

Q. 2

Certainly the first flight. Though his attitude is depressing. I feel that P.C.D. Calton. 54 Defoe Avenue. New Gardens, Surrey. Had more. Born: [REDACTED]

[ACTON COUNTY GRAMMAR SCHOOL]

"The Literature of Empire -"

An Appreciation of the Writings of

Rudyard Kipling

Summary of Essay :-

Read by and story together. I think about story in any of a little

I The PERIOD.

SV Prize

- i) We have come to look on Kipling as the epitome of a whole conception of life and of Empire which, we believe, our grandparents held. Why is this?
- ii) The later-Victorian Empire, and the Administration of India.
- iii) How would the young journalist Kipling see this? What he emphasized, and what he forgot to mention
- iv) The Reaction of Author and Public - Just how far does Kipling "represent the later-Victorians"?

II The MAN AND HIS WORKS.

- i) Early influences and hereditary strains: how they are revealed by his writings, and how much they shaped his mind.
- ii) His period of Indian Journalism - its LENGTH and its IMPORTANCE.
- iii) What happened afterwards... In AMERICA and In ENGLAND.
- iv) "WAVING THE FLAG and BANGING THE DRUM"
- v) and its RESULTS.

III FAILURE AND ACHIEVEMENT.

"The Literature of Empire -
An Appreciation of the Writings of Rudyard Kipling"

I

Two days after the death of Rudyard Kipling he was followed by his King. At the time the witty thing to say was that the King had taken his Trumpeter with him, but that seems to have been almost all that was said. A stubborn silence hangs over the event, and it is hardly one of Reverence: his literary Contemporaries awaited the Voice of Authority, or the Official Biographer, to start the ball rolling; and we are still waiting.

Perhaps the heaviness of the European Atmosphere - diplomatically speaking - , and the Constitutional problems at Home caused the silence amongst those who should have entered the literary " fray "; but then one must remember Shaw - one of the few who vouchsafed anything at all - and his statement that Kipling never grew-up: as a matter of fact he can be imagined as playing Ariel, or Puck, amongst the Literary Giants, the " Gang Hen O' literature ". Too often they looked at his philosophy, or what they took for one, and forgot the work itself; thus there arose the strange circumstance that E.T. Raymond could write " Mr. Kipling is not perhaps a spent force. But it seems safe to say that he will never again be more than a minor one ". That was in 1918.

Because it is this " philosophy " which appears to give such trouble, we may profitably try to judge what there is of it.

A rather abstract, generalised account of Kipling is embodied in the idea of him being the very soul of our grand-parents " Conception of Empire ". Stalky and Co. are taken to embody the " public-school virtues "; Kipling is the pukka Sahib of long-standing, the type of man who came of wealthy stock - all Indian Administrators did, of course - and went East to ravage India and slave-drive its peoples for personal gain and pleasure. He then came home, Nabob-like, and hid himself and his ill-got gains

"muddled stuff"?

from the eyes of decent people like ourselves.

This would all be laughable if it were not so horribly common. Kipling was considered in the post-war period as a definitely démodé creature: he had written some animal stories for children, admittedly, but no one really took him seriously now; and in the rapid passage of the forlorn Peace the idea of a "back-number" became fixed in the popular mind. To read him was to saunter back to that pointless period of pre-war existence which was Heaven to some and Hades to others. Thus did the "later-Victorian" period become Edwardian; the blazing Indian scene, the Vicar's tea-party and croquet-lawn; the "fresh drafts for the first fighting-line, officially called the Indian Civil Service... who die, or kill themselves with overwork, or are worried to death, or broken in health and hope in order that the land may be protected from death and sickness, famine and war, and may eventually become capable of standing alone." These men became the gold-greedy ravishers of a suffering land whom to kill or drive-out was a deed of glory.

"On the City wall"
[Soldiers Three]

This was all a reaction to extremity from the picture of Indian life and Administration which had been created in the popular imagination by Kipling. For he too had gone to an extreme: later we will consider the influence of India upon him, but here it suffices to say that his representation of the men who administered India was rather too much of what he thought they should be, and say, and do, and perhaps too little of what they really were. When the popular imagination - the "Reading Public" - became aware of this, they went to the extreme of re-orientation.

Of course the servants and guides of that Public, the Critics, helped to shape the popular sentiment towards Kipling. Le Gallienne referred to him as the "master of captivating sing-song", the "Burns of the Music-hall"... and thus it became the habit to consider him as either an 'out of date Imperialist' (whatever that might signify), or as a mere comedian.

But because of what the critics were saying, and because it seemed to many that the recent war had been brought-about by just the sort of mentality as Kipling represented, there it became the fashion to treat Kipling as a "second-rate", or "back number" in the world of literature.

