

# KIPLING AND MASONRY

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Rudyard Kipling is one of the giants of modern English literary history. He towered over the closing decades of the Victorian era and lived well into the twentieth century.

Although current literary criticism tends to belittle or to ignore him-probably because he glorified British imperialism and the ideals of colonialism - there was a time when hundreds of "Kipling Clubs" met faithfully to read and to discuss his writings. Each new volume of his stories provided some of the most stimulating programs for those literary "fan clubs".

His place in literature seems assured. He knew how to tell a story, and he told many good ones. The art of the short story has had few masters who surpassed Rudyard Kipling. While his poetry is less extensive and perhaps less "inspired" than his prose, critics have generally agreed that he was a vigorous and, for his day, an unconventional poet, whose use of the British soldier's slang in verse was an outstanding success. "Gunga Din", "Mandalay", and "Danny Deever" have passed into the common fund of "folk culture" and are familiar to millions who couldn't tell you that Rudyard Kipling wrote them.

He was born in Bombay, India, on December 30, 1865. His father, John L. Kipling, was an artist of considerable ability. Like most British children born abroad, he was sent to England for his education, which he received at United Services College at Westward Ho, North Devon. By 1880, however, he was back in India, at Lahore, where at the age of seventeen he began his life's work, writing, as a sub-editor for The Civil and Military Gazette and Pioneer.

Some of his first short stories appeared in that journal. Between 1887 and 1889 he travelled extensively in Asia and America. He lived for four years in the Granite State, Vermont. In 1892 he married an American girl, Caroline Starr Batestier. He became acquainted with the leading American writers of the day, including Mark Twain, with whom he was later to receive an honorary degree from Oxford University, in 1907.

But England was his spiritual home. He settled there soon after his marriage, to become one of that country's most admired and prolific writers. In 1907 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the first English writer to win that prize. In his lifetime he was widely acclaimed and highly honored. He died on January 18, 1936, and was buried as an English hero in Westminster Abbey.

His popularity is illustrated by the report that Kipling himself might have titled, "The bank balance that wouldn't diminish." For a time the author couldn't understand why the checks he wrote in payment of his bills weren't being cashed. Upon investigation, he learned that some of them had been framed and hung on the walls of shops because of the famous signature. Other tradesmen had discovered that they could sell his autograph for considerably more than the cash value of the check. A brisk business in Kipling autographs had kept his own bank balance from decreasing!

Rudyard Kipling was a Mason. More significantly, he was an active and devoted Mason all his life. His writings contain many allusions and references to Masonic ideas and practices; some of them are completely Masonic in thought and motivation.

He was made a Mason in Hope and Perseverance Lodge No. 782 (English Constitution) at Lahore, Punjab, India in 1886. It required a special dispensation, because Kipling was only twenty years and six months of age at the time. The same evening that he was raised he was elected secretary of the lodge, so that he recorded his own initiation in the minutes of his mother lodge!

Only six months later he stood before his brethren, to give them good and wholesome instruction, by reading a paper "On the Origins of Masonry, and the First Degree in Particular." That was merely the beginning of a lifelong service of his heart, and mind, and pen in the interests of the Craft.

Rudyard Kipling became a Mark Master in Mark Lodge "Fidelity" on April 12, 1887, and received the Mark Mariners degree in Lodge "Mt. Ararat" at Lahore, April 17, 1888. In that year he also affiliated with Independence with Philanthropy Lodge No. 391 at Allahabad, Bengal. English Freemasonry has never prohibited dual or plural membership.

After settling in England, he also affiliated with Motherland Lodge No. 3861 in London, and helped to found two other lodges there, Author's Lodge No. 3456 and Lodge Builders of the Silent Cities No. 4948. In 1905 he was chosen poet laureate of Scotland's famous Canongate-Kilwinning Lodge No. 2, Edinburgh, and thereby became one of the successors to the immortal "Robbie" Burns, the first to hold that distinguished Masonic office.

That he was truly devoted to his mother lodge is shown not only by his well-known poem, "Mother Lodge", (which was written as early as 1886) but also by the fact that a few months before his death, realizing that he would never return to Lahore, he sent the lodge a gavel which bore the inscription, "Hope and Perseverance". Our English brethren have long practiced the affectionate custom of giving gifts to their mother lodges. The ancient officers' jewels of the Lodge of Antiquity No. 2, London, are such a gift of filial love.

What seems to have attracted and held Rudyard Kipling to Freemasonry are the same ideals and tenets which have fascinated men of brotherhood since time immemorial, the possibility of all good men "meeting on the level" and building a better society "by the square".

