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*Margaret Lane*

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**B**ORN IN Cambridge, Massachusetts, Margaret Lane lived as a child in the shadow of Harvard University where her father was librarian. She attended the Shady Hill School, an experimental and open-air school, the Cambridge Latin School from which she graduated in 1922, and Wellesley College, following in her mother's footsteps there. Torn between becoming a children's librarian and teaching mathematics, luck sent her to the high school library in Brookline, Massachusetts, which in turn led to a year at Columbia University Library School, and ten years later to a Master's degree at the same school. Her thesis, "Development of Library Service to Public Schools in New Jersey" was published in the *School Library Quarterly* of the New Jersey School Library Association.

Miss Lane's experience has been in the school and children's library fields, in Plattsburg, Delmar, and Potsdam, New York, and in Brockton, Massachusetts. Since 1946 she has been children's librarian in the Memorial Hall Library in Andover, Massachusetts, which she finds rewarding because the work is so varied. She especially enjoys storytelling and helping children find the books they like best.

Miss Lane is a member of the American Library Association, the Massachusetts Library Association, the New England Round Table of Children's Librarians, the New England Library Association, and the New England School Library Association, also of the Merrimac Valley Library Association of which she was president in 1950-1952.

The choice of Rachel Field as her subject for the Hewins Lecture was first, because she has always liked her books and enjoyed using her stories and poems with the story hour children, and second, because each summer she has spent some time on the island next to Sutton Island, Maine, which Miss Field loved so well.

Her special interests, aside from books and children, are birds, as shown by her membership in the Massachusetts Audubon Society, hiking, mountain climbing, and gardening.

In September 1963, Miss Lane is going as a school librarian to the American Academy for Girls in Üsküdar, Turkey, a school for Turkish girls maintained by the United Church Board for World Ministries, where she expects to spend two or three years.

# Rachel Field and Her Contribution to Children's Literature

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*by Margaret Lane*

“If once you have slept on an island  
You'll never be quite the same;  
You may look as you looked the day before  
And go by the same old name.

You may bustle about in street and shop;  
You may sit at home and sew,  
But you'll see blue water and wheeling gulls  
Wherever your feet may go.

You may chat with the neighbors of this and that  
And close to your fire keep,  
But you'll hear ship whistle and lighthouse bell  
And tides beat through your sleep.

Oh, you won't know why, and you can't say how  
Such change upon you came,  
But — once you have slept on an island  
You'll never be quite the same!” [1]

**P**ERHAPS that is one of the reasons why I have chosen to write about Rachel Field. I feel a kinship with her in her love of Maine and islands, in her appreciation of people, history, fantasy, in her zest for adventure.

I never met her, even though I have spent some time almost every summer on Little Cranberry, the island next door to Sutton Island, where she bought the “Playhouse,” and lived for four months or so each year. But I have loved her books. My first contact with any of her writings was the summer of 1921 when we gave the play, “Three Pills in a Bottle,” in the Fairy Ring in our woods in Boxford. I was the Washerwoman, and my sister the Washerwoman's Soul. And then came the joy of using parts of *Hitty* and *Calico Bush* in story-telling, and of watching the children's happy faces as they listened or took the book home afterwards. I like, too, to read aloud bits of her poems and share in the children's appreciation, in their smiles and in their chuckles.

I have enjoyed finding the material for this paper. First it was rereading all those of her books that I had known and reading for the first time the few that I did not know. Then I searched in various libraries and historical collections for the facts of her life and for articles that she might

have written herself that would give me a glimpse of how she thought and worked. But most interesting of all was meeting some of her own friends and talking with them. I visited Mrs. Louise Seaman Bechtel who was Children's Editor at Macmillan when Miss Field's books were being published. I called on Miss Dorothy Lathrop and was introduced to Hitty. I had lunch with Miss Rosamond Lamb who was the friend who accompanied Miss Field when she called on Samuel Sanford for the last time and received from him his grandfather's journal on which *God's Pocket* is based. I spent a delightful afternoon with Miss Louise Bray who told me of Miss Field's 47 Workshop days and who allowed me to read many letters written to her by Miss Field. I called on Miss Severn and Miss Halman, two of her closest friends in New York. I cannot speak of all who have helped me (in person or by letter), but everyone has been most kind and I thank them all.

Rachel Field, although she was born (September 19, 1894) "a stone's throw from Murray Hill," on East 40th Street, New York City, always considered herself a New Englander. When she was six months old, her father, a doctor, died, and the family moved from New York City to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the Field family home. Here where her famous great-uncles, Cyrus W. Field and Henry B. Field had grown up she lived as a child. The glimpses of her that have been left show us a happy little girl, rather chubby, with bright auburn hair, a child full of life and interested in everything, flowers, islands in the brook, acting, cooking, elves, a glorious hodgepodge of this and that. While she was not conscious of it at the time, here were the roots of her later interests, and the foundation for her writing.

One day as she wandered along the grassy road toward Lee, picking a harebell here and there, around the turn of the road came a band of gypsies. Perhaps she had heard tales of gypsies carrying off little girls, perhaps not. At any rate she was frightened and ran screaming to escape over the fence into the woods beyond. But the fence was of barbed wire and she was entangled by it. A gypsy coming to release her just frightened her the more and she cried the louder. Only when she had been set gently down on the other side, and looked back at the gypsies with their many beads and smiling faces, did she decide that she liked gypsies after all. In her first collection of poems, *The Pointed People*, is a poem "Gypsies" which undoubtedly grew out of this experience. Part of it reads:

"Last night the gypsies came  
Nobody knows from where.  
Where they've gone to nobody knows,  
And nobody seems to care!

. . . . .

There were black-eyed girls in scarlet shawls,  
Old folk wrinkled with years,  
Men with handkerchiefs round their throats  
And silver loops in their ears.  
Ragged and red like maple leaves  
When frost comes in the fall,  
The gypsies stayed but a single night;  
In the morning gone were all —" [2]

Later she wrote the poem “Old Gypsies.”

