From "The Magic Fishbone"

CHILDREN'S BOOKS PAST AND PRESENT

By Annie Carroll Moore

There were skippers new and old,—the bold Pathfinder,
And the Mississippi king, Mark Twain;
And a lean Samoan Scot named Robert Louis,
Full-sail to the South again.
—Alfred Noyes

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"I have been telling stories in David Copperfield's Library," writes Marie Shedlock, the fairy godmother of the American library story hour.

Although she has often told her dramatic stories at Rugby, Cheltenham, and other English schools and colleges, Miss Shedlock has never before told stories in a children's library in England — a children's library with an intimate background of books and pictures so placed as to invite reading for sheer love of it—"making reading a regular sport", as one American boy has characterized it. "I had a wonderful audience of boys," Miss Shedlock tells us; "they came out of one of the most sordid quarters of London—they were simply delightful and completely absorbed in the stories."

What kind of stories did she tell the boys of Somers Town? Nothing short of her best. Miss Shedlock mentions no titles but we can be certain there was mystery, adventure, nonsense, and some reflection of the great poetry at the heart of literature. One of the stories may have been the legend of the Welshman who met the sorcerer on London Bridge, for it is a favorite story with both English and American boys and Miss Shedlock includes it in the admirable selection of stories to be found in her own book "The Art of the Storyteller"—a book which May Sinclair says every writer of stories should read, since it is amusing as well as wise. For the storyteller it remains the best book on the subject.

The story of David Copperfield's Library begins with the eleventh

chapter of David Copperfield with its intimate record of what we now know to have been Charles Dickens's daily life with the Micawbers. "My address", said Mr. Micawber, "is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I — in short", said Mr. Micawber, with the same genteel air, and in another burst of confidence, "I live there."

The small house in Windsor Terrace was shabby in Mr. Micawber's day. It may be remembered that he often went to bed "making a calculation of the expense of putting bow windows to the house 'in case anything turned up' ".

Nearly a century went by before anything did turn up, and then one day in 1911 the London County Council appeared in Johnson Street, Somers Town, bringing a small tablet with this inscription:

Charles Dickens
1812-1870
Novelist
Lived Here
in Boyhood

The tablet was fastened to a house bearing the number 13 in a terrace of tottering brick cells. It is significant that it should have been placed between the two front windows of the first floor. In the Micawbers' day "the first floor was altogether unfurnished and the blinds were kept down to delude the neighbors". The London County Council, having done its duty, went away again and nothing else happened until the early spring of 1920, when to a young man walking through Somers Town this "Tiny Tim of a house", as it has been called, came alive. "Some houses live and others die; some have the gift of perpetual youth."

A Dickens lover by inheritance, the Reverend J. Brett Langstaff, who was at the time in charge of Magdalen College House, lost no time in writing to his parents in America:

I have discovered a house in which Dickens lodged during the David Copperfield part of his boyhood. It is a small building, a door and a window on the ground floor and above that two floors, each staring drearily out into the narrow street. The conditions have remained unchanged since the time Dickens took his first impressions as a boy. The appeal for the people and especially for the children is the same as he makes in his novels. It seems to me that if one could make in this David Copperfield house a happy book world for the boys and girls it would in some way make up for the miserable times Dickens had when as a lad of thirteen he lodged there with Mrs. Pipchin, because his father (Mr. Micawber) was most of the time in a debtor's prison. I would have the furnishing throughout of the Dickensian period and on a miniature scale so that one would feel a true giant on entering unless one were a child. I would not have a nursery in any sense but a real library for children, filled with books and pictures and pictures and books from top to bottom. And for those who could not read I would have someone come to read or tell stories.

Two months after this letter was written an attractive and convincing illustrated circular appeared in England containing a letter of endorsement of the idea from Henry Fielding Dickens and a group of councilors bearing names touched with power and magic—Sir James Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, Edmund Gosse, John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, and others. Nor was the interest confined to writers. The actors gave a Charles Dickens Birthday Matinée arranged by Ben Greet, a substantial sum of money was realized from this performance, the freehold of 13 Johnson Street was received as a gift, and the reconstruction of the old house was begun.

It was still in the hands of the workmen when I visited it one hot afternoon last July on my way back from the Eton-Harrow match at

To the dear Readers of the David Copperfield Library.

I began to love Charles Dickens and to read him when I was a little "country mouse eight years old; and then I was eleven, (Oh! wonderful good fortune!) I travelled with him on a certain railway journey between Maine and Massachusetts. It was a magical, a miraculous trip of two hours, during which my child's hand was in his, and his arm around my waist so that in that long talk we became real friends. I have told the tale in my "Childs Journey with Dickens" Some of you may have read it—and it will explain my interest—in the David Copperfield Library.

