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RUDYARD KIPLING IN NEW ENGLAND

HOWARD C. RICE

THE death of Rudyard Kipling has led people to review the details of his astonishing career. Universal renown came to him so early that younger readers of to-day look on him as belonging to a remote generation of " classics." They may have been surprised to learn that he was only seventy at the time of his death. Others have wondered at the fact that the poet of British imperialism and the story-teller of British India married an American wife and once lived in the United States. That *The Jungle Books* were written among the hills of Vermont has seemed not only paradoxical but incredible.

The tradition of visiting English authors and commentators is so well established now that Kipling's visit would call for no more than passing mention if he had come over as a writer in search of material or a lecturer looking for audiences. The facts are quite otherwise: he built his first home in New England, and there he wrote some of his best-known books. Although the circumstances of Kipling's residence in America, as well as " incidents " caused by certain of his remarks, have been recalled recently, few people know, or have cared to inquire how it was that Kipling happened to settle in New England — what he thought of it, and what New England thought of him.

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To understand Kipling's reasons for coming to live in the United States it is necessary to recall the figure of a now-forgotten American writer, Wolcott Balestier, who was born in Rochester, New York, in 1861, but spent much of his childhood in the home of his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Nerée Balestier, near Brattleboro, Vermont. As the name of the family indicates, the Balestiers were not of native stock. Joseph had come to the United States as a child from Martinique, in the West Indies. After an active business career in Chicago he retired to a country home which he built near Brattleboro. He had first become acquainted with this region through a visit to the once fashionable Wesselhoeft water-cure. His grandson, Wolcott, became a writer and went to New York. He was for a time employed in the Astor Library, wrote a life of Blaine for the presidential campaign of 1884, and soon published several novels — among them *Victorious Defeat* and *Benefits Forgot.* In 1888, young Balestier was sent to London as a representative and agent for John W. Lovell, a New York publisher. With a flair for business and a gift for making friends, Balestier very soon had a wide acquaintance among English writers and publishers. He became a partner of the firm of Heinemann and Balestier, among whose activities was the publication of *The English Library,* a series of English and American books designed to compete with the Tauchnitz Edition.

In his office in Dean's Yard, Westminster, and in the home which he maintained with his sister, Caroline Starr Balestier, Wolcott received in 1890 a young English author who had just returned from India by way of the United States — Rudyard Kipling. *Departmental Ditties* and *Plain Tales from the Hills* had already attracted wide attention; other tales of India were being published. This young journalist had also written for the Indian newspapers, the *Civil and Military Gazette* and the *Pioneer,* a series of letters describing his discovery of America and transcontinental journey in 1889 — letters (including an interview with Mark Twain) which

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were later collected and published in 1899 in a volume entitled *From Sea to Sea.* This Anglo-Indian's impressions of America were by no means entirely favorable, but although he could hardly tell why, his heart had gone out to Americans, and he began to love them — especially when he met the Englishmen who laughed at them!

Kipling and Balestier became intimate friends. They collaborated in the writing of *The Naulahka,* published in 1892, a "story of West and East" recounting the search of one Nicholas Tarvin of Topaz, Colorado, for a fabulously beautiful jewel worn by a Hindu maharajah. In 1891, while he was in Dresden in the interests of *The English Library,* Balestier was stricken with typhus, and died there on December 6 at the age of thirty. None was more affected by this tragic news than Balestier's sister Caroline and his friend, Rudyard Kipling. These two had already become engaged at the time of Wolcott Balestier's death. Their marriage took place in London in January, 1892. It was natural that Mrs. Kipling's thoughts should at such a time turn to her family in America and the hills where her brother and she had spent much of their childhood together.

Soon after their marriage the Kiplings set out for the United States. After the briefest of stops in New York they turned north, leaving behind them the city "with her roar and rattle, her complex smells, her triply overheated rooms, and much too energetic inhabitants." Kipling arrived in Vermont on the evening of the eighth of February, 1892. The thermometer marked thirty below freezing. He caught his breath as he stepped from the train into the midnight air, and then into the waiting sleigh, piled high with blankets and buffalo robes. Snow such as this was a new experience for him — he had previously seen it only from a distance, on the peaks of the Himalayas. He has described in *Letters of Travel* the deep impression made on him by this moonlit sleigh-ride through a snow-covered countryside, "beautiful beyond expression."

