Chapter - IV

RUDYARD KIPLING'S WRITINGS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was a world famous English writer of poetry, novels, and short stories. His dramatic ballads retain the vitality of honest speech—humorous, vulgar, and unpoetic. His lyrics remain impressive for their moral intensity and insights into historical processes. He was one of the great masters of the short story. Many of his tales exploit for the first time the discoveries of a mechanistic Western society, and the best of them return to the enduring riddle of India and the East and the ironies of cultural contrast that Kipling knew and appreciated.

The publication of Plain Tales from the Hills might have constituted a turning point in Kipling's literary career. Now that he had a volume of stories in print he could treat journalism as an unpleasant but necessary way to earn a living and reserve his energy for 'Mother Maturin,' his manuscript novel. On the other hand, he could continue to treat the novel as an occasional diversion from his principal job, the enlightenment and entertainment of the Anglo-Indian newspaper public. Had he been living in London, he might have been persuaded by literary friends to finish the novel at all costs. Living in India, however, where there was not a single person who earned his living by writing fiction, he chose the latter course and threw himself into his journalistic work with extraordinary energy. During the eighteen months between Kipling’s return from Simla in the late summer of 1887 and his departure from India in March 1889, his stories, poems, and sketches appeared at an average rate of three a week; nor is it unusual to find weeks wherein the rate of production reaches a piece a day. In the autumn of 1887 he was transferred to the offices of the Pioneer in Allahabad where he was given a variety of jobs: he edited the Week's News,
a weekly supplement that was half newspaper, half magazine; he wrote a substantial story for the News every week for nine months; he contributed numerous turnovers to the Civil and Military, travelled widely in India so as to write travel sketches for the Pioneer, and turned out many occasional poems and satirical essays on contemporary Indian affairs. It was, as Kipling recalled a ‘furious spell of work,’ and it is a wonder that he did not resent the newspapers’ demands. Kipling did not complain or rebel, for he took pride in being able to endure the strain.

Kipling’s development kept on its steady course during his last two years in India. Not merely the life of Mother Maturin and her associates but India herself remained his great subject, for the bewildering profusion of his newspaper writings reflects the diversity of the land. But underneath this multiplicity may be found a single unifying consciousness: Kipling the artist cannot be divided from Kipling the journalist. The young man’s discovery of India proceeded at a continually accelerating rate, and he set down what he discovered in verse, fiction, and newspaper essay, making little effort to separate his various roles. As an artist, he continued to aim at verisimilitude, at the portrayal of a real India free from the obscurities of ignorance, timidity, and sham romanticism; as a journalist, he saw India with the personal and discriminating vision that we associate with writers of fiction. And the roles overlap in other ways. For example, in travelling from Simla to Allahabad, Kipling is forced to halt at the flooded Gugger, and he passes the time in chatting with the old woman who tends the ford. On 2. 8 July 1888 he reports the incident in the course of a bitter complaint about the state of the Umballa-Kalka road ( “In Forma Pauperis” ). Then, a fortnight later, he has transformed the incident into one of his most striking stories of Indian life – ‘In Flood Time’. What began as an irksome delay has become part of his experience of India and her people.
And so the result of that furious spell of work is not a reporter's objective version of life and work in British India, nor is it an irresponsible storyteller's attempt to part a false and glittering picture of the land. Out of thousands of observations he made, Kipling produced several hundred pieces of prose and verse; and these may be thought of as the various fragments of a single vision of India, a vision that strives for realism but is in fact personal, even idiosyncratic. Older readers of Kipling used to complain that such and such a fragment did not correspond with their Indian experiences: swayed by Kipling's claims to verisimilitude, they did not realize that they were asking from an author something that he never intended to give. Our task must rather be to reconstruct Kipling's vision of India from the fragments in which it lies—or, more properly, to sketch the outline of his vision, for Kipling tried never to repeat himself, and each fragment contributes something to the whole. If we have occasion to compare our outline with ascertainable historic facts, it is not because we feel a need to praise Kipling for his truth or criticize him for his falsehood; his vision remains autonomous, but the extent to which it corresponds to the experience of other observers is an important adjunct to any study of the development of Kipling's art.

The dominant theme of recent Anglo-Indian fiction has been the lack of understanding between Indians and Europeans: Foster's A Passage to India is the most notable example, but it is a subject that has fascinated such lesser writers as John Masters, John Berry, and many others. In the late nineteenth century, however, for reasons I have explained in an earlier chapter, relations between the two races had broken down almost completely, so that in a sense the theme was not really available to novelists in Kipling's time. There was peace between the races and a degree of mutual respect, but there was little or no contact. As C. T. Buckland, one of Kipling's contemporaries, wrote,
'The more an Englishman sees of India, the less competent he feels to write about the natives of the country. They are a good and loveable people . . ., but we never seem to come to a true and thorough knowledge of them. The substance eludes our grasp, and we find ourselves contemplating an imaginary shadow.'

Artificial efforts to bring about understanding between the races had failed; those on both sides of the barrier were exceedingly awkward in one another's company. Wali Dad, Kipling's anglicized Moslem, bitterly remarks:

'I might wear an English coat and trousers. I might be a leading Mohammedan pleader [lawyer]. I might be received even at the Commissioner's tennis-parties where the English stand on one side and the natives on the other, in order to promote social intercourse throughout the Empire.'

