

CHATTERTON LECTURE ON AN ENGLISH POET

SOME ASPECTS OF KIPLING'S VERSE

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KIPLING's subtlest artistry, his deepest psychological insights, his most sensitive moral intuitions, are to be found not in his verse but in the best of his prose fiction; and the claims to be made for his poetry are therefore more modest than for works like 'The Man who would be King', 'Without Benefit of Clergy', 'On Greenhow Hill', the Puck and Mowgli stories, *Kim*, 'The Wish House', and 'The Gardener'. Yet he can now be seen in retrospect as one of the best minor poets of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it is regrettable—though understandable—that his reputation should have been so long obscured by the fogs of political and literary controversy.

In some ways, of course, he asked for it. Deliberately polemical and partisan, many of his poems have naturally evoked polemical and partisan responses. Deliberately unfashionable, consciously out of step with modern poetic movements, sometimes defiantly lowbrow, his art has—not surprisingly—been regarded often with disgusted or amused contempt. Hostile critics, on the other hand, have shown over the years a capacity for prejudice and special pleading equal to Kipling's own. Those who maintain that his poems smell of blood and tobacco (like Dick Heldar's paintings), or that 'his mind was a very crude instrument . . . always devoid of finer feeling and emotional discipline',¹ have taken little account of works as various as 'The Way Through the Woods', 'Gethsemane', 'The Storm Cone', and 'The Appeal'. The view that he is essentially the bard of Anglo-Saxon racialism must be qualified by verses like those on 'Buddha at Kamakura', which typify his anthropological but warmly human interest in mankind in all its variety, and his ability to project himself imaginatively into the minds of men of other races and cultures. Those who see him as the quintessential jingo, bawling England's praises, should read as a corrective poems like 'The Islanders', 'The Dykes', and 'The City of

¹ Boris Ford, 'A Case for Kipling?', *Scrutiny*, xi (1942), 24, 32.

Brass', in which he denounces his country for her inefficiency and decadence: few patriots have had a sharper awareness of the discrepancy between their ideals and the reality. The belief that he was first and last a militarist, glorifying brutality and battle, is hard to reconcile with 'The Settler', which stresses the waste and futility of war, the need for reconciliation and atonement, or with 'The Mother's Son', that sad record of a psychological casualty of the trenches, or with his grimly stoical acceptance (in 'For All We Have and Are') of the outbreak of war in 1914:

Our world has passed away,
In wantonness o'erthrown.
There is nothing left today
But steel and fire and stone! . . .

Comfort, content, delight,
The ages' slow-bought gain,
They shrivelled in a night.
Only ourselves remain
To face the naked days
In silent fortitude,
Through perils and dismays
Renewed and re-renewed.

It is a mood (need I say?) far removed from the facile exultation commonly associated with war poetry of that period.

Such examples could easily be multiplied, but although they have their value in modifying an inadequate popular stereotype, they are unlikely to convince the unconverted of Kipling's standing as a poet. For one thing, it might be argued, such a defence concerns itself too exclusively with his philosophy or 'attitudes' and too little with his art, too much with the content and too little with the quality of his writings; while the unsympathetic reader may also feel that here (as in other apologias) a new, acceptable pseudo-Kipling is being fabricated from carefully selected elements, while much objectionable material is ignored or deliberately suppressed. There might be some truth in this suspicion, since the critic who has winnowed bad from good to his own satisfaction is tempted to describe his author in terms of the positive achievements, not the lapses; but the best of Kipling is not necessarily representative of the whole. 'Recessional', for example, strikes a solemnly impressive note of warning against national hubris, pleading for humble and contrite hearts amid the pride and pomp of Victoria's Diamond

Jubilee, but having drafted the famous stanzas Kipling confided to his friend Rider Haggard that

... my objection to that hymn is that it may be quoted as an excuse for lying down abjectly at all times and seasons and taking what any other country may think fit to give us. What I wanted to say was: 'Don't gas but be ready to give people snuff'—and I only covered the first part of the notion.¹

'Don't gas but be ready to give people snuff': the sentiments are not in themselves disreputable, but the aggressive common sense and perky complacent slang contrast disconcertingly with the high meditative mode adopted in the hymn. Nor is this simply a contrast between the author and the man, for the aspect of Kipling's mind which we glimpse here issues not infrequently in execrable verses (like 'Et Dona Ferentes', that embarrassing celebration of the dangerous politeness of the English). This does not, of course, detract from the merits of 'Recessional' itself—I have never understood the anti-Kiplingite assumption that we may discount a good poem (or story) because the author has also written bad ones. But the contrast does suggest the danger of substituting an ideal or 'essential' Kipling for the real one: there are quantitative as well as qualitative judgements to be made here, and the honest critic must acknowledge that nearly all the charges commonly brought against Kipling *can* be documented from his poems. The error lies in accepting that indictment as the whole truth.

In discussing Kipling's verse we are, however, faced with a preliminary difficulty of some magnitude. His poems are now most easily available in the self-styled 'Definitive Edition', based on his own revision of the last 'Inclusive Edition' published in his lifetime, yet this is in some ways a most unsatisfactory volume.² The 'Songs from Books' have suffered from their first collection by the enforced separation from their narrative contexts. Take 'Rimini', for example, sub-titled 'Marching Song of a Roman Legion of the Later Empire':

When I left Rome for Lalage's sake,
By the Legions' Road to Rimini,
She vowed her heart was mine to take
With me and my shield to Rimini—
(Till the Eagles flew from Rimini—)

¹ Morton Cohen ed., *Rudyard Kipling to Rider Haggard*, London, 1965, pp. 33-34.

² T. S. Eliot's well-known anthology, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, follows the arrangement of poems in the 'Definitive Edition', and partakes therefore of its defects.

And I've tramped Britain and I've tramped Gaul,
 And the Pontic shore where the snow-flakes fall
 As white as the neck of Lalage—
 (As cold as the heart of Lalage!)
 And I've lost Britain, and I've lost Gaul,
 And I've lost Rome and, worst of all,
 I've lost Lalage!

This gave me pleasure when I read it as a boy, and it gives me pleasure still—of a simple, unsophisticated kind. An obvious criticism might refer to the discrepancy between sentiment and rhythm, for in marching and work songs metrics have an extra-literary function to fulfil; but if we turn to the story ('On the Great Wall') from which these verses are taken, we find that discrepancy clearly acknowledged:

'And I've lost Britain and I've lost Gaul'
 (the voice seemed very cheerful about it). . . .

And no excessive claims are made for the song as poetry, its ephemeral character being stressed by the singer himself:

'It's one of the tunes that are always being born somewhere in the Empire. They run like a pestilence for six months or a year, till another one pleases the Legions, and then they march to that.'

