Rudyard Kipling’s Letters to His Agents, A. P. Watt and Son, 1889–1899

Kipling, Rudyard, Pinney, Thomas

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To A. P. Watt 10 January 1891

ALS

[London]

10-1-91

Dear Mr. Watt,

I must apologize for my delay in answering yr letter. The MacM’s must think me very ignorant about copyright. Surely they must know that the book was published in the first instance by Lip[pin]c[ot]t’s—absolutely securing c’right. The publication of the 2 additional chapters in America has nothing to do with the case.\(^2\) What good would it do anyone to publish the Chapters alone in England? As to the publication of the book in America through Lovel with the final chapters t’was done of course with my authority and because I knew\(^3\) the story must be out in America in book form 3 months before March in any event and was meanwhile open to anybody’s stealing.\(^4\) I naturally preferred for artistic reasons that if it must be published as a book it shld be published as I wrote it. Here of course it c’d not be issued in book form without my authority and I was not open to the same danger.

Sincerely,

Rudyard Kipling

Notes 10 January 1891

1. The office date stamp on the letter is 11 February 1891, in my judgment a mistake.

2. The edition of *The Light that Failed* published in New York by the United States Book Co., the successor to the John W. Lovell Co., at the end of December 1890, adds two chapters to the first edition’s twelve chapters and ends with the hero’s death instead of an engagement to be married.
3. RK has here inadvertently written “I knew I knew.”

4. The first English edition, with fifteen chapters, was published by Macmillan on 17 March 1891.

To A. P. Watt 11 January 1891

ALS

[London]

Dear Watt

NO! A. G. gets nothing of mine this side the grave—or grove. Let the German man try his hand at the Light by all means. Earle Hodgson is the name of the Rosslyn series man. I haven’t his letter by me just now—being all over the place and the town.

I’ve been thinking seriously over the Walter. Besant agreement. It’s very pretty from W. B.’s side but there’s too little Rudyard Kipling and 3 1/3 % profits isn’t sufficient. Also there’s a general unsatisfactoriness about the names on the posters etc. Now there’s no special call to let W.B. know this. I’ve been trying to write a play but I don’t feel that I can do it at present. Therefore I can’t tie myself down to the work off hand. When I’ve done the play I’ll begin to trade. The business isn’t as easy as it looks, and W. B. must wait. I promise nothing, not because I have other offers but because I want to do the thing off my own bat.

Sincerely

Rudyard Kipling

Notes 11 January 1891

1. This is the first instance of this form of salutation.


4. Probably a syndicating proposition, though I have no information about the agreement.

5. A little over a month later RK wrote to the actor, playwright and theatrical manager, Wilson Barrett, that “I’ve tried the notion in not less than 40 different ways.... It’s not the least use my trying to do a play until I’m sure I can do it—at
present I’m anything but sure” (17 February 1891: ALS, University of Texas). The “notion” for a play may have come from Barrett.

To A. P. Watt  [Early March? 1891]

ALS

Embankment Chambers, / Villiers Street, Strand.

Dear Mr. Watt:

The past week and more has knocked me over with a little go of dysentery which has kept me in much retirement. This must be my excuse for not dancing (indeed I feel but little inclined to walk) but now that I am plastered up I hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,
Rudyard Kipling

P.S. MacM’s repros of my fathers work are simply lovely!1

Notes  [Early March? 1891]

1. RK wrote on 4 March that he was just back from the sea but has “re-started my complaint which is good old Indian dysentery and to sea I must go again” (to John Collier: ALS, Dalhousie University).

2. JLK’s Beast and Man in India, published by Macmillan in October 1891, has 95 black and white illustrations, including ornamental initials, 81 of them by the author.

To A. P. Watt  11 March 1891

ALS

Embankment Chambers, / Villiers Street, Strand.

Dear Watt

Hurroo! Moreau has come up with £250.1 It’s being sent over to my bank. You fetched him evidently and when we meet we’ll divide the carcass.

Sincerely
Rudyard Kipling
Note 11 March 1891
1. Royalties for the sale of the “Indian Railway Library” series.

To A. P. Watt 25 March 1891

ALS

101 Earls Court Road

Dear Mr. Watt:

My notion for the book of collected MacM. Stories—to be published by MacMillan would be as under: To be called “Mine own People.”

