HOW THE HEATHER LOOKS

A Joyous Journey to the British Sources of Children's Books

Joan Bodger

Illustrated by Mark Lang

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To John and Ian, and to Lucy
who went back to find the door

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Foreword

In 1958 our family came into a modest windfall – enough to put into effect a long-cherished dream of spending a summer holiday in England. My husband and I are each half English, we had each spent time in England as children, and each of us – by circumstance, education, and inclination – was steeped in English history and literature.

We cannot claim erudition for our children, but books, conversation, games, genes, and osmosis had made Anglophiles of them. Lucy, aged two and a half, knew her nursery rhymes, having learned them from Randolph Caldecott's *Picture Books* and L. Leslie Brooke's *Ring o' Roses*, both illustrated with scenes from English country life. She also knew Brooke's *Johnny Crow's Garden* and she had pored over the pictures in his *Golden Goose Book* and his illustrations in *A Roundabout Turn* by Robert H. Charles. When she was very young indeed she had been introduced to A. A. Milne's Pooh and Piglet and Christopher Robin, and she was quite well acquainted with the world of Beatrix Potter. It would be another twelve-month before she began to read, but could one truly say that she was illiterate?

Ian, almost nine, worried his teachers because he was a better listener than he was a reader, but he had managed to assimilate

and accumulate an astonishing amount of lore. He was, in his way, as fond of history as his father, who holds a Ph.D. in the subject. He seemed unable to make anything of the mysteries of *Dick and Jane* (authors mercifully anonymous) but he liked to listen to *Beowulf* (also anonymous). His favorite indoor toys were wooden blocks, model soldiers, maps and dioramas. When outdoors, he and his friends engaged in elaborate war games which seemed to require that endless amounts of army surplus equipment be festooned from every knobby shoulder and hip bone. To the naked eye, these little wars may have seemed the ordinary contests between "good guys" and "bad," but it was Romans and Britons, Roundheads and Cavaliers, Napoleon and Wellington who waged their battles in our suburbia.

Ian also liked to draw. Sometimes he drew maps (of places both real and imaginary) but mostly he drew soldiers. In order to do a good job of it he pored over his own and his father's books. He especially liked Howard Pyle's illustrations of knights in armor. He also liked *Life's Picture History of Western Man*, the *Puffin Picture Book of Armor* by Patrick Nicolle, *Weapons: A Pictorial History* by Edwin Tunis, and Robert Lawson's illustrations for a children's version of *Pilgrim's Progress.* These were for looking, although he liked to hear the texts, too. For pure listening, Ian preferred Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*, and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. He also liked ballads and folklore, archaeology and history, and the verse and poetry of A. A. Milne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Walter de la Mare. Revealingly, his favorite poem was "The Land of Counterpane," by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Almost since he was born we had told Ian that he would be able to see "all that" when he went to England. Now, as Lucy was old enough to look and listen, we heard ourselves saying the same thing,

with less conviction. Our children were so literal! They besieged us with questions. Would we see where Rat and Mole had had their picnic? Could we climb to the Enchanted Place at the Top of the Forest? Would we go down to towered Camelot? Could we pay a call on Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle? Privately we adults told each other that of course such places did not exist in reality, but the children's faith was unfaltering – and unnerving. Perhaps, we said, a few of the places really did exist. Perhaps, we said cautiously, we could seek them out.

We began by writing letters to the British Travel Association and the British Information Services. Both agencies were exceedingly kind, but not very helpful. The information we needed was not in their files. Pig iron production – but not Piglet! It is true that there were all sorts of guides to "Shakespeare Country" and "Scott Country" and "Hardy Country," but these were not the landscapes sought by our children. We tried writing directly to authors. Some publishers would not forward letters, some authors would not answer, some authors were dead. We were undaunted. We did not want to be lion hunters. Places, not people, were what interested us. We would explore for ourselves.