Thus the necessary 'placing' is done unequivocally in the course of the narrative itself, whereas it is merely hinted at by the sub-title in the collected verse.¹ In this volume, furthermore, we lose our sense of the connexion between poem and narrative. Parnesius had told, in 'A Centurion of the Thirtieth', of Maximus's ambition to become Emperor of Britain, Gaul, and Rome: the light-hearted soldiers' song about losing all three anticipates Maximus's failure, and 'the Pontic shore where the snow-flakes fall' foreshadows bleakly his death 'by the sea' at the hands of Theodosius. Thus the song, simple in itself (and dramatically appropriate to the singer), forms part of the complex thematic patterning of this series of tales. Similarly, the poems which separate the various narrative sections help to create new dimensions of meaning, while themselves acquiring additional weight from the context in which they appear. Here,

¹ While it is true that marching songs need a succession of verses as well as a good chorus, the metrical banality of the three long stanzas which he added in the collected edition blurs our pleasure in the verse-pattern of the original. Kipling's deliberate expansion of chapter headings and other verse fragments was seldom felicitous.

pre-eminently, we have a case of '[Kipling's] verse and prose [being] inseparable', so that, in Eliot's words, 'we must . . . judge him, not separately as a poet and as a writer of prose fiction, but as the inventor of a mixed form'.¹ Frequently, however, the relation between poems and narrative is less organic. The epigraphs in the early volumes are best taken with the stories for which they were written, and on which they provide explicit or implicit commentaries; but the later stories can usually be detached from the intervening poems without loss—often indeed they gain from the separation, though the poems may suffer, tending as they sometimes do to present with crude simplicity what is rendered by the prose in subtle obliquities of narrative technique.

Such problems are not confined, however, to the 'Songs from Books'. They also arise in the case of poems detached from their verse contexts. Although many of the poems were first published individually in newspapers and magazines, they are best read in the little volumes in which they were then collected (and it was to this arrangement that Kipling returned in the great Sussex Edition of his works, which has the best claim to be regarded as definitive). Thus the notorious 'Loot' as an anthology piece provokes a different reaction from 'Loot' as part of the series of *Barrack-Room Ballads*—experiments in a kind of poetic sociology, involving the deliberate and virtuosic use of an inadequate vocabulary and defective *persona*. In such cases, it might be suggested, the series rather than the individual poem seems the appropriate unit for critical study. Now the posthumous 'Definitive Edition', like the earlier Inclusive Editions, preserves only to a limited extent the arrangement of poems in the original collections. The entire contents of *Departmental Ditties* are transferred without any alteration, but the other volumes are subjected to a good deal of rearrangement, often (as Mr. Hilton Brown has noted) of a puzzling and arbitrary kind. It is logical enough to follow the original 'Barrack-Room Ballads' with those printed in *The Seven Seas*, and to pass directly from these to 'Service Songs' from *The Five Nations*. But it is hard to see why these poems should be placed so late in the collection, or why they should come *after* 'Epitaphs of the War' and two other poems dated 1918. Why, again, should 'Gethsemane 1914-18' be sandwiched incongruously between a poem about absconding financiers, written in 1902, and 'The Song of the Banjo', dated 1894? Incongruities almost as blatant can sometimes be explained,

¹ *On Poetry and Poets*, London, 1957, p. 228.

if not altogether justified: when the 'Dirge of Dead Sisters (For the Nurses who died in the South African War)' is followed by 'The Vampire', Kipling presumably means to acknowledge Woman in her most beneficent and most malignant aspects, and a similar intention seems to underlie the grouping of the anti-feminist 'Female of the Species' with 'A Recantation'. Sometimes, again, the juxtapositions are positively felicitous: Mr. Shanks has drawn attention to the grim propriety of Kipling's placing 'The Lesson' (on what England ought to learn from the Boer War) alongside 'Mesopotamia 1917' (which shows how completely that lesson had remained unlearned). And more generally, one can often see in the arrangement of the poems an impulse to bring together pieces with the same theme or similar preoccupations, so as to group them by subjects rather than by dates, and to show significantly recurring elements in the pattern of national experience.

In spite of these organizing principles, however, one's first and final impression is of the chaotic nature of this volume. Firstly, because the policy of grouping like with like is not carried out consistently. Secondly, because the transitions from one group to the next are sudden, unmarked, and disconcerting. We may, like Mr. Shanks, appreciate Kipling's following 'Recessional' with 'For All We Have and Are', but it is startling to find that the next poem is 'The Three-Decker', written twenty years before as an amusing allegorical description of the old three-volume novel. Kipling has passed here from political themes to a series of poems on art and the artist, but the reader is given no warning of the change. Thirdly, and most serious of all, within most of the 'runs' of poems, and throughout the volume as a whole, there is a perverse, almost wanton disruption of chronology. This is regrettable, not so much because it makes it difficult to trace Kipling's development as an artist—in point of fact little 'development' took place in his poetical techniques—but because it obscures the original groupings and inter-relationships of his verses, and their connexion with contemporary circumstances. As their titles indicate, each of the original volumes had a central theme, different aspects of which were treated in different poems; and although there was in each a large element of miscellaneous poems (or 'other verses'), they had each a kind of unity which came from their being products of a particular phase of Kipling's life, and a particular phase of history or public affairs. His poetry has its roots not in an inner life, spiritual or psychological, but in his responses to the world

around him, and it has to be read with an awareness of that temporal context. (His own partial recognition of this can be seen in his assigning dates to so many poems in the chronological jumble of the Inclusive Edition.) To stress their essential relation to such chronological contexts is not to reduce Kipling's poems to the status of period-pieces—though that may be part of their interest and appeal: it is rather to insist that, as Professor Trilling has said, 'the literary work is ineluctably an historical fact, and, what is more important . . . its historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience'.¹

The very extent of Kipling's popularity marks the gulf between his world and ours, for he was one of the last English poets to command a mass audience. Nor need we assume (as guardians of our own minority culture) that this quantitative success could be achieved only at the cost of qualitative failure. This might sometimes be the case, but the basic difference between Kipling's poetry and the coterie art of the nineties or later decades is one of kind rather than quality. He was dealing largely with what Professor Dobrée has described as 'public themes'—themes which correspond to the common needs and interests of humanity and which therefore evoke a general, but not necessarily a debased or imprecise response. Like the traditional poet as Dr. Hough describes him, he 'addresses his readers in the confidence that he will be understood; that his rhetoric and his mode of address will be familiar to them from their previous reading of poetry; and he appeals to an order of feeling that he assumes to be common to himself and them, simply as human beings, or as members of a particular civilisation'.² The enthusiasm with which Kipling's verses were received—an enthusiasm to be gauged not merely by the pronouncements of reviewers, but by his enormous sales in Britain and America—shows that in his case these assumptions were well justified—that the values and emotions expressed in his art are not to be explained away in terms of his personal inadequacies, prejudices, or neuroses, but were widely acceptable throughout the English-speaking world. He helped to give them greater currency, of course, for like Dryden (to whom Eliot so usefully compares him) he was at once and unashamedly artist and propagandist. Hence a double motive inspired much of his verse, since he wanted to communicate with (and influence) as

¹ *The Liberal Imagination*, London, 1951, p. 184.