“Over the sky’s dark roads  
The caravan moon moves slow,  
And all the hosts of stars  
Forever restless go:  
Unwearied gypsy companies  
Traveling the centuries.” [1]

She, and her sister Elizabeth three years older, attended a small private school of about ten children run by Miss Brewer and Miss Byington. Rachel was to look back and write of her days there:

“Literally I wrote before I could read. It wasn’t that I could not have learned to read earlier, I knew the letters and all that, but it was so much pleasanter to have my mother read real books to me than to plod through the infantile sort of stuff I could have read myself. I went to a little school kept by two maiden ladies. At the time they seemed old ladies to me, but I know now that they could not have been old. I loved poetry and one of them read us a great deal of poetry. I developed very early a facility for memorizing it. I even got so that when my teacher had read a poem to me once I could repeat it from just that single hearing of it.” [3]

In this school she had her first taste of acting. Perhaps it is not usual for seven- and eight-year-olds to act *The Merchant of Venice*, but one December with Rachel as Shylock, Miss Brewer decided it could be done,— and it was! The next June Rachel was Rebecca in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, acted on the school porch with two clothes-horses faintly disguised as a pair of horses, and two sheets to serve as stage curtains. Shylock and Rebecca were contrasting parts, yes, but Rachel acted each of them admirably. Later in Springfield she had the chance to see *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* on the stage and to meet Kate Douglas Wiggin. She even skipped school one afternoon, to see at least part of it a second time, sitting this time by the author and talking with her.

The theater was always to mean much to Rachel. *Peter Pan* was the first play she saw. Once she wrote

“Something had gone wrong. At this late date I forget the reason, and it probably was a good one, but at all events I was not going to the theater with the rest. I must have been eleven or a little older at the time and it mattered terribly. Theaters were few and far between and movies practically unknown, so I hoped up to the last minute that a miracle would happen. Sometimes they did, and you found yourself let in at the last, just when you were most despairing. I reminded myself of Cinderella and the ball, an encouraging story to recall on almost any occasion. But on this particular one, it did me no good and I saw the lucky ones setting off. The last minute had come and gone and Fate had done nothing about it. I remember as if it were yesterday the sound of that door closing.” [4]

She lived from play to play, reckoning time by calculating “before *Peter Pan* or after” seeing Maude Adams at the stage door.

Her love of plays never languished. She had a sense for drama which even crept into her poetry, witness the dialogue with the elf in “Elfin Berries” or the play acting of the “Quiet Child” or “My Inside Self.” These two poems picture a child, sturdy, prosaic in everyday life, but full of lightness, joy and mischief in imagination.

“By day it’s a very good girl am I;  
I sit by the fire and sew,  
I darn the stockings and sweep the floors  
And hang the pots in a row.  
But, oh, by night when the candle’s out  
And my bedroom black as pitch,  
I’ve just to crackle my thumbs to turn  
Into a wild bad witch.

. . .

“Nights of storm and nights of stars  
Are all the same to me —  
It’s up on my broom and straddle the wind  
As it whips my pigtails free.  
Over the chimney pots to go,  
Past the jumbled lights of towns,  
With the hosts of good black trees beyond,  
And dim sheep-sprinkled downs.

“No one knows when morning comes  
And I’m back in bed once more,  
With tangled hair and eyes a-blink  
From the sunshine on the floor—  
No one knows of that witch who rode  
In the windy dark and wild—  
And I let them praise my sober ways,  
And call me a quiet child!” [2]

In her childhood days in Stockbridge we find the beginnings of another interest, an interest that was to influence her all her life, — her love of islands. For the *Horn Book Magazine* in November 1926 she wrote:

“There’s something about islands, I don’t know what it is, but I simply cannot keep them out of the things I write. I always find them there along with pointed trees, toadstools, children, and patchwork quilts. Even when I was a very little girl and lived among hills with no larger body of water than a brook handy, I made islands of the stones in it. I made islands out of sponges stuck full of ferns and placed conveniently (since the inconsiderate owners of sponges were always calling for their return!) in a garden pool. I even found an island big enough to hold me in the tiny triangle of grass where a signpost

pointed the way of three brown country roads. I used to sit there and pretend the roads were ships.” [5]

This early love of islands is reflected in the poem entitled “The Grass Island,” in *Taxis and Toadstools*. And again the same idea appears in her little book *The Yellow Shop* in which the children, Will and Rebecca, set up a lemonade and sandwich stand on a grass island where three roads meet.

Once a reporter asked Rachel Field if she believed in fairies. Her answer sheds light on how the practical and the imaginative were entwined in all she did as a child. She answered,

“I believed not so much in them as about them. I was willing to accept them as real characters in some of the stories I loved. When the story was finished the characters vanished just as characters that now come to life out of the pages of a good novel are gone as soon as some other interest takes the place of the novel. As a child I could pop out of Elfland into the kitchen as quick as a wink. A moment after a fairy tale had held all my attention I could be just as deeply entranced in the cook and what she was getting for dinner, and whether or not she was going to let me stir up something to bake in her nice hot oven. I always liked musing around in the kitchen.” [6]

This same mixture of the practical with the imaginative is evident in her books and gives a special charm to many of her stories and poems. The Elfin Pup’s lightness and springiness is contrasted to his size and clumsiness once he has tasted human food. Hitty tells her own story and yet keeps her doll-like individuality.