When we do come to consider him at all, he seems to represent a long-dead way of life, an epoch of humanity which was killed by the barbarity of the "four years war". But it was not only the abstract term of 'War' which ended that period: there was also the very material consideration that the demands of that war directed the careers of those "fresh drafts for the first fighting-line" from the Administration of India to the slow Hell of Handers.

So too, the idea of the scions of our respectable "middle-class" families going forth upon a life pledged to the service of those "lesser breeds without the law", now became rather tarnished: the ideal was gone, and so was a whole generation which might have supported it.

But because the everyday life of the world in which we circle has become vastly more swift and dangerous, we can look back upon the India of the "later Victorians", and the rather remote England of the literary hermit of "Bateman's" with a certain polite nostalgia: ordinary men have, today, seen far more horror, faced more danger than the gallant soldiers of Kipling's Indian Regiments. Therefore, when we read his fin de siècle stories we are inclined to think them all rather pointless, or "journalistic"; and when we are solemnly lectured upon his "philosophy" and its evil results, we may feel that he is better left alone. The best way of doing this is to grant him one of those horrid glass cases in which the "later Victorians" placed their stuffed birds, and place him upon a rather unsightly pedestal.

Dr. G.A. Williamson:
"Great Britain and the
Empire."

"The early writings of Rudyard Kipling, such as the "Plain Tales from the Hills", depicted post-Mutiny India as a land of comic snobbery and essential decency.

In that passage we have a key to Kipling; the fact is, that though we put him in the "bell-jar on the aspidochelone stand", we cannot be assured he will remain there. The highly respectable strain in his nature, born and bred in upright, middle-class circumstances, had a compensatory vein of irreverent naughtiness. In truth, we often come to regard him as a "Puck amongst the Giants", with the stolid exterior and heavy moustaches barely concealing a devilishness which picked his respectable contemporaries into critical wrath. That is the early period, the "first Indian"; later comes the quiescence and the reaction from all that had gone before, and it is in this later period that Puck has taken on a new identity, as a "familiar spirit" in the world of ghosts.

"Essential decency" is fundamental; the young Journalist would enjoy making comedy from the snobbery of the people "behind the scenes", but the really important people, the Ordes and Tallantires, Findlaysons and Hitchcocks, Spurstows and Stricklands, - must be recognised as men who ~~who~~ work ~~to~~ do, to whose actions one does not apply foreign codes of Law or Morality. They are the real governors of India as far as Kipling is concerned, strong men and silent, recognised by the natives as Masters, and by the powerful tribesmen as honourable equals. Unfortunately the portrait is a trifle overemphasized in places, for good and for bad. The 'Central Government' is always blind to the real state of affairs, and the tribesmen are always always not quite strong enough, or cunning enough: thus the stories become so often like those "Boy's Own" tales in which one knows the ending before the yarn has really begun.

The same applies to the Queen's Army in India: again strong, but Britishly, and again silent, but illiterately; and yet there is a vast volubility about them in the right circumstances - note how carefully Mulvaney has to

have?

(Hopkins)

be treated in the course of his love-remembrances in "The Courtship of Dinah Shadd!" But with all their illiteracy - and we are assured that there is not a 'literate' soldier in Kipling - they are both capable of spinning the finest yarns in the English tongue, and beating the finest warriors in the Indian Peninsula.

In the state of India at the end of the nineteenth century there was much glamour about the façade apparent to the traveller. All the mystery and the glory of the East ~~was~~ spread before the young man's feet: and if he be a journalist, with a roving imagination, his opportunities were boundless. Now the technique of the journalist is to enlarge and emphasise the particular into the universal, to direct attention onto the instance and make it as outstanding as possible, and to give an impression to one's readers that the account given is absolute veracity: thus the young newspaperman may develop a habit of impatience with those who question, and he himself will take hold upon fixed creeds and conceptions which, if he weakens in his faith, will cause him to become either hopelessly reactionary, or silent. This was Kipling's development: he was young when he went to India as a responsible journalist, and he was naturally excited at what he saw and felt. The exciting aspects he emphasised - the "masculine" existence, the danger, the fights. The more common aspects were by that fact passed over by him: every bungalow he visits seems to have its particular mystery, each group of officials has its 'queer' characters; an excellent example of the lengths to which this journalistic technique can go is the story "At the end of the passage."

