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

Kipling, Rudyard, Pinney, Thomas

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To A. S. Watt 10 May [1898]

ALS

The Elms
May. 10th

Dear Alick,

At last I send off copy of The Days Work in three separate envelopes. The Index\(^2\) I enclose herewith. If I hadn’t firmly put an end to it I should have been niggling and fiddling with the tales till Xmas. Please sort them out in the order of the Index and get ’em pinned through where I have not done so.

There will be no introduction or preface so far as I know unless I chance to be suddenly smitten with a poem. Please tell MacM that the earlier I get proof the more I shall be pleased as I shall need at least one revise.

Thine ever
R K

Notes 10 May [1898]

1. RK and his family left for Cape Town, South Africa, on 8 January and returned on 30 April (CK Diary). This was the first of RK’s long stays in the Cape Colony, and accounts for the gap between this and the last letter in 1897.

2. RK’s usual word for “table of contents.”

To A. P. Watt 6 July 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.
July 6. ’98
Dear Watt—

I return today Miss Fleming’s dramatization of “The Light that Failed.” It seems a very strong if somewhat gloomy play and of course I give it my authorization. I see it is marked “By Rudyard Kipling and George Fleming” which is an honour beyond my deserving for, as you know, I am no playwright.

It has been suggested that the prologue does not set forth Dick’s relations toward Maisie with sufficient clearness: and on reading it over there seems some truth in this. My own notion—I put it forward for what it is worth—would be make the war-correspondents in the prologue discuss, as they mend their clothes, the course of the campaign, Dick’s rescue of Torpenhow and Dick’s loud-voiced delirium in camp after the Arab cut his head open. Thus they all know about Maisie as a name. Enter then with Torpenhow, Dick muffled in bandages over his head and eyes and thus blind. He jests about his wound, says he only wants a dog and sling to make him perfect as a blind beggar and so on; a war-correspondent instead of singing “Mandalay” (I have a strong objection to that song being brought into the piece) starts up on the banjo with some sentimental love-song whereupon the inexpressible Cassavetti who does most of the comic business wonders what would happen if their respective lady loves could see ’em in the desert. Dick thanks God he has no dealings with women—because, he says, women put you off your work (i.e. in the prologue he adopts very much Maisie’s attitude in the 1st act—wants his success; is furious with the [word illegible] throwing him off his stride etc.).

To Dick’s statement a man replies in effect: “Go slow! A chap who has been off his head for four nights has thrown a few secrets round the camp.” Dick wants to know what he might have said. “Oh nothing” says the other. “You were quite pastoral and idyllic, asked a girl for a kiss. Which shows you must have begun young etc.” All this chaff would be permissible since Dick only raved of his childhood.

Meantime the sun gets lower, and Torpenhow, who mothers Dick throughout, allows him to take off the bandage. A few scattering shots draw off the war-correspondents to investigate and Dick is left alone thanking God for the gift of sight; pleasing new work; and a way to success. Remember the curtain ought to come down on Thank God, I can
see! How good it is to see. This to me seems to give the key of the rest of the play.

But on the other hand I am no dramatist, have no knowledge of stage-craft and may very probably be deceived by a purely literary instead of dramatic point of interest. However such as my notion is I present it to Miss Fleming and Miss Nethersole\(^2\) to use as they please: and I wish them all success with their play—“adapted from the Light that Failed.”

Yours always sincerely
Rudyard Kipling

Notes 6 July 1898

1. Constance Fletcher (1858–1938), writing as “George Fleming”; her adaptation of *The Light that Failed* was not produced until 1903, and then with great success, starring Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Gertrude Elliott. A summary, with commentary, of the play to accompany photographs of the London production appeared in *Play Pictorial*, December 1902 (but probably early 1903). The text of the play evidently has not been published, so that one cannot determine how RK’s suggestions were received. CK reports that “the dramatised version of *The Light that Failed* comes and is read. A vivid and agonizing play but better than we had supposed” (Rees Extracts, 15 June 1898). They presumably received a copy of the script from the author.