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The spectacle that greeted him the next morning was no less beautiful: a bright white landscape and blue sky, such as New England offers in her happier moods. Apparently it was a case of love at first sight, for during this brief February visit the Kiplings purchased a thirteen-acre pasture on which to build a home. The lot, which was just over the Brattleboro line in the town of Dummerston, adjoined the farm of Mrs. Kipling's grandparents. In the spring they came back to supervise the building of the house, for which a family friend, Henry Rutgers Marshall, had drawn the plans. During the months that followed, they lived at the "Bliss Farm," near by, where their first child was born — shortly before it was time to move into the new house. Kipling's father, a professor in the British School of Art in India, and himself an author, visited his son during the latter months of 1892. He, too, watched the construction of the house with the greatest interest. On the mantelpiece in his son's study he inscribed the words, FOR THE NIGHT COMETH WHEN NO MAN WORKS, and to the furnishing of this new home he contributed, among other things, India print hangings which were still in place a few years ago. The gray-shingled house, reminiscent of the bungalows of India, was called "Naulakha," the name of the fabulous Indian jewel in the novel written by Kipling and Wolcott Balestier.

In 1892 the hillside on which Naulakha was built — it has been pointed out that Kipling always spelled the name of his house "Naulakha," and the title of his novel "Naulahka" — was a treeless pasture. To-day the house is scarcely visible from the road, hidden as it is behind trees and shrubs, many of which Kipling planted with his own hands. To a friend who visited the partly constructed house Kipling explained the theory of it. The house was his ship: "The propeller, that is, the material provision of the furnace and kitchen, at the stern, and his own study, opening up on the roomy piazza looking to the south and east, at the bow." The rooms on each of the three floors all face the east, and are entered from long corri-

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dors along the western side of the house, where the main entrance is also to be found. To the east of the house green fields slope down to the road, and far off on the horizon is Mount Monadnock, " like a giant thumbnail pointing heavenward." Kipling had a great liking for this mountain, which he called his weather prophet. Many years earlier he had come across this name in a parody of Emerson's style. The word had shuttled in and out of his memory until it had led him to Emerson's poem on the wise old giant " busy with his sky affairs." Then he became acquainted with the mountain itself, and finally gave to one of his own essays the title " In Sight of Monadnock."

Here at Naulakha, in sight of Monadnock, Kipling lived and worked until August, 1896. Although he disliked any unnecessary invasion of his private life, he was the most genial and hospitable of hosts to those whom he accepted as his friends. With one of these, the late Miss Mary R. Cabot, the present writer has had the privilege of many conversations. From such memories and from the record to be found in Kipling's own writings it has been possible to reconstruct this account of the famous author's residence in America. Those who saw him in the village streets recall his impressive carriage and coachman, or perhaps his own somewhat unprepossessing appearance which sometimes caused him to be mistaken for " some weatherbeaten farmhand, bent from much hoeing on Vermont hills " — but those who made frequent visits to Naulakha have another picture of the man. They all recall his captivating conversation, which embraced everything from remote rajahs of India to English society and American politics. They remember, too, the keen power of observation in his eyes which, from behind thick glasses, took in every part of a scene at a glance, or his amazing memory, which would revive the details of some small incident long forgotten by every one else.

Occasionally he would read chapters from some work in progress; again he would delight his guests by composing

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innumerable verses upon some foolish or insignificant remark. With his left hand he would drum out the metre, while reciting the verses as rapidly as possible, and sometimes draw illustrations with his right hand. But no matter how clever such verses might be, Kipling would never allow any one to write them down and save them. On Sunday he often spent part of the day composing hymns, for he disliked going to church, where he knew he would be stared at. Before he destroyed these verses he would read them to his Monday guests. A small model theatre provided another diversion. In this Kipling would manipulate the entrances and exits of paper figures while discussing his ambition to write a play. He often did write plays for the amusement of his guests — especially successful was a Christmas Eve skit in which each guest played the part of himself.

Not all Kipling's amusements were indoors. With one of his American friends, " a quiet slow-spoken man of the West . . . who loved the woods for their own sake, and not for the sake of slaughter," he took long walks on snowshoes, learned about the manners and customs of New Englanders at home and along the new railway lines in the Far West, of the animals and birds of the Vermont woods, and the Indian names of mountains and brooks. With another friend he devised a system of snow golf, described as follows:

We played golf over snow two feet deep, upon the crust, cutting holes into the soft snow, and naturally losing the balls, until it occurred to him to ink them red. The first day we experimented with them, we dyed the plain like some football gridiron or Hohenlinden; then we had them painted. The trouble with golfing on the crust was that as the meadow was upon a side hill with gradual slope, a ball went on for ever when once started unless headed off by some kindly stone wall or by one's opponent. It was an easy matter to make a drive of two miles. As spring came little putting greens emerged like oases in the snow, and then we had holes made of empty vegetable cans sunk in the moist soil, round which we would manoeuvre in rubber boots.

