

## RUDYARD KIPLING

Doesn't anyone read Kipling anymore? Are we so politically correct that the teachers in our schools, while pleading present-day irrelevancy, dare not disclose that there was a time when a small group of white men controlled the vast Indian sub-continent, and the British Indian Army was billeted in such romantic-sounding places as Srinagar, Lucknow and Lahore? I'm sure that today, even the most rabid Indian nationalist must admit the indelible stamp left upon his country by the British during their almost two hundred year occupancy. If they can see this, why are we afraid to talk about it?

When I was young, I kept a diary. Usually the happenings in my day-to-day life were of little consequence. However, the entry for 18 January 1936 reads, "Rudyard Kipling died. today in London," which shows you what this event meant to me. My early years were busy ones, but I always had time for a little leisure reading....often about such characters as Privates Mulvaney, Ortheris and Learoyd. in "Soldiers Three". I was impressed by the idea of an Irishman, a Scot and an Englishman serving together in India, and, although of different backgrounds, acting like brothers and willing to risk their lives for one another. But even more thought-provoking was the place held by the lowly water-boy, Gunga Din, in the affections of the author: "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!" From these writings of Kipling I learned that "we're all brothers under the skin".

Kipling had. been born in Bombay in 1865, and, although educated back in England, returned to India to write for several newspapers until 1889. From birth, it would seem, he was steeped in the ancient culture and traditions of the East, an influence which strongly affected his outlook and brought forth from time to time throughout his early life these wonderful stories: "Plain Tales from the Hills", "Soldiers Three", "Wee Willie Winkie" "The Light That Failed", "Barrack Room Ballads", "The Jungle Book", "Kim", "Just So Stories", "Puck of Pook's Hill", etc.

It is of interest to me that when he wanted in his later years to bring a variety of men together, to emphasize the underlying fellowship of humanity: to give men some bond of pleasurable ritual that could elevate them above the confines of social class or distinction, he turned. again to Masonry. He had, of course, noticed. in his early life how Masonry dissolved the barriers of caste and discipline within the British Army. Kipling was raised in the "Lodge of Hope and Perseverance" in Lahore in 1885 (when he was still eight months short of the statutory twenty-one years), eventually becoming the secretary of his lodge (one of five lodges in Lahore).

During a visit last June to Bateman's, Kipling's final residence from 1902 to 1936, in East Sussex, I was particularly fascinated by a small display case upstairs in his study. Among other Masonic memorabilia was a note in his own hand-writing, "I was entered. by a member of the Brahmin Somaj (a Hindu), passed by a Mohammedan, and raised by an Englishman. Our tyler was an Indian Jew." (This quote appears also in his last work, "Something of Myself".) That this multi-racial aspect of the lodge was what he sought is confirmed by the fact that, when he moved from Lahore to Allahabad, he chose to enter the only lodge that had many non-Europeans among its members.

In his post-World War I stories, sprinkled with Masonic references, the emphasis is strongly upon the mixture of classes and trades. He had. always enjoyed a particularly good relationship with physicians, and this fellowship is expressed just as strongly here as in the other group of purely medical "healing" stories. But there is also a very lively and sympathetic concern with tradesmen, grocers, tobacconists, apothecaries, and even barbers.....an affectionate and admiring feeling for those in "the working world". The other feature of the stories is a pleasing delight in the ritual and furnishings of the lodges.

I must note here one morbid theme which creeps in occasionally. The Kiplings had lost their only son, Lt. John Kipling of the Irish Guards, at the Battle of Loos in 1915, and they grieved for him for the rest of their lives. Some of Kipling's stories after this tragedy contain muddled themes, obscure literary and biblical references, and one cannot help but feel that the author is searching vainly for some rational explanation for their loss. Sir Arthur and Lady Conan Doyle were suffering from a similar cruel bereavement, resulting in their deepening interest in spiritualism in an attempt to communicate with their dead son, Kingsley. But for Kipling, however, consolation was to be found in Masonry.

Healing depends on a return to the familiar, to routine and ritual. So, in one of these stories, "Faith and Works Lodge No. 5837", a Masonic Lodge in London, opens its doors "in the interest of the Brethren" to any soldier on leave or in hospital who can show a minimum familiarity with Masonic ceremonial. It is always crowded. States one character in the book (Brother Burgess), "All ritual is fortifying. Ritual is a necessity for mankind. The more things are upset, the more they fly to it." And then he adds, "I abhor slovenly ritual anywhere". Nevertheless, to make it clear that what he and Kipling have in mind is not the dead hand of meaningless, superfluous words, he asks the narrator, "By the way, would you mind assisting at the Examinations, if there are many Visiting Brothers tonight? You'll find, some of them very rusty but.....it's the Spirit, not the Letter, that giveth Life."

In conclusion, I would ask that **we** consider re-instating past authors in their rightful place, realizing how much our young people would have enjoyed these tales of adventure which might also have instilled a few good ideas on "the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man"

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