaded.
I'd hate to be you!

Lois's

Oh, you naughty wind!
Stop blowing my hair, I say!
Oo——oo——oo——oo!——
He's blown it all away!

Mary's

Sweet little dandelion
So bright and yellow!
I'll bet you're having fun—
Aren't you, old fellow?

Virginia's

Oh, yellow sunbeams,
Fallen from the sky,
Are you trying to go back?
Why?

Walter's

Sunny day—cloudy day—
Aren't you afraid
You'll blow away?

Mary's

Little yellow bonnets,
On little green standards,
Where is the milliner?

James's

I'd like to be a dandelion
And wear a yellow cap;
Then by and by a gray cap.
But then, again,—I should not like
To be a dandelion
For the dandelion Hatter
Soon runs out of caps.

Lois's

Naughty little dandelions
Bend and talk together.
They shouldn't keep secrets from me—
No sir! No—sir—ee!

Helen's

Pretty little dandelions
Dancing through my lawn!
I wonder where you're going
As you dance on and on.

Billy's

Fuzzy little dandelion
You'd better look out!
Mr. Lawnmower is whizzing down the avenue.
It's too late, old scout!

Freda's

Little gray dandelion
You'd better run away!
The lawnmower is coming—
Nearer—nearer—
If you don't—
There will be gray hairs
All over your green pillow.

After the children had heard and enjoyed many poems about trees, they gave these thoughts:

Jack's

The great tall maple
With its outstretched arms
Sways and sways
In the sunlight.

William's

When I go out
To our great elm tree
And say—"I'm going to climb you!"
It nods its head
As if it said,
"No—o! No—o!"

James W.

Every day when it is sunny
I see a great tall artist.
He paints and paints all day.
But on rainy days
I can't find his paintings.
(Tree shadows.)

Helen's

I think I'd like to be
A poplar tree
And sway—and sway—
And let the wind
Wash all my limbs;
And then—I'd sway again!

Martha's

Out in my neighbor's yard
Grows a tall poplar tree.
It swings and sways—
Swings and sways.
It must be the fan
That makes the wind
That blows on me.

Having enjoyed poems on storms, thunder and lightning, and the dark, the children gave these fancies:

Wilson's

God's maiden
Is flying over our heads:
I can see
Her long hair stringing wildly.

Paul's

On every stormy night
I see
A hunter riding by!
With a twist and a turn
He throws his spear
And kills the deer
He's after.

Billy's

Boom, boom!
Go the cannons.
Who are having a fight?
The wind and the thunder,
The wind and the thunder!
Boom, boom!
Go the cannons.

Wilson's

Boom! Crash!
Zigzag lines
Dart through the sky!
Who is signalling
As he passes by?

Betty's

Oh, oh, oh!
How you blow!
What—what's the matter—
Oh!
Angry wind,
Noisy wind,
Blow! Blow! Blow!

Marjorie's

The night is dark and still
With the fairies stealing through.

Billy's

The guns flash!
And then boom!
And on come the soldiers:
Mud—wind—rain!

Granville's

Which way does the wind blow?
And where does he go?
He rides through the rain,
He rides over the snow.

Stimulated by hearing some modern rain poems, the children expressed these fancies regarding the sound of rain upon the roof, raindrops on the window, and rain falling in lines:

Francis's

Rain like a slanting hill
Did the fairies weave you
To slide down upon
At midnight?

Wilson's

Oh, wind! Oh, wind!
Is some one combing
Your long gray hair?

James's

One day I saw a fairy airplane
Floating around in the sky;
And from it were dropping
Thousands of tiny gray bombs.

Lois's

Tip! Tap!
Fast and low—
Loud and slow—
Go the tiny hammers of the rain.
Tip! Tap!
Tip! Tap!
Soon the rain house will be built.

Kathryn's

Oh, rain, rain, rain!
You sound like company coming!

Walter's

You pretty gray drops of solder—
What is God mending?

Gerald's

You tiny silver wires
Reaching from sky to earth,
What messages are you bringing?

Mary W.

Piece after piece
Of fine silver thread!
What is unravelling?

Betty's

As I looked out the window pane
I saw a drop come down upon it.
It winked at me—and then went on
Saying, "Goodbye, I'll come again."

Martha's

As I looked out my window
On a very rainy day,
I saw some tiny fairy balls
Roll out of the sky so gray.

