

## PRE PUBLICATION JITTERS - THE READERS REPORTS.

The publication of *The Raiders* had been scheduled for March 1st but due to a number of circumstances it was delayed till March 10th. This delay had significant consequences (which will be explored in months to come).

During January and February, when he must have assumed his job was done, Crockett received three Reader's reports. He was placed in a tricky position. He had to keep his publisher happy but not to compromise on his creative intent or artistic integrity.

We should remember that the publisher's reader has a specific job to do and that what they offer is an opinion (supposedly an 'authoritative' one) But their view is likely to be developed by a) their desire to get their own 'style' of writing across, b) delivering what their publisher wants in order to be paid. Their advice is not always without bias or agenda - indeed usually it has both. So you have to consider the man writing the review as well as the words he writes.

Crockett was faced with a dilemma. While wanting to seem accomodating to TFU's requests, he did not want to rewrite simply to please men who had a different vision of his work. He was quite capable of arguing the case over the critiques, but the danger of an impasse was always present - and this could lead to no publication. With *The Raiders* the stakes were high, and even a month before the final publication date there were still problems being ironed out. These were not all questions of quality and more often issues of 'taste.'

*Some background on the men in question:*

Edward Garnett. Born 1868 (aged 26) from an entirely different background to Crockett. Established English middle class family. He became a significant force in critical reviewing but he was an unlikely candidate to appreciate and/or approve of Crockett's 'style'. His tastes were more Henry James and Joseph Conrad. He had already critiqued *The Stickit Minister*, *A Galloway Herd* (and Crockett's poems) in fairly unequivocal terms. Letters between Crockett and TFU testify to how far Crockett was prepared (or not) to bend to Garnett's critique.

Wilfred Hugh Chesson was a friend and contemporary of Garnett. Note that both men submitted their own work to TFU (in both cases rejected). It seems that the chain of command in 1893/4 was that Chesson received incoming manuscripts, read them, then passed them on to Garnett for comment.

Alexander Hay Japp was a Scot, born 1839 (aged 55) older, and a friend of Stevenson's. Unsurprisingly his opinion diverges from Chesson and Garnett. He moved in different circles and had considerably more experience and personal success.

*The Reports:*

Below are transcripts of the three reports, so that you can form your own opinion (and see something of the fraught process of bringing a novel to publication!) Dates are not easily confirmed but they are from around this time:

*Garnett - Probably from 17th Jan 1894.*

*Crockett.*

*This is not a novel. It is one of Stevenson's romances of the Scotch school, full of local colour, dialect, fighting and rough words; it is decidedly clever and better than we thought Crockett could do. The language and the whole style - with one or two exceptions we will mention presently - are extremely well managed, many chapters are considered as wall-painting quite as good as Stevenson could do; the plot is a good one, and though Crockett's fault is to hang back in the tale when he should go on, and vice versa, it and though he is a better hand at detail than at massing the proportions of the whole, still as a piece of workmanship the story is very satisfactory indeed and marks an advance in no slight degree!*

*As to selling, it certainly ought to sell very well. Coming as the author's second book it ought to attract much attention. Of course all these adventure books, Stevenson's, Q's, Conan Doyle's, Kenahan's etc etc it must be remembered want active and vigorous pushing. There is a large public, but it wants getting at. 'Read the New Scotch Sea-Romance by Crockett' is the sort of thing to advertise about and forthwith the adventurous book is rated a masterpiece. It is often advisable also to illustrate this sort*

of book, but unless the illustrations be good, the book is better without them. As a story of adventure it would certainly be a success in Scotland, among boys and among literary people and if Crockett goes on as he promises to do he will attract the great outside public.

There is one point in which we think revisions should be made carefully. And we should write to Crockett something like this on the point -

We congratulate you on the rough-cast style and the literary workmanship displayed throughout. The local colour, seems to us, could not possibly be bettered. At the same time we think there is one weakness which is a serious flaw in the vraisebalnce of the whole, - every now and again the rugged language is laid aside and sentences of polished magazine article style take their place. This of course destroys the illusion which otherwise it seems you have preserved in a most striking degree. Again some of your metaphors and similes are too obviously those of today - they could not have been used in fighting days. We note a few phrases to illustrate our meaning: -

'Consequently no delicacy about the matter' page 7

Perfectly open and communicative about his habits' p21

Rendered an exceedingly satisfactory account of its assailants' p22

Not at all a sensible observation' p29

Motive etc' p32

'Genius'etc p33

'Observation' p41

'All ... on the side of the law' NB this strikes me as wholly an exotic.

Should not the chapter coming after the carrying off of May be made quicker in its action. One feels the people drift about too much at such a time - and that the event would have united the ideas of all to a very strong and determined action.

