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Rachel Field Correspondence

Rachel Field 1894-1942

Rachel Lyman Field 1894-1942

Hilda McLeod
Maine State Library

Marion Cobb Fuller
Maine State Library

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FIELD, Rachel

New York, New York, 1894 - March 15, 1942
Los Angeles, California

Summer resident
Rachel Field, author of numerous children’s books and plays, and the first woman to win the John Newbery Medal, was born in New York City, New York, in 1894. Her childhood was spent in this village in the western part of the state and in Springfield, Massachusetts. After graduation from the local schools she entered Radcliffe College. Her early literary interests were in poetry.

Miss Field came to attention first with a one-act play, Three Pills in a Bottle, written while a student at Radcliffe College. She worked under Professor Baker when he was head of the department of drama and director of the workshop theater there and at Harvard. Many of her one-act plays are produced yearly in Little Theatres all over the United States.

Her first five years in New York were spent with a leading moving picture company in an editorial position. Since then she has devoted all of her time to the writing of fiction and poetry. Her books are known primarily as juveniles, but Miss Field, believing that children hate having their books written down to them, has carefully avoided, in verse and prose, this form of insult to the young intelligence. Adult readers have been known to like her books almost as much as children do.

Miss Field’s interest lies chiefly in American stories, as illustrated by Hitty: Her First Hundred Years (1929), the biography of a wooden doll, a piece of genuine Americana, which Miss Field and Miss Dorothy Lathrop, who made the drawings for the book, found in a shop on 8th Street in New York.

Thru the experiences of Hitty the history of the past hundred years is told. The book was awarded the John New-
bery Medal in 1930 by the American Library Association as the best children's book for 1929. American Folk and Fairy Tales (1929) is another example of Miss Field's use of American source material. Points East (1930), narratives of New England in verse, is her first book written exclusively for adults.

Miss Field is described as a gracious and charming person, with a delightful sense of humor and an infectious, chuckling laugh. Her hair is brown and curly. She gives the impression of kindliness without sentimentality. Nine months of the year she lives in New York; the three summer months are spent on Sutton Island, off the Maine Coast, where she has a large house.

Miss Field draws and paints, and has illustrated many of her own books with silhouettes and sketches. These include her first book, a collection of poems entitled The Pointed People (1924); another book of verse, Taxis and Toadstools (1926); a series of small, charming, books: An Alphabet for Boys and Girls (1926), A Little Book of Days (1927), Polly Patchwork (1928), and Pocket-Handkerchief Park (1929); and Little Dog Toby (1928), a story of Victorian England.

- LIVING AUTHORS.
Miss Rachel L. Field  
c/o The Macmillan Company  
60 Fifth Avenue  
New York City  

Dear Miss Field:

Some years ago the State Library started an exhibit collection of the works of contemporary Maine authors. Due to the generosity and cooperation of our authors, this project has had such a success that it now numbers several hundred volumes, all inscribed, and most of them presented by the authors.

We found that among those authors not born in Maine, but connected with the State — by living here, or writing of Maine settings — there were so many whom we wished to include that we have broadened the scope of this Maine Author Collection, to include these writers.

Of course we shall want your books in our Collection. Our one regret is that we have not had them before this time. Naturally, we would not ask that you make a gift of these many books, but we shall endeavor to acquire them, and as we do, we hope that you will be kind enough to autograph them for us.

We are hoping, however, that in the meantime you will want to inscribe for the Maine Author Collection a copy of your latest literary work: "Time Out of Mind," which has been receiving such favorable reviews recently.

