

1888

CONSEQUENCES

Rudyard Kipling

Kipling, Rudyard (1865-1936) - An English novelist, short-story writer, and poet who spent most of his youth in India, and is best known for his children's classics. In 1907, Kipling was the first English writer ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Consequences (1888) - From "Plain Tales from the Hills," a collection of stories of life in India. A man secures a good government job by mastering the contents of some secret papers a friend has accidentally received.

CONSEQUENCES

Rosicrucian subtleties In the Orient had rise; Ye may find their teachers still Under Jactala's Hill.

Seek ye Bombast Paracelsus, Read what Flood the Seeker tells us Of the Dominant that runs Through the Cycles of the Suns Read my story last, and see Luna at her apogee.

THERE are yearly appointments, and two-yearly appointments, and fiveyearly appointments at Simla, and there are, or used to be, permanent appointments, whereon you stayed up for the term of your natural life and secured red cheeks and a nice income. Of course, you could descend in the cold weather; for Simla is rather dull then.

Tarrion came from goodness knows where- all away and away in some forsaken part of Central India, where they call Pachmari a Sanitarium, and drive behind trotting-bullocks, I believe. He belonged to a regiment; but what he really wanted to do was to escape from his regiment and live in Simla for ever and ever.

He had no preference for anything in particular, beyond a good horse and a nice partner. He thought he could do everything well; which is a beautiful belief when you hold it with all your heart. He was clever in many ways, and good to look at, and always made people round him comfortable- even in Central India.

So he went up to Simla, and, because he was clever and amusing, he gravitated naturally to Mrs. Hauksbee, who could forgive everything but stupidity.

Once he did her a great service by changing the date on an invitation-card for a big dance which Mrs. Hauksbee wished to attend, but couldn't because she had quarrelled with the A.-D.-C., who took care, being a mean man, to invite her to a small dance on the 6th instead of the big Ball of the 26th. It was a very clever piece of forgery; and when Mrs. Hauksbee showed the A.-D.-C. her invitationcard, and chaffed him mildly for not better managing his vendettas, he really thought that he had made a mistake; and- which was wise- realised that it was no use to fight with Mrs. Hauksbee. She was grateful to Tarrion and asked what she could do for him. He said simply, 'I'm a Free-lance up here on leave, on the lookout for what I can loot. I haven't a square inch of interest in all Simla. My name isn't known to any man with an appointment in his gift, and I want an appointment- a good, sound one. I believe you can do anything you turn yourself to. Will you help me?' Mrs. Hauksbee thought for a minute, and passed the lash of her riding-

whip through her lips, as was her custom when thinking. Then her eyes sparkled and she said, 'I will'; and she shook hands on it. Tarrion, having perfect confidence in this great woman, took no further thought of the business at all. Except to wonder what sort of an appointment he would win.

Mrs. Hauksbee began calculating the prices of all the Heads of Departments and Members of Council she knew, and the more she thought the more she laughed, because her heart was in the game and it amused her. Then she took a Civil List and ran over a few of the appointments. There are some beautiful appointments in the Civil List. Eventually, she decided that, though Tarrion was too good for the Political Department, she had better begin by trying to place him there. Her own plans to this end do not matter in the least, for Luck or Fate played into her hands, and she had nothing to do but to watch the course of events and take the credit of them.

All Viceroys, when they first come out, pass through the Diplomatic Secrecy craze. It wears off in time; but they all catch it in the beginning, because they are new to the country. The particular Viceroy who was suffering from the complaint just then- this was a long time ago, before Lord Dufferin ever came from Canada, or Lord Ripon from the bosom of the English Church- had it very badly; and the result was that men who were new to keeping official secrets went about looking unhappy; and the Viceroy plumed himself on the way in which he had instilled notions of reticence into his Staff.

Now, the Supreme Government have a careless custom of committing what they do to printed papers. These papers deal with all sorts of things- from the payment of Rs. 200 to a 'secret service' native, up to rebukes administered to Vakils and Motamids of Native States, and rather brusque letters to Native Princes, telling them to put their houses in order, to refrain from kidnapping women, or filling offenders with pounded red pepper, and eccentricities of that kind. Of course, these things could never be made public, because Native Princes never err officially, and their States are officially as well administered as Our territories. Also, the private allowances to various queer people are not exactly matters to put into newspapers, though they give quaint reading sometimes. When the Supreme Government is at Simla, these papers are prepared there, and go round to the people who ought to see them in office-boxes or by post. The principle of secrecy was to that Viceroy quite as important as the practice, and he held that a benevolent despotism like Ours should never allow even little

things, such as appointments of subordinate clerks, to leak out till the proper time. He was always remarkable for his principles.