Years later when Rachel Field gave to the Stockbridge Historical Collection a copy of her book *The Pointed People* she marked four poems as being Stockbridge poems,— “To See-Saw” (her little dog), “The Gypsies,” “Blue,” and “The House in the Woods.” In these we catch glimpses of the child and what she will be, of her ever careful absorption in detail, her feeling for animals, her love of adventure; and we can share with her the thrill of the blueness of the bluebird:

“There at the old wood’s edge  
I saw a bluebird fly.  
And its wings beat bright against  
The paler blue of sky:  
They seemed to burn a way  
Into the sky and me,  
Till my heart stood still in a hush  
Of ecstasy....” [2]

Her childhood in Stockbridge had to give way to school days in Springfield, but her awareness of everything around her was only to deepen in the years ahead. She was glad to move to Springfield though she was surprised to find herself behind her contemporaries, and begrudged any time she had to give to algebra and other subjects she did not like. But of her history teacher she said:

“I think I had the best history teacher in the United States. I would not take anything for having had Dr. Jessie M. Law as my teacher of English and American history. She taught me to love history, and made it real and vital.” [6]

Perhaps this was the beginning of the interest that led her to writing books with historical backgrounds, *Hitty*, *Calico Bush*, *Time Out of Mind* and others. She and a friend spent much time in the library and in trying their hands at writing poetry and other things. She was a contributor to the St. Nicholas League, winning the coveted Silver and Gold Badges, and having several of her poems and essays printed. These show that even then her powers of observation were keen and that she liked to play with words. She wrote easily and in her senior year won an essay contest open to pupils in three schools, and a prize of \$20.00.

This was helpful when she applied for admission to Radcliffe College, where she was admitted in 1914 as a special student because of her excellence in writing. Being a special student she was not encumbered with courses she did not want, and could spend all her time on courses in English and writing. She took English 5 under Professor Copeland, English 47 and 47a with Professor George P. Baker, and was a member of the 47 Workshop for two years. The 47 Workshop had grown out of English 47 and 47a, courses in drama writing, because the students had felt that they could only judge their plays with accuracy if they could see them staged. Three of Rachel Field's plays were produced there, “Rise up, Jennie Smith” (1918), “Time Will Tell” (1920), and the outstanding one “Three Pills in a Bottle” (1917), which has been used constantly by amateur groups all over the country. It is a play very characteristic of her, combining whimsy with everyday life, the story of a very sick little boy, Tony, who meets the souls of three persons who pass by his window. Each soul is entirely different from its owner, and each has a pain. To them he gives the pills that were meant to cure him. It reminds one of her poem “My Inside-Self.” And the fact that Tony gives away pills that he really needed is like Rachel herself. She was always giving. Later she was to look back at her 47 Workshop days and her rewarding work there, and was to realize that playwriting was excellent preparation for novel writing:

“In plays people never sit side by side for hours and talk. They move about, pick things up and lay them down again, make gestures and the way they do these things helps us to know what they are thinking or what was behind the thought of the playwright.” [6]

This sense for the dramatic made the action in her stories and novels move along without hindrance.

Later she lived in New York City on East 10th Street in the wintertime, and on a Maine island for four months in the summer, two places the antithesis of one another, but two places which she loved. She was sensitive to the beauty in city streets, to the many people as they went about their businesses, to the intimacy of little city parks, but when she came to her island — the island she had fallen in love with when at fifteen she spent a summer there studying water color with a cousin — then it was the sweep of sea and sky, the pointed firs, the wheeling gulls, or the mushrooms of many colors that caught her eye.

Her first job was in the Editorial Department of Famous Players-Lasky, producers of silent motion pictures. Here she wrote synopses of plays and stories, but in her spare time she was

trying her hand at writing verse and short plays. Already she had material enough for two books, a book of poems called *The Pointed People* and a volume of short plays, *Six Plays*, both of which were published in 1924. In *The Pointed People* the poems reflect her life in Stockbridge, her days in Cambridge, her love of Maine, and her feeling for the city.

“How could I learn philosophy  
Or read great books of history,  
When May came into Cambridge town,  
Sending the petals drifting down  
From tall horse-chestnut trees alight  
With flower-candles, waxy white?” [11]

One gets a whiff of the Maine fir in

“Little green, green fir trees,  
Trooping down the headlands  
Where the old sea tugs and seethes  
At the farthest ledges—  
Little bristling fir trees,  
No one trims your branches;  
Woodsmen with their axes sharp  
Always pass you by.  
Never shall you tower  
Like your inland neighbors;  
You the wind and sea have kept  
Small as gypsy children,  
Shaggy-haired and shy,  
Crowding close together  
Wrapt in cloaks of tattered green  
Your sharp brown arms poke through—  
Little sea-dwarfed fir trees,  
Luckier than your fellows,  
Young as waves and fairies are,  
And every wise small star.” [2]

Or one asks with her

“Do skyscrapers ever grow tired  
Of holding themselves up high?  
Do they ever shiver on frosty nights  
With their tops against the sky?  
Do they feel lonely sometimes  
Because they have grown so tall?  
Do they ever wish they could lie right down  
And never get up at all?” [2]

These poems, as also the ones in her next volume, *Taxis and Toadstools*, bring to children today, as they did when she first wrote them, a glimpse into the world of fantasy, and an understanding of themselves. A nine-year-old girl of my acquaintance listed nine poems that she likes especially, her choices ranging from the realistic “The Animal Store,” to the fanciful “Elfin Berries,” also two thoughtful ones, “My Inside-Self” and “Some People.”

Her plays, too, show great variety, some of them skirting the realm of fantasy, others dealing strictly with everyday life. Her very first play “Everygirl,” a morality play written when she was seventeen, was sent to Kate Douglas Wiggin for approval and criticism and was published in *St. Nicholas* two years later, 1913, bringing her \$30. Her first important play, “Three Pills in a Bottle,” is imaginative; “Rise Up Jennie Smith,” is realistic, as is “The Fifteenth Candle,” a play of tenement life. These were her first copyrighted plays; the first of these was included with five other plays to make the collection *Six Plays*. All her plays are appropriate for children and young people to act, because the action and staging are simple and straightforward, full of vitality and imagination, giving the actor (or reader) an opportunity to experience varying aspects of life always with an insight into character. The plays are never melodramatic, but on the other hand, they are not dull. These plays and the ones that follow in *The Cross-Stitch Heart* and *Patchwork Plays* include themes that are characteristic of Rachel Field’s interests, — those bordering on fantasy, such as “The Sentimental Scarecrow,” and “The Cross-Stitch Heart,” those based on her New England heritage, “Polly Patchwork” (an old-time spelling match), “Greasy Luck” (whaling days in Nantucket), and “Little Square Toes” (a child of Old Deerfield); plays giving a glimpse of English life a hundred years ago, “Chimney Sweeps’ Holiday” and “The Nine Days’ Queen” (Lady Jane Grey on the night before her execution); and those plays depicting various phases of modern life, “At the Junction,” “Bargains in Cathay,” and “Wisdom Teeth.” Most of the plays have also appeared in acting editions and so have been easily available to amateur groups. “Three Pills in a Bottle” was so popular with amateur groups that it was acted week in, week out for a long time.

