

Obituaries

ELISABETH BALL

Elisabeth Ball, one of the most distinguished collectors of children's books of her time or any other, was born in Muncie, Indiana, the day after Christmas, 1897. She was the only child of George and Frances Woodworth Ball. George Ball was one of the five brothers who founded the Ball Corporation, and served as bookkeeper, secretary, treasurer, vice-president, president, and chairman of the board of the firm. He died in 1955 at the age of ninety-two, and his widow died in 1958, the last Ball family member of her generation. At the time of her death on April 29, 1982, Miss Ball was the principal individual stockholder in the Ball Corporation.

Since the turn of the century her family had lived in a dark brown house on Minnetrista Boulevard, beside the other large Ball family houses facing the river which runs through Muncie. Miss Ball was born in that house and lived there all of her life, except for her years at Buffalo Seminary and Vassar College, where she majored in botany, and some extensive travels with her parents and relations.

Her botanical interests always remained strong: no one who knew Miss Ball will forget her joy in the daffodils and spring flowers near her home in Muncie. But her chief pleasure was book collecting, a passion which she inherited from her father, himself an outstanding collector of books and manuscripts. For example, he bought the C. T. Owen collection of children's books, which became the cornerstone of her library, and afterward a great many of the books catalogued by the Paris bookseller Kirkor Gumuchian in his two-volume *Les Livres de l'Enfance* (1930). Later, Miss Ball ordered from dealers and auctions throughout England and America. Sometimes in the

middle of the night she would call London to secure a book when the shops opened there in the morning. Her remembrances of collecting were often mixed with memories of her own childhood, and in a charming essay on collecting children's books, 'The Moving Market or Cries of London Town,' she recalled a childhood visit to Buffalo and the chant of an umbrella mender: 'Ummm-brellas to mend, / . . . / Heee-lp a poor old man.' 'Even then I recognized it as a relic of a bygone era,' she wrote. 'But run as I might, down the street and around the corner, I could never catch up with it.'

When the Morgan Library held a very large exhibition in 1957, 'Children's Literature: Books and Manuscripts,' loans came from institutions and private collectors throughout the world. Miss Ball was a principal lender, and in the next decade her interest in creating an important children's collection at the Morgan Library grew. In the mid-1960s she gave a considerable part of her spectacular collection of early juvenile books to the library. Her library was particularly strong in eighteenth-century English and continental works. A few years later these volumes were complemented by her purchase for the Morgan Library of the Gillett G. Griffin collection of American children's books (largely formed by Wilbur Macey Stone). By 1975, when the library held a most important exhibition, 'Early Children's Books and Their Illustration,' it could be said in the accompanying catalogue that 'since the disposal of the late Edgar Oppenheimer's Library, considered to be the finest collection of children's books of all nations, there can be no question of the supremacy of that formed by Miss Ball.' The fund for early children's books established at the Morgan Library by Miss Ball greatly expanded such collections there, and occasionally an outstanding modern book or manuscript was added to the Elisabeth Ball Collection—like the autograph manuscript, with illustrations by the author, of Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*. The exhibition and the book in 1975 were dedicated to Miss Ball, and she

remained very much the guiding spirit of the Morgan's collection of early children's books.

Elisabeth Ball had been a member of AAS since October 1962, and was very generous through her gifts of books and money. It was she who made possible the acquisition of the Helen and Benjamin Tighe Collection of American Children's Books, a collection numbering more than 600 books printed before 1821. With this gift, the Society was able to add a total of 232 volumes, 59 of them unique, to the already pre-eminent collection of American juvenile literature at AAS.

Miss Ball was also keenly interested in early dolls and children's games, and in bookbinding. She had some very fine paintings, including outstanding works by Eakins and Redon; she also had some marvelous objects by Fabergé. She had been a member of the Art Students League and her knowledge of art was wide-ranging. Miss Ball was a member of American Pen Women, the American Association of University Women, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, and was devoted to the First Presbyterian Church in Muncie. She died in Ball Hospital in that city; her funeral was on May 3 in the home where she was born, and she was buried in the family mausoleum in Beech Grove Cemetery.

Charles Ryskamp

RALPH PAUL BIEBER

Ralph Paul Bieber, elected to membership in AAS in October 1946, was born on May 9, 1894, in Hellertown, Pennsylvania. He earned an A.B. degree from Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1914, an A.M. in 1915 and a Ph.D. three years later from the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation, published in 1919, was on *Lords of Trade and Plantations, 1675-1696*.

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