I ransacked our old favorite books, going over the familiar ground like a detective in search of clues. The Arthur Ransome books, T. H. White's *Mistress Masham's Repose*, even the Pooh books, had maps in the end papers. Were they totally imaginary or could we orient them to an atlas? I searched out more information at the public library and found more books to bring home and read aloud to the children. My husband, who is a reference librarian, brought home biographies and autobiographies of children's authors for me to study. Perhaps something in a writer's life would give a concrete clue to the places described in his books. A kind friend presented me with a twenty-year back file of *Horn Book*, the magazine of books

and reading for children. I combed these for details concerning the lives and works of authors and illustrators.

The more I read the more convinced I became that the children were right. Most places in children's literature are real. We could find them if we searched. All we needed was faith. I was reminded of a poem by Emily Dickinson.

> I never saw a moor,
> I never saw the sea;
> Yet know I how the heather looks,
> And what a wave must be.
>
> I never spoke with God,
> Nor visited in heaven;
> Yet certain am I of the spot
> As if the chart was given.

This book, then, is the story of how Ian and Lucy went to see for themselves "how the heather looks." Ian and Lucy had the faith. It was left to their parents to arrange for passage and to invest in Bartholomew's *Road Atlas of Great Britain*.

CHAPTER I

Caldecott Country

We were bound for Whitchurch, just thirty miles down the road from Liverpool. A few hours before, we had disembarked from a staid, broad-beamed Cunard liner, which had taken more than a week to cross the Atlantic. While still on shipboard we had discovered a 1957 *Saturday Book* in the ship's library and had read a delightful article on Randolph Caldecott, the early illustrator of children's books. Whitchurch, we read, was the town in which Caldecott had lived as a very young man, and scenes in the town and the countryside roundabout had been immortalized in his Picture Books.

In a last-minute decision we had set it as a cautious destination for our first day's journey. We were glad now that we had not been more ambitious. We had arranged months beforehand to rent a car at the docks, but when we were met by the car rental company's agent we discovered that by some mischance or inefficiency we could not be supplied with the kind of car we had requested. We knew, of course, that English cars are small, by American standards, but the car actually supplied must have been built for midgets. Somehow we managed to wedge ourselves and four suitcases into an impossible

space and to set off undaunted. Well, almost undaunted. There was something peculiar about the gearshift, which worked without benefit of clutch, but we told ourselves cheerfully that John would soon get the hang of it. He never did.

Now we were racing down the Great Chester Road, on the wrong side, it seemed to us, in a strange car which we barely knew how to rein in at the crossroads. We had hoped to see the famous arcades of Chester, but the road bypassed the town almost before we knew where we were, and town gave way to open countryside. Chester is where Randolph Caldecott was born and went to school. Thinking of him now as John tried to get the knack of shifting gears without a clutch, I was about to say that driving the new car put me in mind of the desperate John Gilpin on his runaway steed, perhaps Caldecott's most successful portraiture. Looking at the grim-set look in my husband's eye I decided to forgo the literary allusion.

Instead, I turned my thoughts to Whitchurch. We planned to drive into town, consult the local librarian, take some Caldecott Picture Books out of the library or buy them in the local bookshop, and stroll about town identifying the house where he had lived, the familiar scenes he had sketched as background for the nursery rhymes. Ah, innocence! Suddenly, before we expected it, we saw a small brick building marked Whitchurch Council School standing by itself along the roadside. John stopped the car so Ian and I could go in and ask the teacher to direct us. I wondered what it would be like to talk to children who walked to school each morning over the very fields and country lanes made famous in the Caldecott illus trations. Did every household own a dog-eared copy or two, or did the teacher have the thrill and pleasure of introducing the books? If so, the experience must be akin to holding a child up to the mirror for the first time and letting him recognize what it is that the rest of the world holds dear.