We assure you that we will appreciate your kindness in this matter; and may we wish you continued success in literature.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

Secretary
My dear Miss Fuller,

Your very kind letter about "Pink East" has just come and I want you to know at once how much it pleased me to have you write of it as you did. I am very proud to think it is to be in the State Library, for though I cannot claim it to be a real native of Maine, I am much more enthusiastic about it than any other I have seen.
half a mile pretty well. Since I've been coming here for fifteen summers, Sutton is one of the smaller in the Cranberry Isles group. None of the four narratives is exactly of this place except that I've used names and have described certain spots and many general aspects of the islands hereabouts and I pictured the life which I knew it must have been. "Delphium" had a slight foundation of fact behind it; "The Old Gods Come to Somesville, Maine" while not actually taking place in Somesville was partly true and a friend of mine really has seen the stolen gods. But I did not like to use the name of the real Barn. "The Shell: the Lamb and the Bird" is mostly out of my own imagination, with a few bits from old Celtic folk-tales. "Bathsheba Berry" is a well-known folk tale put into a Maine coast setting. So, there they are.

My very best wishes to you and thanks for all your interest,

Always sincerely yours,

Rachel Field
in my various junketings, north, south, east and west.

Just a day or two ago at the request of the Macmillan Company, I sent an autographed copy of "Hitty" to the State Library at Augusta. I don't know if it came into your hands, but I'll be glad to sign it, also, if you would care to have me. Just mail it to me here any time before the middle of September.

As to location of "my" Island, I'm afraid I cannot claim much of it. But I do know its mile and a half by
Chronicles Decline
Of Maine Shipping

Drawing by Marcel Maurel

Rachel Field

Her "Time Out of Mind" lavishes affection on the Maine coast.

Books like the present one read Rachel Field's poignant story of the decline of Maine's picturesque industry, 
"Time Out of Mind" (Macmillan) has in it the same despairing realization of change that marked Isabel 
Carter's "Shipsmates" and Mary Ellen Chase's "Mary Peters." In it, too, is a character—Major Fortune—who must have stepped out of the pages of Dickens' 
"Bleak House," for Major Fortune is exactly like the hard-hearted father of the first part of the earlier novelist's book. But the aim of the author is similar to that of Robert P. Tristram Coffin, who in his last novel, 
"Lost Paradise," told of a beautiful State and the effect upon him of its unchanging charm. It is her diurnal 
appreciation of the Maine coast, regardless of season, that gives "Time Out of Mind" its continued flush of interest.

Kate came to Fortune's Folly at the age of 14 and straightway fell in love with its "strange brightness" of the gulls' breasts and wings, the smell of wild strawberries in late June, the 
waft of geese flying South, the gleam of Wale Back Light, the restful beauty of the sea—in short, Maine.

Portun's Folly, one of many luxurious homes built by sea captains, was owned by the Major. A hard man was 
Major Fortune in his dealings with men and women, but in matters pertaining to sailing ships he was sentimental. Although the age of steam had long since dawned and the Atlantic's age long been laid, he still persisted in facing toward the 1850s, the age of the great clippers, the great whaler. His daughter, Rissa, he understood, but his son, Nat, he did not. The hard and fast rule was that the sea was worthy of a man's best efforts, piano-playing fit only for women. Locking up the piano, however, did not keep tunes from running in the boy's head. Sending him off to sea only served to make greater his triumph when he placed a symphony before a hushed audience in a gaiety.

Circumstances forced Kate to remain in the big house while Nat soared to the heights of success and then married. More and more tourists were visiting Maine and Kate's daughter, Kate, saw gold in clams, home-grown produce and the great pines. The woodsmen came and destroyed a wealth of beauty. Cheaply constructed cottages appeared on the beachlands. The Major shut himself up in his house and died there in despair. When Nat, broken in spirit after an ill-considered marriage, came home, Kate gave up her future and threw away her reputation in his behal'. Spinsterhood beckoned, but she was content.

