

ABOUT RUDYARD KIPLING AND HIS POEMS.

Four years ago, nearly five years ago, I was at a ball on that stately old four-decker, the Royal Adelaide, one of the last, as well as the largest, of the wooden walls of Old England. She has never done any more active service than act as Admiral's ship on a home station, and now never goes outside Plymouth Sound.

But one of the Admiral's staff, whom I met on board, has been out to India, and he had brought back with him a volume of poems by a young Anglo-Indian. I caught it up while a "square" was being danced and read "The Story of Uriah" and "A Code of Morals."

So little was Rudyard Kipling known to fame then, that I had forgotten his name, while I remembered the poems as if I had read them but yesterday, when, to my delight, I recognized them in "Departmental Ditties," "Barrack-room Ballads" and other verses. (John W. Lovell & Co., New York, 1890)

Rudyard Kipling is certainly a wonderful youth. He is only four and twenty, and people are calling him the Indian Dickens for his life-like presentments of life in India, especially the life of Tommy Atkins in India. How close he is to life. I had an opportunity of judging the other day.

Everyone who keeps up with the 'best-broomed' fiction of the day is familiar with the lament of Private Ortheris, in "Forty Tales from the Hills," over his continued deprivation of the delights of London—the Strand and the penny bus and the gin palaces.

It fell to me last summer to have this curiously corroborated. There had been an accident on the Canadian Pacific Railway; a bridge had subsided, with a train on it, between Port Caldwell and Peninsular on the north shore of Lake Superior. A gang of men was scoured together in haste to repair the embankment and bridge; and pretty scourgings they were; the men who were at liberty for odd jobs in this unpopulated part of the country—most of them the riff-raff of the London streets, shot out to Canada by some emigration society, and drifting about the Dominion utterly unsuitable for anything when they got there. I went down on the work-train with these men, sitting on the beams for the repairing. Their conversation had one topic: "Lovely place, Lake Superior, ain't it? bootiful scenery, ain't it? such a lot for a cove to do, ain't there? Why, I'd give the whole — show for a pint of 'arf and 'arf at the Blue Boar's 'Ead in Droory Lane!"

I own that the things that take me most are the "Barrack-room Ballads." It is when Mr. Kipling takes his stand in the shoes of Tommy Atkins, the indistinguishable hero who has won England half her empire and glory, that he evinces his grasp of humanity, his power of creating the generalizations which endure his eye for picking out types as the philologist unearths the roots underlying the whole organ family of languages.

Worthy of the creator of that inimitable triumvirate, Ortheris, Learoyd and Mulvaney, are "The Sons of the Widow"

We've 'eard of the Widow at Windsor,
Its safest to let 'er alone,
For 'er sentries we stand by the sea and the land
Whenever the bugles are blown.
(Poor beggars!—an' don't we get blown!)

Take 'old 'o the wings 'o the morning,
An' flop round the earth till you're dead,
But you won't get away from the tune that they play
To the blooming old rag over 'ead.
(Poor beggars!—it's 'ot over 'ead!)

and "Troopin'." (Our army in the East.)
Troopin', troopin', troopin' to the sea,
'Ere's September come again—the six-year men are free.
O leave the dead be'ind us, for they cannot come away,
To where the ship's a coalin' up that takes us 'ome to-day.

We're goin' 'ome, we're goin' 'ome,
Our ship is at the shore,
An' you must pack your 'aversack,
For we won't come back no more.

Ho! don't you grieve for me,
My lovely Mary-Anne,
For I'll marry you yit on a fourpenny bit
As a time-expired man.

"The Grave of the Hundred Head" has the strength and ghostliness and national pride of that fine story of Mr. Kiplings, "The Man who Was." It is refreshing to read

pages which show that the writer's heart still throbs with rational national pride in the midst of all the sickly maundering about oppression. Not that Mr. Kipling's poems are devoid of the sympathy for the rank and file of humanity which distinguishes his prose works, as witness "Dannie Deever," a poem which strikes quite tragic chords, and "Belts." But I adhere to liking him best in such poems as "Gunga Din." "By the living Gawd that made you, you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din;" and "Mandalay" is the gem of the book.

But that's all shove be'ind me—long ago and fur away,
An' there ain't no busses running from the Bank to Mandalay;

An' I'm learnin' 'ere in London what the ten-year soldier tells,
If you've 'eard the East a-callin', why you won't 'eed nothin' else.

No! you won't 'eed nothin' else,
But them spicy garlic smells,
An' the sunshine an' the palm-trees an' the tinkly temple-bells!

On the road to Mandalay.

I'm sick o' wastin' leather on these gutty paving stones,
An' the blasted English drizzle wakes the fever in my bones;
Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids onter Chelsea to the Strand,

An' they talks a lot o' lovin', but wot do they understand?
Beefy face an' grubby 'and—
Law! wot do they understand;

I've a neater, sweeter maiden, in a cleaner, greener land!
On the road to Mandalay.