Even though the critics officially "write him off", and a very general, hazy conception of his "philosophy" causes some to avoid and many to mistrust his writings, there has nevertheless always been a large public willing to read his stories and

enjoy his verse. This is also a result of his early training as a journalist, for he learned to strike what common people like to read, and he is above all the writer of the "man in the street"; yet even here there is the idealisation of the subject, for it is a particular product of his imagination for whom he seems to write. The dialects are many and rich, yet all ~~are~~ are aids to identification of the speaker. The aggregate of all these speakers, dialects, subjects and 'types' is often believed to be Kipling's conception of Mankind. But surely the whole point is that there is a tacit understanding that the beginning of the yarn carries us into a little world of imagination where anything may happen? If this is not so, then there are many vast and violent contradictions in Kipling's work: which is a suggestion ignorant of the fact that the author was a human being.

The fact that this world of imagination can be assumed at the beginning of each tale gives us a more rational attitude towards his alleged "philosophy". Because "The Maltese Cat" is a brilliant piece of descriptive narration on a game of polo, and also one of Kipling's most moving animal stories, does not mean that the author thought the playing of polo to be life's greatest occupation: it does mean that he thought that each creature should accept his day's work and do it to the utmost of his ability even if he break himself in the process. Beyond that, there is nothing but a really effective tale: which was Kipling's vocation, yarn-spinning, not 'philosophising' all the time. Even so, there are many who would seek veracity in the stories!

II

Kipling was born in India, of such parents as would allow him to grow-up in comfortable circumstances, where the native was a servant, polite, respectful, yet never quite to be trusted: the white man was sahib, Master, demi-God. This background shaped his mind till, at five years of age, he was thrust-out into the broad and rather alien world of a country

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Lacking such a vast number of native servants who regarded the little Master as only inferior to the Deity himself. Worse than that, the status of "Black Sheep" in Portsmouth, England was much inferior to that of the servants in Bombay. For as many years as he had spent in India Kipling remained in Southsea: then he was entered at a Public School where he was to develop into the youth who went out, at 17 years, to write for the "Civil and Military Gazette" at Lahore, and to produce the brilliant "Plain Tales..." which established his position as a very considerable story-teller. The fact that the great men of letters at the time were driven to criticise his work is a fair estimate of his importance.

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The repression of the period in Southsea, and the "fog-years" at Westward Ho! are alleged to have bitten his mind with a strong capacity for fierce hatred. Whether this is true or not, he had throughout his life an intense personal reticence which seems to have had its first direct motive in the American interlude which followed his years in India. It drove him to seek privacy above all, to a "mysticism" and dislike of explanation which alienated many potential readers and followers. But now we must consider the very important Indian period.

It is impossible to associate the name of Kipling with anything or place but India; he is the vessel by which our notions of what life was, and is, like in that continent were formed. The earlier stories give an impression of long years of the company of Tallantires, Holdens, Stricklands; tribesmen, priests, "Real Indians"; Colonels, "privits"; Kings, Governors, tramps, Brothers, animals — in fact the whole of what goes to make the life of a vast and hot and exciting continent. Yet it is not strictly true: this far is correct, that he envisaged all of these peoples in the vivid imagination which built-up a whole body of "fixed ideas, which established" the organisation of that huge land-mass, in

The seven years which Kipling spent there. He physically and humanly could not have had the experiences he claims; the knowledge which he appears to possess is fragmented from slight observation; the answers he so lightly assumes to know are to questions which would not be satisfied by a life spent observing and attempting to administer the native peoples. Yet he flutters to extremes: on the one hand is the unbearable "knowingness" of the young, "bright", naughty boy who has disguised himself as a responsible Journalist. On the other hand there is the mysticism, the belief in powers unseen and unbelievable, the faith in the inner "secrets" of the natives, and the spiritual power they might wield. It never seems to have occurred to him that the great secret about the "great secret" of the East is that there is no "great secret." But as we have mentioned, Kipling loved the fixed conception and the concrete idea: his passion for "the law" is one manifestation of this desire for definite tenets: when he could not see a clear-cut explanation, when an abstraction was the only key to a problem, he was inclined to fly to the opposite extreme and ascribe mystic powers to the first native who came upon the scene; and this insight, or "Power", even became part of his long-experienced Administrators - for example Strickland in "The Return of Murray" savours of a sun-tanned "Sherlock Holmes" who dispenses with material aids to detection.

This love of the concrete conception caused Kipling great inconvenience when he had reason to doubt the substance of what he had thought solid: when the brilliant, respected, "naughty" Journalist got married there must have been a great strain upon his personal "Pan-ishness". Then the tragedy - for it is no less if it be not a farce - which harried him in Vermont; and the terrible blow when he lost his daughter's, and nearly his own, life in New York; and

finally the long period of distress which made him act as figure-head for a machine with which he had no heart, and which destroyed all that he most valued in life; - these represent a succession of blows which turned the prematurely successful young journalist into a hard, "reactionary", tired old man of letters.

