From the Librarian's Shelf

CHARLES WARREN

This time I take down for comment two little books from the children's corner: the first by John Ruskin and the second by an almost unknown author, Caroline Bell.

One of the most charming books which Ruskin ever wrote, with a mountain setting, was a fairy story written for his future wife when she was still a child aged 11 (but not published until nine years later), called *The King of the Golden River. A legend of Stiria.* The opening paragraph reads as follows:

> In a secluded and mountainous part of Stiria, there was, in old time, a valley of the most surprising and luxuriant fertility. It was surrounded, on all sides, by steep and rocky mountains, rising into peaks, which were always covered with snow, and from which a number of torrents descended in constant cataracts. One of those fell westward, over the face of a crag so high, that, when the sun had set to everything else, and all below was darkness, his beams still shone full upon this waterfall, so that it looked like a shower of gold. It was, therefore, called by the people of the neighbourhood, the Golden River.

What a pleasant opening to the entirely charming and moral tale that follows. But what a charming little book our copy is, too, in its pretty blind stamped cloth binding of the period, and with its illustrations by Richard Doyle; and, above all, with its delightful inscription, in Ruskin's hand, to: 'Alice Pignatel with John Ruskin's love. 1864'.

My second book for comment has the title *Pictures from the Pyrenees.* This is a somewhat dull book to read unless you happen to be slightly interested in the history of children's books. It is dated 1857, the emphasis being upon instruction, both religious and otherwise. At that time, books were not being written purely for the pleasure of children. (Shades of Beatrix Potter later!) Yet the little book has its moments, such as the one when 'Nanny' notices one of the little girls looking pale on the channel crossing and puts her to bed to prevent seasickness. An interesting tale, but rather a priggish one.

But what a charming little volume this is, in its contemporary blind stamped cloth binding and decorative gilt cover; and with its hand-coloured vignette illustrations. Not the least interesting thing about it are the advertisement pages at the back of the book for Newberry's 'Children's Library', taken over by Griffith and Farran in 1857. One is reminded of a more famous one run by the radical reformer, William Godwin, in Skinner Street some years earlier; he published books written for children by famous writers such as Goldsmith. Godwin's 'Children's Library' is of great interest in the history of the publication of books for children. He it was who tried to give them better material on which to sharpen their wits.

However, it was not really until authors like Edward Lear and Beatrix Potter came on the scene that the children's pleasure was really catered for – God bless them.