

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
Excerpt
[More information](#)

LORD JIM A TALE

“It is certain my conviction gains infinitely, the
moment another soul will believe in it.”
– NOVALIS.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
Excerpt
[More information](#)

3

TO
MR AND MRS G. F. W. HOPE

*With grateful affection
after
many years of friendship*

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
Excerpt
[More information](#)

AUTHOR’S NOTE

WHEN THIS NOVEL first appeared in book form a notion got about that I had been bolted away with. Some reviewers maintained that the work starting as a short story “had got beyond the writer’s control.” One or two discovered internal evidence of the fact, which seemed to amuse them. They pointed out the limitations of narrative form. They argued that no man could have been expected to talk all that time, and other men to listen so long. It was not, they said, very credible. 5

After thinking it over for something like sixteen years I am not so sure about that. Men have been known both in the tropics and in the temperate zone to sit up half the night “swapping yarns.” This however is but one yarn yet with interruptions affording some measure of relief; and in regard to the listeners’ endurance the postulate must be accepted that the story *was* interesting. It is the necessary preliminary assumption. If I hadn’t believed that it *was* interesting I could never have begun to write it. 10 15

As to the mere physical possibility we all know that some speeches in Parliament have taken nearer six than three hours in delivery; whereas all that part of the book which is Marlow’s narrative can be read through aloud, I should say, in less than three hours. Besides – though I have kept strictly all such insignificant details out of the tale – we may presume that there must have been refreshments on that night, a glass of mineral water of some sort to help the narrator on. 20 25

But seriously, the truth of the matter is that my first thought was of a short story, concerned only with the pilgrim ship episode; nothing more. And that was a legitimate conception. After writing a few pages however I became for some reason discontented and I laid them aside for a time. I didn’t take them out of the drawer till the late Mr William Blackwood suggested I should give something again to his magazine. 30

It was only then that I perceived that the pilgrim ship episode was a good starting point for a free and wandering tale; that it was

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
 Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

6

LORD JIM

an event too which could conceivably colour the whole “sentiment of existence” in a simple and sensitive character. But all these preliminary moods and stirrings of spirit were rather obscure at the time, and they do not appear clearer to me now after the lapse of so many years.

5

The few pages I had laid aside were not without their weight in the choice of subject. But the whole was rewritten deliberately. When I sat down to it I knew it would be a long book though I didn’t foresee that it would spread itself over fourteen numbers of “Maga.”

10

I have been asked at times whether this was not the book of mine I liked best. I am a great foe to favouritism in public life, in private life and even in the delicate relationship of an author to his works. As a matter of principle I will have no favourites; but I don’t go so far as to feel grieved and annoyed by the preference some people give to my *Lord Jim*. I won’t even say that I “fail to understand . . .” No! But once I had occasion to be puzzled and surprised.

15

A friend of mine returning from Italy had talked with a lady there who did not like the book. I regretted that of course but what surprised me was the ground of her dislike. “You know,” she said, “it’s all so morbid.”

20

The pronouncement gave me food for an hour’s anxious thought. Finally I arrived at the conclusion that, making due allowances for the subject itself being rather foreign to women’s normal sensibilities, the lady could not have been an Italian. I wonder whether she was an European at all. In any case no Latin temperament would have perceived anything morbid in the acute consciousness of lost honour. Such a response may be wrong, or it may be right or it may be condemned as artificial; and, perhaps, my Jim is not a type of wide commonness. But I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He’s not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead I saw his form pass by me – appealing – significant – under a cloud – perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me with all the sympathy of which I was capable to seek fit words for his meaning. He was “one of us.”

25

30

35

40 *June 1917*

J. C.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
Excerpt
[More information](#)

LORD JIM A TALE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale
 Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

I

HE WAS AN INCH, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it. It seemed a necessity, and it was directed apparently as much at himself as at anybody else. He was spotlessly neat, apparelled in immaculate white from shoes to hat, and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler's water-clerk he was very popular. 5 10

A water-clerk need not pass an examination in anything under the sun, but he must have Ability in the abstract and demonstrate it practically. His work consists in racing under sail, steam or oars against other water-clerks for any ship about to anchor, greeting her captain cheerily, forcing upon him a card – the business card of the ship-chandler – and on his first visit on shore piloting him firmly but without ostentation to a vast, cavern-like shop which is full of things that are eaten and drunk on board ship; where you can get everything to make her seaworthy and beautiful, from a set of chain-hooks for her cable to a book of gold-leaf for the carvings of her stern; and where her commander is received like a brother by a ship-chandler he has never seen before. There is a cool parlour, easy-chairs, bottles, cigars, writing implements, a copy of harbour regulations and a warmth of welcome that melts the salt of a three months' passage out of a seaman's heart. The connection thus begun is kept up, as long as the ship remains in harbour, by the daily visits of the water-clerk. To the captain he is faithful like a friend and attentive like a son, with the patience of Job, the unselfish devotion of a woman and the jollity of a boon companion. Later on the bill is sent in. It is a beautiful and humane occupation. Therefore good water-clerks are scarce. When a water-clerk who possesses Ability in the abstract has also the advantage of having been brought up to the sea, he is worth to his employer 15 20 25 30

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-82435-4 - Lord Jim: A Tale

Edited by J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

LORD JIM

a lot of money and some humouring. Jim had always good wages and as much humouring as would have bought the fidelity of a fiend. Nevertheless, with black ingratitude he would throw up the job suddenly and depart. To his employers the reasons he gave
 5 were obviously inadequate. They said "Confounded fool!" as soon as his back was turned. This was their criticism on his exquisite sensibility.

To the white men in the waterside business and to the captains of ships he was just Jim – nothing more. He had, of course, another
 10 name, but he was anxious that it should not be pronounced. His incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact. When the fact broke through the incognito he would leave suddenly the seaport where he happened to be at the time and go to another – generally farther east.
 15 He kept to seaports because he was a seaman in exile from the sea, and had Ability in the abstract, which is good for no other work but that of a water-clerk. He retreated in good order towards the rising sun, and the fact followed him casually but inevitably. Thus in the course of years he was known successively in Bombay, in
 20 Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Penang, in Batavia – and in each of these halting-places was just Jim the water-clerk. Afterwards, when his keen perception of the Intolerable drove him away for good from seaports and white men, even into the virgin forest, the Malays of the jungle village, where he had elected to conceal his deplorable
 25 faculty, added a word to the monosyllable of his incognito. They called him Tuan Jim: as one might say – Lord Jim.

Originally he came from a parsonage. Many commanders of fine merchant-ships come from these abodes of piety and peace. Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the unknowable
 30 as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions. The little church on a hill had the mossy greyness of a rock seen through a ragged screen of leaves. It had stood there for centuries, but the trees around probably
 35 remembered the laying of the first stone. Below, the red front of the rectory gleamed with a warm tint in the midst of grass plots, flower beds and fir trees, with an orchard at the back, a paved stable yard to the left and the sloping glass of greenhouses tacked along a wall of bricks. The living had belonged to the family for
 40 generations; but Jim was one of five sons, and when after a course