It was a one-room branch schoolhouse that we had found. The children, sitting at double desks, stared at us, round-eyed. Ian hung back at the door, too shy to enter. Despite the calendar's claim to June, the air outside was chill and raw. Every door and window in the tiny schoolroom was open. The children sat with their feet on stone flags and I noticed that the walls were red brick, patchily covered with thin plaster. The thought flashed through my mind that even the children were burnished to the same hue as the bricks, as though they, too, had sprung from the clay. The boys sat with knobby red knees bare, gaping at Ian in his long flannel-lined blue jeans with turned-up cuffs. The young teacher had never heard of Randolph Caldecott. I explained as best I could, but she shook her head, not comprehending why Americans should come so far to look for a man who illustrated nursery rhymes. She obviously thought our quest frivolous and our interruption rude (which it may have been), but she suggested we continue into town and ask for more information at the Town Hall. Ian, who had blushed scarlet under the gaze of boys his own age, was glad to make his escape.

We came to the square-towered church at the top of the High Street and plunged down the hill into the town. The shops and inns were crowded, people spilling out of the buildings, over the narrow sidewalks, and into the streets. At last we saw a building marked Town Hall and John suggested that Lucy and I hop out while he and Ian found a place to park. I had to hold Lucy in my arms to breach the crowd near the doorway, but once inside we made our way easily to a dank little library on the ground floor. The girl at the desk said that the librarian was on holiday, and she wrinkled her brow in thought when I asked about Randolph Caldecott. She had seen a book about him somewhere in the library, but it was not in the children's section. She went to look in the shelves and came back with Henry Blackburn's *Randolph Caldecott: A Personal*

Memoir written in 1886, the year Caldecott died. I settled gratefully to taking notes, resigning myself to the stark fact that none of Caldecott's own books was to be had.

Randolph Caldecott was a bright, handsome, pleasant boy when he came to Whitchurch in 1861. Not much is known of his early childhood except that it was a happy one and that he was head boy at the Henry VIII grammar school in Chester. There he is remembered as having spent hours drawing, modeling from clay, and carving from wood. He, like us, must have come down from Chester on the Great Road on the day he first came to Whitchurch. Perhaps an apprentice job in a bank does not seem to us ideal for a fifteen-year-old boy who loved beauty and the out-of-doors, but young Caldecott fell in love with Whitchurch from the very first. As careful and thorough with a column of figures as he was with his own drawings, he does not seem to have been in a state of rebellion against his apprenticeship. His zestfulness soon endeared him to his fellow workers and townspeople alike, for he made friends easily and joined in the life of town and countryside. His biographer and close friend, Henry Blackburn, reports that he took lodgings "in an old farmhouse about two miles from town where he used to go fishing and shooting, to the meets of hounds, to markets and cattle fairs."

At this point in my reading Lucy became restless. I took the book back to the desk and went out with her into the cobbled courtyard in the rear of the building. Travel with a two-year-old can be complicated, but it has its compensations. Because of Lucy I had left the musty library and we now found ourselves in the middle of a market fair, watching and listening in fascination as the hawkers cried their wares – cheap crockery, sharp knives, plastic shopping baskets. Before our very eyes we saw the end of an era as many a farmer's wife rushed to buy the new garish pink or blue synthetic

carryall in preference to her old hand-caned basket. My only comfort was uncharitable. The plastic handles looked as though they would break easily and in that case they could not be mended.

Caldecott must have loved Whitchurch especially on days such as this, when the inns were filled to overflowing, when red-faced farmers argued the price of a bull on every street corner, when the farmers' wives came to gossip and haggle at the stalls in the market place or the little shops that line the High Street. I have never seen so many beautiful babies. Beside them Lucy, usually considered rosy, looked a trifle pale and unhealthy. I found that Lucy, in her fleece-lined pale pink snow suit, and I, in my Joseph's colors raincoat, were being stared at and studied, even as I was studying the local inhabitants. (This was the sort of scene that Caldecott would have loved to dash off for the pages of the *Graphic!*) The women, on that rainy day, bore little resemblance to the "lasses" in the Picture Books. They wore navy blue mackintoshes or brown or black wool coats, and they covered their heads with plastic hoods. The bare-kneed children wore high black boots and navy blue mackintoshes belted with a wide buckle at the waist. Only the men, and especially the old ones, seemed unchanged by time. True, the fabrics they wore were transformed by a century's progress, but their silhouettes were the same as that of the old gaffers in *Daddy Darwin's Dovecote.* The stained and colorless mackintoshes reached only to the knee, for all the world cut on the same lines as the peasant smocks worn a century ago. Boots had replaced gaiters, but the hats (whatever their shape on the day of purchase) were as round and limp as the one worn by the farmer who sows his corn in *The House that Jack Built.* And everywhere was the same broad, beefy countenance, also made familiar by that same farmer.

