

The Ocean of Story

RETROSPECT

THERE remains but the pleasant task of acknowledging the help received during my long work of editing the *Ocean*. So varied have been the subjects of my notes and appendixes, that my inquiries and correspondence have been very great. It is most gratifying to know that, with hardly a single exception, I have found scholars and fellow-students only too pleased to help in any way they could.

First and foremost, I would mention the superintendents of the Reading Room of the British Museum. The numerous bibliographical queries, which they have helped to clear up, have, I fear, taken up much of their valuable time, but the kindness and patience they have always shown is remarkable. In this connection I would especially mention Mr F. D. Sladen, Mr A. I. Ellis and Mr L. C. Wharton. In the Department of Oriental Books and MSS. I owe gratitude to Mr E. Edwards, while the continuous assistance afforded by the head of the department, Dr L. D. Barnett, has been a *sine qua non* of the whole work.

I have already mentioned names of eminent members of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Folk-Lore Society, the School of Oriental Studies, and other similar scientific bodies who have allowed me to take advantage of their learning and erudition. I would also like to mention the friendly way in which American scholars have so readily replied to my queries, forwarded me copies of their articles and works, and done everything they could to assist in my research.

As I am sure my subscribers will be only too ready to admit, the engineering of any ten-volume work is no light undertaking, particularly if it includes numerous indexes and appendixes, which continually have to be overhauled, rearranged and improved. Questions of "setting up," sizes of type, and a hundred other important points in the general "make-up" of the work have had to be taken one by one and discussed in the most minute detail, before a working precedent could be set up.

I think, then, the feeling of satisfaction of an editor will be duly appreciated when he sees the completion of a work that has occupied what is usually considered the best ten years of his life. Before speaking of the incident that gave rise to the whole idea of the work, and the man who made the carrying out of that idea possible, I would offer unstinted thanks to my two secretaries, whose patience and pertinacity have so largely contributed to the success of the work, Miss Betty Krause (who had to return to America during the publication of Vol. V) and Miss Maud Lundblad, who continued her work to the end.

To the Riverside Press, who have devoted special care and attention to the printing of the volumes, and have always been ready with valuable suggestions, I am also very grateful.

Then there are my reviewers to be considered. They have, one and all,

received the work in the kindest and most sympathetic way imaginable, and it is of course largely due to this that we have been able to get such a complete list of subscribers, and produce the work volume by volume with as little delay as possible.

The incidents which gave rise to the idea of re-editing Tawney's great translation form quite a little romance, and should, I think, find a place here. In 1917 and 1918 I was working on my *Bibliography of Sir Richard Burton*, and my whole mind became saturated in what I may term "Burtoniana." My researches took me for many months to the Central Library, Kensington, where the remains of Burton's library are housed. My work was an arduous one, as I had to go through, not only every book Burton wrote, but every pamphlet, article and letter, either written by him, or in which he was interested. Many of these pamphlets were bound up into volumes, but the majority were packed away in thirty-four large book-boxes, containing close on five hundred pamphlets. I had examined nearly all of them, when one especially arrested my attention. It proved to be an odd part of Tawney's original edition of the *Kathā-sarit-sāgara*. The work was entirely unknown to me, and, although I knew the *Nights* intimately from cover to cover, my knowledge of Sanskrit fiction was practically confined to the *Hitopadeśa* and "Pilpay's Fables." A hasty inspection of the odd part in question at once convinced me that it must belong to a work of the highest importance, although I knew nothing of its age, author or translator.

I cannot say what it was, but I felt instinctively that this odd part of an unknown Indian work was to be of the utmost importance to me personally. For a time my work on the Burton bibliography stopped, and I at once began to make inquiries about the *Kathā-sarit-sāgara*. It seemed almost as if Burton, with whom I had now become so intimate, was offering me the chance of giving to the public the Indian counterpart of his own great *Arabian Nights*. This feeling grew on me more and more, and I was determined somehow to see it through. And here, for the encouragement of students hesitating to undertake a work of similar difficulty and importance, I would add the following.

After having found out all I could about the work, and having met Mr Tawney, I went straight to Dr Barnett at the British Museum and asked his advice. I told him that, apart from having a deep interest in Oriental folklore and kindred subjects, I could lay no claim whatever to Oriental scholarship ; but that in spite of this fact I was particularly anxious to re-edit Tawney's work. Did he think the idea was presumptuous and ridiculous, and could I dare, with my strictly limited knowledge, to attempt so large an undertaking? So kind and encouraging was his reply that I at once started on a task that, alas! many authors and editors have attempted in— vain to find a publisher. After I had explained the nature of the work and the number of volumes I had estimated it would take, my hoped-for publisher smiled sympathetically and asked the sum I was prepared to put down for the work. My answer merely provoked the wishes

for a “Good morning.” In fact, as time went on, this termination of my interviews began to grow monotonous. However, I never despaired, and finally discovered that the most enterprising and trenchant figure in the literary world was not a publisher at all, but a bookseller Mr Sawyer of Grafton Street. Accordingly I hastened to Grafton House and once more explained my business, which by this time sounded to me more like a recitation than anything else. I waited for the usual “Good morning,” but it did not come. “This work,” he said, “must be of the highest importance, and should be published in a form worthy of that importance. From what you tell me, it is one of the world’s greatest collections of stories, and in all my long experience of bookselling I have never once been asked for it, or even seen a copy. I conclude that it is known only to Oriental scholars. I regard it as an unknown masterpiece, and am willing to publish it myself at my own expense.”

My chief difficulty was thus overcome, and we at once got to work on all those preliminary details necessary in the engineering of such a large undertaking.

Mr Sawyer is truly a wonderful man, and the initiative he displayed in sponsoring the work is deserving of the very highest praise. It is needless to say that without his support the work would never have seen light ; and although the enormous expense involved would have deterred most men, however rich, once Mr Sawyer is determined on a project, nothing can stop him. If he is satisfied— and I think he is— and if in the Elysian Fields Mr Tawney is not disappointed with the new edition of his *Magnum opus*, my work will have received its reward.

[Previous](#) 



[Ocean Home](#)

 [Next](#)



[Home](#)

Prepared for www.wollamshram.ca/1001/Ocean/Ocean_Main.htm
© 2010 (100321)

END.