"Time Out Of Mind" is stereotyped in its mechanics. So far as plot goes, the story has been written several times before. The author overdraws the characters of Rissa and the Major and leaves several questions unanswered. But regardless of resistance in technique and occasional artificialities, "Time Out Of Mind" ranks high among the books written about Maine. The swell of a real sea and the sturdiness of a race are in its pages, bringing it to life.
April 16, 1935

111 East 10th Street
New York
Telephone Algonquin 4-4980

My dear Miss Beed,

Your letter has just been forwarded to me from the Macmillan Co. and I shall be delighted to see that a copy of my new book, with its State of Maine background, goes to you for the library. "God's Pocket" which I did last year, which is a biography based on the Journals of Captain Samuel Hadlock, F.R.C.S., Cranberry Isles, should also be
there as it is a genuine Maine record, but you may already have a copy. I will be glad to send that along with the novel & inscribe them both.

As I recall I have already inscribed & contributed copies of "Hitty", "Calico Bush" & "Points East" to the library, but my memory may not be correct, so I will be glad if you will look it up for me. These three all have a Maine Coast background & should be included. Many of my smaller juveniles are too trivial to warrant such an honor, but these five books I should be very proud to have there. Thanking you for your kind letter— I am, Always sincerely, Rachel Field
April 17, 1935

Miss Rachel L. Field
111 East 10th Street
New York City

Dear Miss Field:

We are delighted with your generosity. Of course we shall want "God's Pocket," a truly distinctive Maine biography, as well as "Time Out of Mind." We appreciate your kindness in offering to inscribe a copy of each for our Maine Author Collection.

We regret that we have not "Hitty," "Calico Bush," and "Points East" in our collection, but we shall want them, particularly as they are of Maine backgrounds. We are ordering copies sent you from Biblion, Inc., in Boston, and hope that you will be so kind as to inscribe them for us. We enclose a return label and postage.

That the success of the Maine Author Collection depends upon the cooperation and kindness of our authors we realize, and we are always grateful for their help — particularly when we receive such a prompt and generous response as was yours. Thank you, and may we assure you of a very cordial invitation should you find it possible to visit our Library and its Maine Author Collection when you are once more in our State.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

Secretary
April 25, 1935

Miss Rachel L. Field  
111 East 10th Street 
New York City

Dear Miss Field:

Your five books arrived this morning, and we are delighted. Please accept our most sincere thanks for making it possible to start the collection of your books so successfully. It is certainly a representative collection, the author of which we are proud to claim as "Maine-adopted."

We thank you for your interest, and we wish to add our word of praise for "Time Out of Mind," which is indeed an unusually fine book.

Very truly yours,

Maine State Library

Secretary
Passing of Maine Shipping Theme of Delightful Novel by Rachel Field, Summer Resident of Pine Tree State

Words of a reviewer fail to convey the charm of Rachel Field's new novel, "Time Out of Mind," and the hold it takes on the reader. Its charm is indefinable. The title conveys the atmosphere and essence of the book. Natives of northern New England will recognize the expression at once. It was commonly used in all old families and it suggests things that have been a constant part of life farther back than one can remember. It is used frequently by Kate, the character whom Rachel Field has made the chronicler of this story.

Miss Field whose summers are spent in her island home near Mount Desert, has absorbed the atmosphere and acquainted herself with the rich store of Maine coast lore to be found in that region. As in the case of other writers Miss Field appreciates the romance of Maine's shipping days and the tragedy its passing brought into many lives. She tells her novel around a fire that it finds response, not only in the hearts of Maine readers, but in readers all over the country. It was proven by the fact that since the first week the book went on sale it took its place on the lists of the "Six best sellers" in fiction in all the large cities of the United States.

It happens that this is the fourth outstanding novel within a year that has been inspired by the seafaring people of Maine. It is preceded by Kenneth Roberts' "Captain Caution," Mary Ellen Chase's "Mary Peters" and Elaine Myers' "Loaves and Fishes." It is "Mary Peters" that is inevitably recalled when one reads the "Six best sellers" in fiction. It is easy to locate Little Prospect, which is not far from the city of Rockland, but every little seaside port town has at least one such old sea captain house as "Fortune's Folly," sitting in grandeur on an eminence overlooking the harbor, its white columns and cupola glistening above the greenery and bloom of its spacious gardens. There is one or more known by the name of "Folly," with accompanying traditions of the builder's extravagance and foolhardiness, but it is not likely that the author borrowed one of these.

