

# RUDYARD KIPLING

BY EDWARD SHANKS

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It does not happen very often in English literature that the political opinions of a writer interfere with critical judgment of his work. Even at the beginning of last century, when the fear of all new things was powerfully aided by the fear of a particular new thing across the Channel which would be physically disagreeable if it ever came to England — even then the persecution of literary radicals seemed a little unnatural and a little absurd. Since then the question cannot be said to have arisen until the appearance of Mr. Rudyard Kipling. Tennyson wrote a good many poems on public subjects; but it would be hard to conceive of opinion as to his poetic merits being moved by them, either one way or the other. Browning wrote a sonnet called 'Why I am a Liberal'; but do many readers know what precisely were the reasons he gave? Morris preached Socialism; and his work in all kinds was acutely appreciated by the rich. In truth, as a rule, the English keep their enjoyment of literature and their interest in politics in separate compartments; and the political ideas of a poet or a novelist very rarely seem to them to be a genuine or an important part of the man himself.

With Mr. Kipling, however, it is altogether different. Since the height of his first fame he has been held to be a political figure; and political points of

view are almost always evident in critical considerations of his work, whether admiring or adverse. Mr. Kipling, so far as I know, never has complained and, it may be suspected, never would complain of this. If it gets him severe and obstinate opponents, it also gets him enthusiastic admirers. . . . Politics is really his ruling and most permanent interest. In the whole-heartedness with which he takes a side, preaching both its general doctrines and its particular manœuvres, in the earnestness with which he publicly admonishes the entire nation on its own public affairs, we must find a comparison for him, if anywhere, abroad, for there is none to be found at home. His position, that is to say, in his writings, must be compared with the position of Hugo in France or of D'Annunzio in Italy — in his writings only, it must be confessed. The English nation has made something of a concession in taking so seriously his utterances on public matters. It might not have made the further concession which would have been necessary if he had come definitely to the day-to-day handling of day-to-day politics. Yet there was a time when he was almost himself a symbol rather than a creator or celebrator of symbols, just as D'Annunzio was the symbol of Italy's movement into the war.

Mr. Kipling's sudden and amazing upward rush into fame, over thirty

years ago, coincided with the beginning of a period of English history which attained its melancholy culmination in the South African War. He came from India, both by birth and by early employment — employment during years which must have been decisive in forming a mind so precociously developed and since so little open to change. He came to England from India with this at least definitely settled in his thoughts, that (I am expressing it as mildly as possible) Liberal opinions on the treatment of subject races were in several particulars much mistaken. This sprang by no means from a mere self-complacent belief in the superiority of the white race or from mere contempt for the 'nigger.' It sprang from a genuine love of efficiency and order. Mr. Kipling saw the English ruling India, as he thought, efficiently. He was far from despising the native races of India; it is even fair to say that he loved them; but he saw in their subordination a necessary principle of order, which ought not to produce shame. Even in that gentle book *Kim*, the country-bred boy, who has spent most of his life as a native, is made to assert his Sahib's superiority over the Bengali Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, who is his departmental superior. *Kim* does not much like doing it, but he knows it is the duty of his blood, and he does it, and is applauded, while the Babu acquiesces.

It is not my business to discuss here the value of these ideas. The point is that Mr. Kipling, fully possessed of them, brought them to an England which was fully ready for them. Those were the days when songs were sung with such refrains as 'Paint another red patch on the map'; and the opinion was generally held that there were still a good many parts of the globe which could be ruled more efficiently by the English than by their own inhabitants. Those were the days when the young

Cecil Rhodes made the first of his grandiose wills, leaving all his fortune — not then very great — for the foundation of a secret society which was to have as its object the Anglo-Saxon domination of the world. Into this world came Mr. Kipling, an able man, believing these ideas, possessed of practical knowledge from which to argue in their favor, and armed with a style which made it almost impossible not to read him. Hence came his leap into a position in English political thought and feeling which, it is safe to say, no other English imaginative writer — even Milton not excepted — has ever occupied. Hence, too, came the difficulty, which still exists, of looking at him dispassionately as an imaginative writer. We do not often mix together our enjoyment of literature and our partisan interest in politics, but when we do it we do it thoroughly.