² *Image and Experience*, London, 1960, p. 40. Cf. Bonamy Dobrée, *The Broken Cistern*, London, 1954, pp. 1-7, 144-6.

wide an audience as possible, while maintaining the highest standards of literary craftsmanship, as he understood them.

Sometimes, admittedly, this balance was upset. Kipling himself would have denied that he ever sacrificed artistic quality to 'direct appeal': '. . . never play down to your public', he wrote in his old age, '—not because some of them do not deserve it, but because it is bad for your hand.'¹ Yet the not infrequent badness of his own hand—the unevenness of his verse—suggests that his judgement was unreliable; and although he may never have consciously played down to his public, its demands did little to reinforce or refine the urgings of his own artistic conscience. From his parents, certainly, he got encouragement, criticism, and helpful advice, and he tells us in his autobiography that 'those two made for me the only public for whom . . . I had any regard whatever till their deaths, in my forty-fifth year'.² Their influence, however, was less constant (though still considerable) once he had left India, and the comments of critics and reviewers were no substitute, since he despised their whole tribe except for a very few respected friends like Henley, Saintsbury, and Charles Eliot Norton. Nevertheless, there was a wider public whose opinion he did value—initially the members of the Club at Lahore, to whom he had to justify his work on each day's paper; then, further afield, the 'men in the Army and the Civil Service and the Railway' who wrote to him suggesting that the rhymes he had published in the *Civil and Military Gazette* might be made into a book, and telling him how 'some of them had been sung to the banjoes round campfires, and some had run as far down coast as Rangoon and Moulmein, and up to Mandalay'.³ Appreciation of this kind, from the critically unsophisticated Sons of Martha, always delighted Kipling with its testimony to his poetry's authenticity and general appeal, but it may have been potentially corrupting for him as an artist. His rather special relationship with such audiences is epitomized in Arnold Bennett's journal entry for 22 October 1898. 'This is my idea of fame', writes Bennett:

At an entertainment on board H.M.S. *Majestic*, Rudyard Kipling, one of the guests, read 'Soldier and Sailor Too', and was encored. He then read 'The Flag of England'. At the conclusion a body of subalterns swept him off the stage, and chaired him round the quarter-deck, while

¹ *Something of Myself* (Uniform Edn.), London, 1937, pp. 150, 218.

² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³ 'My First Book', *The Works of Rudyard Kipling*, Sussex Edn., London, 1938, xxx. 6.

'For he's a jolly good fellow' was played by the massed bands of the Fleet and sung by 200 officers assembled.¹

The verses Kipling chose to recite on this occasion were so well suited to his audience's tastes and prejudices, that he may seem (both as entertainer and as poet) to have been giving them simply what they wanted—to have been offering them an acceptable confirmatory image of themselves and their ideals. Such an hypothesis need involve no charge of insincerity, since Kipling's values were so largely theirs, but it is this very community of values that constitutes the danger: an aesthetically undemanding public's readiness to accept his views might sometimes make him careless of the artistry with which these views were formulated, and reluctant to scrutinize the views themselves. Thus some of his worst poems—'Et Dona Ferentes', 'The Puzzler', 'The Female of the Species'—seem attributable not merely to elements of insensitive stupidity in his own nature, but to a too easily reached understanding with insensitive and stupid readers.

Such failures must, however, be kept in perspective: with their crudity of technique as well as attitude, their style based on a lowest common denominator of communication between poet and public, they are aberrations (though of a recurrent type) from Kipling's normally high standards of poetic craftsmanship. Yet these standards are themselves significantly different from those applicable to his prose. 'Verse, naturally, came first' when he began to write, and he always tended to think of it as the simpler medium. When the Merchant in the Preface to the *Outward Bound* Edition bids us remember that 'many of the cloths are double and treble-figured, giving a new pattern in a shift of light', he is referring to prose textures: Kipling never seems to have aimed at this kind of complexity in verse, the main object and power of which, he told Haggard, were 'to put things in a form in which people would not only read but *remember* them'.² At the outset of his career he had indeed realized that 'it was necessary that every word should tell, carry, weigh, taste and, if need were, smell':

Thus [he tells us], . . . I made my own experiments in the weights, colours, perfumes, and attributes of words in relation to other words, either as read aloud so that they may hold the ear, or, scattered over the page, draw the eye. There is no line of my verse or prose

¹ *The Journals of Arnold Bennett*, ed. Newman Flower, London, 1932, i. 81.

² Morton Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

which has not been mouthed till the tongue has made all smooth, and memory, after many recitals, has mechanically skipped the grosser superfluities.¹

Although such earnestness commands respect there is a certain *naïveté*, a theoretical inadequacy, about this artistic credo which may be connected with Kipling's indifference or hostility to the main literary movements of his lifetime. When Yeats, his exact contemporary, dismisses him as one who, at the turn of the century, had never heard of the defeat of 'Victorianism' or who did not believe in it, the judgement strikes us as grossly unfair.² Kipling may have had something of the 'moral discursiveness' of Tennyson, the 'political eloquence of Swinburne', and 'the psychological curiosity of Browning', but it is not self-evident to us (as it was then to Yeats) that such 'impurities' are in fact poetic defects; and he does less than justice to Kipling as an innovator—far more notable and revolutionary than Yeats himself—in the poetry of the Nineties. 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' and 'The Road to Mandalay' are both exercises in nostalgia, but there can be no doubt which is more original and poetically vital. The comparison with Yeats, however, highlights immediately the limitations of Kipling's originality, which seems somehow to have lacked the potentiality of growth. In his later prose fiction he came to develop a complex, closely organized, elliptical and symbolic mode of writing, which ranks him as a major innovator in the art of the short story, but there is no comparable development in his poetry. 'The Dead King', an unpleasantly fulsome tribute to Edward VII, is written in a consciously experimental metre—which achieves only an effect of awkward over-elaboration. Kipling's gift was, clearly, for simpler, more traditional verse-forms. There are, on the other hand, some classically inspired experiments of considerable interest: his imitations of Horace's Odes, which enabled him to treat public themes and private emotion with a combination of eloquence and restraint; or his 'Epitaphs of the War' ('naked cribs of the Greek Anthology', he is said to have called them) in which pity and indignation (or pity and admiration) issue at best in spare concentrated epigrams like the couplet on 'The Coward':

I could not look on Death, which being known,
Men led me to him, blindfold and alone.

¹ *Something of Myself*, pp. 205–6, 72–73.

² *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, Oxford, 1936, pp. ix–xii.

Or the quatrain on a 'Convoy Escort', which epitomizes a whole Service ethic of duty and self-sacrifice:

I was a shepherd to fools
Causelessly bold or afraid.
They would not abide by my rules.
Yet they escaped. For I stayed.