But Rachel Field found that her spare time was not enough for all the writing she wished to do, and she gave up her job at the Famous Players-Lasky. Besides writing verse and plays she tried a novel. “It went the rounds,” she wrote, “and was turned down as it should have been. But some of the editors wrote me letters about it and they all said that the first part, dealing with the heroine’s childhood, was the best.” [7] This encouraged her to turn to children’s stories, so that for the next ten years or so she devoted herself to this kind of writing, the high point being *Hitty* for which she won the Newbery Medal given each year for the most distinguished contribution to children’s literature.

Later she explained her philosophy of writing for children:

“In writing books for children it is not necessary to have contacts with children. Of course it helps to know children. But if you have it in you to write children’s books, you can write them anywhere,—alone on a desert island, if you have enough paper and pencils.... It seems to me far more important to be able to remember exactly how a thing impressed you when you were a child than to guess how it may impress another child. Children’s natures do not change perceptibly from one generation to another. It is their dress, their speech and their manners that change, not their natures.” [6]

She felt that information for children should not be sugar-coated with story, that books of information and books of imagination are both wanted by the child but that they should be separate. An author should not write down for children. If an author writes a book “to please himself it’s likely to have vitality and spirit and a lack of condescension and self-consciousness.” [8] She felt that she should be just as careful in her phrasing when writing for children as she was in books for adults, for “children are just as observant... and appreciate the right word and the apt description just as surely as grown people.” [9]

Her first stories for children were small books, some of them calling to mind the early chapbooks. *The Alphabet for Boys and Girls* and *A Little Book of Days* were two of these published in 1926 and 1927, both illustrated with her own drawings, done with a reed pen and water colors, small figures of boys and girls very gay and childlike. The verses are fresh and appealing. In a letter to one of her friends she tells how the *Alphabet* was written to comfort herself after a play had been turned down by *The Country Gentleman*. Doubleday accepted it immediately. [10]

*Eliza and the Elves*, published at the same time, was written largely while she was in Maine. Of it she wrote:

“But there is this about toadstools and ideas,— they must be picked right away. If you don’t they vanish the way they came. ‘Eliza’ was like that. She almost did slip away from me, and I couldn’t possibly have caught her if Elizabeth MacKinstry hadn’t happened to be on ‘the Island’ too, to help with her reed pen and ink bottle.” [5]

The title story in this volume is about Eliza whom the elves finally carried off when she was thirteen years old. “The Elfin Pup” tells of a puppy whose nose drew him to eat human food so that he grew large and clumsy, and was unhappy until he came upon a giant who picked him up between thumb and finger and called him “a scrap of a pup.” The verses interspersed between the stories are some of her best about elfin doings. They include “Elfin Berries,” “Elfin Buttons,” and “The Seven Ages of Elf-hood.”

This book and the one that appeared the next year, *The Magic Pawnshop* are books which carry the young reader into the realm of fantasy, setting free the imagination, and yet always portraying characters who are true to life, and who stir one’s sympathy and understanding. *The Magic Pawnshop* is somewhat longer than *Eliza and the Elves*, containing a sustained plot, and more characters, each one of whom is well drawn.

It was about this time that Rachel Field discovered that Louise Seaman (now Mrs. Bechtel), Children’s Editor at Macmillan would pay \$250 for small stories to be published in the “Little Library” format, and \$250 more to the illustrator. Miss Field was frequently in need of quick money, for she supported an invalid sister, and so in 1928 she took advantage of this. *Little Dog Toby*, written and illustrated by Miss Field, grew out of her trip to England in 1920 and her fascination with the Punch and Judy shows.

Two other little books were published at this time by Doubleday, *Polly Patchwork*, and *Pocket Handkerchief Park*. In these, as in *Little Dog Toby*, she leaves fantasy for realism. *Polly Patchwork* is about an old-fashioned spelling match won by a little girl who had to wear a dress made from a patchwork quilt; *Pocket Handkerchief Park* pictures a tiny city park about to be auctioned off, a little park that means much in the lives of the children and grown-ups who play and work around it. In all of these books we enter intimately into the lives and feelings of the characters. Each one is an individual and through each one our understanding of people is broadened. We begin to know that people are the same everywhere.

And then in 1929 came *Hitty*. The story of how *Hitty* came to be written is well known. In an antique shop window on Eighth Street in New York City was a little six and a half inch doll, which Rachel Field had often gazed at as she went by. Her friend Miss Dorothy Lathrop had also admired it. Both had fallen in love with it, but each was unaware of the other's interest. One evening as they were going out to dinner Miss Lathrop said "Let's go round and see Hitty." "Who is she?" asked Miss Field. And so they discovered that they both had loved her on sight, but that she was too expensive for either to purchase. Miss Lathrop went back to Albany, and Miss Field kept her eye on Hitty, only to write one day that Hitty had disappeared from the window. Sold? Miss Lathrop wrote back suggesting that Miss Field go into the shop to inquire for her, that they might buy her together, and maybe make a book of her. The inquiry revealed that Hitty was out of the window merely because another customer had asked about her. Whereupon Miss Field bought Hitty, had her sent to Miss Lathrop, and the decision was made to make a book of her story. That summer Miss Lathrop visited Rachel Field on her Maine island. Together they worked out the outline for the story as they sat on the piazza looking out across the water or before the fire in the evenings. Later as Miss Field finished each chapter she sent it along to Miss Lathrop to illustrate, and so the book *Hitty* came into being. Laughingly Miss Field had said to Miss Seaman, "This will win the Newbery Medal; I think I'll ask for bids from several publishers!" But Miss Seaman told her that would not do, that Macmillan would give her a sealed bid, but that she must not accept any from other publishers. It was a great success, winning many favorable reviews and being awarded the Newbery Medal!