There are many other Americans who love and read Dickens, and want to share in making this Library in the home where he lived as a boy. One of them, Anne Carroll Moore, who chooses the Childrens Books for the New York Public Library, has made this representative selection which I am asked to send as a gift from the generous American publishers whose names appear in each of their presentation volumes.

New York Novembr 1921 Kate Douglas Wiggin

Lord's Cricket Ground — the caretaker's twins asleep in Mrs. Micawber's parlor lending a touch of reality to its tradition. A workman took us from bottom to top of the house, new and delightful possibilities revealing themselves at every turn. Since then the Micawbers' parlor has been converted into a reading room for the older boys and girls, and the kitchen behind it into a kind of "fairy dungeon" for little brothers and sisters who have to be "minded". The extension, comprising a washroom and scullery built out into a small back yard, is now used as a place for the children to wash their hands. The old copper in which the Christmas pud-

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ding was steamed, remains where it was in Dickens's day, while on the floor above — the mysterious first floor — its two rooms connected by folding doors, the books of David Copperfield's Library are to be found. Between the two front windows, where a schoolmate remembered Charles Dickens kept his own books in a cupboard, stands a small chiffonier containing the books Dickens read as a boy, together with a selected edition of his works, presented by his publishers. The low book shelves fitted to the adjoining walls contain some five hundred volumes presented by English and American authors, illustrators, and publishers. There is also a gift of children's books from the French government. The front room is decorated with three large panels in color, representing Dick Whittington, the Babes in the Wood, and the children of China. These crayon drawings, with three others representing the children of Canada, Russia, and India, are the work of L. Leslie Brooke, whose picture books are much loved in American children's libraries. They were chosen by Miss Shedlock and Mrs. Arnold Glover, as a gift from the Dickens lovers of the staff of the New York Public Library.

The first floor back is decorated with original sketches by Raven Hill, Frank Reynolds, H. M. Bateman, and other illustrators, done especially for the house. Here is also the poem in manuscript written by Alfred Noyes on the occasion of establishing the library, and the letter from Kate Douglas Wiggin about the gift of books from American publishers, placed there by George Palmer Putnam.

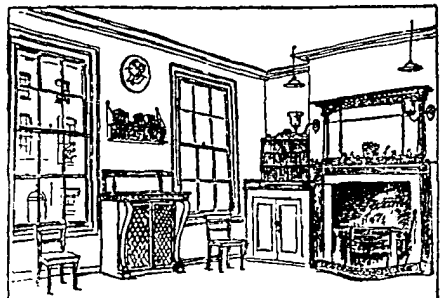
Copperfield's room, second floor back, serves as a private room for the librarian. "My room was at the top of the house at the back, a close chamber; stencilled all over with an ornament which my young imagination represented as a blue muffin; and very scantily furnished."

In this room, no doubt, was conceived the plan of the distinctive Souvenir Book printed in connection with the play at Devonshire House last November — a revival of Bulwer-Lytton's comedy "Not So Bad as We Seem", produced by Nigel Playfair with the support of contemporary representatives of art and letters, under the patronage of Queen Alexandra. The play was originally produced by Charles Dickens and his circle in 1851 and the Souvenir Book contains a picture of the stage at Devonshire House, the royal box with Queen Victoria and King Albert seated in it, a section of the audience, and a reproduction of the play bill. The beautiful poem written and read by Alfred Noyes as an epilog to the production of 1921, is here given in its entirety. Mr. Noyes has caught and recorded the spirit and essence of the children's library idea for any country.

Hugh Walpole's fine tribute to Mrs.

Ewing and Mrs. Molesworth will not surprise the readers of "Jeremy". Compton Mackenzie has written with true feeling of books read in boyhood. W. L. George appears on the page headed "Tell Me a Story". Henry Fielding Dickens relates the children's library idea to his father's boyhood, while Pett Ridge and Professor A. E. Richardson describe Somers Town. There is a reproduction of Hanslip Fletcher's sketch of No. 13 Johnson Street and of a delectable cartoon by Bateman representing "Eustace, the child who, having read every volume in David Copperfield's Library, asks for more". Bernard Shaw says, "The first condition of a children's library is that there should be no children's books in it", reminding us that "Dickens . . . . read Smollett and Fielding and all the other grown up books he could lay his hands on (as I did myself)". But Dickens also read the books on the lower branches of "The Christmas Tree", and if ever a book belonged in a children's library it is his own nonsense story "The Magic Fishbone". The spirited and child-like pictures Francis Bedford has made for the new edition of it might have been conceived at 13 Johnson Street. The Princess Alicia with her seventeen children to be "minded" would revel in the "fairy dungeon". The picture representing Dickens and little Alice Rainbird was hailed with joy in an American children's library whose birthday was once celebrated by Kate Douglas Wiggin, as an authentic portrait of that author at the age of seven.