John and Ian came shouldering their way through the crowd and we held a family council. The car had been parked in the

inn yard at the Swan but there were no rooms for hire. We had arrived in Whitchurch on the day of the semiannual cattle market. Farmers had flocked there from all over Shropshire and beyond. It was already afternoon. We should decide about a night's lodging, but we were too tired and hungry to make decisions. We bought tomatoes from one stall, cheese from another, and made our way back to the car to drive out into the country.

Down a narrow lane we found a wide (though muddy) spot to park near a gate, and pulled over for a picnic. Never had food tasted so good! After nine days of elaborate menus aboard ship we reveled in this simple fare and the freedom to eat it when and where we chose. The children sat astride the gate and gazed across the misty fields to wide horizons and rolling hills beyond. A blackbird sang out, the notes hanging like dewdrops in the still air. Suddenly, we heard a "whuffle" and the sound of heavy hoofs coming toward us down the road. A huge horse, similar to the one in *A Farmer Went Riding*, came into sight over the hedges. Two ruddy-faced boys sat upon his broad back, not astride but with one pair of feet dangling "port," the other, "starboard." Like the country people whom we had seen in the market place, they wore boots to their knees. Their bony young wrists and hamlike hands shot out from rough tweed sleeves be-spangled with drops of mist. They seemed all of a piece with their heavy fetlocked steed, but one of the boys slid from the Percheron's back and unfastened the gate. No word was spoken. The children scrambled down quickly and we all watched in silence as the giant horse was led around our little car. I do not think any of us would have been greatly surprised to see the Ford Anglia crushed like an eggshell beneath one of the hoofs. In a moment boys and steed were lost to sight along the hedge, but we stood staring, as though we had seen a vision. This was pure Caldecott!

We drove back into Whitchurch and counted ourselves lucky

to find a hotel room for ourselves and Lucy at the Old Vic, and a tiny, chintz-hung room for Ian in a respectable pub a few doors up the street. The motherly middle-aged barmaid said she would see that he was tucked in properly at night and that she would bring him his breakfast in the morning. We then set out to explore the town and to find if anyone could give us a clue to where Randolph Caldecott had lived. The town museum was like a family attic, filled with stuffed ducks, an embroidered waistcoat, a magnificent Ark with Mr. and Mrs. Noah and one hundred animals hand-carved from wood. A few faded brown ink sketches by Caldecott hung on the wall. The old woman who acted as char and custodian knew only that he had been a famous man, but where or why she was not sure. John was almost sure he had seen similar sketches in the hallway at The Swan, so we walked down the hill to Watergate Street. There could be no doubt. The Swan was the original of The Angel, the inn to which the *Three Jovial Huntsmen* had repaired after the chase, but the proprietor's wife knew little beyond that. She suggested the newspaper office. The editor remembered that Caldecott had died "in Florida – you know, one of those South Seas places," because he had read it in an old book by Blackburn that had been kicking around the office until he presented it to the library. We seemed to have gone full circle.

Back in our room at the Old Vic, I stood at the window and looked down at the street. An estate agent's office was almost directly across from us and it occurred to me that this was a place that might have in its files the facts of who lived where when. John was still game, so out we went again. Two extremely young men (not much older than a certain bank apprentice must have been) came to the counter to wait on us. Glancing about, I seemed to recognize the establishment of Mrs. Mary Blaize, the lady pawnbroker satirically described in Oliver Goldsmith's rhymes and further brought to life

by Caldecott's illustrations in *The Great Panjandrum Picture Book*. It seemed not unlikely that she would have dabbled in real estate on the side, her sense of business being unerring. The two young men explained that their employer was away "on assessments," but they would do their best for us. Yes, they had heard of Caldecott, but surely we were not interested in so minor and uninteresting a person? Everyone else who came to town inquired about Edward German, the composer, a truly famous person who had owned a very grand house besides.