He echoes Buckland, who reports that at such parties, whether given by native or English gentlemen, 'we fear that . . . there is very little real mutual enjoyment, and the hosts are usually very glad when the last of the guests has departed.'

Louis Cornell observes,

Kipling's vision of India reflects his consciousness of this gap between the dark and the light. Although his 1887 stories explore the possibility of bridging it, Trejago's love for Bisesa ends in disaster, and Strickland's disguises come to an end with his marriage to Miss Youghal. Tentative efforts such as these serve only to emphasize the impossibility of real communication between the races. In Plain Tales he tests the social prohibitions that keep Englishmen and Indians apart, but he finds that - however artificial and constricting they may be - they are unyielding. The stories Kipling wrote in 1888 show him still trying to fathom the Indian mind, but he no longer tries to show
the results of Anglo-Indian ventures into the life of the native Indians. He tells several fine stories from an Indian point of view, but these dramatic monologues do not concern Englishmen who are exploring India. He reports his own explorations in travel sketches, and newspaper essays and verses that deal with Indo-British social and administrative problems; but these sketches are dominated by the reporter, Kipling’s public alter ego: they provide no opportunity for him to create fictional characters who doff their Englishness in order to move in freedom through the dark underworld of Indian cities. In 1888 Kipling looks across the gulf between the races instead of trying to bridge it.4

What Kipling sees on the other side is a partial and somewhat distorted version of the world of the native Indians. It is a version based on Kipling’s own experience, to be sure, and as such it is true to the facts as he saw them; but his experience of India was sharply limited by his being a member of the conquering race. Moreover, his job as a reporter, though it required him to travel widely in India, showed him chiefly those classes of Indians whose lives were public property: the very rich and the very poor. For all Kipling’s tact, curiosity, and linguistic skill, he could not gain access to a normal, middle-class Indian household. As Buckland puts it ‘How can any Englishman venture to write about the real people of India? A civilian has no more true knowledge of the female portion of the native population than a native has of the members of the English peerage.’ I Once again, Buckland’s point is echoed in ‘On the City Wall’, where the reporter says to Wali Dad, in response to a question about Englishwomen, I II You never speak to us about your womenfolk and we never speak about ours to you. That is the bar between us.”

This general prohibition against contact on the domestic level - a prohibition that was Hindu in origin, rather than British - meant that no
Englishman could see into the heart of Indian life, nor was Kipling an exception. Furthermore, the social groups that any conquering race sees the most of are servants and criminals; the prosperous and the law-abiding generally attend to their own affairs. Kipling had had, by 1888, plentiful experience in managing a household full of servants very small wage demands and strict division of labour by caste and seniority meant that a large domestic staff was more practical than a small one. In a lull after the completion of the ‘Plain Tales’ Kipling wrote some turnovers based on his experiences with servants. They were collected as ‘The Smith Administration’ and may be read in From Sea to Sea; but they are jocular and condescending in tone and may be dismissed as exercises in a popular genre. Since the British were largely responsible for the administration of justice, many of the men Kipling knew at the Club had apprehended criminals or heard their trials, so that Kipling’s knowledge of Indian crime was fairly extensive. His general interest in the criminal mind was stimulated by his ‘profession of newspaper reporter and editor, so that it is not surprising to find a group of stories that deal with Indian criminals: ‘Little Tobrah’, ‘Gemini’, ‘Through the Fire’, and ‘At Howli Thana’ are good examples of this type of short fiction.

It was as a reporter that Kipling became acquainted with the opposite end of the social scale - the Indian aristocracy. The activities of a prince become matters of public concern, as do the activities of a criminal. Kipling’s biographer Carrington records some of Kipling’s experiences with Indian aristocrats as early as 1884, when an Afghan Sirdar tried to bribe him in order to win the Civil and Military Gazette’ favour. His trip to Rawal Pindi in 188 S, with its glimpse of the court of Abdurrahman, the Afghan Amir, resulted five years later in two grim poems, ‘The Ballad of the King’s Mercy’ and ‘The Ballad of the King’s Jest’. But it was not until the end of 1887 that Kipling was given his first real chance to form an
opinion of the India of rajas, elephants, and palaces. In November he was sent by the *Pioneer* on a railway journey through the native states of Rajputana in order to write up his impressions in a series of informal travel essays. *The Native States*, as they were generally called, give an example of the administrative complexity of the British raj. They had never been conquered and absorbed into British India; with few exceptions the Rajput principalities were too weak to have offered the conquerors any military resistance, and so they had peacefully recognized British paramountcy. They were bound by separate treaties to submit their external affairs to the will of the Indian Government, but, so long as their rulers remained at peace with their neighbours and kept their own tyranny in check and corruption within limits, they were allowed to regulate their internal affairs as they pleased.