In 1925 he wrote in the London Freemason, "I was Secretary for some years of Hope and Perseverance Lodge No. 782, E.C., Lahore, which included Brethren of at least four creeds. I was entered by a member of Bramo Somaj, a Hindu; passed by a Mohammedan, and raised by an Englishman. Our Tyler was an Indian Jew. We met, of course, on the level, and the only difference anyone would notice was that at our banquets, some of the Brethren, who were debarred by caste rules from eating food not ceremonially prepared, sat over empty plates." (Kipling's memory slipped. Englishmen gave him all three degrees)

To the natives of Lahore in India the Freemasons' hall was "a house of magic", because they wouldn't believe that anything but magic could bring together so many military men of all ranks, so many men of different classes or castes, and so many men of different religions. It was the magic hope of a universal brotherhood which captured a great writer's imagination and gave it the perseverance to depict that hope throughout a lifetime of gifted authorship.

Among the collections of stories which Kipling published, these will probably assure his immortality: *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1887), *Life's Handicap* (1891), *Many Inventions* (1893), *The Jungle Book* (1894), *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), *Just So Stories for Children* (1902), *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), and *Debits and Credits* (1926).

*Plain Tales from the Hills* was an immediate success. These stories of English life in India helped to establish Kipling's reputation as a spokesman for the British Empire. The *Jungle Books* are regarded by many critics as his finest writing. These fascinating tales of wild animals are still best-sellers on book lists for children. The collections published in 1906 and 1910, were written for the children of England, to make them aware and proud of the country and its history.

In 1888-89 the author brought out a half dozen slender paper-bound volumes containing a single story. Among them are some of Kipling's best loved compositions: *Soldiers Three*, *The Phantom Rickshaw*, *Wee Willie Winkie*, and *Under the Deodars*.

He also tried his hand at novels or longer tales. *Kim* (1901), a picaresque novel of Indian life, is generally regarded as the best of these. Hollywood, however, turned into profitable movies two of Kipling's novels, *The Light that Failed* (1891) and *Captains Courageous* (1897). *Stalk y and Company* (1899), based on his experiences at United Services College, still has many admirers.

Kipling's poetry was an early product of his pen. 1886, the same year he was made a Mason, saw the publication of *Departmental Ditties*, a collection of light verse which foreshadowed his ability to express the sentiments of the British soldier in foreign service. This was followed by *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892), which contains the famous "Gunga Din", "Mandalay", and "Danny Deever". In 1896 appeared the collection of poems titled *The Seven Seas*, which contains the Masonic composition, "Mother Lodge"; and in 1903, *The Five Nations*, which includes the famous hymn, "The Recessional", which Kipling wrote in 1897 for the celebration of Queen Victoria's second jubilee.

A complete and scholarly catalog of all the Masonic allusions and references in Kipling's writings is still to be attempted. There are many, some quite obvious, like the plot of "The Man Who Would Be King" (in *Wee Willie Winkie*); and some not so obvious, like the reference to an American Masonic newspaper in *Traffics and Discoveries*. The final verses of the poem, "A Dedication", are clearly Masonic in their thought and expression. Many a phrase in Kipling's writings seems perfectly natural to the uninitiated reader, but to a Mason their fraternal source is unmistakable. There are obvious Masonic ideas in some of the *Plain Tales from the Hills*, as well as in the novel, *Kim*.

Masonic thoughts and expressions can also be found in the stories, "On the Great Wall", "The Winged Hat", "Hal o' the Draft" and "The City Wall". "With the Main Guard" contains a definite reference to the third degree. "The Carpenter" is pure Masonic philosophy. In *Debits and Credits* there are obvious Masonic allusions in such stories as "The Janeites", "A Friend of the Family", and "Madonna of the Trenches". "The Butterfly That Stamped" in *Just So Stories* pictures King Solomon adorned with a Masonic apron, sash, and trinket.

Some of Kipling's poems may be positively labelled "Masonic". Among them are "The Palace", "Banquet Night", "The Widow of Windsor", "Rough Ashlar" and "Mother Lodge", which first appeared in *The Seven Seas* (1896).

The story of "The Man Who Would Be King" (in *Wee Willie Winkie*) has a plot which is based on the degrees of Symbolic Masonry. Its "moral" suggests that no man may use Freemasonry to advance his own personal, selfish ends. "In the Interests of the Brethren" (in *Debits and Credits*) is a wholly Masonic story, which poignantly describes a meeting of crippled and wounded brethren after World War I at "a lodge of instruction", where they were able to "brush up" on their lectures. Kipling wrote the story to stimulate a movement for the establishment of a Masonic War Hospital in England.

Of Masonry there is indeed a plenty in the writings of Rudyard Kipling. He deserves a wider audience among the members of the Craft. If he would take the time to read, many a Mason would discover that Brother Kipling can entertain and enthrall him much better than the average show he watches on television. Brother Kipling knew how to tell a story.