2. Olga Nethersole (1867–1961), English actress and theatrical producer. She does not appear to have acted in the stage version of “*The Light that Failed*” but according to RK she had “the acting rights of the play but I have to be referred to when the play is acted in a new country” (to Hugo Vallentin, 2 May 1908: Harvard University). The program for the English production states that it was authorized “by arrangement with Miss Olga Nethersole!” (Richards, Bibliography, 687).

To A. P. Watt 14 July 1898

ALS

*Dunley Hall, / Nr. Stourport\(^1\)*

Thursday / 14 July 98

Dear Watt—

I have just received copy of this month’s “Author” with publishers’ draft form of agreement and a request for an expression of opinion on the issue.\(^2\) Now my opinions on the thing are unfit
for publication. It is simply the crystallized expression of unmitigated burglary—if it isn’t an outrageous burlesque. Nothing that Besant has ever done to the publisher as a class could damn ’em more effectually than their own expressed notion of business.

The question is should I do a service by saying this openly—if you think so will you please draft me a letter in which it can be put decently. I am sick and tired of the way in which authors are never allowed to do their own business. Rideing’s remarks on the literary agent have helped to further annoy me when I remember how he scored off me some time ago.

Yours disgustedly

Rudyard Kipling

Notes

1. Where Stanley Baldwin, RK’s cousin, was then living, near Stourport, Worcestershire; RK and his family were there from 12 to 16 July (CK Diary).

2. A general “Draft form of suggested royalty agreement between author and publisher” and several specialized model contracts drawn up by the Council of the Publishers’ Association, and a critical commentary on the draft by the secretary of the Authors’ Society, are printed in parallel columns in the July 1898 number of The Author. This is followed by “Further Comments” by Walter Besant. The draft was criticized as too vague and as assigning too many rights to the publisher.

3. RK’s letter appears in The Author, 1 August 1898:

I have seen the draft contracts. Nothing that you, or that The Author, or the whole Society has ever done to, or said about the publisher will condemn him half as thoroughly as his own notions of fairness set forth for him, by his own lawyer, in his own way. Can one say more than that?

Rudyard Kipling.

Rottingdean, July 23, 1898.

4. William Henry Rideing was an editor for both the Youth’s Companion and the North American Review. An article in the July Author, 50–51, comments on Rideing’s “Literary Life in London,” North American Review, July 1898; though generally approving, it repudiates Rideing’s assertion that the literary agent’s chief business is to “create discord” between author and publisher. If Rideing ever “scored” off RK it must have happened in connection with the Youth’s Companion, to which RK had contributed three items before the date of this letter.
To A. P. Watt 29 July 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.
July. 29. 98.

Dear Watt—

I make you my very best compliments on your last stroke, which seems to me almost extravagantly gorgeous.¹

I note that the first tale must be delivered on the 1st of September and it shall be done. I entirely agree with you that under no circumstances must we put it in any one’s power to say that he has bought our entire output ahead. It is not good business. I’ve fought McClure on the subject many times

It did not occur to me to make a general title for the series. So far, they will run

1. a tale not yet named
2. An Unsavoury Interlude
3. The Impressionists
4. The Moral reformers
5. A little Prep
6. The last term

but in a few days I will send you the detailed scheme with a title.²

Queer chaps publishers are. If I went about giving bills for necessaries supplied I should not be loved by my tradesmen. But Lock’s terms will satisfy me.

With renewed thanks and congratulations on the skilful diplomacy of it all

Yours as ever

Rudyard Kipling.

P.S.

A little Prep tho’ already sold to McClure on other terms has not as yet been paid for.
Notes

29 July 1898

1. Perhaps the contract with McClure’s Magazine for the remaining Stalky stories. McClure’s had already published Slaves of the Lamp, Parts I and II, was about to publish “In Ambush,” and would publish six more stories in 1899. Presumably Watt stipulated that the sale was not a commitment for further work.


