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## EDITORIAL

### THE UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL STUDY DAY

This Supplementary issue of the *Journal* contains four of the five papers presented in Bristol last June and again I want to record our thanks to those involved. The organiser was Dr John Lee, the five papers being presented by John, Prof Peter Bailey, Dr Simon Potter, Prof Edward M. Spiers, and Prof Tim Kendall (who couldn't let us have a transcript for various good reasons). Also to Stephen Turnbull, who concentrated on Sir Arthur Sullivan's music, John Cannon who displayed a wide selection of memorabilia (and has written a report for the *Gilbert and Sullivan News*, Autumn 2010), and to Andrew Lycett who chaired the discussion.

### "THE OAK, ASH AND THORN PROJECT"

This new CD from Folk Police Recordings will be released on 21 February 2011. It features a selection of artists from the current folk scene performing new versions of Peter Bellamy's Settings of various poems from *Puck of Pook's Hill and Rewards and Faeries*. These settings were originally released by Peter Bellamy, who was one of our Vice-Presidents, on two albums for the Argo record label in the early seventies, but these have long been out of print.

The CD is priced at £10 in the UK and £11 elsewhere, available from: Folk Police Recordings, 24 Brundretts Road, Manchester M21 9DB.

Tel: 0161 881 5156 email: [thefolkpolice@gmail.com](mailto:thefolkpolice@gmail.com)

There is more information at <http://www.folkpolice recordings.com/the-oak-ash--thorn-project.html>

### THE LIGHT THAT FAILED

A new critical edition of Kipling's 1891 novel has just been published by Victorian Secrets. It has been edited by Paul Fox who is an Associate Professor in the Department of the Humanities and Social Sciences at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates. His academic interests are described as Decadent aesthetics and late-Victorian gothic.

The edition includes a critical introduction, a biography of Kipling, explanatory notes, the 'happy ending' in addition to the normal text, and extracts from the works of various other artists.

ISBN: 978-1906469191, priced at £10 in the UK.

There is more information about the book on the company's website at <http://www.victoriansecrets.co.uk/books/the-light-that-failed/>. Also of great interest on the website are the "FAQs" which set down why Victorian Secrets was founded and the future plans of the team. Basically, they are to publish difficult to obtain works in short runs.

## RUDYARD KIPLING'S NEW POEM.

### The Absent-minded Beggar.

When you've shouted "Rule Britannia"—when you've sung "God  
save the Queen"—

When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth—  
Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine  
For a gentleman in kharki ordered South?  
He's an absent-minded beggar, and his weaknesses are great—  
But we and Paul must take him as we find him—  
He is out on active service, wiping something off a slate—  
And he's left a lot o' little things behind him!

*Duke's son—cook's son—son of a hundred kings—  
(Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay!)  
Each of 'em doing his country's work (and who's to look after  
their things?)  
Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay—pay—pay!*

There are girls he married secret, asking no permission to,  
For he knew he wouldn't get it if he did.  
There is gas and coals and vittles, and the house-rent falling due,  
And it's more than rather likely there's a kid.  
There are girls he walked with casual, they'll be sorry now he's gone,  
For an absent-minded beggar they will find him,  
But it ain't the time for sermons with the winter coming on—  
We must help the girl that Tommy's left behind him!

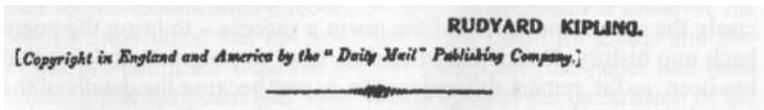
*Cook's son—Duke's son—son of a belted Earl—  
Son of a Lambeth publican—it's all the same to-day!  
Each of 'em doing his country's work (and who's to look after  
the girl?)  
Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay—pay—pay!*

There are families by thousands, far too proud to beg or speak—  
 And they'll put their sticks and bedding up the spout,  
 And they'll live on half o' nothing, paid 'em punctual once a week,  
 'Cause the man that earned the wage is ordered out.  
 He's an absent-minded beggar, but he heard his country call,  
 And his reg'ment didn't need to send to find him:  
 He chucked his job and joined it—so the job before us all  
 Is to help the home that Tommy's left behind him!

*Duke's job—cook's job—gardener, baronet, groom—  
 Mews or palace or paper-shop, there's some one gone  
 away!  
 Each of 'em doing his country's work (and who's to look after  
 the room?)  
 Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and—pay! pay! pay!*

Let us manage so as later we can look him in the face,  
 And tell him—what he'd very much prefer—  
 That, while he saved the Empire, his employer saved his place,  
 And his mates (that's you and me) looked out for her.  
 He's an absent-minded beggar, and he may forget it all,  
 But we do not want his kiddies to remind him,  
 That we sent 'em to the workhouse while their daddy hammered Paul,  
 So we'll help the homes our Tommy left behind him!

*Cook's home—Duke's home—home of a millionaire,  
 (Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay!)  
 Each of 'em doing his country's work (and what have you got  
 to spare?)  
 Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and—pay! pay! pay!*



[This is the complete version of "The Absent-minded Beggar" as it first appeared on p.4 of the Daily Mail of 31 October 1899. An image of the poem at Journal page size was impossible to read, and so I have transcribed the text and inserted images of the original heading and copyright notice.

There are several differences from the version printed in the *Definitive Verse*, forty-one years later, in spelling, punctuation and layout, some of which are mentioned by the Conference speakers. I leave it to members to make the comparison themselves. – Ed.]

## FOLLOWING RUDYARD KIPLING'S "THE ABSENT-MINDED BEGGAR"

By Dr JOHN LEE

[John Lee is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Bristol. He is the author of *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self* (Oxford, 2000), has edited the shorter poems of Edmund Spenser, and has published articles on Renaissance Literature and, more recently, "Shakespeare and the Great War", and "Shakespeare and Kipling". He is at the beginning of a study of the life and times of "The Absent-Minded Beggar".

Dr Lee has quoted from the text of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" as it was first published in the *Daily Mail*. – Ed.]

"The Absent-Minded Beggar" is a poem which has attained a near-mythical status. If you look on the web, or if you go a little 'further' and dig into books related to Kipling, you can find it mentioned many times. Everyone agrees that it was published in the *Daily Mail* on Tuesday 31st October 1899, was wildly popular, and helped raise a lot of money for those involved in the South African war, or, as it was often called at the time, the Transvaal or Boer War. Yet beyond those large details everything becomes a little vague. There are some figures: you will read, variously, that just under £250,000, or £300,000, or about £340,000 was raised, which amounts to somewhere between £14 and £20 million at 2010 values. That's a great deal of money, whichever figure is used; but quite how different those amounts are might be a little worrying. How reliable are these figures? How was this money raised? Who did the giving? Who the collecting? Over how long a period? Or to put those question in a different way: how popular was the poem, in truth? For how long? Amongst whom?

This is a paper, then, that arose from a desire to know more precisely the nature and extent of the poem's success – to bring the poem back into history. Doing that remains a work in progress, and one that has been, so far, remarkably enjoyable, in part because the details of the poem's success have turned out not only to be more interesting, but more impressive, than the myth. What becomes clear in following "The Absent-Minded Beggar" is that the poem managed to create something akin to the perfect cultural storm and, in having done so, it provides a fascinating case-history of the workings of late-Victorian culture.

To try to understand better some aspects of the poem's cultural success, the Second Kipling Study Day, with the support of the Kipling Society and the University of Bristol, was put on. Speakers were invited who could address key aspects of the poem's cultural progress. Peter

Bailey came to talk about the poem and the music halls. Simon Potter addressed the systems of communication that allowed the poem to become an event on an imperial and global scale. Tim Kendall placed the poem in the context of early Boer War poetry. Edward Spiers followed the poem to South Africa to explore the presence and impact of Kipling's poetry amongst the troops, as the war progressed. We were also lucky enough to have Stephen Turnbull, of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society, explaining the history of some musical versions of the poem and, thanks to John Cannon, of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, what approached a curated exhibition of "Absent-Minded Beggar" memorabilia. Andrew Lycett, the Society's Meeting's Secretary, chaired a question and answer session which rounded off the day.

The day's papers, apart from Tim Kendall's, are reprinted here, in the order in which they were given. Together, they provide the best picture available of the poem, but they also offer many new insights into Kipling's presence in his culture more generally – as well as offering authoritative statements on the present state of academic work in their respective fields. My paper opened the Study Day, and attempts to give a preliminary and general sense of poem's life and times, and to offer some evidence by which to measure some of the remarkable claims made on the poem's behalf.