"Fortune's Folly" had belonged to three generations of a family of shipbuilders, who had won distinction on the sea and in military service, when Kate came there to live and had it impressed upon her that "there's no port too far for Fortune's pines to cast their shadows." Kate was the sturdy product of a hilly Maine farm. Like a grim and threatening shadow over the carefree joyousness of childhood, in the heart of Kate grew up the knowledge that her country breeding was threatened with the disintegration of old trees; the village folks with their small gossip and narrow minds; the dreariness of Rissa and Dick Halter, who must always be secondary to Nat in Miss Field's fierce and passionate devotion to her brother; the devotion of Saint Jordan to the Fortunes, turned to hatred and an obsession of revenge in a single night.

All these are combined in one complex and baffling web, through which one must seek to find the great, underlying harmony. As it thrives all sounds and surge of the sea. It was that same sea that inspired Nat to write his great "Sea Symphony" that it had nearly taken his life.

The whole downfall of the Fortune family is encompassed in this story. Kate shows how it was due to the pride and stubbornness of the Major, whose heart hung like a grim and threatening shadow over the carefree joyousness of childhood. In after years Kate came to understand the nature of the man better and compassion was mingled with confidence in him. His daughter, Rissa, never forgave him, for what she considered his heartless cruelty to her brother, and, strangely enough, it was Kate the girl who came into his home as the child of his keeper, who brought some measure of alleviation to his despair. When, with fortune dwindled, health and hope for the future shattered, deserted by his children—ships, forests, family, all gone—he approached her melancholy end.

Major Fortune obstinately blinded his eyes to all that by his own doing. Otherwise he would have seen the inevitable doom of the sailing vessel in time to have saved his fortune, and not defied the signs of the times and the advice of his best counsellors. Excessively stubborn, he would hang any ship that brought him only a dollar. He would have fought his son, Nat, who was physically and temperamentally incapable of carrying on the Fortune traditions as a ruler of the sea. That life on board ship under a rough and unfeeling commander like him that Miss Murty would crush him. That, by refusing to indulge the boy in his passion for music, he would enrage him from the only way by which he might gain the distinction and world-renown the father craved for him.

All these things were apparent to the clear-sighted Kate, whose artistly, practical tho she was, were sharpened by love and sympathy. 

The character of Kate Fernald was comprehensively portrayed by the artist-friend, Dick Halter, when he painted her beneath an apple-tree. He perceived her nature, with the sound-hearted, unflavored, sound-hearted, with the gold and ruddy glow of full development. Dick Dick, if much Kate had to give or how lavish she would be with her gifts asking nothing in return. The condescending woman expressed the same idea when she said: "You've got a heart that's bigger than your child. It's wide enough to take in a raft of people and others..."
who find their way to it'll never be turned aside. You've got a giving hand, not a taking one."

And so it proved thru life, Kate's wisdom, at times, might be questioned, but never her loyalty or her loving devotion; her entire unquestioning willingness to bear the burdens love put upon her. "You'll work things out your own way in secret," Old Lady Phibben's truthful forecast, "No one'll ever tell you what road to take. You'll find it alone and it won't be easy going."

Miss Field is equally skillful in her portrayal of Nat, an entirely different type of character—All fire and air as Kate was all earth," as Old Lady Phibben expressed it. Nat was one of those people fated to be much loved and to bring sorrow and misfortune to those who loved him. He kept two women from marriage to men who loved them and was miserable with the woman he married. Yet, this knot that "makes it plain, he was not to blame, and he suffered even more himself than he made others suffer.