"Perhaps, just perhaps, Hitty didn't live in Maine a hundred years ago, but she has all the character and virtues of the Maine born, and she looks like Maine and like no other place." [12]

So wrote Miss Field.

Briefly, *Hitty* tells the story of her first one hundred years, how the peddler carved her one winter for little Phoebe Preble in Maine, how before a year was gone she had set out on a whaling voyage with Phoebe and her mother on her father's sailing vessel, how the ship was burned and they were marooned on a lonely cannibal island, where Hitty was set up as a Goddess; how she was lost again in China, finally came into the possession of Little Thankful, a missionary's daughter in India, and so returned to the United States to live for a while in Philadelphia. In the following years she heard Adelina Patti sing, met Mr. Whittier, spent years in a haymow, was stolen from an exhibition in New Orleans, became an artist's model, and finally returned to Maine and the old Preble house, at last to be auctioned off to an antique dealer, where she wrote her memoirs.

Why was this book accounted a “most distinguished contribution to children’s literature”? Perhaps because Miss Field was true to her conviction that no book for children should be written just for them. She commented on *Hitty* in a letter to her friend Mrs. Emerson, “I think it (*Hitty*) will amuse you more than the younger generation. I really wrote it for our age.” [13] But a child this spring commented: “There is never a dull moment. It’s exciting, and so many things happen.” There is swift sure movement from beginning to end, a plot well thought out and tied together. *Hitty* herself is well drawn, and tells her story with integrity. Each of the characters in the book lives in its own right and is distinct and true. Here is presented to the child a broad sweep of human nature, children with their varied interests and emotions from six-year-old Phoebe in her strict New England home to Little Thankful in Philadelphia ashamed of her tiny faded doll; and adults, including Phoebe’s hardworking and fair-minded father, captain of the whaling ship, to delicate old ladies, and an Indian snake charmer. Here the child absorbs in detail life in many places and in many times. Rachel Field was a master of detail. She told a reporter

“Perhaps I have the sort of memory that holds impressions, a camera memory. Anyway I have many pictures in my mind, many impressions that I have carried since my childhood. I was always able to take in details. I loved old houses, and I never entered one for the first time that I did not get an exact picture in my mind of at least one of the rooms. I would know just where the windows were, how the furniture was placed, the position of the rug on the floor, what ornaments there were on the mantel or whatnot. A second visit would verify this impression and prove to me that I saw clearly the first time.” [6]

This “camera” memory stood her in good stead for it enabled her to portray vividly the various scenes through which *Hitty* moved. The child reader gains a sense of her New England heritage, but this is set against life in other parts of this country and elsewhere. It is not a narrow provincial view, but a world-wide view, with appreciation of many ways of living. It is a broad sensitive picture of life, but one full of many small and interesting details. *Hitty* is a book of integrity.

Because it is written ostensibly for ten- to twelve-year-olds, and yet is about a doll, the book must frequently be introduced to children. But once a child has started reading it, almost always she will fall under its spell, and finish it happily. Boys enjoy parts of it, too, especially *Hitty*’s whaling adventures and her shipwreck on the cannibals’ island, but in general it is a girl’s book. One twelve-year-old girl picked out the parts that she liked the best: how *Hitty* was first carved by the “salesboy” (as she called the peddler) from a piece of mountain ash wood; how she was found in a crow’s nest; how she went on a whaling voyage, was left behind on the burning ship and finally floated free to land on the island where Phoebe and her family were stranded; how she was lost in China and lived with a snake charmer; how at last she returned to the Preble homestead. “Yes,” the child said, “I liked *Hitty* very much because it is about something that would interest most anybody.”

The married daughter of one of Rachel Field’s island neighbors came to talk with her about *Hitty* and told her it was the first book she had read through in fifteen years. *Hitty* appeals to people of all ages, particularly anyone whose heart is in Maine.

Hitty's adventures have not ceased. Since she wrote her story she flew to Los Angeles with Miss Field to receive the Newbery Medal. She has attended the theater riding in Josiah Titzell's pocket accompanied by her author and illustrator, her publisher and her publisher's husband. A little glass room has been furnished for her with desk, settle, and small hooked rug with a whale design made by Miss Lathrop. She has visited many children's libraries, and now makes her home with Miss Lathrop, where I saw her this spring. Her paint maybe is a bit more faded, but her spirit shines through her eyes, and her backbone is as straight as ever.

But Miss Field did not rest on her oars just because she had won the Newbery Award. Again her creative urge pushed her forward and she wrote *Calico Bush*. The inspiration for *Calico Bush* probably came from the story of Marguerite La Croix, who with her husband, John Stanley, moved from Marblehead after 1767, with their many children and became the first permanent residents of Little Cranberry Island. Just north of the "Head" their hearthstones still lie undisturbed in the field, and they themselves are buried on Maypole Point. All that is known of Marguerite La Croix is that

"she was very beautiful, with dark eyes and jet black hair; that it was she who introduced May Day festivities to the islanders, who for many years on the first of the month gathered around a Maypole erected on the southwest part of Little Cranberry, still known as Maypole Point." [14]

Rachel Field has not used the exact facts as they are known, but has woven similar ones into her story, which once again brings to life pioneer days on the Maine coast in the mid-seventeen hundreds. Just where she laid her story it is impossible to tell. To anyone familiar with the Cranberry Islands and Mount Desert it seems as if she had combined the small islands with the mainland coast west of Mount Desert. The story of Marguerite La Croix is given a new twist in that part of *Calico Bush* where Marguerite Ledoux, or Maggie, feeds the hostile Indians parched corn and maple syrup, and with the younger children organizes a queer Maypole dance in which the Indians join, and then having been treated kindly leave the family in peace.

