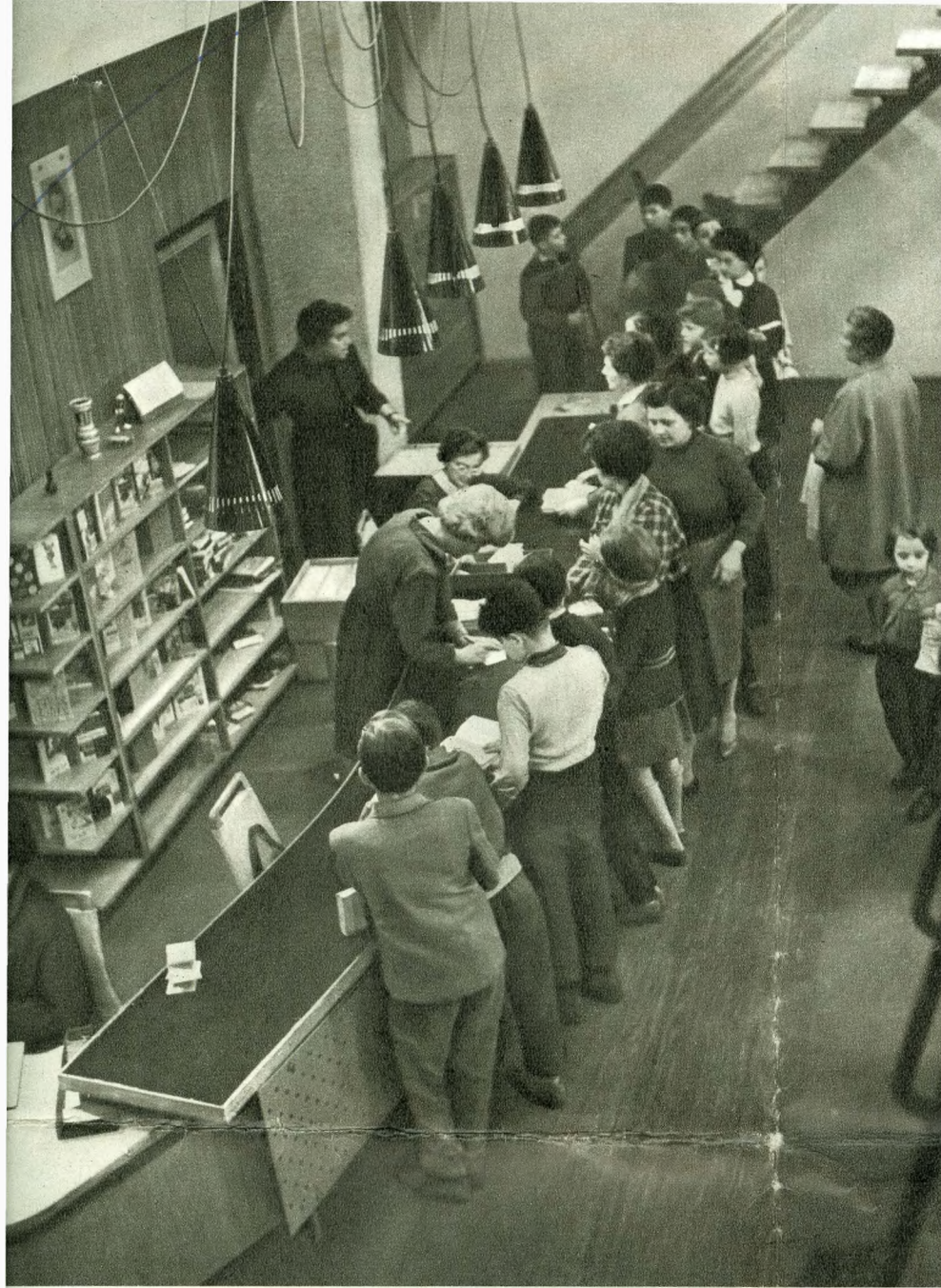


A LIBRARY

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On June 5th, 1901, in Ferenc Liszt Square in Budapest, opposite the Academy of Music, a unique library was dedicated—the first library for children only. The ground floor of a new block of flats was converted for this purpose. The equipment, the low shelves, little clothes-pegs, small tables, chairs and catalogue racks, were all planned to satisfy the particular requirements of the child's mind.

Originally it was thought there would be about fifteen hundred readers. A year after the library was opened, it has 2,806 registered members. It has proved such an attraction to young readers that many have transferred to it from the branch libraries in remote districts. There are some ten thousand volumes in the library, scientifically arranged. The headings of the decimal system used in libraries for adults have been translated into the children's language, with headings such as: Getting to Know the World of Science; Young People's Lives; Learning Languages; The World of Nature; Technics, Art; Games, Entertainment; About Writers and Books; Travel, Geography. To make it easier for small tots, there is another kind of catalogue too: Picture Books, Story Books, Animal



Budapest Note Book

SHE CALLS THE TUNE

The appraiser I intend to write about is not like the stony-hearted pawnshop owner so familiar from classic novels and short stories. My appraiser, though also concerned with antiques, bears no resemblance to the antiquarians of former times who are depicted either as misers or as souls filled with the milk of human kindness. My appraiser wears neither a pince-nez nor side-burns; but she dotes on stiletto heels, for she is a slim, pleasant-faced young brunette. When she fingers an object, no polite, disparaging smile tugs at her lips; her smile is more "ap-

preciative" than depreciatory. Unlike her forbears, she has no interest in buying below value, so that one side of her balance is not heavier than the other. She receives a fixed salary, and the shop may sell only 18 per cent higher than the purchasing price. For my appraiser is employed at the State Commission Store in Lajos Kossuth Street.

