

## A24 "WELL DONE!" 1918

[*within a single rule border*] "WELL DONE!" | BY | Joseph Conrad | LONDON | PRIVATELY  
PRINTED BY CLEMENT SHORTER | SEPTEMBER 1918

*Collation:* [1]<sup>10</sup>; pp. [1–4] 5–19 [20]; 255 x 190 mm.; printed on laid paper watermarked  
'ALDWYCH'.

*Contents:* p. 1, half-title "WELL DONE!"; p. 2, certificate of issue '*This little book contains three papers by | Joseph Conrad, first contributed to THE | DAILY CHRONICLE of August 22nd, 23rd and | 24th, 1918. They are issued here in an | edition of twenty-five copies by kind | permission of the Author for private | distribution among my friends. | [numbered in Roman numerals and signed or initialed in black ink by Clement Shorter]*'; p. 3, title; p. 4, blank; pp. 5–20, text; on p. 20, '[*short rule*] | *Printed by Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd., East Harding Street, E.C.4.*'

*Binding:* Blue-grey heavy wove paper wrappers. Front wrapper printed in black with a repeat of the title page. All edges untrimmed. White laid wrap-around end-papers watermarked 'ALDWYCH'.

*Copies examined:*

#### Notes

This is the third in the series of six Conrad publications issued by Clement Shorter in editions of twenty-five copies each. It reprints without change Conrad's three part article "Well Done!" from *The Daily Chronicle* (London, 22–24 August 1918). "Well Done!" was later included in *Notes on Life & Letters*.

#### General Note on the T. J. Wise Conrad Pamphlets

The T. J. Wise privately printed Conrad pamphlets were issued in two series, though not labeled as such, each containing ten titles. The first series, printed in February, March and April 1919, included "Autocracy and War," "Henry James," "Tradition." "Some Reflexions on the Loss of the Titanic," "Some Aspects of the Admirable Inquiry into the Loss of the Titanic," "Guy de Maupassant," "My Return to Cracow," "The North Sea on the Eve of War," "The Shock of War," and "To Poland in War-time." The second series, probably an outgrowth of the collector interest sparked by the first, followed in December 1919 and January 1920 and included "The Lesson of the Collision," "Tales of the Sea," "Anatole France," "Alphonse Daudet," "Anatole France 'L'Ile des Pingouins'," "Books," "Confidence," "An Observer in Malay," "Prince Roman," and "The Warrior's Soul."

The potential value of these manufactured rarities was evident to both Wise and Conrad from the beginning. The pamphlets printed by Shorter had immediately become collectors' items and, by December 1918, were bringing good prices. It was only natural for Wise, for whom the pamphlet business was an old game, to follow up on Shorter's successes. Wise knew that for the pamphlets to obtain their maximum potential value they had to appear to be genuinely privately printed pieces, not merely small limited editions put on the market at high prices for collectors, so the sale of the pamphlets was handled either by Wise or by Conrad. On 19 February 1919 Conrad wrote to Pinker:

"I am trying to sell 5 booklets of the Shorter & Wise's printing and I wouldn't have bothered you if I could have managed it by this [time], but the transactions take time and moreover I won't let

them go for nothing. A copy of *First News* (Shorter booklet) was sold in Dec<sup>er</sup> last in Am: for £30, unsigned, and presentation copies of *Victory and Chance* for about 60 each. There seems to be a Conrad boom amongst collectors. I had all this in a letter from Janvier the fine-book dealer in N.Y. and also from a collector (of small means) who is indignant at the prices (as if it were my fault) and curses one for letting Shorter and Wise print those booklets. Now he says, 'my collection of you can't be complete. I'll never be able to pay 150 for a booklet.' I sent the letter on to Wise to let him see what I have to suffer for my good nature."

Ten days later, on March 1, he wrote again to Pinker, "Did you communicate with Shorter? I had a communication with him whence it appears Wise has put him off from doing the three booklets he wanted to do. I should rather like to have the two 'Titanic' articles done in that way, either W. or S." While Pinker does not appear to have been involved in helping Conrad sell the pamphlets, as his agent he kept track of the permissions and so knew who was authorized to publish what, and Wise, it appears, got the go ahead for the future pamphlets.