By Christmas Day 1899, "The Absent-Minded Beggar" had been in circulation for some 8 weeks. The *Daily Mail*, as usual, gave over a column to news of the poem's progress. The main heading announced 'Poem Fund Now £50,000', and noted, in a subheading, 'great Christmas Gift to the Nation's Heroes.' In the text proper it was more loquacious: 'The history of the world,' it stated, 'can produce no parallel to the extraordinary record of this poem'. Such a sense of the poem's importance was not new, though the claim for global and historical pre-eminence was. On the 4th December, the paper had been claiming that the poem had 'been seized upon as the incarnation of the national spirit, and has passed into history as the poem of an epoch'. Further back still, on the 14th of November, a bare two weeks after the poem's publication, the *Daily Mail* was estimating that no less than 15,000 people in London had heard the poem recited or sung on the previous night. 'It is impossible to tell,' the column-writer declared, 'and at the same time to preserve a proper appearance of moderation, the plain story of the hold which the "Absent-Minded Beggar" has taken on the minds of the British people. It is extraordinary, amazing—any adjective you like to select.' 'And yet, after all,' he went on, 'it is

only what might have been expected.' This paradox could be explained because of the people involved with the campaign based around the poem. There was the author, of course, Kipling, the writer who best knew how 'to strike the vibrant chords of the nation's sentiment'; then there was Sir Arthur Sullivan, who had set the poem as a song, and was the 'master of English melody'; and there was the *Daily Mail* itself, distinguished by its encouragement of 'the intense Imperialist enthusiasm which is at the bottom of every true British heart'; and finally, but no less importantly, Mrs Beerbohm Tree, who had first recited the poem 'before the people [ . . . ] with a perfection of elocutionary art.' The result was an Enormous Vogue: 'In theatres, music halls, masonic lodges, clubs, concerts, at meeting of friendly societies, at annual dinners, at parish meetings, at private at-homes, in barracks and schools, even in churches and chapels' you could hear the call of the poem's refrain, to "'Pay, pay, pay!'"

It is a remarkable picture, and one that can be confirmed by reading other newspapers of the time, including those outside the metropolis. The *Bristol Mercury* of 13th November, for instance, records: that the poem was recited at the annual Colston dinner of the Bristol North Unionist Club, held in Stokes Croft, and a collection for the 'war fund' of £5 14s 5d taken; and at Captain H. Butt's retirement dinner in Weston-Super-Mare, at Glass's restaurant, a collection for £8 6s 6d being realised for the National Fund of the relief of widows and families of men fallen in the Transvaal. There is also an advert in the same paper for the coming Thursday at the People's Palace, a music hall in Baldwin Street: 'J.J. Challenger, Esq., will recite Rudyard Kipling's Poem, "The Absent-Minded Beggar." Come in Thousands.' This was a special performance, designed specifically as a fund-raiser for the Lord Mayor's Fund for Transvaal Refugees and the Wives and Children of Wounded Soldiers.

The picture becomes more remarkable still when it is realised that even the writer of the Christmas edition of the *Daily Mail*, in proclaiming the poem to have the most extraordinary record in the history of the world, was giving his sense of the poem's impact to a large extent in ignorance of the poem's final success. For, at £50,000, the Kipling Poem Fund was just getting going. A lot more money would be raised by the end of 1900; then the *Daily Mail* calculated that the poem had raised £340,000. That figure, though, contained a large degree of speculation. The paper had received around £135,000 from the public and it had itself donated £40,000. It added to this certain £175,000, a further £165,000 which it believed had been raised thanks to the poem, but which had been given to other funds.<sup>2</sup> How that figure was calculated is not stated, and perhaps may be unknowable. Yet,

though a large figure, it does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility. For the accounts of performances of the poem in other newspapers, like the ones given above from the *Bristol Mercury*, very often do not name the Kipling Fund as being the recipient of the money collected after a recital of the poem.

Moreover, a lot more was done directly with the money raised after 1899. The Christmas edition of the *Daily Mail* mentions the Absent-Minded Beggar Relief Corp ('A.M.B. R.C.). This Corp had been recently set up to address perceived inadequacies in the care of troops and their families. When the S.S. *Jelunga* had arrived, earlier that month, at Southampton, it was carrying back from South Africa the wives and children of serving soldiers. These, it was claimed, had disembarked in a pitiable state, lacking the proper clothes for the English weather, and lacking the ability to buy food or pay for transport onwards. Kipling, according to the *Daily Mail* of 16th December, had wired the paper asking if something could not be done. The A.M.B. R.C. was the response. Starting with a depot cum cafe in Southampton, the A.M.B. R.C. pledged to meet all future transport ships, ensuring that returnees had hot food, clothes, and help with arranging their travel home. This quickly developed into a kind of mix between a transit version of the Red Cross and a proto-NAAFI. A network of depots was quite quickly set up between England and South Africa, looking after those coming back from, and going out to, South Africa.

By April of 1900, a soldier might leave England having had a free breakfast from the A.M.B. cafe, his ship being played off to the, by then famous, tune of "The Absent-Minded Beggar", and with free A.M.B. cigarettes in his pockets (a copy of the poem in each packet), and be similarly welcomed, and later again sent off, in South Africa. On return in Southampton, as well as receiving a hot meal in the cafe, he could send a telegram for free to his family, get warm clothes, and crutches, if needed, and have his transfer onwards arranged. On 21st June the A.M.B. R.C. reported that it had 'clothed, fed, and assisted in many ways, 15,896 sick and wounded soldiers, 627 soldiers' wives, and 1,022 soldiers' children.' More specifically, the R.C. had provided 83,679 articles of new clothing, 2,067 pounds of tobacco, 9,765 pipes to smoke it in, 207,640 cigarettes, 10,268 free meals, 6,963 free telegrams, and 6,857 free letters. By the end of the year, there was also a newly built, 500-bed 'Absent-Minded Beggar' model hospital in Alton.<sup>3</sup> The A.M.B. R.C. also arranged the distribution of parcels and other home comforts in South Africa, and did its best to supply the requests for supplies it received from field hospitals.

The poem's record, in other words, went on being extraordinary well beyond Christmas of 1899, and perhaps became more practically

embodied after that date. The remarkable logistical achievements of the A.M.B. R.C meant that the poem became a part of the experience of most soldiers travelling from England and Ireland to South Africa, as well as of other soldiers from countries of the empire when arriving, and whilst in, South Africa.



How had all of this come about? "The Absent-Minded Beggar" was first published on Tuesday 31st October, under the heading, 'Rudyard Kipling's New Poem'. It was printed across two columns over the best part of half a page. Underneath, there was a description of the ways in which the poem was going to be used to raise a fund 'for the benefit of the women and children of our soldiers who have been ordered south to fight for their country'. These ways were various, but there were basically four. The first was going to be by the sale of copyrights. The *Daily Mail* itself was paying £250 for the poem, which Kipling had asked to be donated to the fund, but any publication, on payment of five guineas, would be given permission to reprint the poem.<sup>3</sup> 22 newspapers had already paid their five guineas. The poem was simultaneously published in four countries – England, Scotland, Ireland, and America; from the start, it had an international stage, and was read differently in different places.<sup>3</sup> On the 2nd November, for example, *The Daily Northwestern* of Oshkosh wrote about 'Kipling's Latest Rot'. 'The reported popularity of Kipling's Absent Minded Beggar' puzzled the paper, as the poem, from its title onwards, seemed to them more insulting of the British soldier than patriotic. That a poem's popularity should be international news a couple of days after its first publication, in a newspaper of a town in Wisconsin, may strike the modern reader as more puzzling. That it allows us to glimpse the different status poetry enjoyed a hundred-odd years ago, and to get a sense of Kipling's stature within that world. That stature, of course, was not uncontroversial; one imagines that *The Daily Northwestern* did not have a high opinion of other of Kipling's poems, as well as "The Absent-Minded Beggar". The political aspects to that controversy can be seen more clearly in the Irish papers. The *Irish Daily Independent*, a nationalist publication, printed the poem on the 31st, to be true, as it said, to its role as an 'organ faithfully recording matters of current interest'. It was clearly wary of doing this, explaining that such an action should not be seen as indicating a change in the paper's editorial policy. *The Freeman's Journal*, one of the *Independent's* nationalist rivals, was having none of it: in a more-nationalist-than-thou vein it declared, on the same day, that the *Independent* had subscribed its five guineas 'in

the name of the most Jingo of Jingoers for the privilege of publishing a Jingo poem in favour of the Boer War'. To certain sections of the Irish nationalist community, Kipling, in fact, was akin to royalty – in a bad sense. Lady Gregory, in February 1900, notes in her diary that when a 'Mrs T' came up to ask if a certain Justice of the Peace had refused to have 'God Save the Queen' played at a charity concert, she replied: "'Yes, and much worse than that, he would not have 'The Absent Minded Beggar!' which she took seriously.'" That Justice of the Peace was Edward Martyn, who would later explain that decision more subtly, in his letter of resignation from the bench, dated 22 March 1900, and published in *The Freeman's Journal*. He had forbidden both anthem and poem to be sung, he wrote, because, of late, 'the Queen's name has been inseparably associated with Mr Kipling's by the party to which I refer [the Irish Unionists] in attempts to glorify and force upon our acceptance a war which I believe to be unjust, unchristian, and deplorable from every point of view.'