The two young men could hardly hide their disdain at my ignorance, but wishing to be polite they turned the conversation to sports. Once again they had me at a disadvantage, and once again my husband stepped in to rescue the tattered remnants of American reputation. The talk switched back and forth from Newport to Henley, from Wimbledon to the World Series. It occurred to me that Whitchurch clerks have changed very little from Caldecott's day. Evidently the young men of the town have always lived and breathed the air of the sporting world, although I was willing to wager that neither of these two gentlemen had ever ridden forth to hounds on a lumbering farm horse, or tramped miles over the snowy fields to hunt rabbits. They looked as though they gleaned their knowledge from the "telly."

Finally we were able to extricate from them (after some checking in the files) that Caldecott had lived at Wirswell: "Under the railroad bridge, sharp to the left, up the bank." We would have to inquire among the houses when we got there. But were we absolutely sure that we did not want to take a run out to see Edward German's place? When they auctioned off Mr. German's estate ("the most splendid auction ever held in these parts, sir!") there had been a cardboard box full of sketches by Caldecott. ("Just scraps of paper, you know.") No one had wanted them particularly, and the young

men remembered that the estate agent had been quite annoyed, because he had hoped for some bidding. Finally the whole box was sold off to someone who rather fancied the hunting scenes.

"Pity you weren't there," said the young man pleasantly. "I think he paid only a couple of guineas for the lot!" John claims he had to support me, pale and tottering, from the office.

Getting to sleep that night was difficult. The crowds continued to mill about directly below our windows, and although it seemed at least two hundred years since we had left our ship that morning our beds seemed to pitch and toss as though we were still on the Atlantic.

The next morning we woke to the sound of a pony clopping by. Lucy nearly fell out of the window in her excitement. The little cart below us, bright and shiny in the morning sun, was filled with bottles of fresh milk. How different the High Street looked! The town was absolutely deserted. We learned that during the night all the cattle had been driven out of town and, after the pubs closed, the crowds had left too. There was a rap at our door, and Ian came bouncing in. Why weren't we up? He had already had his breakfast, but he would have a second one with us. He evidently felt that he had really seen Life. The noise at the bar had kept him awake until after ten o'clock, but as soon as closing time was called the motherly proprietress had gone up to tuck him in.

I left the family at the breakfast table and sallied forth to do a little shopping. Coming out of the hotel, I looked up the street toward the square-towered church at the top. Now that the narrow sidewalks were no longer so thronged that one had to fight for foothold, I could appreciate that we had walked into *The Great Panjandrum Picture Book* the day before, and had not been able to realize it. Whitchurch had scarcely changed since the Great She Bear had come walking down the High Street. The church was the same, and surely the little shops were equally untouched by time.

This was the morning that I was to be initiated into the mysteries of British shopping. The little basket over the She Bear's arm, I was soon to find, was almost a necessity. Nothing comes ready-wrapped in English villages, and it cost threepence for a flimsy paper bag to carry one's purchases in. I went in and out of the little shops, learning as I went. Fruit is bought at the florist's. (Of course! He owns a greenhouse.) Canned and frozen food one buys at Woolworth's. I had to go back up the hill to the butcher in order to buy butter. Outside and in, the butcher shop was decorated with blue and white tiled pictures of sheep and cattle. The meat was set out on great slabs of marble without benefit of refrigeration. Although everything was scrupulously clean, I seemed to be much more aware that life's blood must be spilled, oozed, and dripped about unless we all turn vegetarian. The butter was set out in great tubs. Which did I want? New Zealand… Guernsey… Shropshire? I chose the local product and watched while the butcher weighed out a quarter of a pound, then asked him where I could buy bread. That all depended, he said. Did I just want bread, or did I want Hovis? The shop down the street was licensed to sell Hovis and (glancing at the clock) it should be just coming out of the oven now.