To A. P. Watt

4 August 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton
Aug. 4. 98.

Dear Watt—

The Schoolboy Tales. Information required by McClure
The following are the Tales in order: for publication:
“Stalky.”
An Unsavoury Interlude.
The Impressionists
The Moral Reformers
A little Prep.
The last term.¹

The heroes are throughout Stalky McTurk and Beetle. The first tale which deals with cattle-lifting describes how A. L. Corkran No 104. came by his name of “Stalky” and how he invented the immortal phrase “Isn’t your Uncle Stalky a great man?” An Unsavoury Interlude is merely a private vendetta: The Impressionists and Moral Reformers being sequels. In the latter Stalky and Co set themselves to educate a bully on lines of their own.

A little Prep deals with some of the outside life of a military school. The whole series is designed to give some sort of rough notion of the young of the Englishman in the time of his training; and incidentally to develope some of the relations between masters and boys—the difficulties of school life and the like.
Yours as ever
Rudyard Kipling

Note 4 August 1898
1. This is the order followed in McClure’s Magazine, except that “The Flag of Their Country” was inserted in the sequence, May 1899, between “A Little Prep” and “The Last Term.”

To A. P. Watt 6 August 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.

6 Aug 98

Dear Watt—

It is all very beautiful: but since you are the keeper of our income, will you, like a good man as you are, tell H.M. Government what is necessary for them to know? I have signed and the rest is with you. We have no English insurances that amount to anything: and all the investments seem to have already paid tax.

Yours ever
Rudyard K.

To A. P. Watt 13 August 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton

Aug. 13: 98.

Dear Watt—

Herewith I send you—

Stalky—the first tale of the series:
also

An Unsavoury Interlude
The Impressionists
The Moral Reformers

“A little Prep” is in your possession. It comes after The Moral Reformers and I should be obliged by a look at the type written copy of this, early.

The Last Term will follow in a short time: so now the whole six are off my mind.

Please impress upon Lock the necessity of early proofs.

Yours ever
Rudyard Kipling

The general title is Stalky & Co. I enclose order of tales.

To A. P. Watt 23 August 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.
Aug. 23. 98.

Dear Watt,

I send herewith the copy of a South African tale by Scully¹ which, it seemed to me, might be sent to Scribners. I told this to Scully when he was down here and volunteered to write a letter to Burlinghame² covering the story. Scully naturally wants it all done through you: so I send you his story (an uncommonly good one, by the way) and letter to Burlinghame all to be forwarded next time you are writing to Scribner.

I am not making any “agent’s charge” this time as I want Scully to get a footing in America.

Very sincerely
Rudyard Kipling

Notes 23 August 1898

2. Edward L. Burlingame (1853–1911), editor of *Scribner’s Magazine* from its founding in 1887. A copy of the letter to Burlingame, 23 August 1898, is now at Princeton. In it RK describes Scully as having been “practically brought up among the South African races.... Now that your land is going to have subject-races of her own, she must take an interest in the thoughts and fancies of such folk.”

To A. P. Watt 28 August [1898]

*ALS*

*The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.*

Sunday Aug 28

Dear Watt—

I send with this my “Naval Manœvres” M.S. with head and tail to be typed as soon as possible.¹ G. D. Burgin² has written me that Pearson is [busy?] to start a new mag and wants something from me.³ I suggested this stuff (which is not bad stuff) and he wants to look at it as soon as may be with intent I believe to buy it. Will you put the business through.

Yours always

R Kipling

Notes 28 August [1898]

1. This must refer to the account of his voyage with the fleet in 1897 (see 7 August 1897), since his second voyage did not begin until 1 September 1898 (CK Diary). The two trips together are the subject of *A Fleet in Being*.

2. George D. Burgin (1856–1944), editor and novelist, at this time sub-editor of the *Idler*. He published more than 90 novels.


