

**RUDYARD KIPLING, THE
ARTIST: A RETROSPECT
AND A PROPHECY**

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Rudyard Kipling, the artist: a retrospect and a prophecy by William Cranston Lawton

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The Artist

A RETROSPECT AND A PROPHECY

BY

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RUDYARD KIPLING, THE ARTIST

A RETROSPECT AND A PROPHECY.

Those who have followed Mr. Kipling's swift advance for ten or more years past, have felt, within the last twelvemonth, that a decisive crisis was reached. This has now been doubly emphasized by his alarming illness—and by the black shadow of heaviest bereavement, fallen for the first time upon his joyous career. It seems all but certain that he is to be restored once more to the delights, the burdens, the agonies of the artist's life; but it is at least equally certain that his youth, with its world-wide ranging curiosity, its rollicking humor, its Titanic wilfulness and extravagant expenditure of energy, will have vanished forever. Mowgli, matured, humanized, wedded, a father, a weeper of manly tears, has all but forgotten the jungle. The three musketeers are mustered out. Nor shall we be inconsolable to know that the far more malodorous trio of English school-urchins will soon have

ended their mad pranks. Even the most mischievous of choir-boys must don his white surplice, and pace sedately, when the organ peals and the service opens. Rudyard Kipling's genius is consecrated now to the noblest and most arduous service known to man. The crown of laurels and of thorns can be laid aside no more till the last "Recessional" shall be intoned. May that be yet a half-century away. May his purely poetic career be as long, as happy, as noble, as fruitful, as Tennyson's or Longfellow's. While he lies his hour in enforced silence, there is, perhaps, time to review hastily his wonderful youth-time, to hazard a rash prophecy as to his future activity.

Unhappy, indeed, if such there breathe, is the man without a country: the wretch who loves not best of all the one spot where he was born, be it Colonos or Jerusalem, Stratford or Shiraz.

Surely in toil or fray
Under an alien sky,
Comfort it is to say:
Of no mean city am I.

These lines are from the dedication to Mr. Kipling's birthplace, prefixed to "A Song of the

English." Bombay also speaks first among the world-encircling band of cities in the chorus of loyalty to England. There is little humility in her cry:

Royal and Dower-royal, I the Queen
Fronting thy richest sea with richer hands—

Again, in "The Native-born," Kipling's earliest memories go back

To our dear, dark foster-mothers,
To the heathen songs they sung—
To the heathen speech we babbled
Ere we came to the white man's tongue.

Indeed, though he spent his schoolboy years in old England, this East Indian singer feels that even the loyalty of "mine own people" cannot be understood aright in the island home. As the same poem opens:

We've drunk to the Queen,—God bless her!—
We've drunk to our mothers' land;
We've drunk to our English brother,
(*But he does not understand*).

This protest finds fuller—and, at times, almost plaintive—utterance in "The Flowers," a poem

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called out by a British reviewer, who found "something exotic, almost artificial, in songs which describe in English speech" any flora or fauna save the rathe primrose, the thrush of England, and their insular companions! Strong, clear and thrilling is the note of protest:

Far and far our homes are set round the Seven Seas.
Woe for us if we forget, we that hold by these!
Unto each his mother-beach, bloom and bird and land—
Masters of the Seven Seas, oh, love and understand!

One of the most finished and powerful of his poems is the "Galley Slave," which is missing from the volumes of collected verse, but was published in full by Mr. Warner in his "Library of the World's Literature." And if I interpret this aright, the great Indian empire is there glorified, with little thought of the motherland's superiority. The "rollers of the North," which may some day threaten to swamp the stately galley, give just such a glimpse at the ever-dreaded Russian invasion as is dramatically indicated at the close of "The Man Who Was." The galley-oar that the singer himself has just left is a post in the Indian civil service. There is

something very like a trenchant criticism on the imperial wisdom of the faraway lords in London, in the

Talk of times and seasons and of woes the years bring forth,

when

A craven-hearted pilot crams her crashing on the shore.

And, by the way, though this is true English versè, down to the very line-rhymes and alliterations, how far away it is from the Tennysonian "moan of doves" and "murmur of bees!"

But, in any case, the adjustment between home-love and loyalty to England was surely completed before the "Recessional" could have been composed. Despite, nay, because of its warning to needful humility, there is but the fuller tone of pride and enthusiastic devotion in all its stanzas. No lyric, since the world was, ever had such an instantaneous, world-wide hearing and acceptance.

A question naturally asked next in this connection is: What is the new poet's attitude toward our own people? It is quite clear, on the

the first part of the poem is a warning to the world to be prepared for the coming of the new era.