So it comes about that we find even critics who maintain that Mr. Kipling does not write well. But he, that preacher of the gospel of efficiency, lives, in this, up to his own principles. He can write: by which I mean that he obviously never wastes even the merest shaving of his opportunities or of his great natural talents. He appeared in England, comet-like and amazing. His range of themes was exceedingly broad. He wrote about English soldiers in barracks in India, about Simla grass-widows talking among themselves in their own rooms, about the fighting and mating of seals on the beach of Novastoshnah, about Scottish engineers in the engine-rooms of tramp-steamers, and about horses in New England pastures. It was a marvelous display; and still the wonder grew that one very short lifetime could have included all that he seemed to know. . . .

Mr. Kipling is a reporter — probably the best reporter who ever lived. The first peculiar gift which made his suc-

cess was that of being able at once to get a lively and convincing image of a thing, *even at second-hand*. In one of his stories certain subalterns from the East relate their experiences to Eustace Cleever, a celebrated author. At the end

He replied with another quotation to the effect that, though singing was a remarkably fine performance, I was to be quite sure that few lips would be moved to song if they could find a sufficiency of kissing. Whereby I understood that Eustace Cleever, decorator and colorman in words, was blaspheming his own Art, and would be sorry for this in the morning.

The quotation is from James Thomson, an old favorite. It is a motive which occurs more than once in Mr. Kipling's middle period. Earlier he was merely omniscient. In the middle period he is uncomfortably aware of the real sources of his omnipotence. Later he grows resigned, mellow, and even a little contentedly humble.

At the beginning it is truly and irritatingly the reporter's omniscience. There is something revealing in the tendency of *Plain Tales from the Hills* to begin with authoritative and far-reaching generalizations: —

There are more ways of running a horse to suit your book than pulling his head off in the straight. Some men forget this. Understand clearly that all racing is rotten — as everything connected with losing money must be. In India, in addition to its inherent rottenness, it has the merit of being two thirds sham, looking pretty on paper only. Everyone knows everyone else far too well for business purposes. How on earth can you rack and harry and post a man for his losings when you are fond of his wife and live in the same Station with him? He says, 'On the Monday following'; 'I can't settle yet.' You say, 'All right, old man,' and think yourself lucky if you pull off nine hundred out of a two-thousand-rupee debt. Any way you look at it, Indian racing is immoral, and expensively

immoral, which is much worse. If a man wants your money he ought to ask for it, or send round a subscription list, instead of juggling about the country with an Australian larrikin; a 'brumby,' with as much breed as the boy; a brace of *chumars* in gold-laced caps; three or four *ekka*-ponies with hogged manes, and a switch-tailed demirep of a mare called Arab because she has a kink in her flag. Racing leads to the *shroff* quicker than anything else. But if you have no conscience and no sentiments, and good hands, and some knowledge of pace, and ten years' experience of horses, and several thousand rupees a month, I believe that you can occasionally contrive to pay your shoeing-bills.

This comes out of the mouth of a man in the very early twenties; and perhaps, if it were not so well expressed, it would be dismissible as such and therefore less irritating. But it is in fact the gay omniscience of every young man delivered with a skill in the use of words which makes it impossible to ignore. It is the reporter's gift; and early life is the time for the reporter to exercise it. He is still young, and his omniscience comes at second-hand; and just therefore it must be 'put over' with every ounce of weight he has at his command. Mr. Kipling's appetite for 'putting things over' came by eating. He was in a position where he must do it if he could. The necessity brought the gift to light; and the more he found that he could do it, the more diligently he sharpened the one knife that never failed him. He became a marvelous observer. One sees him again and again in his own stories the silent observer, standing carefully back so that he may not frighten the fish.

Nevertheless, this early work, with whatever cunning it may be done, is crude and raw in content. The author's main intention is to score his effect, and to do that he hits wherever an opening offers, careless of the direction. . . .

This unfair excess in the use of power

may prove inexperience and a certain and peculiar lack of self-confidence. It ought not to suggest lack of competence. Mr. Kipling's ability to produce a definite effect in his own medium should never have been in doubt. He has an instinct for words and for the rhythms in which words may be used, and often shows it in a startling way. His poem called 'Boots (Infantry Columns)' has an almost maddening effect on the mind:—

Try — try — try — try — to think o' something  
different —

O — my — God — keep — me from goin' lunatic!  
(Boots — boots — boots — boots — movin' up  
an' down again!)

There 's no discharge in the war!

Count — count — count — count — the bullets  
in the bandoliers.

If — your — eyes — drop — they will get atop  
o' you —

(Boots — boots — boots — boots — movin' up  
an' down again!)

There 's no discharge in the war!