It was to Nat, from the night she first saw him, small and mischievous—"Everything peaked and startled about his face, brows like two black feathers above merry brown eyes; tumbled spikes of dark hair and a small triangular chin," as she records her first impression—to the night of his death, that Kate gave her unfaltering devotion, weeping up, fuller and deeper, in those months of his despair, when he had the most need of it. For him she sacrificed home and a life of security with Jake Bullard; the regard of her neighbors, her position in the community, and the affection of Rissa, her friend since childhood.

Yet there is no repining or bitterness of spirit in this woman who records so poignantly a life lived deeply, if not widely, when there is nothing left to look forward to. "For it was a strange, high tide that took our three lives and flung them together, to mingle in salt and sun and the fierce currents of our youth. I think there must always be Fortunes and Fernalds wherever there are people in the world whether they go by those names or not."

Miss Field has given a memorable picture of the love between a sister and brother; the sister's protective and defiant in childhood; in maturity so all-absorbing and dominating that it stifled what it would have cherished.

One of the finest things about Miss Field's novel is its consistency. Not a single note of inconsistency creeps into any one of the characters or their actions. And, next perhaps, comes the undeniable literary quality of the writing. Miss Field has an unerring instinct for the right word and the right expression. She can evoke memories as poignantly and as surely as can certain perfumes associated with one's past. If her book is romance, who shall not say it is not also realism, for the scenes and the emotions it portrays are very real and true to life. The bitter is mingled with the sweet in large quantities, but it never embitters its heroine and it never becomes hopeless or sordid.

Surely, consistently and inevitably the story moves along to the dramatic trial in which Kate's action on the tragic night which is the story's climax, is vindicated. Maine readers peruse the book with deep contentment. The places, the vernacular, the people, the traditions, all are familiar. We seem to be participants with her in the evening launching of the "Rainbow," one of those events celebrated for miles up and down the coast, now forever past. Some of the things described, like the launching, are seen thru the glamour of childish eyes; others thru the eyes of maturity, stripped of all illusion.

Only once does the writer's eyes stray, in retrospect, from the saltpine lands, the shipyards and the tiny harbor village, to which Kate has persistently clung, and that is when she lives over again in memory, that glorified and triumphant night in New York, when she saw Nat directing a great orchestra and swaying a whole theatre by the composition which she knew as did no other but its composer.

Sitting in her little room she reflects with calm conviction that "it would make Nat happy to know that sometimes they play his 'Ship Symphony;' it coming to me across miles of air from a far-away concert hall. I knew when I heard the drums begin their familiar beat of hammers on wooden hulls, what I had known so surely that night of his concert and out there alone with him in the storm, that nothing which has ever stirred the heart can be lost to us."

Macmillan Co., New York, are publishers of the book.

B. B. W.
"TIME OUT OF MIND"
A Saga of Maine As Narrated
By Popular Story Writer,
Rachel Field

An inquiry comes from Interlachen,
Fla.: "Will you tell in your book
what you know of Rachel
Field and her 'Time Out of Mind'?

To Macmillan Company we are
indebted to much information concern-
ing this gifted writer whom Maine
claims although she was born in
New York.

Miss Field for many years was

known as one of the most popular
American story writers for young
people of many ages. Her prose
stories have always been enjoyed by
a double audience. The moral
humorously implied in "Eliza and the
Elves"; the sedate and sagacious
side of "Hitty"; the historic detail of
"Calico Bush"; the emotional analysis
"Hepatica Hawks"; the old Eng­
lish background of "Little Dog
Toby"; the New York atmosphere of
"Just Across the Street", all these

were the children's own, and "Points
East", a kind of story telling in
poetry definitely for those at least
over fifteen. "Branches Green"
struck a new note. It contained
poetry written not for the purpose of
pleasing young people, and there­
fore has found for itself a double
audience of older children who are
appreciative of poetry and adults. Not
so long ago Miss Field proved her

versatility in the direction of writ­
ing, by producing an adult novel,
"God's Pocket," as fascinating a
piece of biography as has ever come
out of the Maine background.