In *Calico Bush*, as in *Hitty*, Rachel Field has created characters who stand firmly on their own feet, people whom you might meet around the next corner. There is Maggie, the spirited French Bound-out Girl brought up in a French convent where she was accustomed to the niceties of living, but who is able to adapt herself to the hardships of life in early Maine and who is loyal to her new friends. There is slow-moving but determined Joel, and Dolly, his wife, worried and overworked. Across on Sunday Island there is lively Aunt Hepsa Jordan, well past seventy but smart as a whip.

One girl wrote, "This was a very good book and I liked it a lot." She was most impressed by Maggie's bravery when she gave the Indians food and danced around the Maypole. Any child reading *Calico Bush* will come away with a new appreciation of the life in early days and a feel for the Maine coast with its islands and pointed firs and ever changing sea. A girl will have identified herself with Maggie, or a boy perhaps with Caleb, and each will have grown a bit.

One more novel for young people Rachel Field wrote before she turned to adult fiction. This was *Hepatica Hawks* published in 1932. As a child she herself had been plump and so she wanted to write a story about an outsize girl who made good in her own right. The result is this sympathetic and understanding story of fifteen-year-old Hepatica Hawks, a freak, six feet four and a half inches tall, who is turning from childhood to adolescence with all the usual problems of that age intensified by her size. The various members of the freak show are all individually characterized, but it is Hepatica and the midget, Titania Tripp, thirty-two inches high, who stand out, — not because of their sizes but because they are so understandingly portrayed. In this story the reader gains insight into a way of life that is for the most part unknown to him, but one which turns out to be not as different as one might think. Human nature is the same everywhere.

No discussion of Rachel Field's books for children would be complete without mentioning that she illustrated some of her early books herself. Following in the footsteps of Lovat Fraser she frequently used a reed pen, sometimes with color, sometimes without. At other times she cut spirited silhouettes from black paper as she used to do in Professor Baker's class. She would dash off a lot of drawings or silhouettes and let her editor choose the best from them. She could draw children better than adults. In fact there is a certain childishness about her adult figures, but always her tiny drawings are filled with life, — a child standing tiptoe against the sky, a dog capering with joy in the grass. Books illustrated with her own drawings or silhouettes include *A Little Book of Days*, *Susanna B. and William C.*, *The Pointed People*, *Taxis and Toadstools*, *Little Dog Toby*, *Patchwork Plays* and others. Her illustrations are an integral part of her little books, but when others illustrated her books, Dorothy P. Lathrop, Allen Lewis, Elizabeth MacKinstry, she always wanted to be sure that they received ample appreciation.

During these years when she was writing books for children, she was also contributing to children's magazines and to some adult ones as well. *Child Life*, *John Martin's Book*, *American Girl*, *The Horn Book Magazine* and especially *St. Nicholas Magazine* printed a number of her poems, most of which were appearing in her books at the same time. Thus children who may have had no chance to read her books were able to enjoy the freshness and sparkle of poems such as "The Little Rose-Tree" or "What, No More Witches in New York?" or "Song for a Blue Roadster."

Her articles about children's books in the *Saturday Review of Literature* drew the attention of adults to the kind of books and writing that were available to children. Three times she reviewed the fall's crop of picture books, emphasizing the need of integrity in both stories and pictures. In her article "Imaginative Books" [8] she wrote that what really counts is "this power of setting a world of one's own between two book covers." Some of her poems appeared in Miss Anne Carroll Moore's column "The Three Owls" and in F. P. A.'s column "The Conning Tower," in *The New York Herald Tribune*. At least once for "The Three Owls" she reviewed a book *Madame Roland, A Daughter of the Seine* by Jeanette Eaton, assessing its integrity and directness, its lack of the writing down that destroys true value. She first caught the imagination of the reader by telling of her own reading of *The Tale of Two Cities* when she was a girl, and then recommended that *The Daughter of the Seine* was just the book to carry further one's interest in the French Revolution. [15]

The high peak of Rachel Field's writing for children was over. But the years 1932, 1933, and 1934 saw the publication of the small books *The Bird Began to Sing*, *Just Across the Street*, and *Susanna B. and William C.* The latter, illustrated in line and color by Miss Field, and made up of verses somewhat after Ann and Jane Taylor, describes humorously the trials of Susanna who was too fond of shoes, and William who was too curious about locks.

“And not a doctor dared to hack  
The post-box from his youthful back,  
So William Cox, I weep to tell,  
Must wear through life a square green shell.” [16]

Other children's books bearing her name as editor or as illustrator also contribute to the field of children's literature. The Comtesse d'Aulnoy's *The White Cat and Other Old French Fairy Tales* received new vigor with Rachel Field's editing and Elizabeth MacKinstry's illustrating. Children may be drawn to read more of Dickens' books through becoming acquainted with some of his leading characters in her *People from Dickens*. Her spirited silhouettes illustrate *Punch and Robinetta* by Ethel M. Gate, and her little drawings enhance Eleanor Farjeon's *Come Christmas*.