Here Kipling found a perplexing mixture of ancient and modern. On the one hand, the land impressed him - perhaps for the first time in his life - with a sense of history, an interest that was to be dormant until the writing of the 'Puck' stories many years later. Rajputana was filled with monuments of ancient wars. The abandoned citadels of Amber and Chitor recalled an age when feudal lords had fought savagely and put whole populations to the sword; the palace of Boondi, still inhabited by the court appeared to be 'the work of goblins more than men' - a vast fortress carved out of the living rock. The royal stables of Jodhpur, where the Maharaja hospitably displayed his treasures to the young reporter, proved to house more than, four hundred superb horses in a luxury that took Kipling's breath away. In Udaipur he fell into conversation with a maker of swords and found that Arms-venders in Udaipur are a sincere race, for they sell to people who really use their wares. He had with him a copy of Col. James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, a classic history of the Rajput princes and their
Kipling was fascinated by these historical survivals. He did not try to ignore signs that the old way of life was being undermined here and there by modern importations. If the first glance took in the dead City of Amber, the second glance fell upon the Maharaja's brand-new, steam-driven cotton-press, chugging away by the railway station and 'returning a profit of twenty seven percent', or upon the Jeypore Museum, financed by the Maharaja, that put to shame the impoverished Lahore Museum that Kipling, the curator's son, knew so well. The cotton-press drove him to conclude that, 'The modern side of Jeypore must not be mixed with the ancient'; but, unlike many a traveller in search of the picturesque East, Kipling could write as enthusiastically about a clean water supply as about the awesome Tower of Victory, or the frightening sacred well called the Cow's Mouth. Nor did the fact escape him that these almost absolute rulers, with enormous annual incomes could if they wished, outdo the Government of India in the construction of public works. They had but to command, and foreign experts were delighted to build them hospitals, canals, and railways. The Government, with its tangle of bureaux, appropriations, and red tape, seemed clumsy by comparison.

Kipling's experience of Indian life led him to concern himself with opposite poles of Indian society, the very high and the very low, with a noticeable gap in the middle. But it was more than just experience that led him to polarize Indian society in this manner, for at both ends of the social scale he found ideals and values that he was predisposed to admire. He saw an India that was traditional in social structure and the limitations of his vision were emphasized by the fact that he was prepared, by temperament and background, to appreciate the virtues of a quasi-feudal society. The Indian princes were autocrats and warriors; whatever their defects and
Kipling knew how backward and corrupt they could be, as *The Naulakha* testifies - they had about them the glamour of the European Middle Ages, a glamour that appealed to a young man who had once written Pre-Raphaelite verses in his private notebook. These aristocrats do not play a large part in Kipling's poems and stories, if we except *The Naulahka*, but when they appear they are found in heroic ballads like 'With Scindia to Delhi' and 'The Dove of Dacca', where their virtues are idealized. When Kipling writes the stirring lines,

Four things greater than all things are,-

Women and Horses and Power and War. 6

one feels that the author is not merely giving his speaker values that are in character: he is somehow involved himself.

But the feudal virtues are not restricted to the aristocracy, and Kipling found something to admire among peasants and servants as well as among princes. In the first place, men of these classes could display remarkable ingenuity in hoodwinking the sahibs or one another. Mowgi the sweeper, hero of 'The Great Census,' is a good example — he becomes rich merely by going from town to town posing as a tax-gatherer and recruiting agent: the inhabitants bribe him to go away. Eventually, the reporter meets him in a chain-gang; after hearing his story, he offers to make him his body-servant as soon as his jail term is over. In 'Gemini' the ingenuity of Ram Dass, the money-lender, results in a tale that, with suitable changes of names and places, could be a medieval *fabliau* 'At Howli Thana' is of the same type, though here the ingenious Indians are defeated by an even more ingenious sahib. In the second place, it seemed to Kipling that these men of the lower classes were in close touch with substantial reality, with starvation and disease, passion and death. 'Little Tobrah,' a brilliant sketch of the horrors of famine, is a story cut down to the bare bones of narrative, yet the hero, a
little boy who kills his blind sister to save her from starving to death, dramatic monologue ‘Dray Wara Yow Dee’, whose savagery has disturbed Indian critics, is a pure distillation of the passion of jealousy, an uncivilized, even primordial response to the betrayal of love. And to counter its effect we find ‘In Flood Time,’ a reworking of the legend of *Hero and Leander*, where love is expressed not through morbid jealousy but by heroic endurance in a flooded river.

Like many of his contemporaries, therefore, Kipling admired the virtues of an India that had perished in the Mutiny of 1857, an India of memory and tradition. It follows that he was not receptive to the values of what was to be the most important segment of a new Indian society — the rising middle class. In 1882 Ripon’s attempts at reform had antagonized Kipling, as well as nearly all his acquaintances; and the principles Ripon stood for had been acting like yeast ever since among the Indian clerisy, the educated spokesmen of the middle class. The members of this group were held together not only by the fact of their superior education, but also by their common reliance on words as a mode of action. They were lawyers, schoolteachers, and journalists, for the most part, or men in the service of the Government. Their training in English-language schools had exposed them to British constitutional history, where principle after principle had won out over the opposition of an armed and wealthy conservatism. In the English past they read the future history of India; it is not surprising that they developed an exaggerated faith in abstract principles and in the power of words to turn them into political facts.