For the most part, however, he was content to use, even in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, styles and conventions which he had evolved in the eighteen-nineties: 'his tools remain the same', as Mr. Stewart says, 'and his medium scarcely enriches or subtilizes itself.'¹ 'The Bonfires', published in November 1933, is a poem of immediate contemporary relevance, protesting as it does against the empty pretentiousness and wishful thinking of current politics—not least with regard to appeasing Hitler's new Germany. Yet the style would not have been surprising thirty years before, and the very self-consciousness of the ballade form distracts attention from the dangers alluded to. One can see how Kipling came to be disregarded by many not merely because he was politically unacceptable, but because he seemed a literary anachronism.

None the less, he had throughout his career a remarkable capacity for converting his own weaknesses to strengths. The psychological insecurity, the need to feel that he belonged and was accepted, the urge to assert his membership of an in-group, which made him, in C. S. Lewis's phrase, 'the slave of the Inner Ring', were the very qualities which enabled him to treat so successfully that 'immense area of human life' concerned with men's work and their sense of professional brotherhood.² His admiration for the Service Classes sometimes resulted in the merging of his finer individual awareness with 'the commonest collective emotions' of such limited communities as an Anglo-Indian Club, a barrack-room, or an officers' mess; but it also enabled him to present poetically a whole phase of British imperial experience in terms of the consciousness and ideals of the men most directly involved. If his worship of efficiency went too often with a disregard for the ends to which efficiency was being applied, it saved him from identifying himself completely with the Establishment (as Buchan did), and provided the basis for his exposures—among the best before Sassoon's—of military incompetence. While the simplicity of poetic taste which led to

¹ *Eight Modern Writers*, Oxford, 1963, p. 293.

² *They Asked for a Paper*, London, 1962, pp. 90-92.

his Philistine disregard for new developments in poetry also made possible his bold use of popular and traditional art-forms, in works that can still astonish by their originality and power.

Their apparent simplicity, moreover, is itself deceptive, since each of his poetic modes emerges from, and gives expression to, a whole complex of social, political, and moral values.

He began unambitiously, with *vers de société* in established Anglo-Indian fashions. Such poems 'arrived merrily', he tells us, 'being born out of the life about me',¹ and 'merrily' is the keyword: *Departmental Ditties* is what the title suggests—a collection of essentially light-hearted verses on governmental processes. Yet the 'Prelude' he wrote for the first English edition is a passionate declaration of solidarity with the Anglo-India guyed in most of the subsequent verses. Looking back to British life as he had known it in the East, Kipling saw it now in terms of hardships and dangers willingly endured, of duty steadfastly done, and the poem is an apology for what may seem his own disloyalty in presenting that life as one of frivolity and mild corruption. But the apology itself is potentially misleading:

I have written the tale of our life
For a sheltered people's mirth,
In jesting guise—but ye are wise,
And ye know what the jest is worth.

In publishing these poems in London he may have been offering the tale of their life for a sheltered people's mirth, but it had already been written in jesting guise for the Anglo-Indians themselves—who knew what the jest was worth in the sense of knowing not that it was false (as this poem might imply) but that it was at least half-true. His original readers relished the jokes precisely because they were the jokes of their own service. 'Old is the song that I sing', runs the epigraph to the first narrative in the collection—

Old as my unpaid bills—
Old as the chicken that *kitmutgars* bring
Men at dâk-bungalows—old as the Hills.

Neither 'kitmutgars' nor 'dâk-bungalows' was glossed in the early editions, any more than such terms as *dasturi*, *thana*, *byles*, *koil*, *siris*, and *sat-bhai* in other poems, or slang expressions like 'the gay thirteen-two' or 'three days casual on the bust', or references to Simla institutions like Benmore, Annandale, and

¹ *Works*, Sussex Edn., xxx. 4.

Peliti's. These were things his readers *knew*, just as ancient chickens at dâk-bungalows were facts of their experience, and they would relish the way in which the hills of cliché, capitalized, became those in which appointments have been wangled from time immemorial. Kipling's 'artless songs' are for the most part mere diversions, but a society reveals itself in its diversions; and as the world of the *Ditties* recedes from us in time, they acquire something of the adventitious charm of faded sepia photographs in old albums. The hazards of disease and death which Kipling describes in *Something of Myself* were met by Anglo-India with its own brand of stoicism, sometimes Christian, sometimes flippantly ironic, and the latter mood is well rendered in verses like 'The Undertaker's Horse' or 'A Ballad of Burial':

If down here I chance to die
 Solemnly I beg you take
 All that is left of 'I'
 To the Hills for old sake's sake.
 Pack me very thoroughly
 In the ice that used to slake
 Pegs I drank when I was dry—
 This observe for old sake's sake.

Light to the point of triviality, such verses none the less succeed in catching a mood which has helped many men endure, and by articulating it for his society's own amusement Kipling reveals that society to outsiders and to posterity. The speaking voice makes no pretension to distinction or subtlety, but we are conscious as we read of a weight of experience, not individual but communal. Like all good society verse, however frivolous, the *Ditties* imply a code of manners and values accepted by the members of the group which provides at once the subject-matter and the reading public. Writing from within that group, Kipling views its faults and failures half satirically, half-indulgently, noting its 'official sinning' and unofficial adulteries with ironic detachment—though his indignation on Jack Barrett's behalf shows that there are limits to his comic tolerance. And indeed the humour of *Departmental Ditties* depends on the contrast, unstated but assumed throughout, between the frivolous world portrayed in many poems and the everyday world of the Indian services, dedicated to efficiency, duty, and toil. (It is the fear that English readers may not grasp this contrast that lies behind the last stanza of the 'Prelude'.) For this everyday world Kipling felt an whole-hearted admiration, and at the thought of criticism from outsiders he drops his mask of cynicism and

leaps to Anglo-India's defence with 'Pagett, M.P.'—the classic expression of the man-on-the-spot's irritation at ill-informed parliamentary interference.

One or two poems ('Arithmetic on the Frontier', 'The Grave of the Hundred Head') anticipate what is to be a major interest of subsequent collections—life as it is lived not in Simla or the districts but on the imperial frontiers. This is a natural consequence of Kipling's dynamic conception of Empire as a continual struggle of Order against Chaos:

Keep ye the Law—be swift in all obedience—
Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford.
 Make ye sure to each his own
 That he reap where he hath sown;
By the peace among Our peoples let men know we serve the Lord.

