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Kipling Fighting Putnam

This is a right pretty quarrel, this between Mr. Kipling and the publishing house of G. P. Putnam's Sons. The publishers have explained and deprecated to the limit, but the irate author is having the law on them, quite the same, and every lover of fair play views his action with a sympathetic eye. Not that every, or perhaps any, lover of fair play (except when himself can get an unfair advantage) knows very clearly what it is all about, but publishers have so long covered their comfortable kidneys with the fat of authors that anything offering a prospect of compulsory restitution is most welcome as a variant of the show. The justice of Mr. Kipling's contention, whatever that may be, is hardly relevant; the controlling consideration is that publishers are, as a rule, pigs. It seems right that authors should once in a while have something as good to eat as pork.

But Mr. Kipling must first catch his pig. He accuses the defendants of publishing some of his work without legal right. They reply that they "publish" nothing of his: they merely buy the printed sheets from other publishers, put their own covers on them and sell them. This, in their view, does not constitute publication of them. It constitutes publication by whom, then? Certainly not by the "other publishers." Both Messrs. Putnam and the "other publishers" being innocent of offense and altogether good, it seems logically to follow that Mr. Kipling is himself the offender in having written the books. Still, public sympathy is with him, and it is to be hoped that the defendants will be content with such actual and exemplary damages as he can afford to pay.

I wonder, by the way, if many of Kipling's readers know that his "Rhyme of the Three Captains" is a personal lampoon in which he discharged his bosom of certain "perilous stuff" generated in a quarrel with Harper & Brothers. They figure in the "Rhyme" as the pirate privateer that plundered the merchant brig (Kipling) with the assent of the Three Captains. These three are Messrs. Hardy, Besant and Black, who not only did not stand by their then obscure compatriot in his quarrel with the American publishers, but took up arms against him. In the 1892 edition of Barrack Room Ballads the verses have this note:

This ballad appears to refer to one of the exploits of the notorious Paul Jones, the American pirate. It is founded on fact.

It may so "appear," but it is not; and the facts upon which it is founded are correctly given above. The action of Messrs. Besant, Black and Hardy is another of the many instances of distinguished authors coming smugly forward and testifying to the good moral character of publishers—which means nothing more than that publishers have ceased to rob them and have made restitution from the pockets of authors still obscure and helpless. The note quoted above

may be accepted as pretty fair evidence that the Harpers had “squared it” with Mr. Kipling. There is a good deal of human nature in distinguished authors, unfortunately.

I dare say I shall myself be bearing witness some day to the good moral character of Dr. Adolf Danziger, named on the title page of one of my books as “The Western Authors’ Publishing Company”: to that of the late Way & Williams of Chicago, who promptly accepted a manuscript “book” of mine, kept it an entire year and then placidly changed their minds about publishing it, to that of the half dozen houses that have handled another of my books without making even so much as a “statement to me”; even to that of Chatto & Windus of London! These last gentlemen not only altered the text of a book of mine to which they had purchased the copyright but without my assent or knowledge actually substituted another title for the one which I had given it! That is not all when Baron Tauchnitz of Leipzig thought the book good enough for republication in his famous “Collection of British Authors” he sent me, as his custom, an honorarium of twenty-five pounds sterling, no great sum certainly, but he owed me nothing, there being no international copyright law. Unfortunately, not knowing my address, he sent it through Chatto & Windus. “Through” is not the word—it did not get through: they kept it for their honesty. When some years afterwards I learned about it and Colonel Richard Henry Savage mentioned it to Tauchnitz, and Tauchnitz mentioned it to Chatto & Windus, those honest gentlemen wrote me a lying exculpatory letter inclosing a check for—one-half the amount! The rest they have yet. (This, by the way, is the publishing-house alluded to recently by Mr. Robert Barr, who wrote me down an ass because of his kind entreaty I would not work for a publication of which he and Jerome K. Jerome were editors and Chatto & Windus proprietors.) If ever I incur the ambition to be a distinguished author it will be due to the hope of receiving from Messrs Chatto & Windus twelve pounds and ten shillings sterling and attesting in some leading periodical my steadfast faith in their commercial righteousness.

It is to be wished that the Peace Congress now in session at The Hague would address its wisdom to the task of finding a *modus vivendi* for publishers and undistinguished authors; universal disarmament would be of small advantage compared with that. War is what General Sherman declared it to be, but the unmemorial combat between these two classes of civilians is the supreme affliction. By way of a just settlement of the controversy I suggest the revival of an old Saxon law, which gave to a peasant who had been beaten by a nobleman the satisfaction of cutting his assailant’s shadow projected on a wall. A wronged author granted that separation would be all the better for it and the punished publisher not much the worse. I am not prepared to say that all publishers have shadows in attendance on them; the shadows of some may, I fancy, be a little particular as to whom they are seen with.

Mr. Markham’s book, “The Man with the Hoe and Other Poems,” is “out.” Many of the Other Poems are excellent, some are great. If asked to name the most poetic—not, if you please, the “loftiest” or most “purposeful”—I think I should choose “The Wharf of Dreams,” a sonnet which has not to my knowledge been commended by the reviewers. I venture to quote it:

Strange wares are handled on the wharves of sleep;
Shadows of shadows pass, and many a light
Flashes a signal fire across the night;
Barges depart whose voiceless steersmen keep
Their way without a star upon the deep;
And from lost ships, homing with ghostly crews,
Come cries of incommunicable news,

While cargoes pile the piers a moon-white heap –
Budgets of dream-dust, merchandise of song,
Wreckage of hope and packs of ancient wrong,
Nepenthes gathered from a secret strand,
Fardels of heartache, burdens of old sins,
Luggage sent down from dim ancestral inns,
And bales of fantasy from No-Man's Land.

Really, one does not every year meet with a finer blending of imagination and fancy than that; and I know not where to put a finger on two better lines in recent work than these:

And from lost ships, homing with ghostly crews,
Come cries of incommunicable news.

The reader to whom these strange lines do not give an actual physical thrill may rightly boast himself impregnable to poetic emotion and indocible to the meaning of it.

I observe with disgust that Mr. Markham's publisher, or Mr. Markham's publisher's hired man with a hoe, has had the incredible impudence to "edit" some of the poems. The most shocking example of the villain's audacity is seen in the well-known and justly admired quatrain entitled "Poetry," on page 41:

She comes like the hush and beauty of the night,
And sees too deep for laughter,
Her touch is a vibration and a light
From worlds before and after

The first line of this, as trimmed into metrical, "regularity" by the madman, stands thus:

She comes as hush and beauty of the night.

If Mr. Markham had the hard luck to be dead I fancy that would make him turn in his grave till fatigued by the exertion; living, he may profitably ask himself if his dream of Universal Brotherhood is comparable with the existence of such impossible as the featherless biped that altered that line. If Mr. Markham is willing to fraternize with that kind of horned cattle he is denied the right to roar when gored.

As to the piece which gives title to the book, I do not observe that it improves with age: and of the one entitled "The Man Under the Stone" I am moved to ask by virtue of what qualities is it poetry or even verse. It is neither metrical, nor rhythmic, nor anything also that prose is not, and appears to have been included in the volume in obedience to the demand of a labor union threatening a strike and riot if it were not. I command it to the attention of that illustrious prosedian Professor Hochstadter and hope that his skill in scansion may disclose the law of its being and demonstrate its right to be considered "long meter." I concede a certain sanctity to the Professor's judgment of poetry: he speaks, in a certain sense, *ex cathedra*, for his prosody was obviously derived from the Methodist hymn-book.