Down the street I went again and into a dusky little shop marked by a green and gold "Hovis" sign. I knew at once where I was. Bunches of millet hung from the ceiling, and the walls behind the counter were lined with small drawers. With difficulty I restrained myself from shouting out "What! No Soap!" and glancing over my shoulder to see if the Great She Bear would "pop her head into the shop." Nothing so exciting happened – yet. The rosy-faced girl behind the counter explained that the bread was not out of the oven, but if I would care to wait… She swept an indignant tortoise-shell cat off the chair and I sat down, wondering idly if this cat was a descendant of the one "who killed the rat who ate the malt that lay

in the house that Jack built." Almost at the same instant the door opened, a woman came into the shop with a dog on a short thick chain, and the cat sprang up to the counter arching its back. No wonder! For here was the very dog who had worried the cat (and who was later "tossed by the cow with a crumpled horn"). All my life I had believed that the excruciatingly ugly brindle bulldog in the Caldecott illustrations was a product of the artist's imagination or, at best, a unique specimen of dogdom. Before the day was out I was to see two or three more of the same breed and to learn that this is the famous Whitchurch brindle, born and bred to a life of herding cattle and noted, despite the unfortunate mishap depicted in *The House that Jack Built*, as being an excellent work dog.

I had hardly recovered from the start of recognition before the dog was dragged back out of the shop by its owner. The cat, its back still arched, took several minutes before it would risk climbing down from its perch. The little shopgirl excused herself to run back behind the shop to look at the ovens. A moment later she was back again, skipping into the shop, tossing and juggling a loaf of bread before her. Her sleeves were rolled above the elbow, the revelation of round, firm arms making her more than ever "pure Caldecott."

"That be jolly hot, that!" she said, and wrapped the loaf in a piece of newspaper for me to carry. Oh, how good it smelled! And it was better than a fur tippet to carry against the chill. I bought a wedge of cheese (cut carefully with a string that dangled from the ceiling) and some hundreds-and-thousands out of a big glass jar with a beautifully japanned lid. It was not so much that I thought the children would enjoy the candy that prompted me to do so, but the fun of seeing the delightfully unself-conscious way the girl moved about among ancient shop fixtures and modern advertisements. Some of the containers had probably been on the counter when Randolph Caldecott came to town.

John and the children were waiting impatiently by the time I got back to the inn. What on earth had kept me? The car was all packed and we wedged ourselves in among the suitcases and started out for Wirswell. Too small to be a village, it was not even marked on our map. There could not have been more than half a dozen houses in the district. But where to begin? There was a large Tudor manor house with "Tarrick Hall" marked over the mailbox. It might have belonged to the Master of the Farmer's Boy. It seemed the most likely repository of local lore. I walked to the house and rang the bell. A little parlormaid answered, complete in uniform and ribbons, and said she would consult "the master." An imposing gentleman came to the door and informed me that no Mr. Caldecott lived in the house. I tried to explain that Mr. Caldecott had been dead these many years, that he had been a famous illustrator, but that when he was a young bank clerk in Whitchurch he had boarded with farmers in Wirswell. "I knocked at the door merely to inquire…" I thought the gentleman was about to have apoplexy.

"Madam," he said, "we do not take boarders. You have been misinformed. This has always been a very *important* house. The present Earl of Harlech was born here. I was assured of that when I bought the place. But we do not show the room to visitors…" I beat a hasty retreat down the drive to where John and the children were waiting in the car.

This left only three or four other houses to be accounted for in Wirswell. They all seemed vaguely familiar and the largest (now an old people's home) seemed to us very like the one from which the "maiden all forlorn" issued forth to do her milking. Later inquiry brought us a letter from the Clerk of Whitchurch Urban District Council in which he informed us that Caldecott had lived "at Hinton Old Hall which is on the outskirts of the town and quite close to Wirswell…" No doubt we saw it even if we could not immediately

identify it. If only we could have had a complete set of the Picture Books in hand!

