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Kim

RUDYARD KIPLING



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KIM

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Rudyard Kipling



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INTRODUCTION

Kim (1901) is widely regarded as Rudyard Kipling's finest work, combining his first-hand knowledge of India and the Indians with his graphic and acute observation of human interaction and his flair for historical context. Kim's real name is Kimball O'Hara, the orphaned son of a sergeant in an Irish regiment. Kim's childhood is spent as a waif and vagabond on the streets and in the bazaars of Lahore, until he meets an old Tibetan holy man or lama who is in search of a mystical river and Kim accompanies him on his journey. On the way he joins up with his father's old regiment, is adopted and sent to school. However, he continues his wanderings during his holidays. Colonel Creighton of the Ethnological Survey is struck by Kim's aptitude for secret intelligence work and he joins the British Secret Service. Under the tutelage of an Indian agent, Hurree Babu, he joined in the 'great game' of espionage which was played with the Russians along the North West Frontier of the Indian Empire for very nearly the entire duration of British rule in the sub-continent. Kim, while white, is very much a creature of the land of his birth and the book describes his straddling of the divide between the everyday life of ordinary Indians and the concerns of the British Raj, and contrasts Kim's secular and action-packed life with the spiritual and contemplative searching of his friend the Tibetan priest, in the physically diverse settings of the hostile terrain of the North West Frontier and the whirling kaleidoscope of life on the Indian plains.

Rudyard Joseph Kipling was born in Bombay on 30 December 1865, the son of the artist John Lockwood Kipling and Alice Kipling (*née* Macdonald), the sister-in-law of the artist Edward Burne-Jones. In 1871 he was taken with his sister, Alice Macdonald Kipling ('Trix'), to England to board at Lorne Lodge in Southsea. Here he endured five miserable years which he looked back on with deep bitterness. In January 1878 he went to the newly-founded United Services College at Westward Ho!, near Bideford in Devon,

which he described in *Stalky & Co.* and in which he cast himself as 'the egregious beetle'. In 1880 he met and fell in love with Florence Garrard, who boarded with his sister at Southsea, and on whom he was to model Maisie in *The Light that Failed*. He became editor of the *United Services College Chronicle* in 1881.

He left school in the summer of 1882 and set sail for India on 20 September. He arrived in Bombay on 18 October to begin work on the *Labore Civil and Military Gazette*, writing stories as well as news. In 1889, shortly after publication of *Plain Tales from the Hills* and *Soldiers Three*, he returned to London where he became a literary success following publication of *The Light that Failed* (1890) and *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892). That year he married an American, Caroline Ballestier, and moved with her to Vermont where they lived for four years and during which time he wrote *The Jungle Book*. The Kiplings returned to England in 1896 and settled in Sussex, which forms the background for *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910). Other children's books such as *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Just-So Stories* (1902) were written for Kipling's two children. John Kipling, his son, was reported missing on his first day in action with the Irish Guards at the battle of Loos on 27 September 1915. His body has only recently been identified and placed in a marked grave. A sense of bitter emptiness entered Kipling's work after this tragedy; he became a member of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1917 and he refused to accept the Poet Laureateship and other civil honours. However, he was the recipient of honorary degrees from the universities of Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, McGill, Oxford, the Sorbonne, and Strasbourg, and he was the first Englishman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1907). He died on 18 January 1936. His autobiographical fragment, *Something of Myself For My Friends Known and Unknown*, was published posthumously in 1937.

FURTHER READING

Lord Birkenhead: *Rudyard Kipling*, 1978

C. E. Carrington: *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*, 1955; 3rd edn, rev., 1978

S. S. Husain: *Kipling and India*, 1965

R. Kipling: *Something of Myself*, 1937

G. Orwell: *Rudyard Kipling*, Horizon 1942 (available in *The Decline of the English Murder & Other Essays*, 1965)

A. Wilson: *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, 1977

KIM

Chapter 1

Oh ye who tread the Narrow Way
By Tophet-flare to judgment Day,
Be gentle when 'the heathen' pray
To Buddha at Kamakura!

HE SAT, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher – the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-Zammah, that 'fire-breathing dragon', hold the Punjab, for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot.