The ideal is far from ignoble: it is a high, heroic endeavour to which Kipling summons his chosen people. But the activist ethic depends for its appeal on the sense of difficulties to be overcome, and one suspects that once the land *has* been cleared of evil, the roads and bridges built, peace and order established, things may seem rather dull.¹ Only at times, for Kipling found something heroic in any work well done under arduous conditions, but crises and emergencies—floods, famines, or riots, for example—which test men's true quality measured in terms of ultimate breaking strain appealed to his imagination more than any smooth-running routine. It was natural, therefore, that he should be attracted to tales of Burma or the North-West Frontier—areas where the Carlylean conflict of Order and Anarchy was at its most spectacular and adventurous. Late Victorian yearners for romance—men like Stevenson and Andrew Lang—had sought it usually in the past: the place of Dumas in their theorizing is significant. Kipling, on the other hand, found romance in reality—in the everyday, apparently humdrum work of administrators and engineers; but he also demonstrated the reality of romance by showing that heroic adventures were not anachronisms but facts of contemporary

¹ Cf. 'Georgie Porgie', *Life's Handicap*: 'When the Government said that the Queen's Law must carry up to Bhamo and the Chinese border the order was given, and some men whose desire was to be ever a little in advance of the rush of Respectability flocked forward with the troops. . . . The Supreme Government stepped in as soon as might be, with codes and regulations, and all but reduced New Burma to the dead Indian level; but there was a short time during which strong men were necessary and ploughed a field for themselves.'

life. 'The Lament of the Border Cattle Thief' (in *Barrack-Room Ballads*) draws attention by its title to the similarities between Frontier conditions and those of the old Scottish Border, and the poetic mode, appropriately, is that of the traditional ballad. Kipling uses this dramatically to enter with imaginative sympathy into the robber's anarchic fierceness; so that the poem satisfies simultaneously his anthropological curiosity, his interest in violence, and his belief in the rule of Law—for the very success with which the anarchic fierceness is rendered justifies by implication Britain's policing of the area. His direct imitations of old ballads rarely rise above the level of pastiche; but poems like 'The Ballad of East and West' or 'The Rhyme of the Three Sealers', where he has found a manner of his own, can stand comparison with traditional pieces like 'Kinmont Willie' or 'The Battle of Otterburn'. Only an instinctive literary snobbishness prevents most readers from admitting this. They may feel uneasily that the older ballads are the natural product of a turbulent age, whereas Kipling's are examples of conscious literary atavism; but he was writing of a world where such episodes as he described did actually take place, and he might have retorted that it was not he himself, but the reluctant reader, who was seeking to evade reality.

It may be argued, however, that a modern balladist, unlike his traditional counterpart, should have values transcending those of the participants in the action he describes. The question hardly arises in 'The Ballad of East and West', where the warrior's code invoked is nobly chivalric and Kipling's endorsement of it causes no embarrassment, chiming as it does with the reader's own emotional response. In 'The Ballad of Boh Da Thone', on the other hand, Captain O'Neil's unregenerate past in the Burmese War is contrasted with his peaceful married life to the latter's disadvantage, and there is a distasteful element of delight in violence for its own sake in Kipling's lively description of a dacoit attack:

Then belching blunderbuss answered back
 The Snider's snarl and the carbine's crack,
 And the blithe revolver began to sing
 To the blade that twanged on the locking-ring,
 And the brown flesh blued where the bayonet kissed,
 As the steel shot back with a wrench and a twist . . .
 Oh, gayest of scrimmages man may see
 Is a well-worked rush on the G.B.T.

'The steel came out with a wrench and a twist' is a line from Kipling's schoolboy poem on 'The Battle of Assaye': its recurrence here suggests that this is an area where his concern for authenticity mingles with relish (and the implications of 'blithe', 'sing', and 'kissed' need no commentary). Indeed his enjoyment of the whole episode is frankly acknowledged in the last couplet quoted, which was cut from the later collected editions. It cannot merely be dismissed as an armchair warrior's emotion, for it corresponds—as those with some experience of frontier soldiering will recognize—to an enjoyment which both dacoits and escort would undoubtedly have found in the excitement of the skirmish. But we may legitimately expect a poet to bring finer perceptions, a more sensitive morality, to bear on his material.

This, however, was no part of Kipling's intention. Finer perceptions and more sensitive moralities seemed to him at this stage in his career to be attributes of the Sons of Mary—among whom he included literary critics—attributes cultivated in the security and comfort guaranteed them by the Sons of Martha. A Jamesian sensibility like Eustace Cleever's (in 'A Conference of the Powers') was in his view a hot-house plant of civilization, which could flourish only when insulated from the realities of life as he knew it to be—from the realities that sustain and protect civilization itself:

'To me', said Cleever softly, 'The whole idea of warfare seems so foreign and unnatural, so essentially vulgar, if I may say so, that I can hardly appreciate your sensations.'

To force readers—even readers as refined as Cleever—into an awareness of soldiers' 'sensations' was one of Kipling's primary aims, most notably in the dramatic lyrics or monologues of *Barrack-Room Ballads*. And the primitivism apparent in his choice of subject matter and persona is based ultimately on his conviction that the activities and consciousness of coarser but more useful 'people who do things' provide richer material for art than do the delicate perceptions of the highbrow. In these *Ballads* he was dealing with a society lower than his own in intelligence, education, and sensitivity—a society of which he was not part, though he had observed it sympathetically. For this purpose he adapts the technique of *Departmental Ditties* by writing ostensibly as a member of the group for other members, thus revealing it to the world at large. This involves the adoption of the fictional persona of a private soldier, based not on the

individualized and all-too-articulate Mulvaney (whose Irish rhetoric was a continual temptation to Kipling to overdo things), but on the average Tommy 'whose vocabulary', he was well aware 'contained less than six hundred words, and the Adjective'.¹ The adjective, with other obscenities or blasphemies, was unprintable in Kipling's day, so that he had to use weaker expletives like 'blooming', 'beggar', and 'sugared'; but it was a convention readily understood by large sections of his audience who could (if they wished) make the appropriate substitutions. Otherwise his aim is a stylized authenticity, based on Cockney mixed with soldiers' slang and technicalities which go unexplained, forcing the reader into a kind of intuitive comprehension. Kipling was sometimes accused of surreptitiously extending the soldier's vocabulary by smuggling in poeticisms of his own, but it was not an objection made by soldiers themselves—probably because he found his models in art-forms with which they were themselves familiar—the songs he had heard sung in canteens, round campfires on manœuvres, or, above all, in the London music-halls.² 'The smoke, the roar, and the good-fellowship of relaxed humanity at Gatti's' (just opposite his lodgings in Villiers Street) formed the milieu in which these ballads were conceived. As Professor Carrington observes, they are essentially 'songs for the "Halls" in which the "patter" dominates the musical setting', for in spite of their subsequent success as drawing-room ballads, they were not originally meant to be sung: although Kipling usually had tunes in mind as he wrote, these were highly idiosyncratic aids to composition, not part of the finished product.³ But the poems do imply a speaker and an audience,

¹ 'In the Matter of a Private', *Soldiers Three and Other Stories*.

² Critics who have wondered whether the verses would in fact appeal to 'ordinary soldiers' seem never to have tested their hypotheses in barrack-rooms or sergeants' messes. A contemporary statement, by a more than usually articulate Medical Corps orderly, appeared in the *Cape Times* in January 1898. The poetry may be execrable, but the sentiments are unambiguous:

'... you're *our* partic'lar author, you're our patron an' our friend,
 You're the poet of the cuss-word an' the swear,
 You're the poet of the people, where the red-mapped lands extend,
 You're the poet of the jungle an' the lair,
 An' compare
 To the ever-speaking voice of everywhere. . . .'