To A. S. Watt 31 August 1898

*ALS*

*The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.*

Aug. 31. 98
Dear Alick—

McClure’s have let me down again—bad luck to ’em! They have sent me all of the Day’s book except galleys 1–5 of “The Maltese Cat,” which Macmillans say they have not got.

May I trouble you yet again, to dig up “The Maltese Cat” from the P.M. Gazette in whose files it appeared (’94 wasn’t it)¹ and to turn it in to Macmillan as soon as may be. It holds back the book.

I am off tomorrow to Ireland to join the Fleet, in H.M.S. Pelorus and shan’t be back till the 12th.² I have delayed my trip again and again for the sake of the proofs but can’t afford to chuck away the whole of the trip, with the men of war. So please let Macmillan have the P.M.G. copy of the Maltese Cat, and that will take the book off my hands. Never again will I send proofs to America first!

Ever yours

Rudyard

£25 per thousand by all means if you can get it. There’s nothing timidly shrinking about us. I hope to get a new naval article out of this trip to Ireland.

Notes 31 August 1898

1. 26 and 27 June 1895.

2. The second of RK’s voyages on the Pelorus on manoeuvres: see 7 August 1897. This was the occasion on which, after reciting some of his poems at a concert on the flagship HMS Majestic, he was carried around the quarter deck of the ship on the shoulders of the officers.

To A. S. Watt 20 September 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.

Sept 20. 98.

Dear Alick

I am very pleased to learn that Dunn is taking the article on Naval Manœuvres:¹ and I have no objection to his cross-lining the thing (tho’
it is a barbarous method of attracting attention) nor do I object to his publishing in instalments or to his selling the American rights to the Journal. Only he must be responsible not only for the payments but for the Journal’s integrity in regard to cross-lining, additions and subtractions of matter, title and all the other trifles that American Editors of Hearst’s stamp disregard.

I have just come off another cruise with the channel fleet and am doing a somewhat careful study of the vie intime of the Fleet, from Admiral to midshipman. This, taken with the other, would give, though I say it, a notion of the navy which the average man would not often get. The characters and ships are the same as a year ago and I have striven to keep the continuity of things. If you think well of it, you could arrange to dispose of this with the other: of which it is an integral part. I shall cut down the first part which you are sending me so that it will be much nearer 8,000 than 10,000 words. The second part you can have by the first of next week.

As for the poem recently sent for typing it is for the Times and will raise a somewhat larger explosion than Dunn or the Morning Post would care to stand up to. It should be out in a few days, all being well, if they care to face the howl that it will cause. It is purely political. I will make a title (perhaps even a sub-title) for the naval manœuvre article.

Yours ever

Rudyard Kipling

Notes 20 September 1898

1. James Nicol Dunn of the Morning Post, which published the articles collected as A Fleet in Being (Macmillan, 1898) on 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 November 1898; they appeared in The Times on the same dates. For the first part of the narrative, describing the manœuvres of 1897, see 16 July 1897.


3. “The Truce of the Bear,” intended for The Times, was instead diverted to the 1 October 1898 number of Literature, the predecessor of the Times Literary Supplement. RK protested the decision not to print the poem in The Times: “I wanted the row in the Times and all the virtuous people who believe Russia to be civilized calling you names. However, if you use it for Literature can’t you make its political meaning clear?” (to Moberly Bell, Letters, II: 349).
To A. S. Watt 26 September 1898

ALS

[The Elms]

Sep 26 / 98

Dear Alick—

This seems to me rather more interesting than part I—at least in the account of the interior life of a ship. I’ve tried it on a naval officer who says that it is technically correct. I’d very much like Dunn to take it if you can make him see his way to it, and so round out the complete sketch.

R K.

Note 26 September 1898

1. The note is written on a sheet with the typewritten title: *A Fleet in Being. Part II.*

To A. S. Watt 8 October 1898

ALS

The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.

