

Friends of Kentucky Libraries,

Incorporated

NEWSLETTER

June - July
1969

PUBLISHING: from Robert Browning to Norman Mailor

Notes on talk by MAISIE WARD

Miss Ward began by telling us that she was delighted to have been invited to address librarians. From librarians she has had much help, willingly and efficiently given, all over the world, during the time when she was writing her latest books: "Robert Browning and His world: The Private Face" and "Robert Browning and His World: Two Robert Brownings." To prepare for writing them, she went all over the world - from Dublin to New Zealand, from Toronto to Texas (to examine material and letters in various collections, etc.) Never once did a librarian fail to find whatever there was in the library and to serve her conscientiously.

She continued by saying that all who support libraries are doing a great work, important to general education and to all people as well as more particularly to scholars. We appreciated her comment that she had once startled an audience by saying how grateful she had been to her teachers -not, as expected, for some rare and unusual qualities they had but simply for teaching her how to read.

Miss Ward has had quite a long life of which many years have been spent in the publishing business with her husband. She was, in fact, born the year Browning died. Her family was acquainted with many of the literary figures of the day. Tennyson was a dear friend of her father's and when she was born, visited the family. He said to her mother, "We've both been ill but you have something to show for it. I have not." He was then given a glimpse of her in the cradle and remarked, "She looks like Henry VIII." Members of her family were authors as well as friends of authors. Her grandfather, born too soon to own a typewriter, puzzled his publisher by his handwriting which was, the publisher remarked... "like a pair of walking sticks gone mad." But her father's was compared to "the limbs of a flea."

As a publisher, she is naturally interested in publishing house-author relations and mentioned that Browning had many publishers. His father paid for

the publication of his early work. An unsuccessful play was the first of his works to be actually accepted by a publisher. At that time, a publishing agent was called a "book seller." Among the great publishing companies in England, then, were Murray, Smith-Elder and Longman's. "Pauline" was Browning's first poem to be published. It sold exactly no copies. (Browning later destroyed all but fifteen or so copies. The going price for a copy, at present, is \$1,500.) Another poem, "Paracelsus," was a success. Another, "Sordello," was regarded as unintelligible. Tennyson unkindly said of it, "Only two lines I understand and those are lies." He referred to the first and last. The first was, "who will may hear Sordello's story told;" the last, "Who would has heard Sordello's story told." Such a comment by a popular man creates difficulties for a young author. As a matter of fact, Browning can be understood, almost always, with a little thought. Not all of his poetry is difficult and metaphysical. However, most of his work requires just a little work on the part of the reader for he puts a barrier between himself and the public. But Tennyson's remark was remembered.

When Browning married Elizabeth Barrett, the popular poet and the author of "Aurora Lee," a poem then running through edition after edition, while his best volume to date, "Men and Women," sat on the booksellers' shelves, the discrepancy must have been humiliating. However, he finally came into his own with the publishing, much later, of his long poem, "The Ring and The Book." A real success! Smith-Elder published it. Afterwards, he and Smith became life-long friends.

The relations between author and publisher is a matter which Miss Ward really understands since she has been both. Looking back over the years, so many spent in the publishing business, she sees great changes. The degree to which the best seller now dominates the field saddens her. She mentioned, in passing, the important newspapers in London: that is, the ones which have the good book critics: The London Sunday Times and The Observer.

This noted that most authors feel that publishers fail to advertise their books enough and that generosity on both sides is needed. Browning's fine relationship with Smith was unusual between author and publisher. Sometimes, Browning would say to Smith, "You are giving me too much. Are you sure you can give me so much?" Such a comment on the subject of profits on today's publishing scene is not at all likely.

Miss Ward told us a story of Smith's generosity to Browning. He allowed Browning's son to use part of the publishing building for an art exhibition. The boy was brilliant, talented and had had the best teachers but he was also spoiled and lazy, failing to live up to his early promise - either in art or appearance. However, Browning adored his son with great intensity, transferring to him some of his great love for his wife after her death, fairly early in Robert's life. Miss Ward, in her research, read some of the letters between father and son and is in a position to understand the relationship.

The Sheeds (Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward Sheed) started business with a capital of \$10,000, a small amount for such a venture. They began with a book club. Trying to please the public with these books, they understood the problems of the writers and knew that a book cannot be hurried in the writing; they were patient. Some authors, however, were quite trying; notably, Alfred Noyes, who kept sending them changes after the printer had started his work - an unforgivable sin! G. K. Chesterton, however, was delightfully different - he made no such demands. He

gave his autobiography to the Sheeds to publish. He was fun to work with since he would discuss problems with them and also had a wonderful sense of humor.

She Sheeds also published philosophical works, including some from France. The difficulty with this type of book was that it was, at that time, usually badly translated. One writer, to add to the publishers' troubles, sent them, in with other pages, one blank one. He enclosed a note explaining that he had forgotten to put a ribbon in his typewriter but, if the blank sheet were held up to the light, it could possibly be made out.

