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THE SACRED RIGHTS OF AUTHORSHIP.

(From our London Correspondent.)

A very interesting issue has been raised in the Law Courts by that prolific writer who chooses to be known to the public as "Rita." In an action brought by her against the proprietors of a weekly journal she claims that her reputation has been injured by the wholesale emendations, deletions, and transformations to which plot and treatment have been subjected in one of her serials. Her title is snatched from her, and one to which she proves to be averse is substituted; a most essential murder is robbed of all descriptive detail; the very summing up of the judge in the subsequent trial (surely a good point for the prosecution) is ruthlessly cut out of the story. We imagine that the legal interest of such a process would depend on the nature of the agreement between the proprietor, or editor, and the author; but, in a wider point of view, it may well be argued that in no instance can an author of reputation sell himself body and soul, as it were, to the highest bidder as so much raw material to be worked up into "copy." It is different in the case of that type of serial fiction where a pseudonym of no particular significance covers the identity of a number of mechanical collaborators. Here, the main idea of the plot having been secured, the "writers" assemble like a conclave of conspirators to hatch chapter after chapter, and provide "curtain" after "curtain" by which the reader's appetite might be whetted to the point of his buying the next number. In the case of a writer of "Rita's" standing, a familiar *nom de plume*, having a definite connotation for a vast number of people, is left at the head of a story for which she is only responsible in part, and the public is directly defrauded of the genuineness of its appreciation. "Rita" is better known as a novelist than as a serial writer; it follows that in securing her work for his paper an editor accepts her popularity as excluding her from the peculiar tests he applies to other contributors. If an editor, using the work of "Rita," has a fear that her capacity does not tally with the tone of the rest of the paper, he has been clearly mistaken in inviting her work at the outset. Discrimination is an editor's chief virtue; if he fails in this, subsequent tyranny over his contributors does not repair the gap; but, in the case of a serial story, he must not be held responsible for the merit of an author whose reputation is independent of the paper.

These considerations are so obvious that one may wonder why editors are to be found who disregard them altogether. The only honest method is to alter, so far as possible, with the consent of the author; the frequent practice is to accept work without reservation and to mutilate it subsequently. I do not advocate powerless editors, I do not even deprecate the system of collaboration by which an editor assumes the controlling voice in fiction, as in other things; but, in the instance of well-known authors who write serials on invitation, the ordinary functions of the editor cease to operate. Fiction which is not manufactured on the premises is independent; it introduces a new element; it is a state within the state, with its own ruler and its own laws. It is unheard of that an author, however inexperienced and unimportant, should find that in a book his publishers have made alterations without his sanction. He may consent to be instructed; he may ask them (there may be such courageous people) to take it or leave it. He is, at all events, consulted, bullied, or wheedled; he is allowed to feel that his personality does actually malter. Is there any difference between the right of the publisher to suggest or reject and the right of the editor? If so, by what logic does the fact that a story appears in pieces instead of between card-board covers confer on the producer the right of unchallenged censorship?

While "Rita" has been urging her claims in a Law Court, an amusing letter of Mr. Bernard Shaw's has come to light, dealing with a less substantial and more paradoxical grievance against the proprietors of *Collier's Weekly*. Mr. Shaw receives a cheque of £200 from the editor as a "bonus" for a story considered the best contained in the magazine during that quarter; he returns the prize, protesting that its offer to him was an "unspeakable outrage." He suggests that the money should be used to erect a tombstone to Messrs. Collier, in which case he would contribute an epitaph in attempting "to do justice to their monstrous presumption." This is a heroic spirit; we have made strides since the days of Peg Woffington's little tragedy writer, when even Johnson had to sit behind a screen. Mr. Shaw does not want to be paid twice over, nor does he desire the "prize" which he considers was his as soon as he had consented to contribute his story. One cannot quarrel with Mr. Shaw for being honest; only is it not a little strange that his grievance is not a representative grievance in literature? Mr. Shaw would rather refuse £200 than refuse to give the world a good scolding and himself a good laugh. If Mr. Shaw will not live with posterity for anything else he must live as perhaps the first man who made himself a martyr for the sake of a joke. A man of less rigid principles would have taken the money and given it to the poor.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

SIR ROBERT HART'S DEPARTURE.

Sir Robert Hart, Inspector General of Chinese Customs, left Shanghai for Europe on May 1, after thirty years' successful labour in China. A large assembly gathered at the wharf to bid him farewell.

TERRIBLE BOMB OUTRAGE IN INDIA.

Advices from Allahabad state that a bomb was hurled at the carriage of a Mrs. Kennedy in Muzzaffarpur on Friday, the explosion resulting in serious injuries to the lady and the death of her daughter and coachman. The London *Daily Express* of yesterday says that the bomb was intended for a police magistrate who had lately been transferred to Muzzaffarpur from Calcutta, and who had previously received a large number of threatening letters.

A later telegram from Calcutta reports Mrs. Kennedy's death from her injuries, and the discovery by the police of a large quantity of explosives, detonators, and uncharged bombs in the course of searches made by them in different quarters of the city. Twenty-three arrests were made and a number of letters seized.

LOAN FOR SOUTHERN NIGERIA.

The British Government has consented to the issue of a four per cent loan amounting to three million pounds sterling at 99 per cent, subscriptions to begin yesterday. The loan is for the government of Southern Nigeria, and mainly intended for the completion of the railway line from Lagos to Kano in Northern Nigeria

AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MARRIAGE.

Mr. Ward, whose engagement to the daughter of Mr. Whitelaw Reid, the American Ambassador, is announced, is the brother of Lord Dudley. It it interesting to note that the old Dudley barony fell into abeyance on the death of the 15th Baron Dudley, in 1757, as it still continues among the representatives of his sisters. It is noticeable that even the most captious of American critics seem to have nothing to say against this marriage.

Miss Jean Whitelaw Reid is as charming personally as she is popular in English society. Her prospective husband, who is in his 38th year, is one of the King's Equerries. He was Press censor at headquarters during the South African War, and when he came home acted as assistant private secretary to Lord Stanley when he was at the War Office.

(Continued on page 4.)