Rachel Field was born in New York.
Her family moved to Springfield,
Mass., where she attended the pub­
lic schools, later going to Radcliffe
College for special courses in litera­
ture and composition. During the
last two years there she became a
member of Prof. Baker's "47 Work­
shop," a playwriting course where the
students wrote and produced their
own plays. That marked the begin­
ning of her play writing career. After
that she tried her hand at poetry,
"The Pointed People" being the first
published venture and everything else
followed in due course.

Miss Field says of herself: "From
the year I was 15, I have been going
each summer to a small beautiful
wooded island off the coast of Maine,
and I suppose that it, more than any
one thing in my life has helped me
with my writing. For it means roots
and background to me. It creeps into
nearly everything I write and I never
want to be anywhere else when sum­
mer comes around. Many of my
verses in 'The Pointed People' were
written there; and much of 'Hitty'
and all of 'Calico Bush' has that
coast of Maine setting.''

Miss Field spends her summers in
Maine and her winters in New York
and Connecticut. Trotty, her dog,

is one of her constant, worthy com­
panions.

Referring to "Time Out of Mind", here
is what Miss Field herself has
to say:

"In thinking over what I could say
of myself and why and how 'Time Out
of Mind' came to be written, I was
surprised to discover a series of queer
paradoxes. I wish I could say that
I had been born on a sailing vessel on
a voyage round the Horn instead of
in a brownstone-front within two
blocks of the Grand Central station.
I would like to think that my infant
eyes saw salt water and the bristling
spruces of the Maine coast, but it
must be admitted that they peered
from a carriage trundled in the brown
square of Bryant Park.

"The coast of Maine did not burst
upon me till I was 15. I often
wonder if that may not be the reason
its dark, jugged shores and wooded
islands made such lasting impressions
on my adolescent emotions.

"The big white houses that pro­
sperous captains and shipbuilders set
up to overlook Penobscot Bay and
the harbors always stirred me to
wonder at the lost era they represen­
ted. And so I suppose I was bound

some day to do a book about just
such a house and the people who
lived in it. It must have been more
than a dozen years ago that the
characters of Kate and Nat and
Rissa came into my mind, and they
stayed there in the back of it all
through the time I was trying to write
other things, plays which never
reached Broadway (a far cry from the
coast of Maine), verse, and later the
books for children.

"Ironically enough, I wrote the
New York chapters of 'Time Out of
Mind' last September under Maine
spruces within sound of the sea and
the Line Storm beating on the roof,
and many of the parts that had most
to do with sea and woods were
written here in New York, with the
Clock in the Gas Company's tower

leading me the hours. It was no more
difficult to write of berries and moss
and apples here than there.

"I never went to a ship launching.
The echo of hammers on wooden

timber has come to me second-hand,
through the words of older people
whose ears have actually heard them.
I cannot boast sea-captain ances­
tors, yet here I am writing of the
passing of those days of prosperity.
One never knows how it will be,
especially if one happens to be merely
a 'poor ignorant author' to borrow
a pet phrase from 'Copey' of
Harvard'.

In the April 7th New York Herald
Tribune "Books" "Time Out of Mind"
was reviewed by Robert F. Tristram
Coffin, whose "Portrait of an Ameri­
can" and "Lost Paradise" belong to
the saga of which he speaks. It is
grandly written and if only space
permitted entire re-print! Dr. Coffin
says, in part:

"It is refreshing to read a book in
the year 1933 that leaves one vibrat­
ing as one vibrates after reading a
saga. It is an event that a sage can

say, in part:

"Time Out of Mind' is such an event. This story
of Maine is full of the ancient liter­
ary absolutes. Though we are a
young nation, we have been having
a feast lately of books built out of
our national past, which have the
primitive and fundamental designs
that would look well in an epic.