In the end, the *Daily Mail* recorded some 55 papers who paid their five guineas, though, as recurrent complaints in the paper's columns suggest, many more papers and journals were publishing the poem and not paying. Clearly, however, this was only a small revenue stream. The paper's second means of raising money was to use the poem as a spur to public donation. Copies of the poem, 'in facsimile of Mr Kipling's handwriting, on fine art paper with a portrait of the author on the front cover' were to be sold, 'at a cost of one shilling each'. The details of the offer again speak to Kipling's celebrity and status; part of the edition's attractiveness lies in the sense of authenticity provided by the facsimile handwritten nature of the poem, backed up by a rather aesthetic and 'eastern' portrait of the author. Whether the *Daily Mail* realised quite how attractive the souvenir would be, or quite how well it would provide an outlet for the urge to donate, is unlikely. By the Friday of the first week, on 3rd November, they were reporting that 40 clerks were being employed to answer 10,000 letters a day. Two weeks later, they were answering 12,000 letters, receiving 300 callers, and taking a constant stream of calls, each and every day. They dubbed the poem the Silver Snowball, and apologized to their readers that they were failing to turn around orders on the day of receipt. The poem was a 'boom'.

The shilling cost of the souvenir edition is important. A shilling was chosen as a democratic amount; the fund-raising campaign was intended as a democratic campaign, to which almost all could afford to contribute. There were other funds, such as the Lord Mayor's Fund, to which acknowledged contributions, in pounds, or hundreds of pounds, or even, sometimes, thousands of pounds were made by individuals,

companies, and professional bodies. The *Daily Mail* constantly emphasized that its campaign was for everybody, filling a daily column with stories of the continuing support the fund received. Often these included stories of donations given in the teeth of hardship. On the 29th December, the paper recorded that 'yesterday's pathetic contribution' was a shilling 'sent by a one-legged workman who has five children to support, and who apologizes for "not being able to send before, being out of funds."' This was a campaign, it was continually stressed, that was classless, and almost nationless; it united Great Britain, and, as the poem continued to make its way around the world, it united the Empire. Following "The Absent-Minded Beggar" around the world provided more and more copy in the New Year. On the 23rd of January 1900, the paper sees the poem as a kind of imperial and military Puck: 'The A. M. B. can put a girdle round the earth as long as he is on top of it to keep it for the Queen.' The column goes on to record donations from Gibraltar, Australia, British Guiana, Trinidad, Canada, British America, and talks of how the poem touches American hearts.

The paper, in other words, works to keep interest in the poem alive. This includes other events. As announced on the day of first publication, the manuscript of the poem itself is auctioned off. Over the course of two and a half weeks the price rises, until it is bought on the 16th of November for £525, making it, according to the *Daily Mail*, the most expensive poem in history (they add the £250 they paid for the poem to reach a total price of £775). The purchaser is a Mr Joseph Bibby, the owner of the largest manufacturer of cattle feed in the world, and the owner of *Bibby's Quarterly*, 'a high class literary and agricultural journal'. Some readers had, from early on in the fund's life, sent objects in for auction. These objects ranged from the literary, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's inkpot, to the live, such as a White Minorca cockerel. By the end of November, the paper publishes firm statements that no more deliveries of livestock will be accepted at the offices. More positively, they hold a bazaar, on the 22nd of December. In the New Year they hold a magnificently over-the-top concert in the Albert Hall on 20th January. Eleven champion brass bands of the United Kingdom come down from the North to play, amongst other things, Sir Arthur Sullivan's setting of "The Absent-Minded Beggar". Once again, the scale of the event is record-breaking. 'At Bayreuth', according to the *Daily Mail* of 13th January, 'at the most pretentiously rendered performance of Wagner's "Nibelungen Ring", the orchestra had 128 performers. The Band Festival orchestra will have well over 300 performers, picked from all the best band musicians in England.' It will be the World's Largest Orchestra in the largest, most important music room in England. It will also be an opportunity for Londoners to appreciate the culture of the

Northerner, and to realize that the North is not all given to commerce. Above all, Londoners will be able to see the Northerners' passionate love of music: on the day of the performance itself the paper explains how, 'immediately before the performance', band members 'are often found bathing their heads in cold water, to reduce their excitement.'

These events helped to maintain the visibility of the poem and served to give a sense of the *Daily Mail's* role as organizer of the fund-raising campaign. In truth, however, the poem's continued success, both as a cultural phenomenon and in its ability to produce funds, owed far more to the music halls. In this context, Maud Beerbohm Tree played a key role. Mrs. Tree's Plan, as the *Daily Mail* described it, was the third way in which money was to be raised. She would recite the poem nightly at the Palace Theatre, and donate the £100 per week she received for doing so to the fund. This was to have large consequences, but how Maud came to be involved is also of interest. The *Daily Mail* had been trailing Kipling's poem, in the week before the publication – as, indeed, had other papers, both those who would print the poem on the 31st October and those who would not. Again, the sense of the cultural status of poetry and Kipling is clear, and clearly different from the present. Maud read one of these notices, and telegraphed to Alfred Harmsworth, asking if she might have the poem in advance, so that she might recite it at 'The St James's Hall Ballad Concert' which was being held on the afternoon of the day of the poem's publication. Up to this point, Maud had clearly been undecided as regards what might constitute the right choice of poems for this programme. The adverts for giving her role in the Concert change during the previous week. She is down first to recite, "Soldier, Soldier" and 'Another patriotic poem by Rudyard Kipling', and then, later in the week, "Soldier, Soldier" and Tennyson's "The Light Brigade". "The Absent-Minded Beggar" replaces, in the end, "The Light Brigade".

Maud was a distinguished actress, and her husband, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, was the leading Shakespearean actor, and actor-manager of the day. There were, then, plenty of reasons why Harmsworth should have paid attention to Maud's request, but, in fact, Harmsworth already knew the Beerbohm Trees – as did Kipling. Herbert and Maud had been trying to get him to adapt a story for a play for them at least since 1897, and possibly since 1895. In *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories of Him and his Art*, published in 1917, Maud records how her request to Harmsworth was granted 'very courteously', and with the sanction of the author, with the result that she received 'the proof, typewritten and corrected by Kipling's own hand [. . .] on Friday evening, after Herbert had left for the theatre' (p.112). The story, in fact, seems to have been even more intricate and

small-worldly, and perhaps a little different. In a file of the Herbert Beerbohm Tree collection at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection there is a short, handwritten note from Philip Burne-Jones, the painter son of much more famous painter father, Edward Burne-Jones. Maud was very great friends both with 'Master Philip', as he signed himself, and his father. His father was also Kipling's favourite uncle, and Kipling was himself a good friend to Philip. From Philip's note, it seems that he was the intermediary in this transaction. The note is dated Thursday October 26th, and begins directly, without a salutation: 'The poem will be delivered to you to-day or tomorrow (type-written + in absolute Confidence). // I have had Kipling's consent, + also seen Harmsworth, who is directing that the poem be sent to you at once.' Philip was well placed to get Kipling's consent as Edward Burne-Jones lived, as did the Kiplings, in Rottingdean.

However Maud received the poem, what is clear is that it impressed her, and did so immediately: she read it, 'and had the judgement to see in it one of the greatest human appeals ever made'. She 'took hansom' and went straight to see Mr Charles Morton, the proprietor of the Palace Theatre, and announced her plan to recite the poem. He, for his part, not only agreed but offered the 'king's ransom of a salary' of £100 per week. 'So it came about, and for ten triumphant weeks, for the first and only time in my life, I, without aid from anyone but my author (aid enough, in all conscience!), drew the town.' (p.117) Maud's sense of her and the poem's popularity is quite correct; her performances set going a 'reciting rage' to go alongside the poem's 'boom' (13th November, *Daily Mail*). Not only was she drawing the town, but other music halls, and theatres, wanted to share in that success. By the 14th of November, the poem can be heard at the Tivoli, Alhambra, Oxford and Canterbury music halls, as well as the Palace Theatre, and the *Daily Mail* calculates an audience for the poem of about 15,000 people per night. By early December, the paper carries daily listings of where the poem can be heard. The 5th of December seems to represent the height of the poem's commercial popularity in London; 27 music halls and theatres where the poem can be heard that night are listed, suggesting an audience of something over 50,000. Still other music halls are putting on their own rivals to "The Absent-Minded Beggar". The most famous and successful of these was Henry Hamilton's 'Ordered to the Front', which had its first night on 21 November at The Empire, but there were many such. Alongside the pastiches and parodies, one can, in fact, talk of an "Absent-Minded Beggar" flora, or perhaps fauna: Howard Begbie wrote "The Handyman" to celebrate the sailor's role in the war, and was delighted when Maud agreed to recite it alongside Kipling's poem. All of this testifies to the power of the poem's