It gives the movement of tired men on the march with a truth beyond admiration; and it brings itself home to readers who have never been in that state. Such renderings of physical things are surprising and effective and difficult, just because they are rarely attempted. But in nearly all his short stories Mr. Kipling approaches the rendering of subtler things with equal confidence in the power of words rightly used. His prose, even at the beginning, is a subtle and accomplished instrument. It is never what is meant by the opprobrious term 'mechanical': it is never dull and monotonous. But it often has the movement of one of those complicated machines which he himself, with many technical terms, loves to describe. The wheels revolve, levers appear and disappear, curious well-adapted appliances come into sight for a moment and are gone again. There is a rhythm and a repetition, but it is manifold and vari-

ous in its details; and the mind does not grow weary with seeing the same things too soon again.

This is in the short stories. There was a sensation when Mr. Kipling attempted a novel; and the sensation of the failure is still looked back to, in spite of the fact that in a further attempt, in *Kim*, he has more or less succeeded. But *The Light that Failed* showed that he faltered on a long flight, though he had been so secure on short flights. And, though other points might be criticized, the principal weakness of the book lies in the fact that Mr. Kipling does not seem able to maintain the consistency of his characters over so long a span. The two children, Dick and Maisie, are well drawn; the two adults they eventually become are well drawn; but between the two pairs there is no recognizable connection. At the beginning Mrs. Jennett objects to Maisie's goat:—

'Then,' said the atom, choosing her words very deliberately, 'I shall write to my lawyer peoples and tell them that you are a very bad woman. Amomma is mine, mine, mine!' Mrs. Jennett made a movement to the hall, where certain umbrellas and canes stood in a rack. The atom understood as clearly as Dick what this meant. 'I have been beaten before,' she said, still in the same passionless voice; 'I have been beaten worse than you can ever beat me. If you beat me I shall write to my lawyer peoples and tell them you do not give me enough to eat. I am not afraid of you.'

How could this decisive and strong-charactered child grow into the characterless girl who afterward fails Dick merely for want of strength and clings on feebly to a vocation in which she has no hope of real success but from which she still hopes to obtain a few laudatory press-cuttings? Her inability to rise to the occasion and make a real use of herself in something real

provides the 'little flame of observed life which illuminates the second half of the book. This is an excellent study of character and motive (Dick's own attitude is a trifle stagy) so far as it goes. But it does not go very far. The rest of the story, with the girl who ruins Dick's picture while he is asleep, sticks out her tongue at him and whispers, 'Bilked,' as she escapes, is merely clever improvisation. It is well done: it fills up the space round the small fragment of important truth which Mr. Kipling has to tell. But it is cheaply crude in conception, at best a skillful playing on the nerves of the reader; and again one regrets that so much skill should be wasted on a thing so little worth doing.

In *Kim* this inability to cover a long span is not so noticeable. *Kim* has not the organic construction and development of a story. The tale of Kim's birth and its discovery, of his upbringing, and of his first great adventure in men's work, is not very interesting and does not so much hold the attention that one fails to observe how often, as a tale, it flags. The importance of the book lies in its long leisurely portrayal of British India, in its assemblage of vividly sketched persons, among whom the old Lama, thoroughly understood and beautifully represented, is the best. The Lama is indeed perhaps the best of all Mr. Kipling's characters. He is shown at more length, and with more result for the length than any other.

But undoubtedly Mr. Kipling's gift is rather for the sudden light on character which can be shown in a short story than for any continuous or exhaustive exposition. Certain characters occur again and again in his tales — Stalky and his companions, Mulvaney, Learoyd, and Ortheris. But there is never any attempt at development. The effect of character is built up just

enough to make each episode credible and solid, and no more. It is worth remarking that the adventures of Stalky, Beetle, and M'Turk begin at a point when, as schoolboys at least, they are beyond change. And indeed they do not change from the moment at which they trespass on Colonel Dabney's estate to that in which they bribe Mary Yeo to kiss Tulke. Stalky appears once again as a subaltern, when he might still be a schoolboy, and once again as a battalion-commander — when he might be anybody.

It is when Mr. Kipling attempts something out of his range that he betrays his worst weakness. This worst weakness is the tendency to use his gifts of personality, persuasion, and vividness, his reporter's gifts, to 'put over' something not worthy of the resources lavished on it. When he thus exerts himself he secures what may be called a triumph of brute strength over the good taste which is too delicate properly to defend itself. One's first admiration of Mr. Kipling too often leaves behind it a feeling of having been overcome by unfair force; but if he uses brute strength he also admires it and judges only on immediate results.