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such a house and the people who
lived in it. It must have been more
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characters of Kate and Nat and
Rissa came into my mind, and they
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ary absolutes. Though we are a
young nation, we have been having
a feast lately of books built out of
our national past, which have the
primitive and fundamental designs
that would look well in an epic.
Realm of Music
By Gladys St. Clair Morgan

Rachel Field, a magical name to be added to my Hall of Fame; a jewel to be laid away in my treasure trove of priceless memories. Rachel Field, author of many children's stories, among them "Hitty", a winner of the Newbery Medal, poems of rare loveliness, and in more recent years "God's Pocket" and "Time Out of Mind" which remains at the head of the best sellers after many months and has taken the young author far up on the ladder of success. Though she was born in Stockbridge, Mass., and makes her permanent home in New York City, she has spent many summers in Sutton, a small island off Mt. Desert, and in these sojourns she has become so imbued with Maine atmosphere that she writes more sensitively of it than some of our native-born writers.

It was from Sutton she motored up to Camden the other afternoon to address the Maine Library Association meeting, and it was my great privilege to hear her. She came to Camden with her husband, a blond giant with so much distinctive personality that one cannot imagine speaking of him as "Rachel Field's husband". His name is Arthur Pedersen.

Rachel Field is young and lovely. Dark auburn hair curling back from her face and caught in a soft knot at the nape of her neck. Vivid blue eyes very white teeth. A warm glowing face. To me she conveyed a composite picture of Hedwig Benedict and Ethel Lee Hayden, interesting? She was wearing a blue knitted suit, one of those heavenly blues so popular this season; her hat was a darker blue felt.

Opening her talk on "How Books Happen", Miss Field said: "It seems foolish for me to spend my time talking about books to a roomful of people who know so much more about books than I ever shall" She gave just what we wanted most to hear, behind the scene sketches of how her own books were written. "Books can rise and fall like cakes," was a laughing remark, and tight rope walkers and writers have much in common, you never know when you're going to fall off!" Doctors and their patients were also used as a comparison, a doctor may nurse his patient along to a point where complete recovery is in sight, and then there is a relapse. So with a writer and his book.

* * *

She was seven or eight when she first had the impulse to write a book. It was a very nice book, blank white leaves cut and carefully sewed together and bound in a cover prettily printed in bright crayons: "B-O-O-K". She decided the nice white blank pages looked better than anything she could put on them, so that first book was never written, and "Perhaps it was my best book, who knows?" she queried.

She told of a play she wrote during her second year at Radcliffe which enjoyed no small success. It seemed to her to be very original in thought, and when later she wrote the poem "If Once You've Stepped on an Island", she had the idea that she alone experienced the feeling expressed therein. Yet in both instances she had come to realize that hundreds of others have the same feelings, the same ideas, the same thoughts; that her own thoughts were not original in the least, but simply an expression of another's thoughts on paper.

Miss Field voiced her love for Maine, and Maine appears over and over again in her writing. She says she feels Maine more keenly after she has returned to her New York apartment, and there can readily put on paper pictures visioned during her summer sojourn that elude her when actually in Maine.

She gave a delightful story of "Hitty". One day when she and Dorothy Lathrop, illustrator, were strolling down a New York avenue, they spied a tiny wooden doll, not more than a finger's length, more than 100 years old, in an antique shop window. To her diminutive apron was attached the inscription in almost illegible handwriting "Hitty". It was too expensive to be purchased, but one could admire and long through the glass. Miss Field and Miss Lathrop corresponded later about Hitty. "She is so tanned she must have been on a long ocean voyage", or "I am sure she was in a shipwreck" for what would a long ocean voyage be without a shipwreck! Hitty kept popping up in letters, embroidered more and more, and one day Miss Lathrop wrote: "Why don't you write a story about Hitty and I will illustrate it for you?" and so all at once there was the book "Hitty". It was easy writing, Miss Field told us, because she had Hitty do all the things she always wanted to do when a child nine or so, interweaving stories she had heard her mother and grandmother tell.

