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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

JOHN BROWN, *Publisher*

P.O. Box 1141
Telegrams: OXONIAN CAPE TOWN
Telephone: 3-7412



Thibault House
Thibault Square
Cape Town

OW/LM

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
L. MARQUARD, *Manager*

13/1/60

Mr A. Paton,
23 Lynton Road,
KLOOF,
Natal.

JAN HOFMEYR

Dear Alan,

I was away from the office when your letter of 14 December arrived, and I took the opportunity of the delay involved to consult Mr Brown in London since it is they who will deal with some of the points you raise.

Referring to my and your paragraphs by numbers:

1(a) While we would not object strongly if Canada was an open market, there are fairly obvious disadvantages in that. In the first place, it makes for orderly and efficient marketing if booksellers in one country have one source of supply and a book at one price to sell. In the second place, our Canadian Branch carries stocks, and of our own books only, whereas Scribners operate through an agent who sells other publishers' books as well.

1(b) Mr Brown says, and I agree, that it is essential that somebody should have the monopoly of translation rights in any one area, and it is generally accepted practice that English publishers handle translation rights of books by English authors - in this case, by a South African author. Our London office is in very close touch with Continental publishers, exchanging frequent visits, and we handle the translation rights of the American University Presses whom we represent. It is essential that either Scribners or we should have sole control of translation rights in any one area, and, because of our geographical position if nothing else, we believe we can handle those more efficiently in Europe than Scribners can.

The point about someone (not necessarily the O.U.P.) having a monopoly of translation rights in any particular area is that the author will then get the best terms. If two publishers are trying to sell translation rights in, say,

(2)

Germany, the only people who will benefit are the German publishers.

Taking these two points together:

(i) I take it that you agree that we should negotiate with Scribners on your behalf (though there will eventually be a separate royalty agreement between you and them)? In that case we could, if you wish, offer them an open market in Canada. It is for you to decide.

(ii) We are as anxious as you are not to let Scribners feel any sense of grievance, and I wonder whether, with that assurance it would not be best to leave us to negotiate with them on the question of translation rights, and even on the question of Canada. Moreover, as I said in my previous letter, we shall not make a firm arrangement with Scribners without first consulting you.

1(c) I expressed myself badly in my previous letter. What is really intended is that if you do write to Scribners on this business, make any commitment, or give any undertaking, you should let us know what it is. Otherwise, it would clearly be impossible for us to deal fairly and reasonably with them. Obviously, Scribners and you will be exchanging letters, and it would help us, as your principal agent in this matter, if we knew about it.

5. In offering you 10-12½% I was going on a note in my file (going back to 1951/52) to the effect that I had discussed the matter with you and you had agreed. However, that is neither here nor there. I think I am right in saying that American royalties are, like the price of their books, higher than here or in Britain; but you would know. Our usual royalty is a straight 10%, with a rise to 12½% in the case of a few exceptional authors. The whole cost structure in the States is, as you know, much higher than elsewhere, and people will pay six dollars for a book there for which they would not pay 42/- here or in Britain. Except with legal and medical and such like textbooks, where price is of smaller importance, a more expensive book sells fewer copies, so that what the author and the publisher make on the higher price is balanced by smaller sales. On the whole, the advantage to both lies in larger sales.

(3)

There is the further point that your two novels had considerably larger sales than a biography is likely to have; and when a publisher expects to be able to reprint frequently he can increase the royalty without undue increase on the published price.

How would you feel about a straight 12½% from the beginning?

Nell joins me in warmest greetings to you both. She is on the mend, now, and there is every prospect of her ultimately being healthier with one kidney than she was with two - a strange reflection on Nature.

When am I going to see the first draft chapters you promised?

Yours as ever,

Leo