appeal; for the halls and theatres were, in part, putting on the poem as a way of attracting custom; in bringing in audiences the poem brought in money, and in November the music halls reported record takings. In the 18th of November *Daily Mail*, for example, The Palace Theatre was noted as turning away hundreds a night, and having all its reserved seats booked up for weeks ahead. The Alhambra expressed a similar situation in monetary terms, reporting that it was turning away 'over a hundred pounds every night'. At The Oxford, where 700 people were turned away one night, Miss Kate Tyndall was said to have been 'phenomenally successful' with her recitation of the poem. She was receiving seven curtain calls, 'and has had a dozen invitations to recite the poem at private houses'. The poem, then, not only brought publicity to its performers, which was useful in itself, but also might lead to extra work. Recitals at tea and supper parties were a part of the culture of the time. Kate Tyndall, as the paper made clear, was unable to accept the invitations, under the terms of her engagement, which had her performing at The Canterbury, The Tivoli, The Oxford, and The Strand each night. Maud, however, was employed on a less professional basis, could, and clearly did take advantage of these offers. By the time she stopped her recitals in January, to begin work on her next Shakespearean performance, she had earned £1,000 pounds from the Palace Theatre, and had donated this to the fund plus a further £2,000 from payments for 'private' recitals.<sup>8</sup> The poem, in becoming a 'phenomenon', had achieved celebrity status – it became famous for its fame, as success bred more success. The perfect cultural storm was set in motion.

There were other large contributors to that storm, most obviously Sir Arthur Sullivan, who set the poem as a song. This was the fourth way of raising money set out in the *Daily Mail* of 31st October. Sullivan himself conducted the music for the first performance, which was given at the Alhambra Theatre on the 14th of November. It was an instant success, building on the existing popularity of the poem. In its report of the first night, the *Daily Mail* noted that the audience 'already knew the words by heart', and took up the chorus after the first verse. This meant that those going out to the halls had a choice of whether to hear the poem recited or sung, and it was probably as a song that the poem enjoyed its widest and most enduring popularity. The recording heard at the Study Day, courtesy of Stephen Turnbull, featured Ian Colquhoun, the 'iron voiced' tenor, who took over from the original singer, John Coates, at the Alhambra. Colquhoun's version was not one that could be described as catchy. Thanks to John Cannon, the Study Day was also able to hear another version. This was not a professional recording, but a recording of a member of the general public. Mrs Ada

Willoughby was a public servant who, in 1968, had given an interview, a little on the lines of *Desert Island Discs*, to the BBC, when she was in her seventies. Asked what she remembered about the Boer War, she answered in terms of the songs, mentioning "Dolly Grey" and "The Absent-Minded Beggar". She then began to recite the poem, and that recital, when it reached the chorus, became the song. The version as Mrs Willoughby sings it is attractive and has a certain swing, even a catchiness. That it was an authentic version of its time was confirmed by the fact it was very much closer to the music box version, also played to the Study Day by Stephen Turnbull.

To imagine the impact of the poem, then, is to get a sense of the connectedness the new technologies of the Victorian age had brought about. There was the simultaneous publication in newspapers across the country. Similarly, the recitals of the poem occurred not just in London but across the country, in almost every town of any size, and happened very quickly because of the syndicated and competitive nature of the music hall business. And where there was no music hall, the poem would be performed in countless 'smokers', or other local meetings. On the 31st of October, the day of the poem's first publication, for example, *Jackson's Oxford Journal* records that the Working Men's Club in Watlington, Oxon, cancelled their smoker because of the news of the disaster at Ladysmith. In its place the vicar spoke about the military reverse; they sang the chorus of "Rule Britannia"; the vicar 'gave a capital reading of Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The Absent-Minded Beggar"'; and they finished by singing the National Anthem. Two weeks or so later, the song arrived on the scene, offering further opportunities for performance, as well as new routes of dissemination. There were barrel organs playing the tune on the streets, recordings on gramophone records, and the sale of sheet music for those who wished to accompany the song at home. The poem in its various forms becomes an inescapable part of everyday life. The *Daily Mail* of 23rd March notes that 'it is practically impossible to walk along a London street without it being whistled or hummed or barrel-organed in your ears.' The poem's visual presence needs to be added in to this. Though not a part of the *Daily Mail's* original plan, the special art edition, by the time it was printed, would have, as well as a photograph of Kipling, a drawing by Richard Caton-Woodville of "The Gentleman in Kharki". This would go on to become one of, if not the, dominant image of the war. It became a kind of 'logo' for the poem and the fund-raising campaign, being used and adapted for use on a bewildering variety of products. A. M. B. cigarettes have already been mentioned, and there were also A. M. B. tea sets, match holders, pewter boxes, medals (by Spink, in a variety of metals and at a variety of prices), brass trivets,

engraved glasses painted with gold leaf, handkerchiefs, cushions, oxidized silver bas-reliefs, pickle-forks, butter-knives and spoons, envelopes and writing sets, even, from March, tattoos. One has the sense that not only was the poem impossible to escape, but that one could live in an A. M. B. themed world.

One wonders how Kipling felt, looking on as the poem took on a life of its own. "The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat", a story published in 1917, may offer oblique answers to that. The story tells of how a group of men, wrongly prosecuted for a motoring offence, take their revenge on the presiding magistrate, Sir Thomas Ingell, by making the village of which he is the squire the laughing stock of the country. A large part of the story's interest is in the question of how this is brought about: how the journalist sets going a story in the paper; how the politician asks questions in the House of Commons; and, above all, how the music hall impresario brings out a song that catches the attention of the nation. There are many points of comparison and shared interest between the story of the revenge's success and the story of "The Absent-Minded Beggar"'s triumph. The story's attitude to the main actors is, as often, equivocal. This is particularly the case in the depiction of the impresario, Bat Masquerier; his ability to seize the national mood seems a little too easy, and a little too untrammelled by any sense of responsibility. Various of the persons of the story express, at times, their fear of him. I would suggest that Kipling to a degree pictures himself in Bat. The narrator hears the first performance of the song, in a music hall, naturally. It is sung by a star of the time, 'Dal Benzaguen:

She swept into that song with the full orchestra. It devastated the habitable earth for the next six months. [. . .]

'Wonderful,' I said to Bat. 'And it's only "Nuts in May" with variations.'

'Yes—but I did the variations,' he replied.

It's a comment often made that the rhythms of Kipling's poems are 'only' variations on famous tunes. Bat's answer, it seems to me, is also Kipling's; and in the stories wariness over Bat's ability I would suggest we can also see Kipling worried by a sense of responsibility that Bat, in the story, does not have. He, having heard 'Dal triumph, is only concerned to find out whether it has gone down equally well in Manchester and Glasgow, where he is having it performed simultaneously. A series of phone calls confirms it has become a national phenomenon.

I hope that gives some sense of the impact "The Absent-Minded Beggar" achieved. How the poem managed to raise such a large amount of money (whichever of the various figures is chosen) is a rather different question. The publication of the poem, Maud's salary, Sir Arthur Sullivan's fee (donated, like Kipling's, to the Fund), the Alhambra Theatre's and others' purchase of performing rights, all of these amounts when put together do not seem to account for that much of the total. To these must be added the donations raised by the sale of the edition of the poem, first, and of the poem's setting, second. Final figures for the first of these seem hard to come by; the *Daily Mail* keeps a running total up to the 5th of December, by which time 315,000 copies have been sold (which implies a rate of about 70,000 copies a week). After that date the paper no longer keeps count. This may have been because it increasingly came to seem impracticable. Lily Langtree, for example, had printed a 'souvenir' issue on satin, to commemorate the 100th performance of "The Degenerates". Originally to be of 1,500 copies, a second edition of 600 was printed to meet public demand. Copies were also being sold abroad, often having been printed locally. In March the *Daily Mail* records that 12,000 copies of the poem were sold in the Lyttleton area in New Zealand in the period leading up to Christmas. But also, presumably, the 'market' had reached saturation point; certainly, by the end of January, the *Daily Mail* columns stop offering the 'facsimile edition' for sale, replacing the instructions of how to pay for that edition with instructions of how to send money to the newspaper.

By the 5th December, then, 315,000 copies have been sold at one shilling a copy, making a contribution of £15,750. The next day the Fund's total to date is given as £26,805, making the facsimile edition's contribution about 65% of the total. To that can be added sales of the musical setting. That adds 175,000 copies at one shilling (again), adding, roughly, another £8,750. (The final figure for sales of the music seems to be on 1st March, where 225,000 are said to have been sold, and a 6th edition of a further 25,000 have been printed.) That makes a total of £24,500 out of £26,805, a figure which seems too close to the total when the other sums are taken on board. Allowing for some imprecision, however, what is clear is that the contribution of the donations via purchase of the editions was clearly a very substantial one. (There are also stories within these figures: the *Daily Mail* claims that the sales of the music on the first day – 10,000 are bought in person from their offices, and another 10,000 ordered by telegraph – are a new record in the industry. 25,000 bands are reckoned to be playing the music by the middle of December. By the same time 1,000 permissions to sing the poem have been given to 'Yorkshire vocalists', a third of whom are in Leeds.)