There was some justification for Kim – he had kicked Lala Dinanath's boy off the trunnions – since the English held the Punjab and Kim was English. Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain singsong; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white – a poor white of the very poorest. The half-caste woman who looked after him (she smoked opium, and pretended to keep a second-hand furniture shop by the square where the cheap cabs wait) told the missionaries that she was Kim's mother's sister; but his mother had been nursemaid in a colonel's family and had married Kimball O'Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment. He afterwards took a post on the Sind, Punjab, and Delhi Railway, and his regiment went home without him. The wife died of cholera in Ferozepore, and O'Hara fell to drink and loafing up and down the line with the keen-eyed three-year-old baby. Societies and chaplains, anxious for the child, tried to catch him, but O'Hara drifted away, till he came across the woman who took opium and learned the taste from her, and died as poor whites die in India. His estate at death consisted of three papers – one he called his *ne varietur* because those words were written below his signature thereon, and another his 'clearance-certificate'. The third was Kim's birth-certificate. Those things, he was used to say, in his glorious opium-hours, would yet make little Kimball a man. On no account was Kim to part with them, for they belonged to a great piece of magic – such magic as men practised over yonder behind the museum, in the big blue-and-white Jadoo-Gher – the magic house, as we name the Masonic lodge. It

would, he said, all come right someday, and Kim's horn would be exalted between pillars – monstrous pillars – of beauty and strength. The colonel himself, riding on a horse, at the head of the finest regiment in the world, would attend to Kim – little Kim that should have been better off than his father. Nine hundred first-class devils, whose god was a red bull on a green field, would attend to Kim, if they had not forgotten O'Hara – poor O'Hara that was gang-foreman on the Ferozepore line. Then he would weep bitterly in the broken rush chair on the veranda. So it came about after his death that the woman sewed parchment, paper, and birth-certificate into a leather amulet-case which she strung round Kim's neck.

'And someday,' she said, confusedly remembering O'Hara's prophecies, 'there will come for you a great red bull on a green field, and the colonel riding on his tall horse, yes, and' dropping into English – 'nine hundred devils.'

'Ah,' said Kim, 'I shall remember. A red bull and a colonel on a horse will come, but first, my father said, will come the two men making ready the ground for these matters. That is how my father said they always did; and it is always so when men work magic.'

If the woman had sent Kim up to the local Jadoo-Gher with those papers, he would, of course, have been taken over by the Provincial Lodge, and sent to the Masonic orphanage in the hills; but what she had heard of magic she distrusted. Kim, too, held views of his own. As he reached the years of indiscretion, he learned to avoid missionaries and white men of serious aspect who asked who he was, and what he did. For Kim did nothing with an immense success. True, he knew the wonderful walled city of Lahore from the Delhi Gate to the outer fort ditch; was hand in glove with men who led lives stranger than anything Haroun al Raschid dreamed of; and he lived in a life wild as that of the Arabian Nights, but missionaries and secretaries of charitable societies could not see the beauty of it. His nickname through the wards was 'Little-Friend-of-all-the-World'; and very often, being lithe and inconspicuous, he executed commissions by night on the crowded housetops for sleek and shiny young men of fashion. It was intrigue – of course he knew that much, as he had known all evil since he could speak – but what he loved was the game for its own sake – the stealthy prow through the dark gullies and lanes, the crawl up a waterpipe, the sights and sounds of the women's world on the flat roofs, and the headlong flight from housetop to housetop under cover of the hot dark. Then there were holy men, ash-smeared *fakirs* by their brick shrines under the trees at the river-side, with whom he was quite familiar – greeting them as they

returned from begging-tours, and, when no one was by, eating from the same dish. The woman who looked after him insisted with tears that he should wear European clothes – trousers, a shirt and a battered hat. Kim found it easier to slip into Hindu or Mohammedan garb when engaged on certain businesses. One of the young men of fashion – he who was found dead at the bottom of a well on the night of the earthquake – had once given him a complete suit of Hindu kit, the costume of a low-caste street boy, and Kim stored it in a secret place under some baulks in Nila Ram's timberyard, beyond the Punjab High Court, where the fragrant deodar logs lie seasoning after they have driven down the Ravi. When there was business or frolic afoot, Kim would use his properties, returning at dawn to the veranda, all tired out from shouting at the heels of a marriage procession, or yelling at a Hindu festival. Sometimes there was food in the house, more often there was not, and then Kim went out again to eat with his native friends.