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For a touch of courtesy I recollect his intentional miss of a hole one inch away, throwing the victory to me, who was a stroke and five yards behind him. Retiring from outdoor sports, we would repair to the library for tea and talk.[1]

There were no visitors at Naulakha before lunch. In the library, at the bow of his "ship," Kipling worked every morning from nine until one. To enter this room it was necessary to pass through a smaller one, "the dragon's chamber," where Mrs. Kipling sat with her sewing. No one resented more fiercely than she any intrusion or interruption of her husband's working hours. The amount of work accomplished here in the study at Naulakha is impressive. Among the books completed or written during the years 1892–1896 were: the two *Jungle Books,* some of the short stories included in *The Day's Work,* many of the poems in the *Seven Seas,* and *Captains Courageous. The Jungle Books* must have been already formulated in Kipling's imagination, if not actually written down, at the time of his arrival in Vermont. At a Thanksgiving dinner in the home of a friend, he described for the benefit of the children present, the doings of the troops of monkeys he had known in India. The description made a vivid impression upon the adults as well as upon the children, although they probably did not then realize that the doings of the Bandar-Log were soon to command the attention of an audience as wide as the world. There is an interesting story connected with the manuscript of the Mowgli stories. In February, 1893, Kipling gave this to the nurse who had cared for Mrs. Kipling and the infant daughter born in the late autumn of 1892. He told the nurse that she was to sell it if she were ever hard up. When she had to do so some years later, the manuscript found its way eventually into the hands of the late William M. Carpenter, a collector of Kipling.

1 Reverend C. O. Day, "Rudyard Kipling as Seen in his Vermont Home" (1899), reprinted in Mary R. Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro* (Brattleboro, Vermont, 1922). Miss Cabot's two-volume work contains other valuable information which has been used in this article. Some additional material is to be found in Charles Crane, *Pendrift* (Brattleboro, 1931).

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Although *The Jungle Books* were inspired by much earlier experiences, the germ of another book, *Captains Courageous: A Story of the Grand Banks,* seems to have been planted in Kipling's mind at Naulakha. Dr. James Conland, the family physician, who had shipped as a sailor in his boyhood, was a frequent visitor. Kipling often listened to his stories of adventures aboard fishing vessels, coasters, and East-India traders; later he made a trip to Gloucester in the company of Dr. Conland and other friends. The manuscript of *Captains Courageous,* which was given to Dr. Conland, later came into the possession of the Morgan Library. In the printed volume one can still read the dedication to this friend, with these verses by Longfellow:

> I ploughed the land with horses,
> But my heart was ill at ease,
> For the old sea-faring men
> Came to me now and then,
> With their sagas of the seas.

During this period Kipling's fame and the demand for his work were constantly growing. So great was the volume of his mail that he succeeded in 1895 in having a private post-office established at a cross-roads near his home. It was called "Waite" after the name of the postmistress, Miss Anna F. Waite. One of Kipling's friends related the following story concerning the popularity of his work: Kipling once received from Mr. Bok, the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal,* a request to write a story for that periodical, a magazine for which he had a particular dislike. Thinking to outwit Bok, Kipling replied in the affirmative but deliberately set an exorbitant sum as his price. To his astonishment, the offer was immediately accepted; so he proceeded to submit the manuscript of "William the Conqueror." A few days later there arrived a letter from Bok, who requested that other beverages be substituted for the whiskey and champagne mentioned in the story, because it was against the principles of the *Ladies'*

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Home Journal even to mention the use of intoxicating liquors. Kipling replied that such a substitution was impossible, and that the story must be published as written or not at all. Bok yielded, and Kipling always liked to tell his friends how he had forced the *Ladies' Home Journal* to print the name of an alcoholic beverage.

Although readers will find occasional traces of Kipling's American experiences in his better known works, it is to a few fugitive essays, later brought together with others and published in 1920 under the title *Letters of Travel,* that they must go for the record of Kipling's mature impressions of the American scene. This volume is not to be confused with the two volumes entitled *From Sea to Sea: Letters of Travel,* published in 1899, which contain impressions of Kipling's American tour in 1889. The notion that Kipling strongly disliked America is not borne out by a careful reading of such essays as "In Sight of Monadnock,"[2] "On One Side Only," and "Leaves from a Winter Note-Book." It would be hard to find, even among American writers, any more keenly observant and appreciative pages on a New England winter: the strength of a great blizzard, the "splendid jewellery" of the ice-storm, the "blue, breathless" days, the Japanese landscapes in black and white. Kipling was aware, too, of the terror and solitude of such a season, breeding dreams, visions, hatred, and fear in the minds of lonely, brooding men and women. He delighted in the late but miraculous spring, taking note of the "first blood-root . . . between the patches of April snow," and the other wild flowers in their season. He celebrated the first may-