Yet we are still a long way from the total of £135,000. Some of the remaining £100,000 or so will have come from licensing arrangements, though these do not seem to have been particularly generous. So, for example, Macintyre, the pottery maker, are occasionally recorded in the *Daily Mail* as having sent in £50 in royalty fees for the use of the poem. The exception here may be the A. M. B. cigarettes, which at one point bring in £300 in 10 days. However, none of these seem likely to have raised anywhere near £100,000. The bulk of the rest of the money, then, probably came from straightforward donations; and it is here we begin to approach the poem itself more nearly. For the poem not only exceeded the *Daily Mail's* expectations in terms of the demand that was shown for the facsimile and musical editions. It also became something quite unenvisaged by the paper.

The beginnings of this can be seen at the second night of Maud's recital of the poem. The audience, as she described it, 'rose and showered gold and silver on to the stage'. It was an action that was to repeated many times on many other stages, even though at the Palace Theatre it was only allowed to occur once, as 'Mr. Morton came on to the stage, making a speech in which he miscalled the feverish generosity of the audience "an outrage," and in which he entreated them to desist', out of fear for Maud's safety.

Alas! notices were placed all over the theatre begging that enthusiasm money should be placed in boxes provided for the purpose! Of course this meant a loss of thousands of pounds: there is all the difference in the world between the act of soberly and after reflection dropping a cold coin into a casket and the joyous abandon of flinging in a fine frenzy every valuable one has even the brooch from one's breast in answer to a passionate appeal, with outstretched hands, to "Pay, pay, pay" (*Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories*, p.113).

One has a sense here of style of Maud's delivery of the poem, if only of the last line of its chorus, the 'pay— pay—pay'. Whether 'thousands of pounds' were lost is another matter, though large amounts were thrown. Two weeks later a Mr Van Biene sends in to the fund £70 which has been thrown at him at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, at the rate of about £10 a night. (That is a fair number of coins: somewhere in the region of 200 shillings or 2,400 pennies; one can see why many managers forbade the practice.)

The poem, in other words, began to function as a kind of offertory; and here it is useful to talk about the elephant-in-the-room in discussions of the poem. For all of the *Daily Mail's* claims for the poem at

the time, and for all of the claims since, one may well question the extent to which the poem could claim to have raised any of this money. The occasion of the charitable urge was the war, and the public desire to support those caught up with that war – on the British side. Without that war, and that urge, there would have been no charitable giving. Yet, without wishing to claim too much, I do think the poem provided an appropriate form for such giving; it was written – and in that lies one part of its literary skill – in a way that allowed it to become a kind of national charitable anthem. It allowed people to follow their inclinations, and perhaps better to understand them, by giving them a public form, a kind of small scale liturgy, through which to express their own desire to help, as part of a statement of political and social aspiration. In doing so, it both created the opportunities for giving and fostered an environment of giving. Without the poem, the various funds for the soldiers and their families would, one suspects, have been the poorer.

The poem, that is, was able both to express and to shape the public mood, and it was that two-fold ability that gave it, I would suggest, its power. For the poem was, in a number of ways, unexpected, as can be seen in the accounts of the poem's history. The shower of gold and silver, as has been described, came on the second night, not the first. Accounts of the first night suggest, by contrast, that the audience is a little unsure of its response. Here is the *Pall Mall Gazette's* description from the 1st November:

There was nothing in the programme to excite enthusiasm—that is to say, patriotic enthusiasm—up till ten o'clock. The turns were of an average sort, but the house waited expectantly for what was to come, so long and so patiently that when Turn 13 was reached there was a round of applause which developed into a storm when Mrs. Tree, gowned in a deep tint of scarlet, came on. With the brief introduction, "'The Absent-Minded Beggar,' by Rudyard Kipling," she read the poem, simply and eloquently, with one solitary dramatic gesture at the last line of the last verse, leaving the words—and they could be heard distinctly in every part of the theatre—to make their own impression. The poem may not be a high poetic inspiration, but it fell through a pleasant medium upon sympathetic ears, and moved all hearts. The effect was remarkable. It was not a Union Jack outburst, the prevailing note is not struck in that key—it was a warm but steady and somewhat restrained outburst, as if the sentiment of pride in the army was at the moment dominated by the determination that the nation would do its duty to the Absent-Minded Beggar. There was plenty of opportunity eagerly availed of later on when the orchestra played the National Anthem, and when

the military pictures were shown, for the expression of national and military enthusiasm, but for the time being the warlike sentiment was chastened by a deep touch of pathos.

'The effect was remarkable'; the response was 'not a Union Jack outburst [...] but a warm and steady and somewhat restrained outburst' in which pride is dominated by a sense of duty.' That is all rather vague, but the description can be seen to fall between the description of the *Daily Northwestern*, with its sense that the poem lacked patriotism, and the *Freeman's Journal*, with its sense that the poem was absurdly patriotic. Here was a poem that was not evidently patriotic or militaristic, particularly when compared, say, to Swinburne's "Transvaal", published in *The Times* on the 11th October.' Kipling's poem, in its opening lines, takes aim at the simple-minded jingoism of the music halls:

WHEN you've shouted "Rule Britannia"—when you've sung  
 "God save the Queen" —  
 When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth—  
 Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine  
 For a gentleman in kharki ordered South?

In place of 'killing Kruger with your mouth', as an entrance fee to join the community of the poem, is suggested a donation of a shilling, which, when given, turns the poem from one addressing the reader or audience as a misbehaving 'you' into one of the 'we' who are making common and proper cause:

He's an absent-minded beggar and his weaknesses are great—  
 But we and Paul must take him as we find him—  
 He is out on active service, wiping something off a slate—  
 And he's left a lot o' little things behind him!

Duke's son—cook's son—son of a hundred kings—  
 (Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay!)  
 Each of 'em doing his country's work (and who's to look  
 after their things?)  
 Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay—pay—pay!

This is a poem that takes quite aggressive aim at its audience, and asks them to change their attitude. It is also a poem full of word play and verbal wit. Take, for example, the final line of the chorus: 'Pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay—pay—pay!' This is a nice paradox,

depending for its effect the fact that in giving away money you typically incur a loss or debt, not a credit; in this context, however, the reverse is true, for one's social credit, in contrast to one's financial credit, is determined less by what you have than by what you have given. Or take the title itself: is the soldier 'the absent-minded beggar/bugger' because he has forgotten to take care of all those 'little things', such as his wife, partner, and children (mentioned in the next stanzas)? Or is he 'the absent minded-beggar' because he has, in his pride, refused or forgotten to ask for help? (As this makes clear, 'beggar' cannot in any simple sense stand in for 'bugger', though 'bugger' may be heard in 'beggar'.) With this sense, an attitude of admiration comes into the poem. Then, as the poem progresses, there is a clear sense that it is we, the reader or member of the audience, who run the risk of being the true 'Absent-Minded Beggar' if we do not come to the aid of his family in its need, a failure which, if allowed to happen, we must hope that he, being an 'Absent-Minded Beggar' will forget, if not forgive. That, of course, seems unlikely, for though he may be absent-minded 'he heard his country call / And his reg'ment didn't need to send to find him!' The poem suggests, in fact, that his remembering of his duty to his country is the cause of his forgetting of his family. The poem, in other words, turns upon its audience as it progresses, inviting us in to chuckle at the roguish soldier, known since Shakespeare's times for his weaknesses in wiving and swiving, but finally showing us a mirror in which we see ourselves as the likeable rogue we set out to find, minus the likeability – for we have no exonerating excuses for our forgetfulness, bar selfishness. The poem's movement is deft, and sharp, and understated. The poem is also interestingly allusive. For it is hard to hear the title, or think of the titular figure, without thinking of what is perhaps the single-most famous phrase concerning the British Empire. In 1883, John Seeley had published *The Expansion of England*. As the *Dictionary of National Biography* notes, it was an immediate and hugely influential success, setting out to explain, from its reading of history, where Britain's future lay. To Seeley, the future was one of a Greater Britain as a kind of 'World Venice'. For 'we seem', he wrote, 'as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind'. The 'absent-minded beggar', in this sense, is no less or more than the imperial soldier, the 'poor beggars' that make 'up the forces / O' Missis Victorier's sons' in "The Widow at Windsor" rephrased.

