ДЖОН ГОЛСУЪРТИ
THE CONSUMMATION

About 1889 there lived in London a man. named Harrison, of an amiable and perverse disposition. One morning, at Charing Cross Station, a lady in whom he was interested said to him:

“But Mr. Harrison, why don’t you *write*? You are just the person!”

Harrison saw that he was, and at the end of two years had produced eleven short stories, with two of which he was not particularly pleased, but as he naturally did not like to waste them, he put them with the others and sent them all to a publisher. In the course of time he received from the publisher a letter saying that for a certain consideration or commission he would be prepared to undertake the risk of publishing these stories upon Harrison’s incurring all the expenses. This pleased Harrison who, feeling that no time should be wasted in making his “work” public, wrote desiring the publisher to put the matter in hand. The publisher replied to this with an estimate and an agreement, to which Harrison responded with a cheque. The publisher answered at once with a polite letter, suggesting that for Harrison’s advantage a certain additional sum should be spent on advertisements. Harrison saw the point of this directly, and replied with another cheque—knowing that between gentlemen there could be no question of money.

In due time the book appeared. It was called “In the Track of the Stars,” by Cuthbert Harrison; and within a fortnight Harrison began to receive reviews. He read them with an extraordinary pleasure, for they were full of discriminating flattery. One asked if he were a “Lancelot in disguise.” Two Liberal papers described the stories as masterpieces; one compared them to the best things in Poe and de Maupassant; and another called him a second Rudyard Kipling. He was greatly encouraged, but, being by nature modest, he merely wrote to the publisher inquiring what he thought of a second edition. His publisher replied with an estimate, mentioning casually that he had already sold about four hundred copies. Harrison referred to his cheque book and saw that the first edition had been a thousand copies. He replied, therefore, that he would wait. He waited, and at the end of six months wrote again. The publisher replied that he had now sold four hundred and three copies, but that, as Mr. Harrison had at present an unknown name, he did not advise a second edition: there was no market for short stories. These had, however, been so well received that he recommended Mr. Harrison to write a long story. The book was without doubt a success, so far as a book of short stories could ever be a success....

He sent Harrison a small cheque, and a large number of reviews which Harrison had already received.

Harrison decided not to have a second edition, but to rest upon his *succès d'estime*. All his relations were extremely pleased, and almost immediately he started writing his long story. Now it happened that among Harrison's friends was a man of genius, who sent Harrison a letter.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you could write like this; of course, my dear fellow, the stories are not 'done'; there is no doubt about it, they are *not* 'done.' But you have plenty of time; you are young, and I see that you can do things. Come down here and let us have a talk about what you are at now."

On receiving this Harrison wasted no time, but went down. The man of genius, over a jug of claret-cup, on a summer's afternoon, pointed out how the stories were not "done."

"They show a feeling for outside drama," said he, "but there is none of the real drama of psychology."

Harrison showed him his reviews. He left the man of genius on the following day with a certain sensation of soreness. In the course of a few weeks, however, the soreness wore off, and the words of the man of genius began to bear fruit, and at the end of two months Harrison wrote:

"You are quite right—the stories were not 'done.' I think, however, that I am now on the right path."

At the end of another year, after submitting it once or twice to the man of genius, he finished his second book, and called it "John Endacott." About this time he left off alluding to his "work" and began to call his writings "stuff."

He sent it to the publisher with the request that he would consider its publication on a royalty. In rather more than the ordinary course of time the publisher replied, that in his opinion (a lay one) "John Endacott" didn't quite fulfil the remarkable promise of Mr. Harrison's first book; and, to show Harrison his perfect honesty, he enclosed an extract from the "reader's" opinion, which stated that Mr. Harrison had "fallen between the stools of art and the British public." Much against the publisher's personal feelings, therefore, the publisher considered that he could only undertake the risk in the then bad condition of trade—if Mr. Harrison would guarantee the expenses.

Harrison hardened his heart, and replied that he was not prepared to guarantee the expenses. Upon which the publisher returned his manuscript, saying that in his opinion (a lay one) Mr. Harrison was taking the wrong turning, which he (the publisher) greatly regretted, for he had much appreciated the pleasant relations which had always existed between them.

Harrison sent the book to a younger publisher who accepted it on a postponed royalty. It appeared.