The often moulted cry of "Reactionary! Tory!" - or such like - has its cause in the misunderstanding of Kipling's nature. He clung to what he thought were fundamental tenets: he expressed his belief in "the Law", a rather hazy conception, but one which had its roots in a very real feeling of the code of "essential decency" which kept Society together. But the utter disruption of that code of behaviour shook Kipling's faith in man; if only that had been all! But something far more tragic occurred; his own son, the very soul of his existence it seemed, was destroyed thoughtlessly in the war which was indirectly the result of the Imperialism led by Kipling himself. For at the end of the 19th Century "Imperialism was a sentiment rather than a policy; its foundations were moral rather than intellectual; its greatest exponent was Rudyard Kipling."

D.C. Somervell
"English Thought in the
19th Century", page 186

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Even worse than this "sentimental" attitude was the fact that Kipling had ~~took~~ taken the lead of the recruiting-drive now, in 1914, as he had at the turn of the century: even though he had begun to realize that the British Army is not an ever-glorious organization which fights simply for the fun of a "scrap;" and because of his position in the drive, how could his son avoid volunteering to serve his King and Country? It seems to be almost one of those "occurrences" in the logic of history that the boy should die at the "front."

Perhaps it was here that Kipling really died, and the critics saw this much when they proceeded to regard him as a "spent force". Even if this last blow were the real end, we have forgotten the trend of thought which produced "Recessional", for example. The wonderfully adventurous days

Remarkably —

Williamson —

in India represent the illusion: the idea of the "Law" which pervades life and is recognized by all men. The life devoted to service, "loyalty, discipline, duty: don't talk, get on with the job"; the "essential decency of man"; but then comes disillusion; the death of dearly loved-ones; the barbarity of civilized races; the realization that the white man may not be fit to spread his so-called civilization to the ancient races of Asia, and the East in general.

Then, as in the case of so many others at that time (Lodge, for example), Kipling was attracted by the world of "spirits"; he had used the medium in earlier works — "The Return of Anurag", "At the end of the passage" (pathological), "The Finest Story in the World" — but now the short-story-teller's tool, or technique, became a very absorbing study. The best example is, I feel, "The Gardener", a work so unlike the Indian tales that one might hesitate to ascribe to Kipling its authorship. This is the later Kipling who becomes less and less prolific and "popular", and whose passing receives no more than the conventional obituaries; since his death there has been no real criticism, or attempt to understand him: Shanks, Brown, T.S. Eliot, and others have considered, praised, or damned; little else is there, and none of that fierce "attack-and-counter" in which he himself would have delighted.

III

Kipling's first book — the "Plain Tales from the Hills" — was published in 1888, the year of Victoria's first Jubilee. Then came "Soldiers Three"; here was a brilliant teller of short-stories who found his subjects not in the streets of cities, nor the villages of Wessex, nor the country houses of aristocratic pretension: but rather in the Barrack-Rooms of the British Army, the rain-sodden bungalows of remote Residencies, the fever-

strengthen frontier-posts; the important dividing-line in Kipling's work comes when he ceases to talk of soldiers and begins to write of Doctors: yet they are all men who have jobs to do, and whose life is passed in service. The 7 years which he spent in India enabled him to produce much of his greatest works: he introduced the lovable figure of Thomas Atkins to the general "Reading Public"; and he set forth in a very great poem "The White Man's Burden" (published 1899) the only real, moral basis of Empire; in that poem is embodied the right spirit of Imperialism at its best. Soon the warning note appears - for "Recessional" is a siren rather than a hooter - with the demand that national humility should temper national pride. Do not let us be too hard upon Kipling for the "lesser breads" which accompany a prayer for deliverance from patriotic intoxication; rather, should one remember that although the British are God's chosen people, they are chosen above all for service, to be examples. The idea of duty is carried from the soldiers to the animals: it is treated allegorically in the Jungle Books, where the creatures of the wild all "fulfil themselves in obedience to the law of their being", except the monkeys - rabble of the animal kingdom - who refuse to recognize this "Law": one is reminded of those Radical politicians who were beginning at this time (the turn of the century) to bring about the end of the world into which Kipling and his creations so well fitted.

Somerset

The greatest exponent of Imperialism was Rudyard Kipling: he emphasised its best aspects - Service and Humility; but from his hands it was taken, to be interpreted in a dozen ways, as often as not Evil. It led indirectly to a war far more terrible than anything envisaged in the most horrific of his Indian Tales: so did it slaughter thousands of those same young men who should have lived "to Take-up the White Man's Burden". In this resultant prostitution of his noblest of themes Kipling found disillusionment: the greatest Prophet of the British race came to realize that ~~those~~ he had been too much of a youthful idealist: one would not be

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wrong to suggest that those same British races, of which he had held so high an estimation, for whom he could see ~~no~~ great a future, finally let him down!

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