After the Ilbert Bill controversy subsided, Kipling concerned himself little with the new Indian middle class; Lahore was not a favourable place to observe their activities, for they were chiefly to be found in Bengal. But in the early months of 1888 Kipling was sent on another journey for the
Pioneer, this time to Calcutta, where he was forced to take notice of the clerisy. His first response to the Indian metropolis reminds us of his provinciality. He expected to find ‘a real live city’, an Indian counterpart to London, but all he could think of at first was the stench that permeated every corner of the town. It seemed to him that an efficient English municipal government would have made short work of the sanitary problem; but Calcutta was experimenting with local self-government, so that Kipling readily found an excuse for attacking the clerisy: ‘In spite of that stink, they allow, even encourage, natives to look after the place! The damp, drainage-soaked soil is sick with the teeming life of a hundred years, and the Municipal Board list is choked with the names of natives — men of the breed born in and raised off this surfeited muckheap!’ His animus was increased by a visit to a meeting of the Bengal Legislative Council. Traces of the ‘Big Calcutta Stink’ drifted into Writers’ Buildings, and yet the Indians who sat there debating municipal business seemed to take no notice of it. They talked at length about matters Kipling does not appear to have understood. All he could think of was cleaning up the city: ‘Where is the criminal, and what is all this talk about abstractions? They want shovels, not sentiments, in this part of the world.’

The American tourist Katherine Mayo in her book Mother India speaks of India’s dirty and squalor. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s novel Heat and Dust is all about this. V. S. Naipaul in his three Indian accounts speaks of this.

‘Shovels, not sentiments’ adequately sums up Kipling’s rejection of the Indian middle class and its ideals. He was not a racial bigot: though he was susceptible to theories of race characteristics that were in the air at the time, he recognized merit where he found it. But for orators who relied on ‘principles’ and ‘precedents’ he had nothing but contempt. He did not spend much time attacking the clerisy during the remainder of 1888, and he wisely
suppressed his newspaper essays on the subject. Two such sketches — ‘The Tracking of Chuckerbutti’ and ‘A Free Gift’ — ridicule the pretensions of an inflammatory Indian journalist; in other pieces he satirizes, in passing, the British and Anglo-Indian liberals who were in sympathy with Chuckerbutti and his fellows. But a long essay on the 1888 meeting of the Indian National Congress, then in its third year, leaves no doubt about his point of view. It is perhaps significant that Kipling’s critique of Congress is so outspoken that one of the persons he refers to assaulted the editor of the Pioneer. But the essay itself need not concern us at length, for Kipling merely rehearses arguments that were current in Anglo-Indian circles: that Congress did not represent the Indian masses; that the delegates had no clear purpose; that they were incapable of conducting an orderly meeting, let alone the affairs of a subcontinent. In fact, it is hard to conceive that any group made up of members of the Indian clerisy could have won Kipling’s approval. The avowed aim of Congress was discussion, not action — the group was in no position to transform theories and principles into concrete political facts. Had they been plotting an armed mutiny, Kipling could have understood them and perhaps even admired them. As it was, he found no place in his vision of India for these seemingly ineffectual orators; he would have found it hard to believe that their ‘principles’ and ‘precedents’ would some day induce England to relinquish her Indian Empire.

G. L. Dickinson in his essay “An Essay on the Civilizations of India, China and Japan” with E. M. Forster’s foreword, writes,

I will say first that I conceive the dominant note of India to be religion; of China, humanity; and of Japan chivalry. For example, Indians believe that the true life is a spiritual life; that they respect the saint more than any other man; and that they regard the material world as
'unreal,' and all its cares as illusion. Religion is a dominant factor in their life and yet they have not understood it properly. Indian religion is 'inhuman' compared to Christianity. Man is a plaything and slave to natural forces there. Indian religion is pessimistic."

Dickinson says the West believes that all effort ought to centre upon the process of living in time; that the process has reality and significance; and that the business of religion is not to deliver us from effort by convincing us of its futility, but to sanctify and justify it. The Vedas, it is true, reflect an attitude to life similar to that of the western Aryans. But the Vedic way of life is lost. At this count, China and Japan are at one with the West. So the real antithesis is not between East and West, but between India and the rest of the world. Dickinson thinks of social institutions. He writes, "India is a home of caste. Caste may be defined as the hereditary determination of man's place in society. No hard and fast line can be drawn between caste and class, for wherever there are classes the position of the father plays some part, and usually the chief part, in determining the position of the son. Moreover, almost all societies—China is the great exception—have passed through an age of caste; Egypt, of course, par excellence, Japan, Europe in the Middle Ages. But in India caste has developed into a rigorous and a multiplicity unknown in any other country. Castes and sub-castes are innumerable, and new ones are always springing up. India has never been democratic, either in theory or in practice; never had the ideal of equal opportunity; always the priest. Nothing, of course, could be more radically antagonistic to the whole current of theory and practice in the modern West. But his antagonism does not exist at all in the case of China and only in a much modified degree in the case of Japan. Here, too, the position of India is unique. It is the antithetic pole to the West.
Kipling achieves his most complex portrayal of native India in a story that has not been much discussed by critics — 'On the City Wall', first published as part of In Black and White in December 1888. It is a story that takes little account of the conventions of the narrative art: the ostensible climax, for instance, where the reporter discovers that he has unwittingly helped a revolutionary to escape from the police, is too minor an incident, placed too close to the end of the tale, to seem in proportion with the rest of the story. But 'On the City Wall' is more than the account of an exciting night of religious riot in the alleys of Lahore. In its pages the forces that were to shape modern India confront one another and struggle towards a partial and ironic resolution. At the centre of the story, involved in the action and yet apart from it, is the figure of Lalun, the courtesan. India as a sinister, desirable woman is an old symbol, but for Kipling it still kept part of its validity. He had seen Lalun's counterpart standing at the door of a decayed house in Calcutta, caught in the glare of a policeman's lantern, 'blazing — literally blazing — with jewellery from head to foot'. But Lalun herself — with her barbaric wealth, her ancient songs, her beauty, her uncanny knowledge of worldly affairs, her inaccessibility— becomes less a real prostitute than a representative figure of India; she will take part in the scheme to liberate Khem Singh, but in the end she will be unchanged, unaffected by its outcome. The character of Lalun reminds us Kamala in Hermann Hesse's novel Siddhartha.