In the short stories, however, this temptation to him can be, by the nature of the thing, lacking throughout an entire piece. And as a writer of short stories he does undoubtedly come first in the English language. Mr. Wells, to take one example, who was obviously much influenced by him, deserves to be mentioned in the same category. But Mr. Wells has attempted other things — and succeeded with them — and has not given the whole of his time or the best of his wits to this particular form, in which he has not Mr. Kipling's range or his variety. There are others, but space is too short to mention them here. The canon of

Mr. Kipling includes some fourteen volumes; and the stories are of all sorts, gay and grave, exotic and domestic. The classification of them would make an admirable theme for a *Doktorfrage*; but, having said something already on the diversity of their subjects, I must leave that alone.

The point to be observed is that here can be seen the curve of Mr. Kipling's development from the early arrogance of

He heard the sound that a man never forgets all his life — the 'ah-yah' of an angry crowd. (When that sound drops about three tones, and changes to a thick, droning *ut*, the man who hears it had better go away if he is alone.)

through the somewhat uneasy maturity of 'The Finest Story in the World' to the mellow and golden autumn of 'Friendly Brook.' It is as though Indian suns (but surely he was not very long in India) had saturated him with raw light, which it has needed decades of more temperate weather to soak out of him again. His gift of understanding, of seizing the heart of a situation, was never in doubt. . . .

There are those indeed who consider that Mr. Kipling deservedly made his reputation in the early nineties and that since then he has been nothing but a shadow of his younger self. Yet, it may be proper to ask, may not the shadows cast by so violent a light prove to be of more value than its own rays? For me, at any rate, up to the publication of his last collection of stories, Mr. Kipling's work has grown increasingly satisfying. The dazzling, enchanting skill remains; but the rawness and violence of the feelings, or the appeal to the reader's feelings, is diminished. The first ponderable sign of the change is marked perhaps by the publication of *Kim* in 1901. It appears in such stories as 'An Habitation En-

forced' and in the gracious details of *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*. In 'Friendly Brook' the exquisite power of description is as strong as ever it was. . . .

I may have seemed to write sneeringly or slightly of much of Mr. Kipling's earlier work. If one considers his writings as a whole one is haunted by a sense of huge talents taking too often a path of least resistance which an equally admirable ingenuity much too easily discovers. Thus haunted, it is only too easy to fail to give any impression of his range and versatility, to forget to mention with the rest such things as the solid, contenting horseplay of 'My Sunday at Home,' 'Brugglesmith,' and 'The Village That Voted the Earth Was Flat.' But even where one sneers, even where one sees qualities improvable and improved by time, one quality is always obvious and must not be denied. There is an immense vitality in all this work. It has, for good or evil, set a fashion of surprising endurance and nothing without vitality could ever have set a fashion which endured so long.

Mr. Kipling may have learned — he certainly did from Stevenson, he may have done from Maupassant; but his is the spirit which beyond dispute can be traced in almost every page of the popular magazines both in England and in America.

When we come to look at his verse the same thing must be said. Most of it is rhetoric; but little of it is ineffective rhetoric.

There is much to be said against such writing as this: —

Tom Hall stood up by the quarter-rail. 'Your words in your teeth,' said he.  
'There 's never a law of God or man runs north of Fifty-Three.'  
So go in grace with Him to face, and an ill-spent life behind,  
And I 'll be good to your widows, Rube, as many as I shall find.'

A Strabound man shot blind and large, and a  
 warlock Finn was he,  
 And he hit Tom Hall with a bursting ball a  
 hand's breadth over the knee.  
 Tom Hall caught hold by the topping-lift, and  
 sat him down with an oath.  
 'You 'll wait a little, Rube,' he said. 'The Devil  
 has called for both.  
 The Devil is driving both this tide, and the  
 killing-grounds are close,  
 And we 'll go up to the wrath of God as the  
 holluschickie goes.  
 O men, put back your guns again and lay your  
 rifles by,  
 We 've fought our fight, and the best are down.  
 Let up and let us die!  
 Quit firing, by the bow there — quit! Call off the  
 Baltic's crew!  
 You 're sure of Hell as me or Rube — but wait  
 till we get through.'

