

## BOOKS

*Scottish Fairies, the Chair Wind, and How to Talk to a Firefly*



I MIGHT as well admit that I disagree with the Child Study Association and other official selectors of reading for young children. Their selections may exactly hit the mark as far as children's needs are concerned, but they so mercilessly neglect to study the needs of the adult, who must, after all, read all the books over and over, and, although probably in no danger of being *formed* by them, runs other risks, such as losing his mind. Also, however suited to the child a book is, it is no pleasure to give a Christmas present one doesn't like oneself.

"The Thinking Book" (ages two to five), by Sandol Stoddard Warburg, designed and illustrated by Ivan Chermayeff (Atlantic-Little, Brown), is as beautiful to look at as any children's book this year. It is in the form of a dialogue between a mother and her little boy, the child's part unspoken. The mother is doing her best to turn the little boy into a useful citizen, to persuade him to get up and wash and dress himself, but he is slow as a pudding to bake, as a turtle half awake, as a peach in the sun, as a snail going to run, as a handful of honey, as jokes that aren't funny, as nothing to play and nothing to say on a rainy day—because he is *thinking*. When his mother asks him to "put on that shirt, the yellow one," he is thinking—thinking of all the pieces of dust that float and shine in the sunshine, and he is thinking of lemons and limes and oranges and yellows; when she reminds him to wash both hands and wash them clean, he is thinking of washing clean, of water in pails, in pools, in streams, and cool things like smooth pebbles and all the shells and the bells and the wells. . . . "That's why I couldn't put my socks on. That's why I couldn't put my shoes on. That's why I couldn't lace them up."

Ivan Chermayeff's pictures are done with large brush strokes in bold designs and brilliant colors—blue, black, lemon yellow, and red. There is a question in my mind whether children in general will get as much delight out of the text of this book—which is marvellous—as their parents will, but they can always look at the pictures, listen to the nice sounds, and *think*.

Christmas stockings should have, poking out through the top, a doll, a drum, a candy cane, and one corner of a storybook. "Big Brother" (ages two to five), by Charlotte Zolotow, with pictures by Mary Chalmers (Harper), is just the right size. "Once there was a little sister," it begins, "and a big brother who teased her." He tells her he put tacks in her bed (he didn't, really) and she cries. He pretends to eat her candy and she cries. He pretends that he thinks she has three eyes, that he is going to break an egg in her hair, and so on, and each time she cries, until one day he pretends to lock her in her room and she looks up from her crayoning and sees that he hasn't locked her in at all, so she doesn't cry, and that's the end of the teasing and the beginning of a new era, as he sits down on the floor beside her and they color together until suppertime. These scenes

of malice and dismay take place in a characteristically Mary Chalmers world, where the hens are companionable and inquiring, the cat puts its head in the lap of an old-fashioned doll, and there is a flower-edged brook for cooling the ankles.

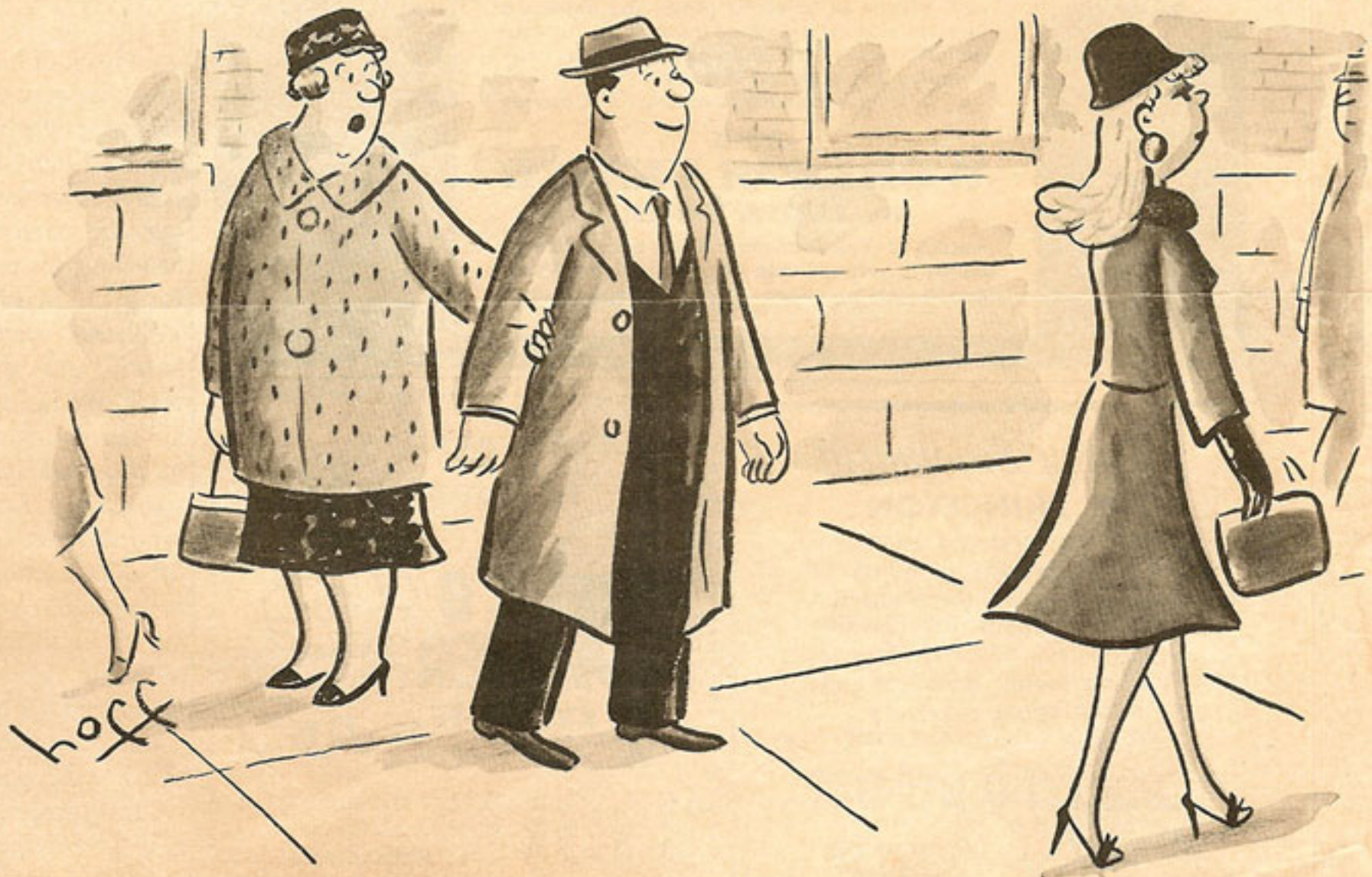
"Bruno Munari's ABC" (ages two to five; World) is a lighthearted alphabet book, full of the surrealistic surprises that one has come to associate with this Italian artist. Each double-page spread is an experiment in balancing colors, textures, and space. It is as if every letter had produced its own mood and color. S is a Sack of Stars and Snow for Santa Claus, all kinds of Shells, and a Sign (Stop); for V there is a fly (who has flown over from F) on a Voyage, and also a Vertical Violet Violin; W is a Watermelon on a Wagon with a Wooden Wheel, and Z is that same insistent fly going *Zzzzz*.

An alphabet book of a very different and more advanced kind, for children who are actually learning to read, is "The American Speller," by Barbara Cooney, who also did the illustrations for it (Crowell). This is an adaptation of Noah Webster's "Blue-Backed Speller," which was published a hundred and seventy-five years ago and was the initial part of an ambitious plan to

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"Sam, what's happened to us?"