

# REALISTIC STORIES

**REALISTIC STORIES** Few British writers of the Victorian period excelled in realistic stories; perhaps they too closely associated them with the moralistic tales of the past. Two British writers did earn fine reputations as writers of both fantasy and realism, and a third writer of realistic stories is British by birth, but American by adoption. Edith Nesbit excelled not only in fantasies (*Five Children and It*, 1902, and *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, 1903), but in the *family adventure story*, most notably the stories of the Bastable children (*The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 1899, and others). Her work looks backward to earlier Victorian literature in its sometimes condescending portrayal of children, but her best books contain interesting and strongly drawn characters engaged in compelling plots.

Rudyard Kipling experimented with a wide variety of genres for children. In 1894 he published *The Jungle Book*, a collection of fantasy tales set in India, featuring Mowgli, a boy who enjoys a special relationship with jungle creatures. Kipling turned to realism in *Stalky & Co.* (1899), an almost brutally frank school story. (The school story was a subgenre for Victorian boys focusing on the antics of boys at private boarding schools—called public schools in Britain. The best known of this variety is Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* [1857].) Kipling's novel *Kim* (1901) is the story of a boy of mixed heritage growing up in British India; a coming-of-age tale, it is generally regarded as his finest work.

Frances Hodgson Burnett is a bridge between Great Britain, where she was born, and the United States, where she eventually settled. She gained a lasting reputation with her modernized Cinderella stories, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), about an American youth who inherits an English noble title; *A Little Princess* (1905), about a girl who must overcome adversity through her essential goodness of heart; and her most celebrated work, *The Secret Garden* (1911), the story of Mary Lennox's redemption in the bleak English moors. *The Secret Garden* is a deliciously romantic work, with Gothic atmosphere, mysterious characters, and rich symbolism.