RUMMAGE ROOM

There are many Commission Stores in Budapest—some sell furniture, others clothes, sport outfits,

carpets and technical supplies, on commission. And all operate on identical principles. But this shop in Lajos Kossuth Street is the grandfather of them all—both with respect to its history and to the objects it sells. It has been operating for fifteen years, and deals exclusively with antiques and antique furniture. The shop is chock-full of china figurines, cut-glass, Chinese vases, antique statues, boxes and old paintings, like a rummage store. It is in this environment that this pretty young woman does her valuing—she is probably the youngest appraiser in Budapest.

CASH PAID

Standing behind the counter she was scrutinizing a china figurine, turning it this way and that to get a view from all sides. Then she looked up at the owner:

"We can take it for a thousand forints." The owner nodded, a

receipt was made out for the object, his name and address were noted, and when the object is sold he will be sent the money by post.

"We also buy for cash," she said, "but then we take 25 per cent instead of 18 per cent for handling charges. Of course we only pay cash for articles that are in demand."

"Such as?"

"Chinaware, cut-glass vases, antique bracelets, chains, and above all bookshelves made of choice wood."

"And what is hardest to sell?"

"Antique furniture. People nowadays prefer to buy modern stuff."

"How long have you been working here?"

"Oh, ten years now. I began in an antiquarian's shop, and after completing a course I came to work at the Commission Stores."

"I imagine you're a pretty good hand at it by now."

"You can never know it well enough. You always have to go on studying."

FOR CHILDREN ONLY



Photographs by Marian Reismann

half—he is of course only a nominal reader because he cannot actually read yet, but he thumbs through the picture books, enchanted.

There are two reading rooms—one for the smaller, another for the bigger children. The difference between the two is partly in the sizes of the tables and chairs, partly in the rules. The tots are allowed to talk aloud (this could hardly be prevented), while in the bigger children's room there is silence, in training for the time when they will have to conform to the rules of reading rooms in the regular libraries.

The reading room for the little tots is decorated with toys, dolls and animal figures, helping to bridge the transition from the nursery to the land of books. That this is necessary is shown by a remark made by five-year-old Évike Bognár. Coming home from her first visit to the library, she told her parents, "The library's nice; it's got a Teddy. It doesn't matter that there's also books..."

The children also help, volunteering to give a hand to librarian Ágnes Kepes. They have a chronicler, too, a different child each time, who records the more interesting events in the library's life in a diary—

visitors, lectures, film-shows, discussions on books, etc. Here, for instance, is one entry: "On August 30th, we had a film show. The film *A Star Fell* was shown. András Dienes, the filmwriter told us about Petőfi. Three hundred children heard him. Unfortunately we were not very quiet... Ilona Gerendai, chronicler."

Sándor Novobáczky



Stories, The World of Children, Historical Fiction, Adventure Stories, Famous People, Theatre, Puppet Shows, Poems.

Over half the readers are boys. The upper age limit is 15, and there is no lower limit. The youngest member is three and



Illustration by Pál Csergezán

"Do you often make mistakes?"

"Well I do, sometimes. But then the supervisor corrects my estimate. If it is too low, the owner benefits because he receives a larger sum after the sale. If I set too high a price, we first ask the owner whether he will agree to sell at a lower price."

NO SALE

An elderly man came in with a middle-aged woman in tow. The woman took an antique silver clock from her bag and handed it to the appraiser with the remark: "A seventeenth century piece." The appraiser examined the clock, and said:

"Well, it isn't exactly seventeenth century, it's sixty years old at the most. But it's a fine piece of workmanship. We'll take it for two thousand five hundred forints."

"I've been offered five thousand for it," the woman said indignantly. She took the clock, put it back in her bag, and left the shop with her companion.

"It seems some people are not familiar with current prices," I said.

"Generally they are. Of course there are some who think their particular treasures are worth more. But the other day a man who sold a Baroque glass with a double lid was pleasantly surprised when I valued it at three thousand forints. He had expected only a few hundred. Incidentally, if you ask me, I'd say that woman had no intention of selling her clock. Did you notice how she glanced at the man when I said 2,500 forints? And the man said nothing. My guess is that she wanted to sell the clock to him, and

they brought it here for an estimate. We often have cases like that where we actually do general valuation jobs."

"I PREFER MODERN..."

"Is there a big demand for paintings?"

"Yes, very," she replied. "We sometimes sell a good picture within a matter of hours."

"What was the largest sale you made recently?"

"A picture by the great Hungarian painter Mészöly—it went for 25,000 forints the other day."

"Who bought it?"

"We don't know, we don't take down the buyer's name. We only keep a record of the seller's."

"You don't mind if I ask you a personal question? Do you buy antiques yourself?"

"To be quite frank, I don't. I value them, but I prefer modern things."

György Csapó