

ASPECTS OF AUTHORSHIP.

ONE morning about a fortnight since I came up to Toronto from my rural home in the county of Leeds to make arrangements for the publication of my first—and last—novel. I expected “The Revengful Ranger of the Remorseless Reef” to create a sensation in the republic of letters, and after careful deliberation I was fully resolved to keep the copyright in my own hands, and not to dispose of it upon any terms whatever. How eagerly I looked forward to the time when it would be given to the world with my name on the title-page, accompanied by the usual notice reserving the right of translation. How I deplored the injustice to Canadian authors of the absence of an international copyright law with the United States. Of course my book would be reprinted in New York, and I would reap no direct benefit from the tremendous sale it would certainly have in America. However, there was the consolation that the reprinting of it there would pave the way for the sale of advance sheets of my next romance; and I would meanwhile have an extensive circle of readers.

Having had no experimental knowledge of publishers and their ways, I had resolved to call upon my old friend and college chum, Paul Y. Syllabull, whose name, during the last three or four years, I have frequently seen mentioned in Canadian periodicals in no complimentary terms. He has for some time been a contributor to the daily newspaper press of Toronto, and some of his more elaborate articles have found acceptance in leading English and American magazines. I had determined to submit my MS. to him, and to solicit his advice as to whether it would be more judicious to bring it out in illustrated monthly parts, or to adopt the more common method of putting it forth all at once in a crown 8vo. volume.

Paul and I had not met since the days of our boyhood. Our paths in life since leaving Victoria College, Cobourg, had been widely different. He had no sooner taken his degree than he made his way up to town, articulated himself to a firm of solicitors, and proceeded to read for the bar; which uncongenial pursuit he shortly afterwards abandoned to tread the flowery paths of literature. (N.B.—I particularly affect expressions which are not hackneyed.) I never took a degree at all. In fact, the taking of degrees is not my strong point. I was always fond of reading, but the books which have found most favour in my eyes are not of a kind calculated to train the mind for the passing of college examinations; and I am sorry to say that my tutors, one and all, pronounced me an incorrigible dunce. In doing so, I think they made a mistake; but they were always backward in acknowledging genius, unless the genius happened to be of the most orthodox kind; which mine was not. I hold that a youth may be a trifle loose in his Greek verb, and still not be such an utter dolt, after all. But my tutors, not satisfied with merely pronouncing me a dunce, expressed a unanimous opinion to the effect that I did not possess sufficient application to enable me to learn any respectable trade. It was doubtless in consequence of this expression of opinion on their part that I was articulated by my father to that eminently respectable firm of solicitors, Messrs. Tarr & Phethers, who are known far and wide for the sharpest practitioners in our county. But I was literally

“A youth foredoom’d his father’s hopes to cross,
Who penn’d a stanza when he should engrave;”

and did not take kindly to the legal profession. I regret to state that after I had spent a few months in their office, Messrs. T. & P. had the bad taste to echo the opinion erewhile expressed by my college tutors, and to return me upon my father’s hands like a bale of unsalable goods. They said there was no use trying to teach the hard, dry science of law to a youth who could not be induced to give his mind to it, and whose head was full of poetry, and romances, and such like rubbish.

It began to be currently reported about the neighbourhood that my father’s only son was a noodle. You know what Macaulay says: “No reports are more readily believed than those which disparage genius, and soothe the envy of conscious mediocrity.” When the Messrs. Rectangle (engineers) declined to receive me as a pupil, my father came to the conclusion that the only course open for me to adopt was to go behind his counter, and retail

sugar, coffee, treacle, and what not. I “accepted the situation,” which returned the compliment by accepting me.

But although I so far deferred to my honoured father’s judgment as to accede to his wishes in this respect, I had an inward consciousness of the possession of a soul above groceries, and occupied my spare time in the compilation of an intensely exciting story of hair-breadth ‘scapes and moving accidents on the Spanish Main. To cut this part of my account short, I brought my assiduous labours to a close a fortnight since, and came up to town, as already recorded, to publish. I had never corresponded with Paul, and was unacquainted with his address; but, dunce as I am, it occurred to me to consult the directory, where I found what I wanted: “Syllabull, Paul Y., United Empire Buildings, Adelaide St. East.” I lost no time in presenting myself at that address, where I found my old friend. His chambers consisted of two scantily furnished apartments on the third floor. He was busily engaged in scratching off an elaborate article for the *Tautological Review*, in which Dr. Cutus Canby’s treatise “On the Armour of the Ancient Greeks” was handled pretty roughly, and was shown to be in many respects inaccurate.

There is no need to multiply details about my novel, because that is not what I took pen in hand to enlighten the readers of ARCTURUS about. Suffice it to say that after my friend had perused a few pages of it he convinced me of the utter impracticability of getting it published. He was very frank, and assured me that not even Messrs. Vermun & Scrubbs would undertake to bring out such a farrago of trash. He added that even if it were ushered into the world under the most favourable auspices imaginable, there would be no possibility of inducing anyone outside of a lunatic asylum to accept a copy of it as a gift.

I have been living with Paul ever since. I have just about made up my mind not to return to the home of my boyhood. I am not appreciated there, and my father’s customers have been gradually falling off ever since I stationed myself behind his counter. I have made all manner of mistakes, and these mistakes have all been on the wrong side for the customers. During the last week I have advertised in the daily papers for all sorts of situations, but have not yet received any suitable responses. Paul has let me into a few secrets about authorship, which I think may possibly be turned to account, and having nothing better on hand to-day to occupy myself with, I have sat down to write this paper.

I must premise that when Paul and I were at College together he was by no means conspicuous for cleverness or erudition. He was not particularly fond of reading, and knew less of books than I did, except such books as were included in the curriculum; and I have often since wondered where on earth he had contrived to pick up, in so short a time, the marvellous amount of multifarious learning displayed by the articles bearing his name in the various periodicals to which he contributes. I shall never wonder about it any more, because he has told me.

Last evening I came in from a stroll up Jarvis Street, and found him hard at work at an article on the mysterious Michigan murder which took place on Christmas Eve. With his permission I ran my eye over the sheets of his MS., and was hugely astonished at his familiarity with the secret devices of detectives. He suggested what seemed to me a startling and original plan for the discovery of the criminal. He criticised the conduct of the Detroit police-force with the utmost *sans froid*, and it was quite evident that had the matter been placed in his hands the culprit would have been arrested, tried, condemned, hanged—and for all I know drawn and quartered—before this time.

“I say Paul,” I remarked, “I would like to know how a small head like yours contrives to carry such an enormous amount of knowledge. All subjects are household words to you. In last month’s *Technologist* you had an exhaustive article on the Coal Supply. This month you have sent in one on the feasibility of employing petroleum for smelting purposes. A day or two since, you contributed to the pages of the *Ecumenical* a scholarly paper on the Constitution of the United States. Only last night you reviewed Professor Fogey’s Manners and Customs of the Middle Ages;” and to-night you seem to be equally at home on “Murder, considered as one of the Fine Arts.” Where have you managed to pick up such a fund of miscellaneous wisdom?”