The actual conspirators are shadowy figures, though led, it seems, by a member of the Indian clerisy: "a fat person in black, with gold pince-nez'. Khem Singh, the old soldier, is merely their tool. He is, of course, a symbol of the warrior class of traditional India, the men who fought the British in 1857 but who, in 1888, no longer seemed a force to reckon with; it is characteristic of Kipling's blindness to the real aims of the clerisy that he
should have imagined their employing so blunted a weapon. Their antagonist, the Supreme Government, also stands in the shadows, but its concrete manifestation is the guns of Fort Amara, ‘the line of guns that could pound the City to powder in half an hour’. But this is a last resort: the guns will not be turned on the City, nor will the soldiers fire their rifles into the thronging rioters.

For the central struggle of ‘On the City Wall’ is more complex than a mere play of force against force, and its protagonist is the bitter young Moslem, Wali Dad. Educated at an English Mission-school, Wali Dad is trapped between two Indias, the traditional and the new. He has lost his faith in Islam, but he can see no future in collaborating with the English conquerors. Though he wastes his time courting Lalun and dabbling ineffectually in the conspiracy, he nevertheless has a clearer insight into modern India than the conspirators themselves. Wali Dad correctly estimates old Khem Singh as an ‘Interesting Survival’: “He returns to a country now full of educational and political reform, but, as the Pearl says, there are many who remember him. He was once a great man. There will never be any more great men in India. They will all, when they are boys, go whoring after strange gods, and they will become citizens — ‘fellow-citizens’ — ‘illustrious fellow-citizens’. What is it that the native papers call them?” The irony here is sustained and complex: Wali Dad is describing himself, yet he has committed himself to this lost cause; he will prove right in his evaluation of Khem Singh, yet the strange gods after whom he will go whoring are the old familiar gods of Islam; in reverting to the old religion, he will throw himself back on traditional India, but he will render himself useless to the conspiracy in doing so. In the end, of course, it is the reporter who guides Khem Singh through the rioting city: appropriately, for the reporter himself is enchanted with Lalun and to some
extent has come to share Wali Dad’s ambivalent position, though he has approached it from the other direction. And in the end, the ironic circle is complete. The conspiracy succeeds in spite of Wali Dad’s reversion to Moslem fanaticism, but final victory lies with the Supreme Government after all, and for the reasons advanced by Wali Dad. Khem Singh ‘went to the young men’ but the glamour of his name had passed away, and they were entering native regiments or Government offices, and Khem Singh could give them neither pension, decorations, nor influence — nothing but a glorious death with their back to the mouth of a gun’. And so Khem Singh gives himself up and returns to prison, and Wali Dad presumably remains as impotent as ever. In so far as ‘On the City Wall’ is a prediction of the future of Indian nationalism, Kipling made a plausible guess. He could not know that India would belong to young men who would cross the line Wali Dad was unable to cross, and who would not revert to what they once had been.

The gulf that divided dark India from white, though it obscured much, gave Kipling a certain perspective. In writing about Indians, Kipling was dealing with facts and attitudes that have since become history and practical politics. We can examine his work and point with some confidence to areas where his vision was distorted or weak. But Kipling himself is very nearly the sole historian of the day-to-day life of British India. Was the social life of Simla really based upon not-quite-adulterous friendships between young men and older married women, or is this aspect of Kipling’s world a distortion of reality? One cannot find evidence that either confirms or denies Kipling’s version of this society; but one cannot eliminate the possibility, that other writers of fiction either ignored or chose to suppress what was a widespread and disturbing state of affairs. Kipling’s treatment of other aspects of Anglo-Indian life presents a slightly different problem. It has often been claimed that Kipling was the first to deal realistically with civil
engineers, or the Indian Army, or a polo match; but can we trust the testimony of inexperienced readers who were delighted to find their special interests taken note of in readable, exciting stories? Amidst the chorus of praise from technical men, enthusiastically claiming Kipling's verisimilitude, it is well to listen to an occasional dissenting voice, like that of the social historian Dennis Kincaid: Simla remained cold. The fellow [Kipling] was clearly a bounder; his stories of life in the Hills were informed by the natural envy of a cad who had sought and been refused an entree into Simla society. No doubt Kincaid exaggerates, but the existence of such an anti-Kipling sentiment in India may find corroboration in the fact that, after the appearance of Echoes, neither the Calcutta Review nor the Asiatic Quarterly Review — the chief spokesmen for Anglo-Indian culture — reviewed his books, even after his recognition in England as the greatest writer British India had produced. Until the appearance of an exhaustive, unbiased study of Anglo-Indian society and the Anglo-Indian mind, we have no way of deciding to what degree Kipling's vision of British India corresponds with the vision of other observers. If any pattern fits the majority of Kipling's Anglo-Indian stories, it is that they deal with the problem of how to behave in situations of extreme physical and emotional stress — a problem that recurs throughout Kipling's writings. Many of Kipling's stories take on the nature of moral experiments: characters and the values they live by are tested against circumstances; they may win, suffer defeat, or achieve no more than a stalemate. But in fiction, as in the laboratory, some experiments are more illuminating than others. If the experimenter's prejudices lead him to set up conditions that favour one result over another, the test will be worthless: the only way to determine the strength of a material is to break it. Thus, Kipling's least interesting Anglo-Indian stories are the ones in which his predispositions in favour of a particular set of values lead him to
moderate the stresses to which the values are subjected. In his weakest stories, he allows his characters and their way of life too easy a triumph.