The Courting of Dinah Shadd.
The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney.
On Greenhow Hill.
The Mutiny of the Mavericks
The Man who was
The Head of the District
Without Benefit of Clergy.
Namgay Doola.
The Mark of the Beast.
Bertran and Bimi
The Return of Imray

Could you open negotiations for these and send me a copy of each story to go over? I have a little time now.

Sincerely
Rudyard Kipling

Notes 25 March 1891
1. The address of the London house where RK’s parents were living. RK kept the Villiers Street flat until about May 1891, but was, in effect, living at 101 Earl’s Court for some time before that. His sister Alice (“Trix”), in England without her husband, joined them there, the last renewal of the “family square.” She later recalled that RK had a bedroom, top floor front, and a desk in a front room downstairs where he could write (Kipling Journal, December 1942, 13).

2. The list that follows roughly resembles the contents list for the collection called Mine Own People published in New York in March 1891. In May 1891, RK learned that an American book under the title of Mine Own People already existed
(Letters, II: 35). He therefore changed the title of his collection to Life's Handicap, Being Stories of Mine Own People and considerably augmented the selection. This English edition was published on 14 August 1891 and a month later an American edition of Life’s Handicap, with the same contents as the English, replaced Mine Own People in America. The original New York edition of this collection is notable for a “critical introduction” by Henry James.

To A. P. Watt 7 April 1891

ALS

101. Earls Court Road

7 / 4 / 91

Dear Watt:

Many thanks for all your letters. I’m back in town now, with the remnants of my old cold on me, but otherwise cheerful. Enclosed please find M[oreau]’s letter: wh. answer Very Stiffly. I have no copyrights to sell and the letter’s a piece of dee impudence.

The nations of the Earth as you will see want to translate my Works. Can you settle with Norway and Italy as enclosed.

Sincerely
Rudyard Kipling

P.S. Gently insinuate to M. that we want a statement of accounts.

R K.

To A. S. Watt1 [19 April 1891]2

ALS

[101 Earl’s Court Road]

Sunday night

Dear Alick,

Here’s the “Finest Story etc.”3 Please hurry her thro’ the type writing and send to me at 101 Earls Ct Road. Better send her to the Atlantic.4 She’s a good tale I think:

Sincerely
Rudyard.
Notes  [19 April 1891]

1. Alexander (Alick) Strahan Watt (1869–1948), the second of A. P. Watt’s four sons; he joined his father in the agency business and succeeded him as the head of the firm.

2. Watt’s response to this letter is dated 20 April 1891 (see note 4, below); Sunday was the 19th.


To A. S. Watt  [April? 1891?]\(^1\)

ALS

[London]

Thursday.

Dear Alick

Tomlinson received.\(^2\)

I don’t know Richard Harding Davis personally.\(^3\) His name isn’t Chester. Will send all work as soon as possible.

R.

Notes  [April? 1891?]

1. The only clue to a date is the reference to “Tomlinson,” which CK says was “written last April” (Diary, 23 January 1892).


3. Davis (1864–1916), American journalist, particularly noted as a war correspondent and as the author of many books about his adventures; he was as well a prolific writer of short stories, novels, and plays. He was currently editor of Harper’s Weekly. RK came to know him during RK’s American residence.
To A. S. Watt [22? July 1891]\(^1\)

*ALS*

101. Earls Ct Rd

Dear Alick,

Herewith your enclosures and a fool of a letter which I can’t see the drift of. Anyway tell the writer that I can’t make an appointment. I’m trying to do what I can but just now I’m under the doctors orders.\(^2\)

Rudyard.

Notes [22? July 1891]

1. Received 22 July 1891 (office date stamp).

2. RK wrote on 23 July 1891 that the “doctors are trying to chase me out of England again on another sea voyage” and that “all work of any kind is forbidden” (to Meta de Forest: *Letters*, II: 37).

To A. P. Watt 12 August 1891

*ALS*

101 Earls Court Road.  


Dear Watt,

I should be much obliged if you could help my friend Mr. Bridges Lee in the placing of a monograph on Indigo.\(^1\) It’s special work, and of a kind that is needed and I am pretty sure that the proper firm could make a good thing out of it. You see it’s special work and for that reason needs specially working. If you could give him your advice and help in the matter you know that I’d be grateful.