(Margaret Lane, *Edgar Wallace*, London, 1938, p. 98).

³ *Something of Myself*, pp. 79–81; Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*, London, 1955, pp. 352 et seq.

and gain by being read aloud, for it is thus that we can best appreciate their colloquial vigour and the simple but intoxicating rhythms which are a major source of the pleasure Kipling's verse provides. (The fashionable equation of simple, strongly marked rhythms with artistic crudity is surely as misleading as the assumption that to explicate complexities in Kipling's prose technique is necessarily to demonstrate emotional or philosophic subtlety.)

These ballads constitute a documentary account, remarkably frank and inclusive except where sexual matters are concerned, of the soldier's life in peace and war; and since this is presented through the soldier's own eyes, we are made to participate imaginatively not merely in his activities but in his modes of thought and feeling. The dangers inherent in this method, and indeed in the whole cult of the primitive, are exemplified by 'Loot'—a poem which has therefore received more than its due of critical attention. Although it is clearly a documentary item, it is also a deliberate outrage to bourgeois morality, and there is a zest, a gusto in the verses which have suggested to many critics that Kipling's own emotions are involved. The identification of poet and speaker is never complete, since the linguistic indexes of class are a continual reminder of the poem's *dramatic* status. Yet it can be argued that (since no morally normative standards are implied) this distinction merely enables Kipling and the reader to indulge vicariously impulses which they would be ashamed to acknowledge openly in their own persons.¹ We may admire the frankness which allows Kipling to include such a poem in his collection, instead of presenting a more idealized picture of the strong man Thomas Atkins and his imperial doings, but his own ready acceptance of such doings reveals the potentially debasing as well as liberating factors in his choice of medium and persona.

Critics have erred, however, in taking 'Loot' as typical of the series as a whole. Primitivism may result in a cult of brutality, but it can also provide new perspectives on strange and familiar aspects of experience. The expansionist enthusiasm of the Nineties was given new piquancy and power when transposed into the idiom of the Barrack-Room Balladist:

¹ A similar pattern can be observed in 'The Grave of the Hundred Head', where instead of a proletarian narrator a native protagonist, the savagely loyal subadar, serves to disarm moral criticism, enabling readers to relish (anthropologically, as it were) a revenge massacre which they could hardly have condoned if it had been ordered by a British officer.

Walk wide o' the Widow at Windsor,
 For 'alf o' Creation she owns:
 We 'ave bought 'er the same with the sword an' the flame,
 An' we've salted it down with our bones.
 (Poor beggars!—it's blue with our bones!)

Hands off o' the sons o' the Widow
 Hands off o' the goods in 'er shop,
 For the Kings must come down an' the Emperors frown
 When the Widow at Windsor says 'Stop!'
 (Poor beggars!—we're sent to say 'Stop!')

The assumptions here are identical with those of 'The English Flag': there is the same pride in imperial achievement and the same awareness of the human cost (to the Empire-builders), but this poem is more firmly rooted in the psychological realism of the ordinary soldiers' wry distaste for their own part in the process, though there is no repudiation of the process itself—rather a reaffirmation of faith in it, all the stronger for the incipient challenge overcome. Kipling's spokesman for the barracks can also direct attention to what Wordsworth called 'the great and simple affections of our nature', the opposite extreme from 'Loot' being found in a poem like 'Ford o' Kabul River'. ('Never,' as Le Gallienne said of another ballad in the series, 'is the miracle of art more fully brought home to us than when such coarse material is thus touched to finer issues.'¹)

Kabul town's by Kabul river—
 Blow the bugle, draw the sword—
 There I lef' my mate for ever,
 Wet an' drippin' by the ford.
 Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
 Ford o' Kabul river in the dark!
 There's the river up and brimmin', an'
 there's 'arf a squadron swimmin'
 Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.

This verse-pattern is sustained throughout, the first four lines of each stanza lamenting the loss of a comrade, the last four (or chorus) recreating with a change of tense and metre events as they happened, the two time-scales merging only in the desolation of the final stanza. The recurrent line 'Blow the bugle, draw the sword' forms a refrain ironically qualified by the context in each case, so that its martial fervour seems a mere futility. (In the collected verse the line reads 'Blow the trumpet . . .'¹—

¹ *Rudyard Kipling: A Criticism*, London, 1900, p. 32.

a change made in the interests of accuracy, since it is clearly a cavalry regiment that is involved; but there is a loss of the potent alliteration of the original, and it is pleasing to find that Kipling restored the earlier reading in the Sussex Edition.) The poem is simple but dignified in its grief, for the measured rhythmical control (with pervasive hints of muffled drum-beats and slow marching) guarantees its emotional integrity throughout. Wholly free from sentimentality, avoiding too the factitious consolations of conventional elegy, it finally disposes of the view that Kipling's choice of a popular medium and 'low' persona must result in crude emotion or crude art. (Indeed the advantages of his proletarian, Other Ranks style can be gauged by contrasting 'Ford o' Kabul River' with the pretentious mythologizing, the inflated rhetoric, of his elegiac dedication of *Barrack-Room Ballads* to his own dead friend Wolcott Balestier.)

One is tempted to linger over the varied and virtuosic use Kipling made of this poetic idiom—to consider the ways in which he presents delightedly the waywardness of unregenerate humanity together with an assertion of the supreme values of Law, Order, Duty and Restraint, Obedience, Discipline. Or one might turn to his adaptation of the same technique in his *Barrack-Room Ballads* of the Boer War, to render a new phase in military experience, to reveal the weaknesses of the 'red little, dead little Army' he had thought so admirable, and to criticize the society which had made that Army in its own image. The Kipling who, as proprietor of Bateman's, idealized the hierarchic social structure of rural England, was capable of presenting its defects, its restrictiveness (scenic and social), through the disillusioned eyes of a returned Irregular:

'Ow can I ever take on
With awful old England again,
An' 'ouses both sides of the street,
An' 'edges two sides of the lane,
An' the parson an' gentry between,
An' touchin' my 'at when we meet—
Me that 'ave been what I've been?