Kipling's failures are usually the result of his uncritical acceptance of moral values that are, in themselves, quite admirable. The conditions of life in India were constantly testing the physical and emotional stamina of Europeans — the soldier had to resist boredom, discomfort, and disease, enemies more subtle and dangerous than the armed tribesmen of the border; the civilian had to face the same enemies as well as constant hard work and an even more exhausting load of responsibility. Short of attacking the whole system or abandoning the Indian Empire, there was little one could do but exalt courage and strength. 'Only a Subaltern' provides an example of a case where Kipling allows his admiration for these virtues to get the better of him. Bobby Wick, the subaltern of the title, is not so much a character as an article carefully manufactured to meet prior specifications. The specifications are not bad, for a human being with Wick's qualities would probably be an effective subaltern and a loyal and generous friend. But as a moral experiment the story is of no value: Wick's courage and devotion never flag, for he has been designed by his creator to triumph over just such strain as he is subjected to. 'Only a Subaltern', in other words, is sentimental, for the author has set out to control all his reader's responses, to draw upon the reader's easily accessible stores of admiration and pity. Bobby Wick's victory is too easy.

Kipling knew better than to fill a gallery with portraits of Bobby Wick, but similar motives can be detected in other stories that risk the charge of sentimentality. In "His Majesty the King" the facile victory's won by childish innocence; in 'Wee Willie Winkie innocence and courage rather awkwardly combine in order to prove that even a six-year-old sahib can be a match for Border tribesmen: in each case the reader's stock responses to
the idea of childhood are drawn out and manipulated. ‘The Story of the Gadsbys’ is nothing but a series of ordeals, some facetious and some serious. The whole was intended to be ‘an Anglo-Indian Autour du manage’; and it might have turned out well, for the Gadsbys’ marriage has to outlast nearly every strain to which an Anglo-Indian marriage can be subject. But something went wrong, as Kipling realized later. The innocence and good intentions of old Gaddy and his Minnie win victories that seem contrived, and the story keeps descending into troughs of the commonplace: the nervous bridegroom, the compromising letter from an old flame, the tender announcement of pregnancy. Only at the end does Gadsby face a real dilemma and the story take on substance. The carefully built structure of domestic happiness is finally confronted by a moral imperative, the Captain's duty to his regiment; Gadsby's weakness is exposed, and for a moment he becomes real.

In writing of barracks life, Kipling is less apt to fall into cliches than he is when dealing with men and women of his own class, nor does he stack the cards quite so decisively in favour of a given system of values: apart from the fact that courage and cleanliness are good, dirt and cowardice bad, the author's own predilections are never as apparent as in ‘Only a Subaltern’ or ‘His Majesty the King’. Mulvaney, the central figure of the barracks stories, most often rescues them from sentimentality. As long as Kipling can maintain his own poise, the reader has in mind that Mulvaney is not always a lovable rogue but at times a thief, and even, as ‘The Solid Muldoon’ shows, a fairly cold-blooded adulterer. As the reporter's voice dies away and Mulvaney's voice takes over, we move into a new realm of values. It is possible for us to suspend judgment while Mulvaney saunters through the married quarters, for his behaviour is, in a sense, wrapped in the insulation of his nostalgic pride. ‘With the Main Guard’ succeeds almost perfectly in
what it sets out to do, for it explores the savagery of hand-to-hand fighting in such a way that the reader's presumable dislike of the actuality of violence is never brought into play. The stifling inactivity of the hot night in Fort Amara prepares the reader to accept Mulvaney's version of the battle in Silver's Theatre, not as a ghastly and irresponsible attempt to make the reader lust for blood, but as a work of art; Mulvaney's imagination has sustained his companions in an hour of need. In stories like these the conditions of barracks life in India set up searching tests of the values a soldier lives by. Mulvaney normally resolves these dilemmas by means of his courage and strength — 'Black Jack' is a good example — but his victories are not easy, and, in the long run, the last victory always eludes him. For he is not the pattern of a successful private soldier, as Bobby Wick is of the perfect subaltern; Mulvaney's courage and strength are not adequate to overcome his own weaknesses and lusts; we do not feel that the author is manipulating our responses in such a way as to foist upon us a conventional system of values.