Very important is her contribution to the field of American folklore in her book *American Folk and Fairy Tales* published in 1929. In her preface she summarized the chief characteristics of folklore:

“Yet there is this about all folk and fairy tales,— they must possess a certain frankness and simplicity of idea. They must be direct and unhurried, yet also swift of action and salted and peppered liberally with talk and sayings.... Then, too, it seems to me there is always an element of the supernatural, or at least of the impossible in all folklore . . .” [17]

The stories in this book illustrate these characteristics and give the children a chance to dip into a few of the best of the Indian legends, Negro stories, Louisiana folk tales, southern mountain stories, Paul Bunyan and Tony Beaver stories, as well as to become acquainted with two stories based on older legends, *Rip Van Winkle*, and *The Great Stone Face*. All these stories are genuinely American and are true folklore. Few New England folk tales exist, perhaps, as she says “because the early settler was too busy and practical-minded, or perhaps it was not his nature to spin such tales.” [17]

But New England culture is rich in folk sayings and beliefs. These crop up all through her books. To mention a few such instances: Hitty was carved out of a piece of mountain ash wood which brings luck besides having power against witchcraft and evil. Captain Preble did not want to change his ship's name because it was considered bad luck to do so. The old ballad “Calico Bush,” gives its name to the book and runs as a thread of scarlet through it. A poem, too, in *Fear Is the Thorn* is based on this ballad. Old sayings and beliefs, such as “blood on the door step will bring tragedy,” “a red ear of corn is a sure sign of marriage,” “the dragonfly is the Devil's darning needle,” these and many others add local color.

*Points East*, one of her first adult books, brings together a few New England legends. It is a book largely of narrative poems that combine practicality with a sense of wonder for the marvelous, the commonplace with the imaginative. In *The Shell, the Comb, and the Bird* Bill brings home a wife

“Strange cargo ... from foreign parts,  
A woman, but no bigger than a child,  
A thing as brown and light as fallen leaves  
With eyes like narrow hollows of sea water,  
And dark hair caught up by a jeweled comb  
That gave out jets like fire. Her dress was red  
As wood-bine in October. In one hand  
She held a curly shell and in the other  
A wicker bird-cage, with a bird inside” [11]

In another poem *Bathsheba Berry*, summoned by a weird stranger to help a woman in childbirth, thought

“But I declare if ever I see home  
And my own bed again, I won’t deny  
The most ungodly and outlandish tales  
That anyone can tell, for nothing’s queerer  
Than this night’s business,— and it’s not done yet!” [11]

And again in *Fear Is the Thorn* she adapts a Scottish legend, imagining it to happen among the islands of Maine where seals may still be seen sunning themselves on the wet seaweed. This is “The Ballad of the Seal Woman” brought to a tragic conclusion.

She now turned largely to adult books. In the following years there appeared three books of poetry for adults, a biography, and four novels. The biography was about one Samuel Hadlock, Jr., a sea captain and showman, born and brought up on the Cranberry Islands. One day when Rachel Field was in her twenties (in 1921) she was picking raspberries on Big Cranberry. Suddenly an old island man called out to her. As she approached, perhaps seeing that she was somewhat fearful, he said to her, “Don’t be frightened. You’re as safe with me as if you was in God’s pocket.” This was Samuel Hadlock’s grandson, Samuel Sanford, and it was he who years later gave her Samuel Hadlock’s journal, upon which she based her account of him, calling it *God’s Pocket*. She followed the Journal very closely in telling Captain Hadlock’s story, a story of “romantic enterprise and love and tragedy.” [18] After his first wife died he left his three children with his sister, and set out for Europe with two Eskimos and a collection of oddities. He traveled over Ireland, England, Germany and France showing off his oddities at fairs and before kings and queens, and prospering surprisingly. Finally it was love at first sight with “The Prussian Lady.” They were married and two years later returned to Big Cranberry. But it was not long before he sailed again, this time to far northern parts on the ship “Minerva,” crewed by his relatives and friends. They never returned, but “The Prussian Lady” continued to live on Big Cranberry. Today the Journal is in the Islesford Historical Museum on Little Cranberry where it can be seen for the asking.

Two poems in *Fear Is the Thorn* were inspired by her visit with Samuel Sanford and his stories of his grandfather Captain Hadlock. One poem called "North of Time" contains these lines:

"Why, yes," the old man shifted in his chair,  
"That's Grandfather's own chart hung by the door,  
And that's his compass on the shelf up there.  
He knew the world and foreign parts before  
Most Island boys had learned their A.B.C.'s,  
And how to cipher. He stood six feet two,—  
It's queer to think a man like that should freeze  
Sealing, up north in Greenland, but it's true,  
And him not forty." [19]

Two days later Samuel Sanford had died, struck by lightning as he bathed in a tin bathtub. And Miss Field wrote:

"This small house fitted him like some square shell  
Weathered and worn, as if it somehow bore  
His very likeness, but no smoke thread mounts;  
He will not stand in greeting at the door  
As he stood, gaunt and smiling, three days back." [19]

The poems in this volume and in *Branches Green* reflect her maturer insight, but the subjects still vary from island sights and sounds, Manhattan glimpses, to remembrances of other days, and three narrative poems. In *Fear Is the Thorn* are several of her own late love, for she did not marry until she was forty-one.

"Love came late to me,  
As spring to northern Maine  
Suddenly rears its vehement green  
Where snows have lately lain.

Because I waited long  
I cannot be discreet.  
All that I have I must put out  
In prodigal sweet on sweet.

It is not counted strange  
In any northern place  
If daisies, lilacs, and roses bloom  
With asters and Queen-Anne's-Lace.

Seasons are short at best,  
So never smile to see  
A heart that mingles its bud and fruit

As inconsistently.” [19]

To these poems, too, there is the same lilt that characterizes her early children’s poems, and through them runs her love of sea and sky and people.

In a number of her poems we sense her fascination with time. There is the “Spinner of Time,” a poem based on a newspaper note about a spider trapped in an alarm clock.

“Wise men have made a marvel of this thing,  
Peering with awed and curious eyes to see  
A spider spinning silken threads to snare  
The hands of time that never snared may be  
Since the first sun set over Eden’s green,  
Or hourglass poured its measured sands away;” [19]

The poem “Ticking Clocks” bears the following refrains:

“Its ticks are saying, Plenty of Time,  
There’s always Plenty of Time.

...

Says over and over, Time will Tell  
Yes, Time will always Tell.

...

