

WE have heard so many complaints lately about the story of 'Balaam' being too difficult for children that we are beginning to wonder whether the difficulty is in the mind of the teacher rather than that of the pupil. What *is* the difficulty? Is it that the ass talked? The fairy-tales of Grimm and Hans Andersen are full of talking animals, but no one has ever suggested that these stories were too difficult for the children.

Is it that the ass saw the angel and Balaam did not? That should cause even less surprise. We have all heard well-authenticated stories of animals perceiving, by some sort of sixth sense, things which are hidden from our grosser senses. One has heard of dogs growling in the presence of something evil or sinister. Surely, in the same way, they sense the presence of something good and holy from the spirit world.

It is our experience that, if the story is read straight through, with no suggestions from the teacher that it is improbable, the children will accept it simply and naturally.

If any child should, *without any outside prompting*, find it hard to accept the story as it stands, one can always suggest, as Paterson Smythe did in one of his commentaries, that it may have been a dream.

There are many lessons to be learnt from the story of Balaam—God's care for the animals ('the ass would I have saved alive'), the duty of unquestioning obedience to God's will, and the wistfulness of the words in which Balaam describes the vision of the future which was vouchsafed to him, sinful man as he was.

Why should we deprive children of this beautiful story because to our materialistic minds it seems unscientific? Surely it is better to say, with Shakespeare, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy'.