All of which is impressive, but the poem's real ideological work gets going with the line 'For a gentleman in kharki ordered South'. 'A gentleman in kharki' is a great phrase; in a poem full of quotable phrases, it is perhaps the most famous. It serves as the tag-line to

Caton-Woodville's illustration, and one can see why; "The Absent-Minded Beggar" is not a good tag-line for the simple reason that, as has been seen, it's meanings are various, and progressively developed. The phrase is, in a sense, too complicated or inflected to stand happily on its own. 'A gentleman in kharki', while also a rich phrase, is rich in a manner which allows it to be self-standing. It is another paradox; private soldiers are, by definition, not gentlemen – gentlemen, by definition, are officers. The poem, however, aims to rewrite this definition, by placing the private soldier within a notion of service that ennobles all, and which pictures a very different England to the one the Absent-Minded Beggar is actually sailing away from. In this England, everyone is a king. That is the force, first, of the chorus: 'Duke's son—cook's son—son of a hundred kings—'. It is the force, also, of the variations of the chorus: 'Cook's son—duke's son—son of a belted earl— // Son of a Lambeth publican—it's all the same to-day!'; 'Duke's job—cook's job—gardener, baronet, groom— // Mews or palace or paper-shop'; 'Cook's home—duke's home—home of a millionaire.' The persons, jobs, and places can be transposed because they have become equivalent, if not in rank and social worth – for those differences remain – then in weight and dignity and place within the structure of the poem and the poem's values.

More could be said here, both about the conception of soldiering at the time, and about the deeply contested nature of the notion of the gentleman. Kipling's subtlety, and the heart of the poem's success, lies in his use of the music hall idiom to these ends. Peter Bailey talks in his paper of how Kipling draws on the language of fraternity and mutual self-help. It is an important insight. I would like to suggest that Kipling not only understands and uses that idiom of the music hall, but engages with some of its more 'political', and equally central, dynamics. In an earlier paper on the music hall, Bailey looks at the arrival of the 'swell' song in the music hall of the 1860s, the most famous example being "Champagne Charlie".<sup>10</sup> As Bailey reads it, these 'swell' songs are troubled constructions of fantasy and political striving, and those tensions inhere in the figure of the 'gent'. The swell songs are, at one and the same time, proudly working-class, and socially aspirational, and deeply distrustful of the new world of the emergent culture of mass consumerism. The music hall of 1899 is very different, of course, from that of the 1860s, and the very idea of it as a place of working-class values or authentic Englishness was subject to debate at the time, and has continued to be so. I think, though, that what Kipling does in "The Absent-Minded Beggar" is to recast the swell or gent as the soldier; 'the gentleman in kharki' stands as a figure, or fantasy, of social reconciliation, in which working-class culture is granted gentlemanly

status by a bourgeois audience who acknowledges its dependency upon that culture. This is Henry V's St. Crispin's Day speech rewritten for modern times, or, as Bailey might say, for the 'bully-pulpit': 'For he to-day that sheds blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, / This day shall gentle his condition.'

This is political cunning on a grand scale, particularly if you think that the poem succeeded, as some do. So, for example, Miller, in his book about the South African campaign, claims that,

Kipling almost single-handedly restored the strong ties between civilians and soldiers and put Britain and its army back together again. Thanks to the 'Absent-Minded Beggar,' Tommy Atkins became a national hero for the first time since Waterloo."

This is all well and impressive, but what, though, if these are not your politics? What if you were a Liberal, who had seen the increasing demilitarization of British society through the Nineteenth Century as an example of progress? In *The Influence of the Press*, published in 1913, Scott-James, saw the South African war as a turning point for a mass audience newly created by the Education Act of 1870:

It was not only the moment when the working classes were being aroused to a feverish effort to think and feel and stretch themselves out towards life, but when the whole nation, aware perhaps of that deep stirring within its womb, was becoming conscious of itself in a new way, was perceiving the processes of change, was wearying of the old and unreal formulae, and was experiencing a new excitement, a lust for some collective action on the part of the organism, some demonstration of its eagerness for revolution or war [...] As it happened, Mr. Chamberlain, Mr Kipling, and the *Daily Mail*, plumped for *war*—for the most sensational, the most diverting, and at the same time a supreme national topic.<sup>12</sup>

Where things might have turned out for the better, Chamberlain, Kipling and the *Daily Mail*, a kind of unholy trinity, ensured the clock was turned backwards. To give Kipling so much 'credit' seems to me unpersuasive; one cannot imagine any one person as such a truly terrifying Bat Masquerier. What Scott-James makes plain, however, is the extent of the Liberals' fear of Kipling, and their belief in the claims of the *Daily Mail* about the influence of the poem. It is probably no coincidence that Robert Buchanan's famous attack on Kipling, "Is this the Voice of the Hooligan?", was published in December 1899, at the height of the poem's commercial popularity.

But perhaps the best evidence of the importance of "The Absent-Minded Beggar", and of Kipling, is given by the ways in which, having placed a girdle around the world, the poem entered into the world of literature. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, published in 1922, but set in 1904, Mr Best talks to Stephen Dedalus:

—Mallarmé, don't you know, he said, has written those wonderful prose poems Stephen MacKenna used to read to me in Paris. The one about *Hamlet*. He says: *il se promène, lisant au livre de lui-même*, don't you know, reading the book of himself. He describes *Hamlet* given in a French town, don't you know, a provincial town. They advertised it.

His free hand graciously wrote tiny signs in air.

HAMLET

ou

LE DISTRAIT

*Pièce de Shakespeare*

He repeated to John Eglinton's newgathered frown:

—*Pièce de Shakespeare*, don't you know. It's so French. The French point of view. *Hamlet ou...*

—The absentminded beggar, Stephen ended. (II, 9)

The comparison is a neat one. Hamlet is, of course, absent-minded about his revenge, as well as a beggar, even poor in thanks. Beyond those similarities, though, is the recognition that both figures, and their respective authors, can stand for English literature, and stand for English literature as an imperial force. Though that imperial dimension has other, quite unHamlettian aspects. The Prince and the beggar are not everywhere comparable; as Stephen goes on to say, 'Khaki Hamlets don't hesitate to shoot'.

#### NOTES

1. The *Daily Mail* and other papers can be read at the British Library, Colindale, on microfilm. There is also a relatively new, and remarkable, digital resource, 'British Newspapers 1800-1900'. This does not include papers which are still published, or papers which, though no longer being published, might have a commercial interest in digitizing their archives.
2. These figures come from James Gildea, *For King and Country: Being a Record of Funds and Philanthropic Work in Connection with the South African War. 1899-1902* (London: [n.p.] printed by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1902). The *Daily Mail* provided Gildea with the figures.
3. The hospital, also known as the Princess Louise Military Hospital, can be seen in its second life as the Lord Mayor Treolar Cripples' Hospital and College on a Pathé newsreel at: <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=72438>. The hospital and its

- site has now been largely redeveloped for housing, though at least one of the original buildings is said to remain.
4. The poem was not published free of copyright, as it is often said to have been.
  5. See Simon Potter's paper, however, for a discussion of the ways in which travel eastwards, to Australia and New Zealand, was very much slower, and presumably by ship. Interestingly, the *Japan Times* published the poem on 29th November, but did so after it had been cabled from its New York *Journal* correspondent.
  6. See, for example, *Daily Telegraph*, 27th and 28th October.
  7. Henry Irving had been making similar requests in 1897. The Trees would eventually succeed; in 1903 Herbert put on *The Man Who Was*, a single-act play adapted from the story of that name by Kinsey Peile with help from Kipling. It was a considerable success, mainly because it allowed Herbert to show one extreme of the range of his (sentimental?) acting as Austin Limmason.
  8. Maud is often reported as having earned £70,000 from her recitals at The Palace. All such statements are based on Julian Ralph, *War's Brighter Side: The Story of THE FRIEND Newspaper edited by the Correspondents with Lord Roberts's Forces, March-April, 1900* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1901).
  9. Tim Kendall's paper compared Kipling's, Swinburne's and Hardy's responses to the South African war.
  10. Peter Bailey, "Champagne Charlie and the music-hall swell song", in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 101-127.
  11. Stephen M. Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld: Britain's citizen-soldiers and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), p.23.
  12. R.A. Scott-James, *The Influence of the Press* (London: S.W. Partridge, n.d. [1913]), pp. 194-95.



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## KIPLING'S BULLY PULPIT: PATRIOTISM, PERFORMANCE AND PUBLICITY IN THE VICTORIAN MUSIC HALL

By Prof PETER BAILEY

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As a mass culture industry, the late Victorian music hall was a powerful engine of popular taste and opinion and, as it proved, a perfect platform for promoting Kipling's poem "The Absent-Minded Beggar". This appeal for funds for serving men in South Africa and their dependents at home at the height of the Boer War was first published in the *Daily Mail*, then performed as a dramatic recitation on the music hall stage. What explains the explosive match between author, artefact, medium and public in the global success of this piece and its message?