There was a very important batch of papers in preparation at that time. It had to travel from one end of Simla to the other by hand. It was not put into an official envelope, but a large, square, pale pink one; the matter being in MS. on soft crinkly paper. It was addressed to 'The Head Clerk, etc. etc.' Now, between 'The Head Clerk, etc. etc.' and 'Mrs. Hauksbee' and a flourish, is no very great difference, if the address be written in a very bad hand, as this was. The orderly who took the envelope was not more of an idiot than most orderlies. He merely forgot where this most unofficial cover was to be delivered, and so asked the first Englishman he met, who happened to be a man riding down to Annandale in a great hurry. The Englishman hardly looked at it, said, 'Mrs. Hauksbee,' and went on.

So did the orderly, because that letter was the last in stock and he wanted to get his work over. There was no book to sign; he thrust the letter into Mrs. Hauksbee's bearer's hands and went off to smoke with a friend. Mrs. Hauksbee was expecting some cut-out pattern things in flimsy paper from a friend. As soon as she got the big square packet, therefore, she said, 'Oh, the dear creature!' and tore it open with a paper-knife, and all the MS. enclosures tumbled out on the floor.

Mrs. Hauksbee began reading. I have said the batch was rather important.

That is quite enough for you to know. It referred to some correspondence, two measures, a peremptory order to a native chief, and two dozen other things. Mrs. Hauksbee gasped as she read, for the first glimpse of the naked machinery of the Great Indian Government, stripped of its casings, and lacquer, and paint, and guard-rails, impresses even the most stupid man. And Mrs. Hauksbee was a clever woman. She was a little afraid at first, and felt as if she had taken hold of a lightning-flash by the tail, and did not quite know what to do with it. There were remarks and initials at the side of the papers; and some of the remarks were rather more severe than the papers. The initials belonged to men who are all dead or gone now; but they were great in their day. Mrs. Hauksbee read on and thought calmly as she read. Then the value of her trove struck her, and she cast about for the best method of using it. Then Tarrion dropped in, and they read through all the papers together, and Tarrion, not knowing how she had come by them, vowed that Mrs. Hauksbee was the greatest woman on earth. Which I believe was true, or nearly so.

'The honest course is always the best,' said Tarrion, after an hour and a half of study and conversation. 'All things considered, the Intelligence Branch is about my form. Either that or the Foreign Office. I go to lay siege to the High Gods in their Temples.' He did not seek a little man, or a little big man, or a weak Head of a strong Department, but he called on the biggest and strongest man that the Government owned, and explained that he wanted an appointment at Simla on a good salary.

The compound insolence of this amused the Strong Man, and, as he had nothing to do for the moment, he listened to the proposals of the audacious Tarrion. 'You have, I presume, some special qualifications, besides the gift of self-assertion, for the claims you put forward?' said the Strong Man. 'That, Sir,' said Tarrion, 'is for you to judge.' Then he began, for he had a good memory, quoting a few of the more important notes in the papers- slowly and one by one as a man drops chlorodyne into a glass. When he had reached the peremptory order- and it was a very peremptory order- the Strong Man was troubled. Tarrion wound up- 'And I fancy that special knowledge of this kind is at least as valuable for, let us say, a berth in the Foreign Office, as the fact of being the nephew of a distinguished officer's wife.' That hit the Strong Man hard, for the last appointment to the Foreign Office had been by black favour, and he knew it.

'I'll see what I can do for you,' said the Strong Man.

'Many thanks,' said Tarrion. Then he left, and the Strong Man departed to see how the appointment was to be blocked.

Followed a pause of eleven days; with thunders and lightnings and much telegraphing. The appointment was not a very important one, carrying only between Rs. 500 and Rs. 700 a month; but, as the Viceroy said, it was the principle of diplomatic secrecy that had to be maintained, and it was more than likely that a boy so well supplied with special information would be worth translating. So they translated Tarrion. They must have suspected him, though he protested that his information was due to singular talents of his own. Now, much of this story, including the after-history of the missing envelope, you must fill in for yourself, because there are reasons why it cannot be written. If you do not know about things Up Above, you won't understand how to fill in, and you will say it is impossible.

What the Viceroy said when Tarrion was introduced to him was- 'This is the boy who "rushed" the Government of India, is it?

Recollect, Sir, that is not done twice.' So he must have known something.

What Tarrion said when he saw his appointment gazetted was- 'If Mrs. Hauksbee were twenty years younger, and I her husband, I should be Viceroy of India in fifteen years.'

What Mrs. Hauksbee said, when Tarrion thanked her, almost with tears in his eyes, was first- 'I told you so!' and next, to herself- 'What fools men are!'

THE END