Rich as this vein is, however, Kipling himself found it inadequate for many of his purposes. In *Kim* he goes furthest in acknowledging the limitations of the private's mode of vision, but all through his career he was conscious of issues, especially political issues, which demanded solemn, dignified, and lofty treatment, in a higher style than the *Barrack-Room Balladist*

could provide without incongruity. It is the treatment rather than the issues which I want to consider briefly in the remainder of this lecture. Poems like 'The Song of the Women' in *Departmental Ditties*, 'The English Flag' in *Barrack-Room Ballads*, 'A Song of the English', in *The Seven Seas*, 'The Burial' and 'Recessional' in *The Five Nations*, 'The Covenant' and 'The Houses' in *The Years Between*, exemplify the problems involved, and often, it must be admitted, Kipling fails to solve them. There is a good deal of bombast in his political verse, especially when he is writing in what Le Gallienne called his 'Methodistical-jingoistic manner', in which Jehovah of the Thunders, Lord God of Battles or of Hosts, is invoked rather too frequently—and too confidently—in the cause of British Imperialism. Often too, as Mr. Stewart has suggested, we are conscious of a surfeit of kinship imagery—the Mother country welcoming her colonial sons and daughters, the daughter nations holding lofty converse with the mother, brothers proclaiming kinship with their brothers in other lands. Yet the Five Free Nations, linked rather than divided by the Seven Seas, are not merely celebrated in windy rhetoric: they are also presented in vivid, sharply realized vignettes of scenery and human life—in 'The Flowers', for example, or 'The Native Born' (in spite of its embarrassing chorus), or 'The Song of the Wise Children'. Often too the old magic still works, the rhetoric and rhythms stir our emotions, we respond strongly, deeply, not unworthily, to some of the best verse-propaganda in the language. We must surely pay tribute, no matter what our own political allegiances may be, to the impassioned invective of 'Cleared' or 'Mesopotamia 1917', the flamboyant patriotism of 'The English Flag', the fervour and prophetic wisdom of 'The Islanders', the superb secular hymnology of 'The White Man's Burden', the solemn denunciation of German frightfulness in 'The Outlaws 1914'.

Kipling, however, is more versatile than even this list would suggest. He can also captivate us by his epigrammatic formulation of unfashionable views:

And . . . after this is accomplished, . . . the brave new world begins
 When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his
sins. . . .

Or he may divert us and discredit his opponents by deft caricature of attitudes which he despises, like those of the Progressive in 'Natural Theology':

Money spent on an Army or Fleet
 Is homicidal lunacy. . . .
 My son has been killed in the Mons retreat.
 Why is the Lord afflicting me?
 Why are murder, pillage and arson
 And rape allowed by the Deity?
 I will write to the *Times*, deriding our parson,
 Because my God has afflicted me.

Another recurrent formula is his use of emblematic incidents to convey harsh political wisdom. 'The Pirates in England', for example, one of the poems written for C. R. L. Fletcher's school history book, tells how as power passes from Imperial Rome in her decadence, the order she has sustained in Britain disappears in anarchy. The Wall, Kipling's symbol for the barrier between civilization and savagery, is crossed by the Picts, agents of a new terrible disorder:

They killed the trader, they sacked the shops,
 They ruined temple and town—
 They swept like wolves through the standing crops
 Crying that Rome was down.

They wiped out all that they could find
 Of beauty and strength and worth,
 But they could not wipe out the Viking's Wind
 That brings the ships from the North.

They could not wipe out the North-East gales,
 Nor what those gales set free—
 The pirate ships with their close-reefed sails,
 Leaping from sea to sea.

They had forgotten the shield-hung hull
 Seen nearer and more plain,
 Dipping into the troughs like a gull,
 And gull-like rising again—

The painted eyes that glare and frown
 In the high snake-headed stem,
 Searching the beach while her sail comes down,
 They had forgotten them!

The orgy of destructive anarchy brings its own nemesis, which comes not by chance, but as a natural, necessary consequence: the winds and the pirates whom they bring are so closely associated here that they are felt to be of the same order of

inevitability: both are seen as part of the very nature of things. This sense of inevitability is intensified by the poem's rhythmical structure. Although made up of stanzas formally and syntactically self-contained, it constitutes (like so many of Kipling's poems) a single unbroken rhetorical movement, what Professor Léaud calls a poetic 'monad', and to quote it in part or to interrupt it with commentary is to destroy its very life. The brief narrative is so vividly imagined and so informed by passionate conviction that we overlook its historical inaccuracy; for by this reshaping and telescoping of events Kipling quintessentializes what for him (as for Carlyle) was a fundamental truth of history—that any order, falling into decay, will be overwhelmed and replaced by anarchy, which brings in turn its own terrible antidote since the Gods of the Copybook Headings cannot ultimately be denied.

Closely related to this mode but distinct from it is the poem based structurally on an expanded metaphor. An early example is disastrously mishandled. 'The Galley-Slave' appeared in the first English edition of *Departmental Ditties*, and like the 'Prelude' to that collection it voiced Kipling's deeper feelings about the Indian Empire he had treated with such flippancy in many of the ditties themselves. He now sought to express, through the symbolic figure of the galley-slave, the paradoxical love and loyalty a man may feel for the service in which he has toiled, suffered, and grown old. To ignore the metaphorical structure of the poem is therefore to miss its whole point, though this is not to say that it is successful—rather to suggest the terms in which its weaknesses should be defined:

Yet they talk of times and seasons and of woe the years bring forth,
Of our galley swamped and shattered in the rollers of the North;
When the niggers break the hatches and the decks are gay with
gore,

And a craven-hearted pilot crams her crashing on the shore.

She will need no half-mast signal, minute-gun, or rocket-flare,
When the cry for help goes seaward, she will find her servants

there.

Battered chain-gangs of the orlop, grizzled drafts of years gone by,
To the bench that broke their manhood, they shall lash themselves
and die.

The literal description clearly operates as allegory: the galley is British India; 'the rollers of the North' refers to the Russian menace; 'the niggers [breaking] the hatches' to a native

insurrection; the 'craven-hearted pilot' to a gutless Government or Viceroy; while the energy of the verb-phrases—'swamped and shattered', 'crams her crashing on the shore'—revitalizes the worn old metaphor of the ship of state. In 'gay with gore', on the other hand, Kipling yields too easily to the lure of alliteration, and the phrase (together with the exuberant rhythm) suggests not anything as sinister as a lust for blood, but a kind of schoolboy relish for the disaster quite at variance with the mood he is seeking to establish. Then the image of the niggers breaking the hatches is an extraordinary one to come from the pen of an imperialist. One can hardly assume that Kipling is being uncharacteristically cynical (on the literal level about slave-trading, on the allegorical, about the relationship of governors and governed), or that this is a momentary recognition of a half-truth about Empire, which he would normally repudiate. It seems to be mere careless writing, and the discrepancy between vehicle and tenor in his metaphor becomes still more marked in the next stanza. The basic idea—that men who have served India will return to her in her hour of need—is unexceptionable, but the notion of *ex-slaves* coming to the rescue offends our sense of probability, while we cannot help being conscious of the sheer impossibility of their knowing about the galley's plight. (Kipling would have been better advised to forgo the rhetorical flourish of the first line, and to allow the galley its distress signals.) This lack of correspondence between the two levels of meaning occurs elsewhere in the poem: 'the mutter of the dying never spoiled the lover's kiss' may have been true of Simla and the Plains, but it is ludicrously inapplicable to conditions in a galley; 'the bench that broke their manhood' is applicable to the galley but not to service in India. The Empire may be said to have taken her servants' manhood, but hardly to have broken it, and the element of distorting over-statement in the phrase appears again in the references to brands, galls, welts, and scars: even allowing for the dangers and discomforts of life in India, these seem exaggerated, inappropriate symbols for the marks it leaves on men. There is no need, however, to mutter darkly about Kipling's neurotic hunger for cruelty, for the lack of imaginative realization makes these images as innocuous as the shootings in a boy's adventure story. When he wrote of galley-slaves with full imaginative awareness, the effect is very different: in 'The Song of the Galley-Slaves' (from 'The Finest Story in the World') the harsh vivid detail, the irregular yet monotonous rhythms, and the reiterated cry of protest which

forms the refrain, all help to make the rowers' lot disturbingly present to our imaginations. 'The Galley-Slave', by contrast, is hardly about galley-slaves at all, and one's criticism must be directed at the impropriety of Kipling's choice of basic metaphor, and the ineptitude with which it is exploited.