And this is (perhaps) an earlier comment from Garnett - again I can't confirm the date - I include it to give 'flavour' of Garnett's views on Crockett's writing:

The more realistic (using the word in the best sense) Mr Crockett is, the better his work is. The more intimately he knows sections of the Scotch countryside life, the more he can select episodes for artistic treatment without indating truth.

The danger of most novelists is their desire to get more out of their human material than nature and surroundings warrant.

This is an old truism, but where both Hardy and Barrie have broken down is where they have forgotten it. (eg in the Stonehenge scene in Tess and the flood scene in the Little Minister) Some of Mr Crockett's sketches are truly realistic (ie with the realism of Miss Wilkin's) some are overstrained in their pathetic and tragic effects.

This tendency to overstrain must be avoided; if Mr Crockett does this he will be all right. As to the outline he gives us, it seems very promising, if he can treat it realistically

E.Garnett

#### Wilfred Hugh Chesson's Review of

The Raiders

By

S.R.Crockett

This is a thoroughly exciting romance of the Georgian period when Galloway was a very wild country indeed, and the pirates and smugglers made the 'red cock crow' against their enemies.

The plot turns on a young laird of Rathan (an islet at the Border) where rescue of an abducted maiden leads to a multitude of weird scenes possible in a land of intense individualism which Mr Crockett has graphically described, and, in fact, illuminated.

He has made his hero his mouthpiece, and the style of the book is of that painted simplicity, so to speak, which we associate with R.L.Stevenson. His character is wonderfully life-like, as is that of the heroine.

The verve of the romance masters the reader, we yet notice two or three things which are possibly faults. We are disposed to think, for example, that the earlier part of the book is overweighted by personages of inconsiderable important and that there is... [missing]

... wants more explanation than is actually given, the narrator using a number of words with which English readers are unfamiliar.

*Alexander Japp:  
Review of The Raiders*

*I have read this MS with the greatest interest. There is close knowledge of character, powerful description and great knack for incident and situation in it. The humour of several of the characters is seized and effectively presented; but never allowed to hinder the movement. Silver Sand and Quharrie are well contrasted, and Ebbie Hart [?] and Sammlle Tamson are touched off with true knowledge; so are Pat Heron and the gypsies; and the spirit of the times surely seized. The love-passages between the hero and May Maxwell are all the more effective to my idea, from the kind of revulsion in attracting which the somewhat shy young fellow feels towards her at first; and the clever girl with her just a wee too attentive mockeries for indifference is cleverly done; and that some of May nursing the hero and wiping the blood so tenderly from his wound is well led up to and is, I think, excellent in itself. On the whole, the author, it is clear, writes of what he knows and has thoroughly mastered and is intimate with - result, a most effective and convincing picture of life at the date taken up - and all ends happily.*

*Two disadvantages are in view of the public. The story owed nothing whatever to Mr R.L. Stevenson, but it comes after David Balfour and many readers alas, critics also, do not distinguish in these matters. Like David Balfour, the hero tells his own story; and in a good deal of it he is in similar straits and goes over much the same kind of ground in part; and both tell it in a kind of modified quaint English with just a soupcon of Lowland Scotch in it. 2. The Scotch in the mouths of the characters is true Lowland Broad Scotch, a great many phrases in which English readers would find it a wee hard to get at the ream meaning of. But in these days of Barrie and Thrums surely, this would not form a permanent obstacle to success. It needs, however, to be taken into account. Barrie has got a great name and once that is got people will be in the fashion, though I am sure lots of people profess to understand Barrie, who don't in the least understand many of his bits of dialogue. There is as much humour in some passages here as in many of Barrie's; and I cannot conceive but that it would have a fair success, though there is a deal of the lottery in such cases - Crockett deserves a fair success if he doesn't get it.*

*Sometimes things are put which, though true enough in the mouths of the characters and to the time, and richly expressive historically, are not advisable to print exactly in that shape (for coarseness etc), for instance on is at p44 as it now stands about the gypsy Faa never having a bride at the bride-bed without her hands strapped behind her - dramatically true in all respects and historically true also, but, in a popular story, such things need to be a leetle orientated so to say. Mr Crockett on reflection wil, I am sure, understand*

*Alexander H. Japp*

*May Mischief of The Raiders would be, to my mind, a far better and more taking title.*

You may well think that the reports tell as much about the reader as the writer - and this is definitely something to consider. Remember, all three men were 'invested' in the publishing business. From the perspective of history we are able to place the work (and the reports) in context and draw different, perhaps more nuanced conclusions - whether that be to the literary 'quality' or the marketing component of *The Raiders*. I suppose if nothing else it shows there's much more to judge a book by than the cover or than first meets the eye. If nothing else, I hope you'll be able to start contextualising Crockett (and his work) more broadly from now on.