Sincerely

Rudyard Kipling

Note 12 August 1891

To A. P. Watt 13 August 1891

ALS

101 Earls Court Road:
Aug. 13. 91.

Dear Mr Watt

Alick has just given me your splendid present. Fitly to thank you I ought to write you an anacreontic ode: but I can’t. I can only say thank you very much. Unless I’m knocked on the head for its silver value it will see me through the world.¹

For any sakes keep yourself out of this infernal town just now—things are warm and muggy past telling—and be well when I come back.

Very sincerely yours

Rudyard Kipling

P.S. *Times* keen on a Samoa letter! Or Kimberley.² I’m going to put Alick on the war-trail anon.

Notes 13 August 1891

1. RK was soon to leave on his long tour mostly in the southern hemisphere, first to South Africa, then to Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia, and India. The trip was cut short by about a month when, in Lahore, he learned of the death of Wolcott Balestier and hurried back to London. He sailed from Southampton on 22 August on the S.S. *Mexican* for Cape Town and was back in London on 10 January 1892.

2. In South Africa, where RK spent two weeks, he did not visit Kimberley. RK talked vaguely of visiting Robert Louis Stevenson on his tour but seems not to have made any definite arrangements; when, in New Zealand, he made inquiries, he learned that the regular steamer connections to Samoa would not fit his schedule. He published no letters about the trip in *The Times* but wrote two uncollected items, “One Lady at Wairakei,” for the *New Zealand Herald*, 30 January 1892, and “Home,” *Civil and Military Gazette*, 25 December 1891. A. P. Watt’s gift was no doubt something for RK’s travel kit, though “anacreontic” suggests a drinking cup.

To A. S. Watt [17? August 1891]¹

ALS

Monday
Dear Alick

Herewith the parcel of M.S. to be stored till I return. I hope it won’t be a worry.

Sincerely,
Rudyard Kipling

Note  [17? August 1891]
1. The Monday nearest to RK’s sailing date on 22 August was the 17th.

To A. P. Watt  [Summer? 1891]¹

ALS

101 Earls Ct Road,
Sunday

Dear Mr. Watt,

All thanks for the Light money. I’m glad Mrs. W[att].² has been impressed favourably—for the Lord only knows the ways of womenkind. I wish I could get you a big man for each day in the week. Even then I should be in your debt.

Sincerely
Rudyard Kipling

Notes  [Summer? 1891]
1. Dated only from internal evidence. The American edition of The Light that Failed was published in December 1890; the English edition in March 1891. RK began using the Earl’s Court address around late March 1891; on 22 August he left on his long voyage. This letter belongs somewhere between those dates.
2. A. P. Watt married Roberta Strahan (1844/45–1908), sister of the publisher Alexander Strahan, in 1866 (ODNB). Watt had worked for Strahan in the 1870s.

To A. P. Watt  4 November 1891

ALS

The Grand Hotel / Dunedin Nov 4 1891¹

Dear Watt—
This is just a line in the middle of many hurries to commend to you Mr. Rouse-Marten who, like myself, does not know the London market for our wares, and needs guidance.\(^2\) If you can help him half as much as you have helped me he I feel sure will be pleased and I shall be under another debt of gratitude to you.

Sincerely

Rudyard Kipling.

Notes 4 November 1891

1. RK was now at the end of his visit to New Zealand; he arrived in Dunedin in the morning of 4 November and sailed for Bluff, the last stop in New Zealand, in the afternoon of 5 November (J. B. Primrose, “Kipling’s Visit to Australia and New Zealand,” *Kipling Journal*, March 1963, 16). From Bluff he sailed to Hobart, Tasmania, and Melbourne.

2. Charles Rous-Marten (1841–1908), a native of New Zealand, wrote many books and articles about railways; he was a regular contributor to the English *Railway Magazine* from 1897.

To A. S. Watt [1891?]\(^1\)

*ALS*

[London] Sunday

Dear Alick,

No thanks! Any authorization of that muck would be dear at all the profits. I don’t so much mind the man ruining the Light as murdering Mulvaney. Couldn’t you sorter break it to him that I won’t authorize his plays and that if he uses Mulvaney I shall be likely to protest.

Rudyard.

Read it yourself—if you can.

Note [1891?]

1. The only clue to a date for this letter is the reference to “ruining” *The Light that Failed*. Since the first version of this did not come out until the end of 1890, and since the final version was not published until 17 March 1891, the letter is not likely to be any earlier than the latter date.