We were not the only ones who have set out to explore Caldecott country. In his biographical memoir Henry Blackburn quotes a letter from an unnamed pilgrim who preceded us:

> During occasional rambles in this and the neighboring country of Chester, more especially in the neighborhood of Whitchurch, I have been interested in the identification of some of the original scenes pictured by Mr. Caldecott in his several published drawings. Thus: –
>
> Malpas Church, which occupies the summit of a gentle hill some six miles from Whitchurch, occurs frequently – as in a full page drawing in the *Graphic* newspaper for Christmas, 1883; in *Babes in the Wood*, p. 19; in *Baby Bunting*, p. 20; and in *The Fox Jumps Over the Parson's Gate*, p. 5.
>
> The main street of Whitchurch is fairly pictured in *The Great Panjandrum*, p. 6, whilst the old porch of the Blue Bell portrayed on p. 28 of *Old Christmas* is identical with that of the Bell Inn at Lushingham, situated some two miles from Whitchurch on the way to Malpas…

It seems strange that Caldecott did not consider himself a good landscape artist and refused several commissions to do such work. During his trips to the Continent it was the people who captured his fancy and set his pencil going; châteaux and cathedrals he left to others. Occasionally, as in the sketches of Parliamentary scenes for *Pictorial*, he would have another artist "fill in" the architecture. I cannot think why. The world he created in his children's books certainly does not lack veracity. Although he was gifted, ambitious, and experimental, he seems to have set certain limits for himself. His Breton folk bear little resemblance to the tortured peasants of van Gogh and Gauguin; his eye for the foibles of high society is as keen as Lautrec's, but he lacks the savagery. One would wonder if he had ever heard of the Impressionists, yet when he died Vincent

van Gogh was among those who paid him tribute in a letter of condolence written to his widow.

Caldecott left Whitchurch in 1867, when he was twenty years old, to go to Manchester where he clerked in a bank and joined an artists' club. From Manchester he went on to success in London and made several continental sketching tours with his friend Blackburn. In 1886 he and his wife sailed for the United States, hoping that the Florida climate would alleviate his tubercular condition. He continued to send off cheerful notes and sketches to the *Graphic*. The people he saw during a stopover in Washington fascinated him, especially Black Americans and the pioneer types he saw in the rotunda of the Capitol. He even managed to take part in a fox hunt in Maryland, his caustic pencil recording a countryside already beset with outdoor advertising. A few weeks later he died in Florida. He was barely forty.

If ever a man truly loved a place, that man was Caldecott and that place was Whitchurch. One might almost say he was in love with it and that his Picture Books represent some of the most delightful love letters in the world. The green triangle made by Whitchurch, Malpas, and Wirswell is almost unbearably dear and familiar to anyone who knows his Caldecott. The fields and lanes gave us the feeling of homecoming that John and I were to discuss many times. Each of us had one English-born parent, and we were brought up on more or less the same books. Now we found ourselves in a countryside we had shared unknowingly. Those enormous pigs! Those fawn-colored cows! The broad-faced farmer striding across his fields! We knew them all. The feeling went beyond our childhoods into the ghostly past.

Now, as John drove our car through the very countryside made known to us along with our nursery rhymes, I glanced at the children, covertly watching their reactions. Ian, even as John and I,

seemed to be struggling with a half-remembered dream, but to Lucy the line between shadow and substance offered no problems. Although she had been born only thirty months before, she had spent a great deal of that time in Caldecott country. How many times she had sat on my knee (as she was doing now) so that we could open wide the book and let her enter in. So many people had argued against our taking her on this trip to England that we had become dubious ourselves. Lucy's whole life, ran the argument, was taken up with eating and sleeping and diapers. She would not care where she was, nor would she remember where she had been. Now, studying her bright little face, I was made humble. Lucy could accept absolutely that she had entered a world where she was already at home. She was the only one among us who did not need a guidebook.