Wilson's

Oh, tiny little threads
Are you reaching down
To help mother mend my clothes?

Billy B.

Delicate little slanting trapezes
Hung down from the sky roof—
Don't break and let the fairies fall!

Helen's

The grass is having a party.
Just see the crowds going!
How they hurry—hurry—

Given the privilege of choosing their own subjects, the children gave this rather interesting variety of poems:

Writing on My Blackboard

When I write on my blackboard
My thoughts just seem to run
Straight down from my head to my fingers
As fast as anything.

Betty

A Swim

I love to go in swimming
When the water looks like gold;
But when I get out again
I'm very, very cold!

Marjorie

Morning Dew

Last night
Before I went to bed
Mother said
I could wear her pearls.
I lost them;
I went to bed worried;
This morning I found them all again
Scattered over the grass.

Betty K.

Frozen Milk

Every winter morning
When I go out
To get the milk bottle
It raises its cap
And politely says,
"How do you do, today?"

Mary C.

Swinging

Oh, I like to go up in a swing—
To and fro—
High and low—
Oh, what fun!

Martha

Toadstools

I saw the fairies' council grounds
But the fairies were gone. This morning
Their queer little stools all stood around
Awaiting the fairies' returning.

Betty K.

Tulips

One morning as Miss Tulip
Woke up, so very gay,
I saw her with her best dress on—
Jewelled, the first of May.

Betty K.

Bubbles

Little fairy gas bags
Floating in the air—
But now they have exploded
And fairies come down in wee parachutes.

Billy

A Road

Pretty gray ribbon—
Winding, winding—
I like you!
You lead to my grandmother's.

Marjorie

Smoke

Curly haired, gray haired,
Old man of the smoke
Starting off on your flight.

James

Tiny Yellow Chick

I have a little pillow—
Sweet and soft and yellow.
You can never guess it!
A tiny yellow chick.

Mary Margaret

Busy!

Sway, sway!
Big elm tree!
Work, work!
Little bee!
Don't you ever get tired?

Ruth

Wind and Trees

Cooling breeze, gentle breeze!
How you love to rock the trees!
Up they go, down they go,
Nodding—nodding—
In a row.

Virginia

Hollyhocks

Pretty, pretty hollyhocks!
Walking toward my garden gate,
You make me think of olden times
When mamma was a little girl.

Mary W.

Hollyhocks in Wind

First over—then back—
Hollyhocks sighing in the breeze.

Walter

The poems lack something as they appear on paper for not the least of their attractiveness lies in the voice and manner of the pupils as they give them orally, fresh from the making.

There is apparent a relish and a zest for one's own poem that may be pardoned these beginners. The reader is asked to give them every advantage that sympathy and respect for sincere effort can afford.

To make children more sensitive to the beauty in the common things of their environment, to give them the pleasure and satisfaction that come from hearing others say the things that perhaps they feel, yet cannot express, and to encourage them to think

pretty thoughts in the form of poems are three interactive purposes in the use of modern poetry with children. To be made aware of beauty through poetry leads them to find satisfaction in the expression of beauty in poetry; to attempt to create beauty makes them more sensitive to the attempts of others; while this sensitiveness results in further awareness of beauty, continued seeking for satisfaction in poetic expressions of beauty, and repeated effort to create poetic beauty.

Modern poetry is marked by sincerity, simplicity, and apparent spontaneity. Children respond to it because they like the tone and spirit they find in it. In a very genuine sense the modern poets and the children speak the same language.

A little boy expressed the sound of a heavy rain upon the roof in these words:

"Thump! Thump! Thump!
A great bear walking across my roof."

The name of one of the most modern of the modernists comes to the lips of adults who hear that little poem. The similarity in style is striking.

It is significant that in the wake of the modern poets and their wide use in the schools come such interesting results from children as appear in "Singing Youth" by Mable Mountsier and "Creative Youth" by Hugh Mearns. These, of course, represent the creative work of somewhat select groups of children, but throughout our public schools children are trying their wings and heartily enjoying their flights even though they be nothing more than flutterings. The longer, steadier, higher flights may come to some few of these sincere little poets. Let us encourage and stimulate them to continued effort by keeping them in touch with the poems of those who succeed in saying for them in such delightful ways the things they "feel in their hearts" and cannot express.