Louis Cornell comments,

At his best, Mulvaney becomes larger than life. Tougher, stronger, more imaginative than any man could be, he takes on heroic size and enters a realm that is outside normal human experience; part of the greatness of 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney' lies in the fact that he becomes, in some mysterious way, equivalent to Krishna, the legendary hero whom he impersonates. 9

The trouble with Mrs. Hauksbee, on the other hand, is that Kipling tries too hard to reveal her 'character'. When she first makes her appearance in the' Plain Tales', she comes before us as a brilliant creation: mischievous, intelligent, fascinating, she is the embodiment of the spell that Simla cast over the young Kipling. But in the later stories, especially the overlong '
Education of Otis Yeere’, a good deal of the life goes out of her. Splendid to
watch in action, she is less amusing to listen to. Worse still, Kipling
sentimentalizes her. As an admirer of the early Mrs. Hauksbee, one finds the
‘many sobs and much promiscuous kissing’ of ‘A Second-Rate Woman’
awkward and embarrassing; for Kipling’s vision of Anglo-Indian social life
is basically anti-heroic, so that in trying to make Mrs. Hauksbee into a
heroine — a representative, that is, of the values he stands for — Kipling
defeats his own purposes. It is significant that he had to invent a cardboard
villainess, Mrs. Reiver, in order to set off Mrs. Hauksbee’s virtues.

In his stronger Simla stories, Kipling reveals a moral bias, as it were,
by default; he no longer tries to provide a hero. Simplest in conception of
this group is ‘At the Pit’s Mouth’, where two nameless and unpleasant
people cross the narrow line from flirtation into adultery: there is no doubt
that the narrator strongly disapproves of them, but his obvious hostility
gives them more autonomy than they would have if he had indulged in any
sort of special pleading. The contrived denouement — a particularly ghastly
riding accident — is so vividly presented that we can forget that the ‘fate’
that overtakes the Tertium Quid is merely the caprice of the author, at pains
to dispose of an evil character by appropriately horrible means. In ‘The Hill
of Illusion’, however, Kipling scorns such a mechanical punishment;
instead, he allows his characters to expose one another for what they are. He
is not at his best in this artificial form — a story entirely in dialogue — but
I doubt whether any other Englishman writing, in 1888 could have exposed
so coldly and neatly the itch, of mutual distrust that afflicts a couple on the
eve of an adulterous elopement.

‘The Hill of Illusion’ is an impressive attempt, but it is overshadowed
by ‘A Wayside Comedy’. The former could take place anywhere, but the
latter is peculiarly Anglo-Indian in the moral ordeal its characters must
suffer. Like Morrowbie Jukes, they are trapped, but without any of the
paraphernalia of Gothic melodrama: ‘Kashima is bounded on all sides by
the rock-tipped circle of the Dosehri hills’, and that circle, by the laws that
govern the lives of Anglo-Indian civil servants, cannot be broken. The
experimenter has achieved the fictional equivalent of a controlled laboratory
environment: ‘Sorrow in Kashima is as fortunate as Love because there is
nothing to weaken it save the flight of Time.’ Kurrell and Mrs. Boulte,
having nothing else to do, fall into a safe and static adultery. But external
conditions change: Mrs. Vansuythen comes to the Station; Boulte and
Kurrell both fall in love with her; in anguish at her loss, Mrs. Boulte forces
an exposure of their tangled relationships. Their ordeal is simply to live with
one another, to solve the problem of how to behave in these circumstances
of intolerable stress. And there is no solution. Being what they are, these
people behave as they must, without any of the obvious virtues — courage,
strength, wit, honour — with which Kipling has endowed his characters
elsewhere. The isolation so characteristic of life in British India has forced
them into a moral dilemma, but the best resolution they can achieve is a
stalemate: they must wait until chance releases them from one another’s
intolerable proximity.

It is said,

‘The Man Who Would Be King’, the best of the stories Kipling wrote
in India, must conclude any study of his apprenticeship, not only
because of its brilliance, but because in a sense it embodies and sums
up Kipling’s attitude to India and the role of the British in the land
they had conquered.”10

The story is susceptible of innumerable interpretations: in its mysterious
way it is concerned with issues larger than the adventures of a pair of
English ne’er-do-wells in the unexplored hills of Kafiristan. Nevertheless,
the form of the tale is straightforward. Dravot and Carnehan are tragic figures, conquerors who, like Tamburlaine, conceive the ambition of becoming emperors. They are above the common run of mankind; they are as strong and vigorous as Mulvaney, as subtle at disguise as Strickland, as worldly and cynical as McIntosh Jellaludin. With courage and luck they pile success upon success until they become gods in the eyes of their primitive subjects. But in the end they violate the conditions of their success. Dravot overreaches himself in wanting to take a wife from among their subjects, and his failure of judgment causes him to pull down upon his own head the frail structure his courage and ambition have reared.

Like 'A Wayside Comedy', 'The Man Who Would Be King' is peculiarly Indian in the moral experiment to which its heroes are subjected. 'A Wayside Comedy', however, displays Anglo-Indians in a state of paralysis. Isolated in the remote valley of Kashima, the heirs of the conquerors are unable to enjoy the fruits of conquest. They are a far-flung patrol of an army of occupation, but they lack the inner strength to survive the rigours of such a calling; India is too much for them. In a sense, 'The Man Who Would Be King' looks back to an earlier generation, a generation less troubled by boredom, isolation, and responsibility. Dravot and Carnehan recapitulate the British conquest. Like Clive and the great generals who followed him, they prove that a disciplined native army, provided with effective weapons, is a match for a much larger force of untrained tribesmen. Like the great Anglo-Indian administrators, they find the land divided by petty rulers: they put an end to internecine war, establish the pax Britannica, and win the support of tribesmen who prefer subjection to anarchy. Even their motives show the odd mixture of patriotism and personal ambition that characterized the men who conquered the world for England: "... we'd be an Empire, when everything was shipshape, I'd hand
over the crown — this crown I'm wearing now — to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say: 'Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot.'