At the end of three weeks Harrison began to receive reviews. They were mixed. One complained that there was not enough plot; another, fortunately by the same post, that there was too much plot. The general tendency was to regret that the author of "In the Track of the Stars" had not fulfilled the hopes raised by his first book, in which he had shown such promise of completely hitting the public taste. This might have depressed Harrison had he not received a letter from the man of genius couched in these terms:

"My dear fellow, I am more pleased than I can say. I am now more than ever convinced that you can do things."

Harrison at once began a third book.

Owing to the unfortunate postponement of his royalty he did not receive anything from his second book. The publisher sold three hundred copies. During the period (eighteen months) that he was writing his third book the man of genius introduced Harrison to a critic, with the words: "You may rely on his judgment; the beggar is infallible."

While to the critic he said: "I tell you, this fellow can do things."

The critic was good to Harrison, who, as before said, was of an amiable disposition.

When he had finished his third book he dedicated it to the man of genius and called it "Summer."

"My dear fellow," wrote the man of genius, when he received his copy, "it is *good*! There is no more to be said about it; it *is* good! I read it with indescribable pleasure."

On the same day Harrison received a letter from the critic which contained the following: "Yes, it's undoubtedly an advance. It's not quite Art, but it's a great advance!"

Harrison was considerably encouraged. The same publisher brought out the book, and sold quite two hundred copies; but he wrote rather dolefully to Harrison, saying that the public demand seemed "almost

exhausted." Recognising the fact that comparisons are odious, Harrison refrained from comparing the sale of the book with that of "In the Track of the Stars," in which he had shown such promise of "completely hitting the public taste." Indeed, about this time he began to have dreams of abandoning the sources of his private income and living the true literary life. He had not many reviews, and began his fourth book.

He was two years writing this "work," which he called "A Lost Man" and dedicated to the critic. He sent a presentation copy to the man of genius, from whom he received an almost immediate reply:

"My dear fellow, it is amazing, really amazing how you progress! Who would ever imagine you were the same man that wrote 'In the Track of the Stars'? yet I pique myself on the fact that even in your first book I spotted that you could do things. Ah!—I wish I could write like you! 'A Lost Man' is wonderfully good."

The man of genius was quite sincere in these remarks, which he wrote after perusing the first six chapters. He never, indeed, actually finished reading the book—he felt so tired, as if Harrison had exhausted him—but he always alluded to it as "wonderfully good," just as if he really had finished it.

Harrison sent another copy to the critic, who wrote a genuinely warm letter, saying that he, Harrison, had "achieved" it at last. "This," he said, "is *art*. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this.... I crown you."

Harrison at once commenced his fifth book.

He was more than three years upon this new "work," and called it "A Pilgrimage." There was a good deal of difficulty in getting it published. Two days after it appeared, however, the critic wrote to Harrison: "I cannot tell you," he said, "how very good I think your new book. It is perhaps stronger than 'A Lost Man,' perhaps more original. If anything it is too—I have not finished it yet, but I've written off at once to let you know."

As a matter of fact, he never finished the book. He could not—it was too—! "It's wonderfully good," he said, however, to his wife, and he made *her* read it.

Meanwhile, the man of genius wired saying: "Am going to write to you about your book. Positively am, but have lumbago and cannot hold pen."

Harrison never received any letter, but the critic received one saying: "Can you read it? *I* can't. Altogether over 'done.'"

Harrison was elated. His new publisher was not. He wrote in a peevish strain, saying there was *absolutely no sale*. Mr. Harrison must take care what he was doing or he would exhaust his public, and enclosing a solitary review, which said amongst other things: “This book may be very fine art, too fine altogether. *We* found it dull.”

Harrison went abroad, and began his sixth book. He named it “The Consummation,” and worked at it in hermit-like solitude; in it, for the first time, he satisfied himself. He wrote it, as it were, with his heart’s blood, with an almost bitter delight. And he often smiled to himself as he thought how with his first book he had so nearly hit the public taste; and how of his fourth the critic had said: “This is *art*. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this.” How far away they seemed! Ah! *this* book was indeed the “consummation” devoutly to be wished.

In the course of time he returned to England and took a cottage at Hampstead, and there he finished the book. The day after it was finished he took the manuscript and, going to a secluded spot on the top of the Heath, lay down on the grass to read it quietly through. He read three chapters, and, putting the remainder down, sat with his head buried in his hands.

“Yes,” he thought, “I *have* done it at last. It *is good*, wonderfully good!” and for two hours he sat like that, with his head in his hands. He had indeed exhausted his public. It was *too* good—*he could not read it himself!*

Returning to his cottage, he placed the manuscript in a drawer. He never wrote another word.

1904.

ЗАСЛУГИ

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