"Why not a 'Dickens Reader'?" asks Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. Because there is abundant evidence in England and America that readers made up of selections from great authors are too often joy killers to potential readers in the flesh. Children no more than grown ups like literature presented piecemeal. Better typography, a freer field for the artist who has the gift of seeing something new in an old book, more variability in outward form, the break up of traditional sets and series which look alike and look *dull*—these are important considerations in the publication of books for children at the present time. When they have been more effectively acted upon, children's libraries will scrap the type of book which Carl Van Doren so aptly characterizes as "immental". Although applied to the American novel, the word fits the kind of book I suspect Mr. Shaw has in mind when he says "no children's books".



Interior of Dickens's Library, from a sketch by Hanslip Fletcher

"I dare say you might like a present of books," writes Hilaire Belloc to David Copperfield's Library; "and, if so, let me know which of my books may be of service to you." Would that more gifts to libraries were preceded by a similar inquiry! Isn't Mr. Belloc's "Cautionary Tales" too sophisticated or too suggestive of wrong things to do, to place in a poor neighborhood? This question may not have been put in England, but it is sure to be in America, where a new

edition of these nonsense verses with their inimitable illustrations ("The nicest things you ever saw") has just appeared. Those who "see no sense" in Edward Lear will probably see none in Mr. Belloc. But I would deprive no boy or girl of the privilege of making acquaintance with Henry King, who chewed Bits of String, Rebecca, who slammed Doors for Fun, and Charles Augustus Fortesque, who always Did what was Right, and so accumulated an Immense Fortune. Humor, the most democratizing of all influences, is too seldom trusted to do its own work in its own way.

Fortunately, David Copperfield's Library did not inherit a fixed selection of books, and I find it a refreshing thing to speculate as to what books are already there and which of the new books one would like to have tried out in a new environment. Someone should send over the Swedish picture book by Elsa Beskow, called "Lillelbror's Segelfärd". The pictures alone tell the story of a little boy who sails away to see the world, just as Beatrix Potter's pictures tell her stories. Walter de la Mare must already have sent his "Peacock Pie" (I have yet to find the child who doesn't call for "more Jim Jay"), and now comes his charming book of fairy poems "Down-Adown-Derry", illustrated by Dorothy Lathrop.

I celebrated Kate Greenaway's and Randolph Caldecott's birthdays by visiting Philadelphia artists, publishers, and booksellers. At the Beck Engraving Company I saw advance illustrations for the holiday books of three publishers and some of the original drawings for Elizabeth Shippen Greene's illustrations for "Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare", which will receive a more discriminating note in another review. The bright prospect for the early autumn presented by Philadelphia publishers is sustained in New York. Sara Teasdale's thin anthology "Rainbow Gold" is a very real invitation to American and English children to read poetry. Dugald Stewart Walker is illustrating the book. Hilda Conkling's "Shoes of the Wind" contains lovely verses. "Barberry" is one of them. "The Voyages of Dr. Dolittle" by Hugh Lofting is assured of a warm welcome. "Wisp, a Girl of Dublin" by Katharine Adams promises to be as charming a story of life in Ireland as her "Midsummer" is of Sweden. Jay Van Everen is making the pictures. The book which attaches itself to David Copperfield's Library by giving a picture of child life in London a hundred years ago is "Memoirs of a London Doll", written by herself and edited by Mrs. Fairstar. This little book was first published in Boston in 1852 and has been out of print for a number of years.

The Art of the Storyteller. By Marie L. Shedlock. D. Appleton and Co. London: John Murray.

The Magic Fishbone. By Charles Dickens. Illustrated by Francis D. Bedford. Frederick Warne and Co.

Cautionary Tales for Children. By Hilaire Belloc. Alfred A. Knopf. London: Duckworth and Co.

Lillelbror's Segelfärd. By Elsa Beskow. Ahlen and Akerlunds.

Down-Adown-Derry. By Walter de la Mare. Illustrated by Dorothy Lathrop. Henry Holt and Co.

Tales from Shakespeare. By Charles and Mary Lamb. Illustrated by Elizabeth Shippen Greene. David McKay.

Rainbow Gold. Selected by Sara Teasdale. Illustrated by Dugald Stewart Walker. The Macmillan Co.

Shoes of the Wind. By Hilda Conkling. Frederick A. Stokes Co.

The Voyages of Dr. Dolittle. By Hugh Lofting. The Macmillan Co.

Wisp, a Girl of Dublin. By Katharine Adams. Illustrated by Jay Van Everen. The Macmillan Co.

Memoirs of a London Doll. By Mrs. Fairstar. The Macmillan Co.