

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

Rudyard Kipling

Will there never come a season
Which shall rid us from the curse
Of a prose which knows no reason
And an unmelodious verse:
When the world shall cease to wonder
At the genius of an Ass,
And a boy's eccentric blunder
Shall not bring success to pass;

When mankind shall be delivered
From the clash of magazines,
And the inkstand shall be shivered
Into countless smithereens:
When there stands a muzzled stripling,
Mute, beside a muzzled bore,
When the Rudyards cease from Kipling
And the Haggards ride no more?

This skit which is quoted from a volume of a rather clever verse by a young Cambridge don, has in its closing couplet touched a popular chord, and while I sympathize with its general tone and its structure on Haggard, I must confess – if it be a confession that I should be sorry if Rudyard should cease from Kipling quite yet a while for he has given me many a pleasant hour, and I wish for more. It so happened that a cousin of Rudyard Kipling, a young Englishman married a Cincinnati girl, has recently been here on a visit to her parents, and from him I learned a few things about the young officer which are not covered by the notice of his life which was put forth some time ago by his admirer Mr. Andrew Lang.

He told me that Kipling's first book "Plain Tales from the Hills" was printed in India, like most of his first productions, and a copy was sent to my informant who took it to a London publisher who sagely returned it as being unmerchantable, and within two years paid a Thousand pounds for the right to publish a cheap edition of the same book.

Kipling is but twenty six years of age, as he was born on the last day of December 1865. He spent his early days in England, separated from his parents

as so many of the little Anglo-Indians are, for his father was for many years at the head of the School of Art at Lahore.

That starved life of the farmed out child separated from its parents which was the bitter experience of his own childhood, it is reproduced in the early chapters of "The Light that Failed" and in the beautiful child story of "Baa-Baa Black Sheep".

"Wee Willie Winkie" and "His Majesty the King" are stories of happier Anglo-Indian children, who passed their childhood in India with their parents. His other story of child life, and in my opinion the best of his sketches is "The Story of Muhammed Diu" – a tiny little native, whom one almost learns to love from the three or four short pages of its two brief life, which Kipling so feelingly has pictured. When still a boy, Kipling went to India and took up journalism as a means of earning his livelihood, and the effects of this misdirection of his faculties can be traced in too much of his literary work. In a few years he gained an excellent position on the Staff of the Calcutta Pioneer, writing the Plane Tales and some of his other stories meanwhile.

Subsequently he was for a time in New York as a special correspondent and doing hack literary work. His journey from India to New York was made via the Pacific and across the Continent. On this journey he wrote those letters to his Calcutta newspaper which were afterwards bundled into that poor volume entitled "American Notes" – a newspaperly string of words, discreditable even as a pot-boiler.

After the phenomenal success of the "Plane Tales from the Hills" he went to London to enjoy its fruits and from his experience at this time apparently has he derived material for part of "The Light That Failed." Physically, Kipling is short, thick-set and very muscular. He courts all sorts of exposure and especially enjoys a rough life, entailing hardship and fatigue. Some of his stories show great knowledge of women though essentially he is a man's man, but he has a very lovely sister from home, perhaps he has gained the knowledge of her sex just as Mrs. Howells has helped out her husband's stock of information on the same troublesome subject.

This story called "The Light that Failed" is the only one that can be dignified by calling it a novel. He has written one shorter story published in a volume by itself: "The Story of the Gadslys" and seventy odd stories, studies and sketches which have been published in a half dozen volumes, beginning with "Plane Tales from the Hills," and followed by "Soldiers Three", "Under the Deodars," "Life's Handicap," "Mine On People" and "Black and White". Besides these he has published two volumes of verse called "Departmental Ditties" and "Barrick Room Ballads and other Versus," they give is fresh and glowing view of the social, military and native phases of that life.

What may be called his military stories largely deal with the adventures of his "Soldiers Three." Mulvaney, the drunken, pugnacious, loquacious, kindly Irish ruffian of the old-school; Ortheris, the impudent little cockney blackguard, Learoyd, the huge Shropshire sharp-shooter. These characters are more nearly literary creations than any other of Kipling's people. Much of what they do and say is what Mr. Kipling would have said and done under the same circumstances. In the creation of characters, he has shown little power; it usually is Kipling himself who speaks. An exception to this limitation, however, is noticeable in the "Soldiers Three" and possibly in one or two other characters who have an individuality of their own.

As to his style, there is hardly enough of it to warrant its being thus styled, for he has no real prose style by which, as a literary quality, his work can be identified. The chief trait by which his productions in general can be recognized is a bright crispness which, however, is tainted with a sort of vigorous journalistic smartness, evidencing the bad habits acquired during those years when he was in that worst of literary schools, the newspaper.

His greatest strength is an unusual faculty for vivid description which amounts to a genius, and this, with a wonderful individuality of happy simile and fortuitous phrase, added to his brightness and brevity, have earned him his reputation.

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