By the late 19th century music hall was the dominant form of commercialized public entertainment across the country.<sup>2</sup> In 1892 a Parliamentary Committee reported 160 music halls in England alone, a figure that was to rise to some 250 by 1914 and may well be an underestimate. Initially a rogue branch of capitalism music hall was rapidly consolidating as a modern corporate business whose operations and profits matched or surpassed those of mainstream manufacturing industries. Combinations of houses into syndicates or chains produced the largest operation of its kind with the formation of Moss Stoll Empires in 1900 with a capitalization approaching £2 million and forty outlets nationally, subject to centralized management and nationally integrated programming. Something like a third to a half of all remaining halls were under some form of syndicate control, many of them booking their artists through Moss Stoll. These corporate halls, newly built and restyled as 'variety theatres' featured enlarged capacities and twice nightly houses, colonizing the suburbs of big cities as well as the centres. The Empires of the brand mimicked imperial grandeur, providing vicarious consumption of the trophies and exotica of Britain's territorial empire, exemplified in the decorative elephants, oriental deities and pagoda like domes of the Hackney Empire, opened 1901, a triumphant design by Frank

Matcham, Moss Stoll's court architect. The spacious interiors of these new palaces of the people were complemented by a veritable democratization du luxe in the generous scale and quality of their amenities – plush seats (fauteuils), deep carpeting, handsome foyers, bars and crush rooms, and proper, sometimes quite splendid toilets.<sup>3</sup>

London boasted the greatest concentration of halls. In 1892 the 35 largest were estimated to sell 14 million seats annually. In 1900 there would have been 40 or so in the capital, including the well established fashionable West End houses of the Palace, the Alhambra and the Empire. These theatres of variety were part of a larger concentration of new leisure attractions that flourished in a late century London which, no less than Paris, was enjoying its own belle époque. Orthodox theatre in London was also enjoying a boom, the West End becoming a theatrical theme park with the construction of a dozen or more new theatres, concentrated on Shaftesbury Avenue, an aspirant grand boulevard opened up in 1887.<sup>4</sup>

Though separate entities at law, music hall and the 'legitimate' theatre grew closer together in these years. Music hall was forbidden by the Theatre Act of 1843 from producing the fully staged spoken drama of the legitimate theatre but had always offered piecemeal items of theatrical entertainment, most notably the sketch or play in miniature and excerpts of melodrama. Increasingly from the 1880s the new halls or variety theatres adopted the full material and mechanical apparatus of the theatre proper, complete with proscenium arch, modern staging effects and more directive house design. There was an increasing convergence of style, genre and personnel, as leading straight actors performed in sketches on the halls, while music hall stars, notably comics, were featured in new forms of 'light' entertainment filling the legitimate theatres – musical comedy, prototype of the modern musical, and revue. The critic Justin McCarthy argued that music hall had effectively colonized the legitimate stage such that the new musical comedy seemed little more than another form of variety show. Albert Chevalier, himself a straight actor who had become a star on the halls with his cockney impersonations, nonetheless deplored what he called 'the music hall-isation of the theatre', a threat to cultural standards he likened to *Titbits*, the mass circulation magazine, taking over *The Times*. Leading theatre managers such as Herbert Beerbohm Tree remained hostile to the halls for their illegal production of stage plays and the competition for audiences.<sup>5</sup>

Yet investment capital and its entrepreneurs migrated happily across these two major sectors of the burgeoning entertainment business. Prominent here was George Edwardes, the lessee / manager of three West End theatres, manager of the Empire Theatre of Varieties in

Leicester Square and director of the Manchester Palace. The inventor of musical comedy and the modern chorus line, Edwardes pioneered modern commodified production, packaging his shows in touring companies for provincial and international distribution. Richard D'Oyly Carte was another thrusting theatrical entrepreneur, opening the Savoy theatre in the Strand in 1881, the headquarters of Gilbert and Sullivan operetta and its world wide touring companies. Carte's introduction of fashionable first nights added the glamour of the social event to theatre going, doing much to lure back a middle class clientele. In 1891 he opened the Royal English Opera House at the juncture of Shaftesbury Avenue and Cambridge Circus. Resolutely modern in its American steel-frame construction and electric lighting, the new Opera House was distinguished by its bold ornamental façade and richly decorated interior. As an opera house it was a commercial failure, obliging Carte to shift to variety entertainment in 1893 under the new name of the Palace Theatre. It was here that Maud Tree, wife of Beerbohm Tree, declaimed "The Absent-Minded Beggar" in its sensational debut in 1899.<sup>6</sup> Later set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan, this was to be replayed in halls and theatres across the country to similarly enthusiastic responses in donations and applause.

The Palace was typical of the big central London halls in attracting a better class audience. Since the pioneer days of Charles Morton, the 'Father of the Halls', proprietors had bid for more respectable patronage both for revenue and the defensive colouring it provided against persistent charges of pushing drink, harbouring prostitutes and presenting indecent entertainments. In the 1850s Morton sought to attract respectable women and families to his Canterbury hall in lower class south London while luring fashionable patronage from across the river with operatic selections and an art gallery. Still in the business in the 1890s as manager of D'Oyly Carte's Palace he had seen his ideals largely realized even if claims of moral purity were still being compromised. In 1894 the Palace was attacked by the National Vigilance Association for staging semi-nude 'Living Pictures'. By this time, however, the predominantly working class clientele of the early halls had been joined by a substantial middle class fraction secure in higher priced stall accommodation, reassured by the superior appointments, more orderly conduct and respectable rhetoric of the new variety theatres. In 1896 E.M. Forster took his mother and aunt to a music hall, writing up their visit for his school magazine, albeit in Latin. There was an extensive secondary audience for music hall songs generated by cheap sheet music played on newly affordable pianos in middle class and working class parlours – one in nine households possessed the iconic instrument. Morton's successor at the Palace, Alfred Butt,

reported a large number of requests for auditions from suburban ladies encouraged by friends impressed with their singing at their At Homes.<sup>7</sup> Outside, errand boys, street singers, barrel organs and pianolas repeated the hits of the day, the music widely available in pirated versions: 'Every suburban High Street on a Saturday night was a mixture of market and music hall'.<sup>8</sup>

The social and cultural centre of gravity in the late century music hall audience lay in the substantial and growing contingent of the suburban lower middle class. White collar workers expanding in number with the growth of clerical and other service industries, they were avid consumers of the new commercial popular culture. Famously, Lord Salisbury judged the new halfpenny *Daily Mail* a newspaper 'written by clerks for clerks'. The young of the class used the halls as a school of manners, a site for self-display and flirtation. Benefitting from the independence and earnings conferred by 'the white blouse revolution' young women of the class were also now more conspicuously out on the town and pleasure bent. An observer in the West End in 1906 noted 'shopmen, clerks . . . but more numerous still are the shopgirls, typists, telegraph and telephone girls, and thousands of other girls... spending all their money gadding about, on sixpenny novels, on magazines, and above all on the theatre.' Young working class wage earners were another numerous element in the audience. Undercover in an East End tailoring shop in the 1880s, Beatrice Webb, nee Potter, noted the girl machinists' enthusiastic conversation on local music halls and 'going up West' to the theatre, where 'the show in the boxes and stalls is as good as the play'.<sup>9</sup>

Yet music hall was also under attack as a disturbing manifestation of a new mass culture. The Liberal C.F.G. Masterman combined aesthetic revulsion and deep political unease at what he called 'the new civilization of the Crowd' attacking the suburban lower middle classes for their susceptibility to 'the huge ignorance of the music hall and yellow newspaper'. In 1901 the noted economist J.A.Hobson held the halls responsible for what he termed *The Psychology of Jingoism*, an ultra patriotism that erupted with the war in South Africa and took over the streets in the wild celebrations of Mafeking night. Radical journalist W.T. Stead branded the war 'a Music hall war', its 'colossal ineptitude' attributable to entertainment he reviled as 'drivel for the dregs'. Such charges spoke to contemporary fears shared by Kipling that commercialized leisure and big city life were a threat to racial survival, endangering national efficiency at work and at war in a more dangerously contested world. Yet at the same time a cadre of literary intellectuals were championing the music hall as a modern folk art, whose robust and instinctual pleasures expressed an essential

Englishness and antidote to the enervations of bourgeois respectability. Fabian socialists proposed the halls be nationalized.<sup>10</sup>

Thus music hall was never out of the news. Its shows, its stars (and their salaries), its bosses (and their profits) were under regular review in the papers and periodicals, a major topic in an endlessly self-referential, mutually promotional loop of publicity for the growing business of commercialized leisure, its marketing and consumption. At the Leicester Square Empire in 1898, George Edwardes presented a spectacular ballet, "The Ballet of the Press", a history of print from Caxton to the present, its finale a grand parade of dancers costumed as newspapers, with pride of place going to the *Daily Mail*. Cheap photographic illustration and the introduction of the newspaper interview drove the new glamorization of women as showgirls and leisure time adventurers. Dudley Hardy's sensational posters of the Gaiety Girls, the chorus line in the musical comedy of the same name, were reproduced and imitated in a blizzard of graphic publicity on hoardings, omnibuses, newspapers, cigarette cards and the new picture postcard. A Rip Van Winkle character in an Arnold Bennett novel of 1908 confronted with London's streetscape after forty years seclusion is astounded by 'gigantic posters . . . in every available space'. 'All had to do with food and pleasure', he exclaims in wonder, 'endless invitations to debauchery with ham, tea and beer . . . and an astonishing quantity of pleasure palaces that offered you exactly the same entertainment twice over on the same night'."