Hear how it booms out Time and Tide,  
Solemnly Time and Tide.” [20]

And then another poem:

“Old Gardener Time is abroad tonight  
In the frosty dark with his tireless broom.” [20]

The same sensitivity to Time occurs even in the titles of her plays or books. Her one long play (unpublished) was entitled “Time Will Tell.” Two of her novels are *Time Out of Mind* and *And Now Tomorrow*. Hitty herself is conscious of time, of the hundred years she has already lived, and of what is ahead:

“Perhaps, like the child on the sidewalk I, too, shall take to the air. Why not, since the world is always arranging new experiences for us, and I have never felt more hale and hearty in my life? After all, what is a mere hundred years to well-seasoned mountain ash wood?” [21]

And then came her four novels, *Time Out of Mind*, (1935) *To Know Ourselves*, (1937) *All This and Heaven, Too*, (1938) and *And Now Tomorrow*, (1942). *Time Out of Mind* is rooted deeply in old Maine in the days of the last sailing vessels when fortunes were dwindling, old families

going downhill, and new business taking over the old towns. It has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

This book is dedicated to Arthur S. Pederson, for the pattern of her life had changed. On June 20th, 1935, she had married Arthur S. Pederson, a literary agent. The wedding took place in St. George's Church in New York City with a simple ceremony attended by only a few friends. One of them knowing of her love of hurdy-gurdies arranged to have a hurdy-gurdy playing outside the church as she came out! After a honeymoon spent on Sutton Island, they went to California. She kept on with her writing. *To Know Ourselves* written in collaboration with her husband, was the next book, a story about those living on the fringes of Hollywood.

*All This and Heaven Too*, her third novel, while laid for the most in Paris, also has an Old New England background. It is a story based on the life of Rachel Field's great-aunt, Henrietta Desportes, when as governess in the house of the Duc de Praslin she became the defendant in a murder trial that upset French politics and helped one king from his throne. After being acquitted she left France for America where she taught French for a year, then married Henry B. Field, the brother of Cyrus Field of Atlantic Cable fame. This book has been translated into eleven languages, and was filmed for the motion pictures, Miss Field watching over every detail. A Braille edition was also published. Both as book and motion picture, it won her great acclaim.

*And Now Tomorrow* was the last of her novels, already appearing in serial form in *McCall's Magazine* (February to June, 1942) at the time of her death, and in book form shortly thereafter. It too is laid in New England, in a Massachusetts factory town at the turn of the century. The Peace Pipe Industries is an old family-run mill, unwilling to change with the times, thus forcing the workers to unionize, and causing much bitterness and misunderstanding on both sides of the river.

In 1939, the Pedersons completed their family with the adoption of little Hannah, aged eight weeks and named for Arthur's mother. Life was very happy for them. In the next two years Miss Field published three more children's books, *All Through the Night*, *Prayer for a Child*, and *Christmas Time*, each one evidently written with Hannah in mind. *All Through the Night* is the Christmas story told through the eyes of a dog. A class of twelve-year-olds to whom this story was read listed the parts they liked the best:

“When Mary says ‘Sometimes these beasts are more friendly than men who kill and hurt.’”

and

“When the sun came out in the morning and shone through the rafters, and the dog saw the sign of the cross that the shadow had made and was afraid.”

and again

“How the dog gave up his good home to go with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus makes this an interesting and a very different ending to the Christmas story.”

They liked the simplicity of the story both in thought and words. One child felt the pictures added much to it; they are Miss Field's own pictures, simple and childlike.

*Prayer for a Child* is of the intimate everyday things that Hannah knew, but the appeal is to all children everywhere. It was first printed in *This Week* with the title "A Baby's Prayer." Elizabeth Orton Jones' illustrations for it in 1945 broadened its appeal and won for it the Caldecott Medal.

If Rachel Field had lived longer (on March 15, 1942, after an operation and brief illness she died) undoubtedly there would have been more books both adult and children's, the children's ones written for Hannah. Probably in them there would have been something of the broadness and mightiness of the West, for she loved the West and felt its magic, as is suggested in her *Mariposa Grove*:

"In Mariposa Grove the air  
Is resinous and sweet,  
A thousand years of needles there  
Lie thick beneath the feet.  
At noon the sun's high golden glare  
Is dim where branches meet  
And tawny trunks with sunset's flare  
Are lit for day's retreat.

. . . .

"In Mariposa Grove the heart  
May shuffle off despair.  
Old fears like last year's cones depart  
To fall in stillness there,  
And through that sun-flecked quietude  
The mind may freely rove  
By elemental fare renewed  
In Mariposa Grove." [22]

Whenever I have talked with friends of Rachel Field they have spoken of her boundless vitality, her never flagging interest in people, her eagerness to help them, her keen enjoyment of life, and her awareness of everything and everyone around her. She did not do things prosaically. Instead of merely picking chanterelles (mushrooms) for supper on Sutton Island she might arrange them artistically with cranberries or leaves in her basket before transferring them to the saucepan. Spriggin, her little black Scotty, might have been left in the apartment when she went to the publishers' offices, but, no, he went too, enlivening her business contacts and making friends. She often invited friends to "chowder parties," and she used to say that the only difficult thing about making chowder was watching it so it would not burn. These parties were eagerly awaited. Her peculiar gift has been to incorporate this keen appreciation of life in her writing, and to pass along bits of it to her readers whether in poetry, plays or stories.

And so, Rachel Field has given us much. In her books for children, and for adults too, we gain perspective, a sense of history, and appreciation of how broad social changes affect individual

lives, an understanding of our New England heritage against a world-wide background. We meet people, drawn so sympathetically and surely that we can identify ourselves with them, and understand ourselves the better. Her books for children frequently bring that breaking away from the staid and solid, that venture into the world of the imagination that today's matter-of-fact children need so much. And withal she does not write dully and stolidly. There is lilt, vitality, humor, vibrant action and integrity on every page. Her books will live, especially the best of her children's books. The world is richer for her sojourn here. We salute Rachel Field!

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