She told of "Calico Bush" another charming young story, concerning The Maypole, around which is one of those curious stories that have come down from generation to generation; from the first settlers on Cranberry Isles, to be exact, of the French wife of an early settler who had set a maypole up on the spot now known as The Maypole.

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Miss Field tells of the frequent meetings with the aged grandson of Capt. Hadlock and his wife, the “Prussian lady”. “Some days he would talk and some days he wouldn’t,” said Miss Field, “but always on my part there were gentle proddings and questionings. One beautiful July day I called on the dear old man, and in the course of the visit he showed me, to my amazed delight, the tattered diary of Capt. Hadlock, two worn, almost illegible, record books, such as were seen in all country stores a generation or so ago. He was in his most talkative mood that day, and I was profoundly moved to hold in my two hands those records of Capt. Hadlock’s travels with his show, records which just by chance had not been taken with him on that last voyage which spelled disaster. The two old books were placed in my hands, a definite legacy, for two days later the old man died. My time was then given over almost entirely to deciphering the faded handwriting, making out the quaint phonetic spelling, and piecing together the travels as they progressed bit by bit. Occasionally there would be a page missing, presumably where the entry had been too spicy to meet the approval of the gently bred “Prussian lady.”

Miss Field pointed out that such books as that grow out of definite pictures, but other books are acquired in a more painful fashion, from incidents noted here and there and dovetailed together, from threads starting we know not where and woven in and out. Such a book is “Time Out of Mind”. When Miss Field first began to come to Maine, she was impressed by the beautiful large white houses set on high bluffs amid spruce trees. One of these houses in a seafaring town she named “The Folly”, you remember “The Folly” in “Time Out of Mind”? She looked at and studied these old houses, heard stories about them, asked questions about them, and began to realize what the shipbuilding era had meant to Maine.

That probably was the beginning of the story, although it may have been the description of a launching heard in the conversation between two old women in Newburyport, Miss Field listened as they talked, saw their shoulders lift, their eyes brighten, their faded cheeks take on color as they said “Do you remember...” and went on to tell of the sound of the hammers, the thrill as the boat left the ways and took the water. “It was so romantic and exciting to hear them talk,” said Miss Field, “but when I questioned them, one told me, sadly shaking her head, and looking at me with a pitying expression, “You are too young to have ever been to a ship launching.”

But from that description I took away the romance, the excitement, the sound of the hammers, to be put in a book. And then the clock which runs through the story, seen in an antique shop, the little figures of two woodsmen coming out on the stroke of the hour to saw away at their unseen log, a French clock that had been brought overseas by a Bath captain. When I saw it I decided then and there that some day this little clock would go into a book, in the white house called “The Folly.”

Miss Field’s comment was: “Writing books is much like berry picking. You go out to pick blueberries, but you come across some nice blackberries, and chances are that you return home with your basket filled with blackberries instead of blueberries. Some times you return with only a few scattering berries in the bottom of your basket. One thing is certain, however; you come home with one of two things, with your basket either empty or with contents that may surprise you.”

Rockland
Courier-Gazette
Sept. 14
October 10, 1935

Miss Rachel Field
111 East 10th Street
New York City

Dear Miss Field:

Recently we purchased the book, SUNG UNDER THE SILVER UMBRELLA, a most delightful collection of children's verse. We find that four of your poems are included, and considering this, we hope you will be kind enough to autograph the book. We are sending it to you today, and enclose a return label and postage for your convenience. It is our intention to have the book autographed by the four Maine Authors herein represented: Elizabeth Coatsworth, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Laura Richards, and yourself. We will very much appreciate the addition of your autograph.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

Secretary
October 22, 1935

Miss Rachel Field
111 East 10th Street
New York City

Dear Miss Field:

Thank you for autographing and returning SUNG UNDER THE SILVER UMBRELLA. Such kindness and cooperation are truly appreciated.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

Secretary