Oct. 8. 98

Dear Alick

I am very much annoyed about the disgusting way in which MacM’s have advertised *the day’s work.* If you look at the papers you’ll see that they have lumped it economically with popular six-bob novels.1 It isn’t a novel in the first place and if it was it hasn’t any business to be where it is. Also I don’t wish to be made responsible (as I am in Literature q.v.) for all the six-bob novels in MacMillan’s list there.2 Can’t you get ’em to take little pains over the job—give it half a thought sometimes. It’s all done anyhow at present.

Ever yours

Rudyard.
Note  8 October 1898

1. In, e.g., the *Athenæum*, 8 October 1898, 478, at the bottom of a one-column advertisement from Macmillan, under the heading “New Six Shilling Novels,” *The Day’s Work* is at the head of a list of eight titles by such authors as Rolf Bolderwood, S. Weir Mitchell, F. Marion Crawford, and Horace Annesley Vachell; it is distinguished only by a slightly larger type than is given the others. In next week’s Macmillan advertisement, *Atheneum*, 15 October, 518, *The Day’s Work* has been withdrawn from the list of “Macmillan’s New Novels” and occupies a box of its own at the head of the column:

   Rudyard Kipling’s New Book
   Twenty-Fourth Thousand
   THE DAY’S WORK
   Crown 8vo. 6s.un

2. Macmillan’s ad for “New Six-Shilling Novels” in *Literature*, 8 October 1898, begins with RK’s name centered in capitals, followed by *The Day’s Work* and the titles of four novels. The names of the other authors, not in capitals, are all set off to the right margin, so a casual glance would give the impression that all of the titles following RK’s centered name are of his authorship. The other authors are H. A. Vachell, Mrs. Oliphant, F. Marion Crawford, and M. E. Seawell.

To A. P. Watt  27 October 1898

*ALS*

   *The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton."
   Oct. 27. 98.

Dear Watt—

Yours of yesterday. It did seem to me that now was the time to run in “A Fleet in being,” but I do not see that it follows I have to give up American rights. If Dunn had been any sort of an editor he would have seen this patent fact without showing.

In my opinion if the thing does not begin publication this week it will fall flat, as compared with making a good hit. That’s all.

The negotiations for the American rights have now been pending for some weeks, and it [remains?] my idea that an answer could have been
got out of McClure yesterday, the *World* referred to by cable, Dunn warned, and the whole thing settled. It does not seem to me that it is any settlement of the situation for me to forego my American rights to save time. I have sent you a wire today in which I have tried to explain this.

*To recapitulate.* If the *Fleet in being* cannot begin this week or at latest Monday—it may stay over till the next war-scare.¹ I have had no proofs, and I do not know whether it has been copyrighted in America. If it has been copyrighted it seems to me that it might be published in England at once, and published later in America.

Sincerely
Rudyard Kipling

Note   27 October 1898

1. Publication did not begin until 5 November, the Saturday following the coming Monday. The Fashoda incident that threatened conflict between the French and English in Africa occurred in September 1898.

To A. S. Watt   2 November 1898

*ALS*

*The Elms, / Rottingdean, / Nr. Brighton.*

Nov. 2. 98

Dear Alick—

I return herewith the M*[orning]*. Post proofs. I did not understand that they had the right to sub-head ’em as they have done; thereby knocking all shadow of literature out of them, and reducing them to the level of rather weak American journalism.¹

I fancy your theory about the absorbedness of America just now is about right;² so we must not complain if none of the U.S. papers like the thing, but get it out *on this side*, as soon as possible. I suppose in the long-run we can always make something out of the American copyright.

Yours always
R K.
Notes  2 November 1898

1. But see 20 September 1898, where he says he has no objection to “cross-lining,” supposing that that is the same thing as sub-heading. The book version retains the subheads.

2. Over the Spanish–American War of that summer. The peace treaty was not signed until December.