As he drummed his heels against Zam-Zammah he turned now and again from his king-of-the-castle game with little Chota Lal and Abdullah the sweetmeat-seller's son, to make a rude remark to the native policeman on guard over rows of shoes at the museum door. The big Punjabi grinned tolerantly: he knew Kim of old. So did the water-carrier, sluicing water on the dry road from his goatskin bag. So did Jawahir Singh, the museum carpenter, bent over new packing-cases. So did everybody in sight except the peasants from the country, hurrying up to the Wonder House to view the things that men made in their own province and elsewhere. The museum was given up to Indian arts and manufactures, and anybody who sought wisdom could ask the curator to explain.

'Off! Off! Let me up!' cried Abdullah, climbing up Zam-Zammah's wheel.

'Thy father was a pastry-cook, Thy mother stole the *ghi*,' sang Kim. 'All Mussalmans fell off Zam-Zammah long ago!'

'Let *me* up!' shrilled little Chota Lal in his gilt-embroidered cap. His father was worth perhaps half a million sterling, but India is the only democratic land in the world.

'The Hindus fell off Zam-Zammah too. The Mussalmans pushed them off. Thy father was a pastry-cook –'

He stopped; for there shuffled round the corner, from the roaring Motee Bazar, such a man as Kim, who thought he knew all castes, had never seen. He was nearly six feet high, dressed in fold upon fold of dingy stuff like horse-blanketing, and not one fold of it could Kim refer to any known trade or profession. At his belt hung a long

openwork iron pence and a wooden rosary such as holy men wear. On his head was a gigantic sort of tam-o'-shanter. His face was yellow and wrinkled, like that of Fook Shing, the Chinese bootmaker in the bazar. His eyes turned up at the corners and looked like little slits of onyx.

'Who is that?' said Kim to his companions.

'Perhaps it is a man,' said Abdullah, finger in mouth, staring.

'Without doubt,' returned Kim; 'but he is no man of India that I have ever seen.'

'A priest, perhaps,' said Chota Lal, spying the rosary. 'See! He goes into the Wonder House!'

'Nay, nay,' said the policeman, shaking his head. 'I do not understand your talk.' The constable spoke Punjabi. 'O Friend-of-all-the-World, what does he say?'

'Send him hither,' said Kim, dropping from Zam-Zammah, flourishing his bare heels. 'He is a foreigner, and thou art a buffalo.'

The man turned helplessly and drifted towards the boys. He was old, and his woollen gaberdine still reeked of the stinking artemisia of the mountain passes.

'O Children, what is that big house?' he said in very fair Urdu.

'The Ajaib-Gher, the Wonder House!' Kim gave him no title – such as Lala or Mian. He could not divine the man's creed.

'Ah! the Wonder House! Can any enter?'

'It is written above the door – all can enter.'

'Without payment?'

'I go in and out. I am no banker,' laughed Kim.

'Alas! I am an old man. I did not know.' Then, fingering his rosary, he half turned to the museum.

'What is your caste? Where is your house? Have you come far?' Kim asked.

'I came by Kulu – from beyond the Kailas – but what know you? From the hills where' – he sighed – 'the air and water are fresh and cool.'

'Aha! Khitai [a Chinaman],' said Abdullah proudly. Fook Shing had once chased him out of his shop for spitting at the joss above the boots.

'Pahari [a hillman],' said little Chota Lal.

'Aye, child – a hillman from hills thou'lt never see. Didst hear of Bhotiyal [Tibet]? I am no Khitai, but a Bhotiya [Tibetan], since you must know – a lama – or, say, a *guru* in your tongue.'

'A *guru* from Tibet,' said Kim. 'I have not seen such a man. They be Hindus in Tibet, then?'

'We be followers of the middle way, living in peace in our lamaseries, and I go to see the four holy places before I die. Now do you, who are children, know as much as I do who am old.' He smiled benignantly on the boys.

'Hast thou eaten?'

He fumbled in his bosom and drew forth a worn, wooden begging-bowl. The boys nodded. All priests of their acquaintance begged.