At seventeen, the daughter of the Sheeds decided not to go to college but to become a translator, immediately. She began her career with a book written in French by a Roumanian. A few years later, when the author met the Sheeds, he asked to be introduced to "the learned lady" of their company who had translated his book so expertly, do doubt expecting to see some white haired scholar and was astounded when confronted with a teen-ager.

Translation is always a problem. There are several schools of thought on the subject of technique. The English author, Belloc, for instance, said that he preferred to read a page of the original, digest it, put it away, and rewrite it in his own words, in English.

Miss Ward here told us that she is still a great reader. An interesting aside - she was taught to read Browning by a man who was taught by Browning! Her advice is: Keep reading!

She commented on Browning societies. * Browning's highbrow friends despised them. (The fact that the man who started the first society was a difficult person helps to explain their poor start.) Before this occasion, a society for a living poet had never been heard of. Browning's friends thought the idea silly, noting that the societies abounded in fights. However, they were useful in unexpected ways. George Bernard Shaw was one of the most assiduous attendants at the meetings of one such society although he had a private reason - he went primarily to learn how to debate! He succeeded in this ambition and then stayed to admire the poet. Shaw said of him: "Browning often had a burst of pure music." Miss Ward agrees.

She hopes that we will all read "The Ring and the Book." This is an exciting narrative poem with an Italian setting. The pope mentioned in it is a historical figure, a forerunner of Pope John XIII. "Browning's pope felt," she ended, "like Pope John when he talked of ecumenism, the value of sympathy for all and the examination of the most varying points of view. The mind does help. The union of hearts can begin at once and will help people to explore paths that lead to the union of minds."

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* There are at present several Browning Societies in Kentucky, a fact which interested and pleased Miss Ward when she was told of it, after her talk. Friends of Kentucky Libraries, Incorporated, has among its membership several members of Browning Societies.

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Resignation of Mr. Sherwood Kirk - July 15, 1969

Mr. Sherwood Kirk, who has worked for twelve years in the Department of Libraries, Frankfort, is resigning to take the position of State Librarian of Florida in Tallahassee. By the time you read this notice, he will already be in Florida. Mr. Kirk's energy, hard work and enthusiasm will be truly missed. We wish him well in his new work.

Mr. Kirk has long been a member of Friends of Kentucky Libraries, Incorporated.

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Next Newsletter - September

Because of vacations, this issue of the Newsletter will be the last until September. At that time there will probably be an extra large issue for all the accumulated news.

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Have You moved? Planning to move?

Please send us change of address. It is disheartening to lose members!

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Ways and Means
Logan Helm-Woodford County
Library

This library is one of the few in Kentucky that has a regularly published newsletter of its own. In the February 1969 edition, there were listed several items needed at that time - a refrigerator for the new kitchen, service of a number of volunteers for such work as book mending and reading to children.

There is nothing like letting your needs be known to all. "Ask and ye shall receive," we are told. We members of the State group hope that this enterprising library in Versailles now has all that was requested, and furthermore, suggest that other library groups or branches of Friends of Kentucky Libraries follow suit.

The small newsletter of this library is recommended as a pattern which can be followed by others. It is readable, newsy, brief, interesting.

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Kentucky Progress Development Office (KPDO)

(Notes taken from address by Barbara Williams and on an interview with her.)

The Kentucky Progress Development Office is a state planning agency, a division of the Governor's Office (and affiliated with several Washington agencies but not directly under any one of them.)

The purpose of KPDO is to co-ordinate all federal programs in the state as well as plan for economic and social development throughout the state.

If a county has a specific state or federal program which its residents are interested in seeing advance, any citizen can contact the KPDO office in Frankfort for assistance. This assistance might include furnishing consulting service or planning aid. Representatives of a locality or community or county can visit this Frankfort office, write or phone. (Phone - 564-3605.)

The office has five divisions: The Division of Planning, The Division of Development Assistance, Comprehensive Health Planning, Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Division of Development Information. The aspect of this office which will probably be of most immediate interest to librarians is assistance in library work - construction and services.

To participate, it is necessary for the community or some members of it to take part in the Area Development District Councils. To date, only seven of the fifteen Area Development Districts have been funded: The Big Sandy, Headquarters at Prestonsburg; Fiveco, Headquarters at Catlettsburg; Kentucky River, Hazard; The Barren River, Bowling Green; the Lincoln Trail at Elizabethtown. The Buffalo Trace and Gateway A.D.D. have been funded but are not yet staffed. These communities are planning toward economic and social development which could include libraries. Two counties have already received funds for library services.

Some documents published by the KPDO Office might be useful to local public libraries. They can be received upon request when they are available. The Kentucky Directory of Federal Grant-in-Aid, a loan program, is now being brought up to date through the 90th Congress. Development data books on most of the A.D.D.'s are also available. Some of these data books are, however, out of print but they will be reprinted when updated. A directory of information, available from state agencies is also ready to go to the printer and should be available about July 1. Plans are underway to compile an inventory of human resources development information.

Mrs. Williams' advice to librarians is to order, as soon as possible, all of these publications which may be useful until such time as the supply is exhausted. For more information, contact Mrs. Williams in her office.