Conrad's attitude toward the pamphlet venture was contradictory: he wanted the best possible price for the pamphlets but recoiled defensively when collectors complained at the cost of these pieces of ephemera. He needed the revenue the pamphlets could bring him but was too sensitive to handle the negotiations himself. Richard Curle came to his aid as middle man. In a letter to Curle, 11 November 1919, Conrad wrote, "Have you seen Wise – I wonder? If the thing goes through pray ask him to mark his envelopes *Private* when he writes to me on that matter. Like that the letter is certain not to be opened by anyone but myself. It's as well for you to know that too tho' indeed we've never had any great secrets between us – as yet."<sup>62</sup>

Exactly what the secret was we can only speculate. The assumption is that it had something to do with the pamphlets, and the guess which goes beyond the assumption is that Wise had suggested planting a few of these in bookshops at stiff prices to establish their value and then offer the first set and a second one which was in preparation to the major Conrad collectors at these premium prices.

The full extent of Richard Curle's involvement is not known, but he evidently handled the sale of the pamphlets to both Keating and Quinn. On 18 March 1920 Conrad wrote to Curle:

I enclose you here a letter from Keating. Do you think that 500 dollars has been asked for *one* pamphlet?

Well! It is a startling bit of information, to be sure, if it is as I take it. I don't understand why K. should be indignant as 500 dollars being asked for a 10 set, since he has already paid \$50 for single copies.

The first thought that comes into my head in any case is that if Q. [John Quinn] doesn't jump at a set at \$75 a copy he will be a colossal ass. As to the rest, I have answered Keating rather sharply, not liking quite that suggestion that I should "prevent" . . . Prevent what? How can I stop the dealers asking what they jolly well like, unless, indeed, I had my finger in that pie myself. That little work "prevent" raised my dander considerably.

On May 5th he wrote to Curle:

I have cabled Quinn yesterday: "*Two sets of ten each and seven [sic] of Shorter's will be sent to you next week in the terms of Curle's letter.*" Conrad."

Finally, in a letter dated 15.8.20, Conrad reported to Curle:

The Quinn deal has been closed satisfactorily by a draft for 1650 dolls= £450.1.1 – and many thanks to you, dear Richard, for it.

Certain distinctions between the pamphlets in the two series have been noted. The imprint of the earlier group describes them as “printed for private circulation” while in the later group Conrad is directly associated with them in the imprints which variously describe them as “printed for Joseph Conrad” or “printed for the author.” Both series limited printing to twenty-five copies of each pamphlet, but in the first series the pamphlets are unnumbered while in the second they are almost always numbered as one of the twenty-five.<sup>63</sup> Both changes were aimed at strengthening collector interest in the pamphlets, the first by associating their printing with Conrad and the second by assuring the genuineness of the limitation.

In one other aspect the two series differ. For the second there survive a large number of proof copies with Wise’s corrections while for the first series none are known. Apparently Wise, seeing the great interest in the pamphlets themselves, perceived that the corrected page proofs, especially if preserved complete with proofs of the wrappers, could become prime pieces for Conrad collectors. Accordingly, he instructed the printers to save all proofs and return them to him. His note on the front wrapper of the proofs for “Alphonse Daudet” reads “Please return to me, when done with, *all* the proofs & revises of *the whole* of these Conrad pamphlets. T. J. Wise”. From one to three sets of page proofs for each second series pamphlet except “The Warrior’s Soul” found their way into collectors’ hands and have survived. The sameness of the notes by Wise on some of these, as will be seen in the individual descriptions below, leads one to believe more proofs than actually necessary may have been called for, then annotated and set aside for eventual sale to collectors.

Conrad took no interest in revising or correcting the text of his miscellaneous pieces for their publication in the Wise pamphlets. No evidence exists that he read proof on them and in all probability Richard Curle ferreted out their original appearance in magazines and newspapers and Wise had them printed directly from these. Except for a few minor changes in punctuation and correction of typographical errors in the originals made by Wise the pamphlets are faithful reproductions of the original periodical versions before Conrad’s revisions made for their publication in *Notes on Life & Letters*. As such they are useful for many Conrad collections have the Wise pamphlets but not the issues of the periodicals in which these pieces originally appeared.

When in the spring of 1920, Conrad began work on the collective volume of his miscellaneous prose published the following year as *Notes on Life & Letters*, Curle supplied him with proofs of the Wise pamphlets and on these Conrad made his revisions in the text which were then incorporated in the book. When Conrad’s library was sold at auction 13 March 1925, lots 191 through 200 were described in Hodgson’s catalogue as “mostly proof sheets of the Privately Printed Editions of articles written by Conrad, and corrected by the Author as copy for the volume of ‘Notes on Life and Letters’”. The ten lots included proofs of the eighteen Wise pamphlets which were published in *Notes on Life & Letters*.<sup>64</sup> (The item “Anatole France” in lot 192 included both “Anatole France” and “Anatole France ’L’Ile des Pingouins”).