One is inclined to begin by saying that the worst against this style is that it has raised up to itself so great a crop of quite intolerable imitations. But this very fact is, as a phenomenon, worthy of notice and even of admiration. Uncountable poets have been pricked to imitation and a large public applauds them. This is due no doubt to the fact that some generations in large well-policed towns have engendered in our race a platonic and disinterested love of violence; but it must be recorded that Mr. Kipling was the first man to put this dumb feeling into words. The style is bold and coarse. It derives from old ballads, but its boldness springs, not as there from naïve instinct, but perceptibly from civilized cunning. Its flavor is therefore different. Its swinging gait, deliberately adopted, is too mechanical to merge into the milder intimacies and humanities of the ballad.

But there are moments when Mr. Kipling, clearly with the same model in mind, gets nearer to the original. His besetting weakness is the desire to make an effect by the quickest and surest means: this style is a short cut to an effect. But occasionally — and often enough to make the sum of all

the occasions impressive — his feeling about his subject quite overcomes this weakness.

Real feeling comes through in even 'Gentleman Rankers' — which is an example of an intermediary type between the ballad and the music-hall song — and in 'Ford o' Kabul River.' The merely dialect poems are connected with these; and it must be admitted that Mr. Kipling has once or twice raised the Cockney speech to the dignity of a poetic tongue: —

The Injian Ocean sets an' smiles  
 So sof', so bright, so bloomin' blue;  
 There are n't a wave for miles an' miles  
 Excep' the jiggle from the screw.  
 The ship is swep', the day is done,  
 The bugle 's gone for smoke and play;  
 An' black ag'in the settin' sun  
 The Lascar sings: 'Hum deckty hai!'

*For to admire an' for to see,  
 For to be'old this world so wide —  
 It never done no good to me,  
 But I can't drop it if I tried!*

Oh, I 'ave come upon the books,  
 An' frequent broke a barrick rule,  
 An' stood beside an' watched myself  
 Be'avin' like a bloomin' fool.  
 I paid my price for findin' out,  
 Nor never grutched the price I paid,  
 But sat in Clink without my boots,  
 Admirin' 'ow the world was made.

It is philosophical and beautiful, and, as an indispensable preliminary to these, it is sincere. The dialect might have been used patronizingly, merely with a view to 'quaintness.' But here the feeling of the poem transcends the accidents of the language and merely fixes them as part of its final success.

Thus it is throughout the whole of Mr. Kipling's work. He has always been described as a precocious writer; and it is very generally assumed that his early brilliance necessarily entailed exhausted and disappointing later years. It would probably be nearer the truth to say that those gifts which in him were the earliest to display them-

selves needed time and hard work before they could be brought into their proper place. This prophet of coördination has found it no easy matter to coördinate his own talents. Now, and for some years past, he writes very little. But in most of what he writes now

those early brilliant faults have been subdued and have become useful subsidiary virtues. Time, and severe impartial standards, winnowing his work, will winnow much of it away; but they will certainly leave something that is unique.

## LAND HUNGER

BY LOVRO KUHAR

*[Lovro Kuhar is among the latest appearances in Yugoslav literature. This autobiographical study was written upon his return from the World War, where he served first in the Austrian army and later as a Yugoslav Legionary against the Central Powers. He has published numerous short stories in Slovenian and Croatian periodicals. 'Land Hunger' is a vivid portrayal of the peasant moods that have led to sweeping changes in the ownership of land throughout Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Aegean.]*

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My father was a peasant. He had no land of his own; he rented it from others. We moved from one place to another; and the frequent moving stamped my youth with unpleasant memories. My earliest recollections are of a cheerful home in the country, an indescribably beautiful, sunshine-flooded place. But that was not my birthplace. When I was older, I learned that mother gave me life elsewhere and had brought me in her arms to this fairy-tale home. When I was about eight years old, father and I happened to pass my birthplace.

'See, that is where you were born,' said father in a solemn voice. I looked and shuddered.

Presently we left the pleasant home on the hill. Why, I do not know; I think father had quarreled with the

owner. At that time I did not yet clearly comprehend such things.

I remember that moving. The sun was shining. In front of us someone drove a well-loaded wagon; behind it, father led the cow by a chain, and then I came with mother, who carried a baby, my brother, in her arms. Mother's eyes were red from weeping; she often glanced at me and at the little house which stood on the hilltop amid trees and sloping fields, flooded with sunshine. Whenever father looked back, mother would look at the ground and try to hide her grief. Coming to the edge of the wood, where the old home disappeared from view, she could no longer restrain herself and sobbed loudly.

Even as a baby I liked best to be near father. Whenever I could I ac-