Why, then, does this simulacrum of the Indian Empire fall and crush its makers? The meaning of Dravot's and Carnehan's failure is complex. On the one hand, they have effected their conquest under false pretences. They have concealed from their people the real significance of the Masonic Mark; 'Only the Gods know that,' " says Billy Fish; "We thought you were men till you showed the Sign of the Master.' 'In Kipling's stories deceit is often a risky business: the truth that underlies situations and men has a powerful tendency to manifest itself. Kafiristan, like India, is a place of extremes; circumstances corrode and destroy false appearances. On the other hand, Dravot and Carnehan succeed as gods and fail only when their manhood is revealed. One of the many ironies of the story is provided by Carnehan's perpetual awareness of his rough-and-tumble background, his continual reduction of their royal acts to the terms he best understands. And so, when Dravot proposes to take a wife — 'A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood-brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs' — Carnehan can see it only in terms of a casual liaison with a native girl: 'Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was a platelayer?' says I. 'A fat lot of good she was to me.' Dravot is justifiably angered by the comparison; and yet Peachey is not entirely wrong about Dravot's motives: rather, he is oversimplifying them. Dravot's desire for a queen is more than lust and more than political strategy; in a sense, it is one of those gestures towards a real contact with the conquered land that occur in Plain Tales and always come to nothing. Like the British in India, Dravot and Carnehan can move just so far in the direction of acclimatizing themselves to Kafiristan before they are forcibly reminded that an immense gulf lies between them.
and their subjects. Reducing the problem to his own simple terms, Carnehan sums it up thus: There's no accounting for natives. This business is our 'Fifty-Seven.' It is appropriate that Dravot, the unsuccessful builder of a bridge between races, should die as he does, hurled into a chasm from a broken bridge, a bridge that has been destroyed by the tribesmen he has tried to civilize and enlighten.

Louis Cornell comments,

The twenty-two-year-old newspaper reporter who wrote 'The Man Who Would Be King' was no longer an apprentice. For six years he had had to write prose and verse on demand; each year his output had grown more copious, his style more individual and assured. India had provided a strange environment for a young writer, but on the whole Kipling could — and did — count himself fortunate in having lived there. Conventional modes of literary development were dosed to him: he knew nothing of the university, the ephemeral little magazines, the awkward attempt at a first novel, the struggle for acceptance by the established literati. On the contrary, he had no rules to follow; his imagination could be fertilized by direct exposure to an enigmatic land that lay outside the borders of English literary tradition; he had to forge a style that would capture the interest of an audience quite unlike the English literary public."

Kipling sailed from India in March 1889, but in a sense he never left it behind him. Not only was his great reputation based on his Indian stories; not only did he return to the land in his imagination in London, Sussex, and even far-away Vermont. For the rest of his life he would remain, to some extent, a 'returned Anglo-Indian': a homeless man who had left a vital part of himself in the East; a writer whose view of the world was inexorably
conditioned by the land and the people amongst whom he had grown to maturity.

Kipling was not just a writer like Hardy and Conrad. He was, like Eliot and Pound, a political thinker. Kipling was an empire writer. He was an imperialist, a racist and prejudiced against the marginalized people in the world.

It is said,

Kipling was an authoritarian in the sense that he was not a democrat. To him, a parliament was a place where people with no knowledge of things as they were could dictate to the men who did real work, and could change their dictates at whim. His ideal was a feudalism that had never existed, a loyal governed class freely obeying incorrupt, conscientious governors. He was vague about how you became a governor: you probably (as in the Empire) just found you were one. Nevertheless, birth, influence, money, educational status and the like must not count as qualifications for leadership. Merit, competence I. and a sense of responsibility were what did count: ‘the job belongs to the man who can do it’. As George Orwell pointed out, Kipling was further from being a fascist than can easily be imagined in a period when totalitarianism - a very different thing from authoritarianism - is accepted as a possibly valid or even desirable system.”

Kipling was an imperialist. He accepted the Empire as it stood and he approved the annexation of Upper Burma. His position has been explained semi-mystically the Empire was justified because it fostered virtue in its administrators and psychologically the Empire was attractive because it was an island of security in a turbulent, hostile universe.
Kipling was a racialist, or racist. The White Man’s Burden is indeed a burden, an arduous duty, not the inheritance of a natural privilege, and the white men must carry it not because they are white but because they are qualified; for instance, the Americans in the Philippines must govern their ‘new-caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half child’ who cannot govern themselves. This is a limited racialism: white men, in practice those whose native tongue is English, are good at exercising authority in beneficent ways and have the wherewithal—medicine, transport systems, law-enforcement—to do it. Kipling believed in the separation, or rather the continued separateness of races.
References:

2. Wal Dad appears in ‘On the City Wall,’ Dec. 1888, p. 139.