In spite of this failure, however, Kipling's mind worked habitually in metaphoric modes. (It is not really surprising to find that he admired the 'high and disposed allegory' of Phineas Fletcher's *Purple Island*.) One of the most telling rhetorical devices in 'The Islanders' is his use of polemical puns, based on a perception of latent metaphor, to intensify the irony of his questions about enemy invasion:

Arid, aloof, incurious, unthinking, unthanking, gelt,
 Will ye loose your schools to flout them till their brow-beat
columns melt?
 Will ye pray them, or preach them, or print them, or ballot them
back from your shore?
 Will your workmen issue a mandate to bid them strike no more?

While in poems like 'The Dykes' (which is more strictly comparable with 'The Galley-Slave') he succeeds in elaborating a descriptive narrative vividly compelling in itself, but embodying throughout an insistent and precise allegorical significance. Still better is the artistry of 'Rimmon', where he abandons the fatal facility of the fourteener ('a craft that will almost sail herself', he calls it in one revealing aside) for a ballad stanza which imposes stricter formal limits. These help to concentrate his indignation at the Old Guard's reluctance to embark on major army reforms after the Boer War—his disgust at their reassertion of the peace-time *status quo*:

Duly with knees that feign to quake—
 Bent head and shaded brow,—
 Yet once again, for my father's sake,
 In Rimmon's house I bow.

The curtains part, the trumpet blares,
 And the eunuchs howl aloud;
 And the gilt, swag-bellied idol glares
 Insolent over the crowd.

'*This is Rimmon. Lord of the Earth—
 Fear him and bow the knee!*'
 And I watch my comrades hide their mirth
 That rode to the wars with me.

For we remember the sun and the sand
 And the rocks whereon we trod,
 Ere we came to a scorched and a scornful land
 That did not know our God;

As we remember the sacrifice,
 Dead men an hundred laid;
 Slain while they served His mysteries,
 And that He would not aid. . . .

Kipling's Biblical analogies, often misused, are justified in this case by their precision, for the poem's ironic force resides not merely in the diminishing comparisons which he goes on to develop, but in the detailed correspondences between the Old Testament-based narrative and contemporary reality; while there is a peculiar piquancy about the lines where he allows the two levels to merge (in the description, for example, of the uncleanly image girded about the loins 'with scarlet and gold'—these being the colours of peace-time ceremonial).

A final example of high seriousness successfully achieved, of political ideas poetically rendered, is provided by 'The Settler', which was first published in *The Times* on 27 February 1903, with an epigraph from a speech delivered by Joseph Chamberlain in Cape Town a few days before:

I leave this shore more convinced than ever that the forces—the natural forces—that are drawing you together are more potent than those evil influences which would tend to separate you. . . . Above all, South Africa needs the best capacities of all its children.

The poem echoes and re-emphasizes Chamberlain's views on the need for reconciliation between Boer and Briton, yet this detracts in no way from Kipling's fully personal apprehension of war's sterile destructiveness, as opposed to the fruitful labours of peace:

Here, where my fresh-turned furrows run,
 And the deep soil glistens red,
 I will repair the wrong that was done
 To the living and the dead.
 Here, where the senseless bullet fell,
 And the barren shrapnel burst,
 I will plant a tree, I will dig a well,
 Against the heat and the thirst.

Here, as in the soldier ballads, he speaks through an assumed persona, but one less particularized in terms of social status, one

less restricted in vocabulary and insight. In this stanza the Peace-War, Life-Death antitheses issue in vivid metaphoric terms: the earth 'glistens red' in literal truth as the ploughshare turns up the wet rich soil, but the words also remind us that it has been soaked with blood; and this interplay between the two levels of meaning is continued in lines where elements of practical farming ('I will plant a tree, I will dig a well') are also profoundly symbolic actions. Pervasive too is the contrast between the recent conflict of race against race and the 'holy wars' now to be undertaken against natural forces destructive of fertility: the transformation the poem pleads for is epitomized in the fine conception of turning to irrigation purposes the river-lines once so fiercely defended by the Boers, and the water-holes at which British detachments had sought to ambush wandering commandos. The idea which Kipling goes on to propound, of South Africa as a granary of Empire, cannot move us as it did his original readers, but the corn-imagery is potent in its more permanent associations with the natural cycle of life, growth, fertility, rebirth:

Earth, where we rode to slay or be slain,
 Our love shall redeem unto life;
 We will gather and lead to her lips again
 The waters of ancient strife,
 From the far and the fiercely guarded streams
 And the pools where we lay in wait,
 Till the corn cover our evil dreams
 And the young corn our hate. . . .

Here, in the waves and the troughs of the plains,
 Where the healing stillness lies,
 And the vast, benignant sky restrains
 And the long days make wise—
 Bless to our use the rain and the sun
 And the blind seed in its bed,
 That we may repair the wrong that was done
 To the living and the dead!

Needless to say, South Africa's subsequent history casts an ironic shadow over this poem. Few now can see that unhappy country as 'a large and sunlit land where no wrong bites to the bone', and Kipling himself noted bitterly in later years that after the war the Boers had been put 'in a position to uphold and expand their primitive lust for racial domination'. He could not have been expected to foresee that the partnership of white races which he advocated in 1903 would be finally achieved under

Boer hegemony, in the interests of just such a policy. Like so many of his poems, 'The Settler' is the product of a single historical moment and partakes of that moment's limitations. Yet written as it was at the end of a savage racial war, it shows a generosity to the defeated enemy and an understanding of the nature of war itself, which compel a respect not always accorded to Kipling—a respect fully warranted by his combination here of humane wisdom and poetic power.

It is a useful reminder that political and moral insights, like artistic excellence, are the prerogative of no one system of ideas; that the poetry of imperialism is not, therefore, a contradiction in terms; and that Kipling, in spite of lapses into prejudice, doggerel, or bombast, provides some of the most remarkable examples in the last hundred years of the transmutation of politics into enduring art.