[2] This essay was first published in a commercial compilation entitled *Picturesque Brattleboro,* Reverend Frank T. Pomeroy, Editor, (Northampton, Massachusetts, 1894). A comparison of this version with the one printed in 1920 in *Letters of Travel* shows that many sentences, and even whole paragraphs, were omitted in the earlier printed text. The nature of the omissions seems to indicate that either Kipling himself, or perhaps the cautious editor, desired to spare the susceptibilities of prospective purchasers of *Picturesque Brattleboro.* It may be noted here that this album contains photographs of Kipling's home as it appeared in 1894.

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flower in one of his poems, and once declared to a friend that he would never think of leaving Naulakha while the wood-anemones were in bloom. The " flaming blood-red maples " won his admiration in autumn; while during his first summer in Vermont he decided that the New England summer had creole blood in her veins!

It is not surprising to find that a man who described with such skill the animals of the East should also observe the animals of the West: the woodchuck down in the field, the red squirrels among the beeches and hickories, and the "partridges" eating the checkerberries on the outskirts of the wood. He learned to recognize the tracks of fox and deer in the snow, and the sorrowful cry of " brer coon " at night. Although there is but a casual mention of these animals in his writing, Kipling did make at least one attempt to build a story around his new acquaintances: " A Walking Delegate," the chief characters of which are Vermont horses. A few years ago one could still see in Kipling's study a series of statuettes depicting the characters of the Uncle Remus stories — a present from Joel Chandler Harris. These characters were of great interest to him, and he was struck by the fact that he could find a prototype for many of them in the folklore of India. It is amusing to imagine that Brer Rabbit and Rikki-tikki-tavi and the Elephant's Child joined hands, in Kipling's mind at least — belying his own famous words about the East and the West.

Kipling's interest was not confined to the American landscape, to plants and animals; it extended to the inhabitants of the country about his home. " The long, unhurried drawl of Vermont " was a source of constant wonder to him. He thought that New England dialect, although supposedly written in English and its type, might just as well be printed in Swedish or Russian! But he liked these people: " unhandy men to cross in their ways, set, silent, indirect in speech, and as impenetrable as that other Eastern farmer who is the bed-rock of another land." They did not often appear in the

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papers; they told very little in the outsider's estimate of America, and yet no less than several millions of these people were Americans. Kipling observed the social transformations which were taking place in this region. He was acquainted with the deserted farms twenty or thirty miles across the hills on the way to the Green Mountains, "started in a lean land, held fiercely as long as there was any one to work them, and then left on the hill-sides." He knew that the West and the cities were draining this country of its inhabitants — farmers who a generation earlier had made their own clothes, soap, candles, and food, and now bought them at shops. Nothing amused him more than the race of itinerant peddlers and wandering quacks who annually invaded the region, hawking their wares from farm to farm: huge red-and-gilt biographies of Presidents, twenty-pound family Bibles, genuine steel engravings, patent electric pills, seeds, pins, and flavoring-extracts! About one of these, a florist's representative peddling seeds, who had come "to swindle every citizen from Keene to Lake Champlain," Kipling wrote a poem in 1893 — "Pan in Vermont."

There is, then, plenty of evidence to show that Kipling appreciated, and even loved, many of the things he found in America. But it would be a mistake to think that this appreciation and affection included all Americans and all things American. There were many things he did not like, and the bluntness with which he stated his opinions often stirred resentment. He had little sympathy for the summer boarders, who came from the cities of the plain, faithfully dragging their telephones and telegraphs after them, panting to do things, talking of "getting there" and "being left." The droves of women with their kodaks, their nerves, and their passion for stripping the bark off white birches to make blue-ribboned waste-paper baskets especially annoyed him. This antipathy dated back to his tour through Yellowstone Park in 1889. He spoke scathingly of their "Gospel of Rush," and remarked that they would return "partially civilised, soon

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to be resavaged by the clash of a thousand wars whose echoes do not reach here."