'I do not wish to eat yet.' He turned his head like an old tortoise in the sunlight. 'Is it true that there are many images in the Wonder House of Lahore?' He repeated the last words as one making sure of an address.

'That is true,' said Abdullah. 'It is full of heathen *buts*. Thou also art an idolater.'

'Never mind *him*,' said Kim. 'That is the government's house and there is no idolatry in it, but only a sahib with a white beard. Come with me and I will show.'

'Strange priests eat boys,' whispered Chota Lal.

'And he is a stranger and a *but-parast* [idolater],' said Abdullah, the Mohammedan.

Kim laughed. 'He is new. Run to your mothers' laps, and be safe. Come!'

Kim clicked round the self-registering turnstile; the old man followed and halted amazed. In the entrance-hall stood the larger figures of the Greco-Buddhist sculptures done, savants know how long since, by forgotten workmen whose hands were feeling, and not unskilfully, for the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch. There were hundreds of pieces, friezes of figures in relief, fragments of statues and slabs crowded with figures that had encrusted the brick walls of the Buddhist *stupas* and *viharas* of the North Country and now, dug up and labelled, made the pride of the Museum. In open-mouthed wonder the lama turned to this and that, and finally checked in rapt attention before a large alto-relief representing a coronation or apotheosis of the Lord Buddha. The master was represented seated on a lotus the petals of which were so deeply undercut as to show almost detached. Round him was an adoring hierarchy of kings, elders, and old-time Buddhas. Below were lotus-covered waters with fishes and water-birds. Two butterfly-winged devas held a wreath over His head; above them another pair supported an umbrella surmounted by the jewelled headdress of the Bodhisat.

'The Lord! The Lord! It is Sakya Muni himself,' the lama half sobbed; and under his breath began the wonderful Buddhist invocation:

To him the way – the law – apart,
Whom Maya held beneath her heart,
Ananda's lord – the Bodhisat.

'And He is here! The most excellent law is here also. My pilgrimage is well begun. And what work! What work!'

'Yonder is the sahib,' said Kim, and dodged sideways among the cases of the arts and manufacturers wing. A white-bearded Englishman was looking at the lama, who gravely turned and saluted him and after some fumbling drew forth a notebook and a scrap of paper.

'Yes, that is my name,' smiling at the clumsy, childish print.

'One of us who had made pilgrimage to the holy places – he is now abbot of the Lung-Cho Monastery – gave it me,' stammered the lama. 'He spoke of these.' His lean hand moved tremulously round.

'Welcome, then, O lama from Tibet. Here be the images, and I am here' – he glanced at the lama's face – 'to gather knowledge. Come to my office awhile.' The old man was trembling with excitement.

The office was but a little wooden cubicle partitioned off from the sculpture-lined gallery. Kim laid himself down, his ear against a crack in the heat-split cedar door, and, following his instinct, stretched out to listen and watch.

Most of the talk was altogether above his head. The lama, haltingly at first, spoke to the curator of his own lamassery, the Such-zen, opposite the Painted Rocks, four months' march away. The curator brought out a huge book of photos and showed him that very place, perched on its crag, overlooking the gigantic valley of many-hued strata.

'Ay, ay!' The lama mounted a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles of Chinese work. 'Here is the little door through which we bring wood before winter. And thou – the English know of these things? He who is now abbot of Lung-Cho told me, but I did not believe. The Lord – the excellent one – He has honour here too? And His life is known?'

'It is all carven upon the stones. Come and see, if thou art rested.'

Out shuffled the lama to the main hall, and, the curator beside him, went through the collection with the reverence of a devotee and the appreciative instinct of a craftsman.

Incident by incident in the beautiful story he identified on the blurred stone, puzzled here and there by the unfamiliar Greek convention, but delighted as a child at each new trove. Where the sequence failed, as in the annunciation, the curator supplied it from his mound of books – French and German, with photographs and reproductions.