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no ten commandments, an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are calling, an' its there that I would be—

By the old Monlmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea.
And there's a splendid finale to "The Young British Soldier:"

When you're wounded an' left on Afghanistan's plains,
An' the women come out and cut up your remains,
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains,
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

Go, go, go like a soldier,
Go, go, go like a soldier,
Go, go, go like a soldier,
So oldier hof the Queen.

Englishmen will love Kipling's poems as they love Kipling's prose, because they make our great Indian Empire part of our everyday knowledge, as all the colonels who have returned from India since the days of Clive and talked of nothing but India till the day of their death.

His "Christmas in India," with which I will conclude my quotations, is worthy of Adam Lindsay Gordon.

Gray dusk behind the tamarisks—the parrots fly together,—
As the sun is sinking slowly over home;
And his last ray seems to mock us,
Shackled in a life-long tether
That drags us back howe'er so far we roam.

Hard her service, poor her payment—
She in ancient, tattered raiment—
India, she the grim step mother of our kind.
If a year of life we lent her, if her temple's shrine we enter,
The door is shut—we may not look behind.

Black night behind the tamarisks—the owls begin their chorus—

As the conches from the temple scream and bray,
With the fruitless years behind us, and the hopeless years before us.

Let us honor, O my brother, Christmas day!

Call a truce then to our labors—let us feast with friends and neighbors,

And be merry as the custom of our caste;
For if "faint and forced the laughter," and if sadness follow after,
We are richer by our mocking Christmas past.

Compare this with the immortal finish of poor Gordon's masterpiece "The Sick Stockrider," not so well known as it should be in America, though where is the Australian who has not these lines by heart:

I've had my share of pastime and I've done my share of toil;

And life is short—the longest life a span;
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
Or for wine that maketh glad the heart of man.

For good undone and gifts misspent and revolutions vain,
Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know.
I should live the same life over, if I had to live again,
And the chances are I go where most men go.

The deep blue skies wax dusky and the tall green trees grow dim,
The sward beneath me seems to heave and fall;
And sickly, smoky shadows through the sleepy sunlight swim,
And on the very sun's face weave their pall.

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle-blossoms wave,
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

One of Mr. Kipling's happiest veins in his prose—the vein in which he entertains us with the Gadsbys—is very little represented in his verse, about the happiest instance being the poem quoted in the Sunday Sun:

THE BETROTHED.

"You must choose between me and your cigar."

Open the old cigar box, get me a Cuba stout,
For things are running crossways, and Maggie and I are out.

We quarrelled about Havanas; we fought o'er a good cheroot.

And I know she is exacting, and she says I am a brute.

Open the old cigar box, let me consider a space;
In the soft blue veil of the vapour, musing on Maggie's face.

Maggie is pretty to look at, Maggie's a loving lass,
But the prettiest cheeks must wrinkle, the truest of loves must pass.

There's peace in a Laranaga, there's calm in a Henry Clay,
But the best cigar in an hour is finished and thrown away.

Thrown away for another as perfect and ripe and brown,
But I could not throw away Maggie for fear o' the talk o' the town!

Maggie, my wife at fifty, gray and sour and old!
With never another Maggie to purchase for love or gold.

And the light of days that have been, the dark of the days that are.

And Love's torch stinking and stale, like the butt of a dead cigar.

The butt of a dead cigar you are bound to keep in your pocket,
With never a new one to light tho' it's charred and black to the socket.

Open the old cigar box, let me consider awhile;
Here is a mild Manila, there is a wifely smile.

Which is the better portion, bondage bought with a ring,
Or a harem of dusky beauties, fifty tied in a string?

Counsellors cunning and silent, comforters true and tried,
And never a one of the fifty to sneer at a rival bride.

Thought in the early morning, solace in time of woes,
Peace in the bush of the twilight, balm ere my eyelids close.

This will the fifty give me, asking naught in return,
With only a Suttie's passion, to do their duty and burn.

This will fifty give me. When they are spent and dead,
Five times other fifties shall be my servants instead.

The furrows of far off Java, the isles of the Spanish Main,
When they hear my harem is empty will send me my brides again.

I will scent 'em with best vanilla, with tea will I temper their hides,
And the Moor and the Mormon shall envy who read of the tale of my brides.

And I have been servant of Love for barely a twelve-month clear,
But I have been Priest of Partagas a matter of seven years.

And the gloom of my bachelor days is flecked with the cheery light
Of stumps that I burned to Friendship and Pleasure and Work and Fight.

And I turn my eyes to the future that Maggie and I must prove,
But the only light on the marshes is the will-o'-the-wisp of Love.

Will it see me safe through my journey, or leave me bogged in the mire?

Since a puff of tobacco can cloud it, shall I follow the fitful fire?

Open the old cigar box, let me consider anew;
Old friends, and who is Maggie, that I should abandon you?

A million surplus Maggies are willing to bear the yoke;
And a woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke.

Light me another Cuba; I hold to my first-sworn vows,
If Maggie will have no rival, I'll have no Maggie for spouse!

With this I must bid adieu to Mr. Kipling and his verses.

DOUGLAS SLADEN.