Kipling had little good to say of New York City. He inveighed against its lawlessness, its squalid barbarism, its reckless extravagance, its disregard for human life, its shiftlessness, and its corruption. All these unflattering remarks, including the reference to " the long, narrow pig-trough " are preserved for the curious to read in the essay, " Across a Continent." Nor did Kipling wholly overcome his mistrust of Main Street, the term he used to describe the small town near his residence. To him it seemed that the inhabitants lived on terms of " terrifying intimacy." He noticed that although Main Street had little to do with strangers like himself, Main Street knew everything — and much more — that went on among them. Their clothing, their cattle, the manners of their children, their bearing towards servants — all such matters and many more he reported and discussed. Although he complained that the native wisdom of Vermont was not always equal to the task of grasping the problems of the lives of others with delicacy — that its mistakes were sometimes pathetic — he philosophically concluded that towns of a certain size were more or less similar the whole world over.

Kipling, like many other English visitors to the United States before and since, resented what he termed Yankee curiosity — what the Yankees themselves thought was nothing more than being friendly or neighborly. American reporters were his especial bugbear. He had not forgotten those who welcomed him at San Francisco when he first visited the United States in 1889. Many stories are told of his studied attempts to evade their persistent efforts to penetrate into his retreat at Naulakha. Such annoyances colored Kipling's judgments of America and often led him to make those sweeping statements which were quoted widely, and to his disadvantage. A small incident or remark would, according to his friends, often distort his whole view of a subject. These same friends knew better than any one that Kipling remained an

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Englishman at heart, an Englishman whose patriotism had been sharpened and accentuated by long absence from Great Britain. He could rarely see the gleam of idealism which lay beneath America's commercialism and lust for wealth. With one of his Vermont friends Kipling used to discuss "The Great American Novel" and his own ambition to write it; but this friend could only smile to herself, for she realized that, in spite of his genius, he utterly lacked the necessary understanding of America to do this. In 1894 he made his most serious attempt to define the essence of America in the poem, "The American Spirit Speaks," with its well-known lines,

> The cynic devil in his blood
> That bids him mock his hurrying soul,
> That bids him flout the Law he makes,
> That bids him make the Law he flouts.

Kipling accused Americans of a "savage parochial pride that squeals under a steady stare or a pointed finger," and yet he himself fiercely resented any criticism of British policy. During his residence in America the dispute between Great Britain and the United States over the boundary of Venezuela called forth, in a certain section of the American press, that latent Anglophobia which bursts out time and again — sometimes on the slightest pretext. As he read such articles he would, according to a friend, "smile a quiet smile" and make "mental comparison of American and English navies." Once when a luncheon guest at Naulakha replied rather flippantly to some remark on the trouble in Venezuela, Kipling asked her with some vehemence if she realized that "The Great White Squadron" could wipe out the cities on the Atlantic coast of her country within a few days. When the lady acknowledged that she did not and questioned the truth of the supposition, her host became so angry that he got up and left the table. Such touchiness is not surprising to those who recall the glorification of the Empire which came from his

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pen in the next few years, combined with bitter attacks on opponents at home and abroad who dared to question his peculiar brand of imperialism.

Kipling's plans for Naulakha had every evidence of permanence. On various occasions both he and his wife expressed the opinion that the conditions there were ideal for his creative work. The achievements of these years would seem to confirm the statements. While it is clear that Kipling's adaptation to American ways was never complete, yet it is doubtful if the fact that he was a foreigner would have led him to leave Vermont had not an unpleasant quarrel crystallized latent resentment. A discussion with a near relative over a boundary line led to an altercation and blustering threats. The case got into court; so what might have remained a row in the family became the property of the public. To have private affairs discussed in Main Street was bad enough, but the presence of reporters from the metropolitan dailies was insufferable to a man of Kipling's susceptibilities. The calm of Naulakha and the peace of his own mind were completely shattered. In August, 1896, he left Vermont and returned to England, there to make his home.

In 1899 Kipling made his last visit to the United States. Not only was he critically ill in New York, but his eldest child, Josephine, died at the same time. In spite of painful associations, however, Kipling must have preserved many pleasant memories of the four years during which he lived in Vermont. At a later date he wrote to a friend there that his wife and he were crouched over an inadequate fire aching with the English cold and longing for Naulakha. The dwelling still stands — firmly anchored to its hillside, a reminder that Kipling once made the land his home.

In 1922, when the newspapers were heatedly discussing some disparaging remarks which Kipling made on America's rôle in the war, a New York columnist protested: "What difference does it make if he is an insufferable Tory? He wrote *The Jungle Book*. Has everybody forgotten that?" Any real

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account of Kipling in America would not deal with the mortal man who quarrelled over a patch of land with a neighbor but rather with the teller of stories which have fascinated the minds and the hearts of its people. But that, to use Kipling's own phrase, " is another story."

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