Here was the devout Asita, the pendant of Simeon in the Christian story, holding the holy child on his knee while mother and father listened; and here were incidents in the legend of the cousin Devadatta. Here was the wicked woman who accused the master of impurity, all confounded; here was the teaching in the deer-park; the miracle that stunned the fire-worshippers; here was the Bodhisat in royal state as a prince; the miraculous birth; the death at Kusinagara, where the weak disciple fainted; while there were almost countless repetitions of the meditation under the Bodhi tree; and the adoration of the alms-bowl was everywhere. In a few minutes the curator saw that his guest was no mere bead-telling mendicant, but a scholar of parts. And they went at it all over again, the lama taking snuff, wiping his spectacles, and talking at railway speed in a bewildering mixture of Urdu and Tibetan. He had heard of the travels of the Chinese pilgrims, Fu-Hioun and Hwen-Tsiang, and was anxious to know if there was any translation of their record. He drew in his breath as he turned helplessly over the pages of Beal and Stanislas Julien. ' 'Tis all here. A treasure locked.' Then he composed himself reverently to listen to fragments hastily rendered into Urdu. For the first time he heard of the labours of European scholars, who by the help of these and a hundred other documents have identified the holy places of Buddhism. Then he was shown a mighty map, spotted and traced with yellow. The brown finger followed the curator's pencil from point to point. Here was Kapilavastu, here the middle kingdom, and here Mahabodhi, the Mecca of Buddhism; and here was Kusinagara, sad place of the holy one's death. The old man bowed his head over the sheets in silence for a while, and the curator lit another pipe. Kim had fallen asleep. When he waked, the talk, still in spate, was more within his comprehension.

'And thus it was, O Fountain of Wisdom, that I decided to go to the holy places which his foot had trod – to the birthplace, even to Kapila; then to Mahabodhi, which is Buddh Gaya – to the monastery – to the deer-park – to the place of his death.'

The lama lowered his voice. 'And I come here alone. For five – seven – eighteen – forty years it was in my mind that the old law was not well followed; being overlaid, as thou knowest, with devildom, charms, and idolatry. Even as the child outside said but now. Ay, even as the child said, with *but-parasti*.'

'So it comes with all faiths.'

'Thinkest thou? The books of my lamassery I read, and they were dried pith; and the later ritual with which we of the reformed law have cumbered ourselves – that, too, had no worth to these old eyes.

Even the followers of the excellent one are at feud on feud with one another. It is all illusion. Ay, *maya*, illusion. But I have another desire' – the seamed yellow face drew within three inches of the curator, and the long forefinger-nail tapped on the table. 'Your scholars, by these books, have followed the blessed feet in all their wanderings; but there are things which they have not sought out. I know nothing – nothing do I know – but I go to free myself from the wheel of things by a broad and open road.' He smiled with most simple triumph. 'As a pilgrim to the holy places I acquire merit. But there is more. Listen to a true thing. When our gracious Lord, being as yet a youth, sought a mate, men said, in his father's court, that he was too tender for marriage. Thou knowest?'

The curator nodded, wondering what would come next.

'So they made the triple trial of strength against all comers. And at the test of the bow, our lord first breaking that which they gave Him, called for such a bow as none might bend. Thou knowest?'

'It is written. I have read.'

'And, overshooting all other marks, the arrow passed far and far beyond sight. At the last it fell; and, where it touched earth, there broke out a stream which presently became a river, whose nature, by our lord's beneficence, and that merit He acquired ere he freed himself, is that whoso bathes in it washes away all taint and speckle of sin.'

'So it is written,' said the curator sadly.

The lama drew a long breath. 'Where is that river? Fountain of Wisdom, where fell the arrow?'

'Alas, my brother, I do not know,' said the curator.

'Nay, if it please thee to forget – the one thing only that thou hast not told me. Surely thou must know? See, I am an old man! I ask with my head between thy feet, O Fountain of Wisdom. We *know* He drew the bow! We *know* the arrow fell! We *know* the stream gushed! Where, then, is the river? My dream told me to find it. So I came. I am here. But where is the river?'

'If I knew, think you I would not cry it aloud?'

'By it one attains freedom from the wheel of things,' the lama went on, unheeding. 'The river of the arrow! Think again! Some little stream, maybe – dried in the heats? But the holy one would never so cheat an old man.'

'I do not know. I do not know.'

The lama brought his thousand-wrinkled face once more a hand's breadth from the Englishman's. 'I see thou dost not know. Not being of the law, the matter is hid from thee.'