Modern historians have been less concerned with the entertainment industry as such than with its specific impact on popular politics and ideology, a matter of some dispute.<sup>12</sup> Thus the London music hall of the period has been represented as a powerful conservative influence on its working class clientele, identifying strongly with the Tory party, pumping up patriotic and imperialist sentiments in a 'culture of consolation' that compensated for political impotence. Other interpretations suggest workers distanced themselves from such overheated propaganda, arguing that jingoism was more of a lower middle class enthusiasm. It seems clear that patriotic productions on the music hall stage were indeed popular though the question remains as to how wide this was and how deep its effect. A recent study claims the proportion of patriotic songs to the industry's total output was distinctly limited, arguing that its public, like the nation at large, were only 'absent minded imperialists', their regard for such matters ephemeral and superficial.<sup>13</sup> Songs are significant social and cultural texts but the dynamics of their performance and reception and the distinctive subculture of the halls also need attention in explaining the ready engagement and momentum that music hall gave to Kipling's "Absent-Minded Beggar".

War and national emergency were staples of music hall fare from its earliest existence as a distinct institution in the 1850s. The halls served as a great conduit for a miscellany of popular forms and genres, including a traditional taste for tales of heroism and derring-do. Common roots with the popular theatre generated the war spectacle, combining the heroics of melodrama and the ballad tradition in grandiose dramatizations of the battlefield. Spectacular re-creations of Trafalgar and Waterloo retained an enduring appeal across the century, while later battles provided new perennials, notably recitations of Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade", with one or more of the survivors in hallowed attendance.<sup>14</sup>

But the halls thrived on topicality and immediacy. As improved communications provided direct reports from the battlefields, the halls responded with instant dramatizations of the latest events. The Eastern crisis of 1877-1878 produced a clutch of topical spectacles. The Canterbury mounted a succession of shows depicting the battle of Plevna between the Turks and the Russians (with a benefit night for the Turkish Compassionate Fund), the dispatch of the British fleet to the Dardanelles, the Congress of Berlin, and a ballet celebrating the British annexation of Cyprus. At the North Woolwich Gardens, entrepreneur Billy Holland, 'The People's William', staged a Grand Congress Dinner, serving its statesmen-actors with the exact menu and music provided at Berlin."

In keeping with the idealization of the heroic common man of the ballad tradition, such productions often foregrounded the exploits of the common man in uniform. Jack Tar, the traditional stereotype of the sailor, was the dominant stage hero of the early century. Historically a figure of much less respect, the private soldier joined the cast of popular heroes after major gains in popular esteem in the Crimean War.<sup>16</sup> The soldier on stage was increasingly redeemed from his previous outsider status, further humanized with the depiction of family or romantic ties back home. A practise drawn from the theatre was the parade of servicemen on stage: a patriotic spectacular at the Canterbury featured a detachment of the Coldstream Guards from the Tower. Children were also used, often in great numbers, trained by drill sergeants attached to the new state elementary schools. Music hall proprietors were enamoured of the military, courting local officers as guests at their dinners and benefit nights, proud of their own commissions in the newly raised Volunteers. In garrison towns and others with barracks, other ranks were a conspicuous part of the audience, if usually consigned to the gallery. At the Oxford, where the whole company complete with waiters lined up twice a night to render the "National Anthem" and "Rule

Britannia" during the Eastern crisis, special matinees were provided for Guardsmen on their return from Egypt in 1882 with a present of two pints and a twist of tobacco each.<sup>17</sup> The soldier was increasingly represented in romantic terms as the lovable if wayward rascal. As James Fawn sang in 1887:

You all know what a soldier is;  
At least the nursemaids do.  
He's very fond of making love,  
He doesn't care who to.<sup>18</sup>

No less than Jack Tar, the private soldier achieved his iconic personification in the 1890s as Tommy Atkins, subject of Kipling's eponymous poem in his best selling *Barrack-Room Ballads*. Private Tommy Atkins featured as a character in the *Gaiety Girl* of 1894, true to form as a comic romantic, yet ever ready for the fray. 'To keep our flag a-flying, he's a doing and a dying / Ev'ry inch of him a soldier and a man.' Music hall put a high premium on the real heroes. In 1895 music hall agents laid siege to Netley Military Hospital to secure the services of the wounded Piper Findlater V.C., hero of the Gordon Highlanders' dramatic victory at Dargai on the North West Frontier.

It is the songs in particular that have been targeted as the prime stimulants of jingoism, a bombastic, militarist patriotism of a mostly Tory persuasion that broke out in the strident support for Disraeli's anti-Russian foreign policy during the Eastern crisis of 1877-78. The trigger was the runaway hit "By Jingo" by G.W. Hunt, expressly written for G.H. Macdermott – the 'Great Macdermott' – an established star of commanding stage presence. It has been argued that the song indicates an unwillingness to initiate hostilities, stating only a readiness to fight if Turkish sovereignty and British interests in the security of Constantinople and the sea route to the East are threatened by Russian aggression. Hence the chorus: 'We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do / We've got the men, we've got the ships / We've got the money too.' 'We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true / the Russians shall not have Constantinople'. But as the crisis deepened, the song was recast, 'jingo' was transformed into a collective noun –

'Jingoes sure are we!' – and made an unconditional call to arms.<sup>19</sup>

Macdermott's performance first registered as a sensation at the London Pavilion, catching the attention of Disraeli's secretary Monty Corry and, as the mostly now disproven story goes, earning some discreet financial support from the Tories. That the Pavilion was among the more trendy halls with a greater proportion of clerks, shopmen, medical students and men about town in its audience speaks to the

thesis of a mostly petit bourgeois enthusiasm for such sentiments. But the trade press shows the earliest success of "By Jingo" was in the predominantly working-class halls of South London and the East End. Nor was this a solely metropolitan phenomenon for such patriotic fervour is well attested in the provinces. Macdermott's exaltation of Disraeli's assertive foreign policy, with Gladstone and John Bright cast as pusillanimous snivelers, went down predictably well in Tory Liverpool but also, to the astonishment of the local reviewer, carried Birmingham halls by storm in a town 'as full of Liberals as the sea is full of salt'.<sup>20</sup>

But some qualifications must be made to this picture of a broad popular audience hooked on strident patriotism. Again it is helpful to see music hall as a conduit for older forms and practices. As well as inheriting and reworking the traditions of melodrama and the ballad, music hall inherited a popular love of parody as counterweight to pretension and idealism. In a modern entertainment industry with a media fed self-regard and growing fetish of celebrity, parody became more relentless and few successful acts escaped. Thus almost every song of heroic action or suffering, often in the same bill and by the same artist was accompanied by an explicit parody. Thus a celebration of the Royal Fusiliers' victory at Inkerman was immediately sent up as "The Royal Boozeliers" while the excesses of jingoism made it especially vulnerable. Herbert Campbell, a specialist in the style, enjoyed great success with his rejoinder to Macdermott: 'I don't want to fight, I'll be slaughtered if I do / I'll change my togs and sell my kit and pop my rifle too! / I don't like the war, I ain't no Briton true / And I'd let the Russians have Constantinople.' Campbell suggested that Russophobia was whipped up by the press 'because it makes the papers sell'. All politicians anxious to help the Turk, he declared, ought to put on uniform themselves. Significantly, Campbell also noted the poor financial support for wives of reservists during the Afghan and Zulu campaigns.<sup>21</sup>

Added to resistance to the recklessness of high policy and the false glamour of patriotism was a recurrent emphasis on the serving soldier's more common fate as casualty than hero, after service as much as during it. In the mid '80s Charles Godfrey followed his successful sketch "On Guard", whose hero defends his post against all odds, with a sequel "On Tramp" which shows him as a destitute veteran callously neglected by his country and consigned to the workhouse. Another inherently critical mode was the mock heroic. The head waiter at the Metropolitan in Edgware Road did a regular turn as the People's Strategist, sending up official pronouncements with his own comic manifestos. Herbert Campbell produced more spoofs on the military, waving a shabby pocket handkerchief tied to a stick while the chorus

sang 'Our noble militiamen triumphantly cry / You shan't blow your nose on our flag.' The officer toff was another frequent target of this counter tradition, caricatured in song as comically eccentric, flirtatious or bumbling. Toys based on music hall characters included a mechanical doll mimicking "The Galloping Major", a 1907 hit in the style.<sup>22</sup>

Traditional music hall history maintains the War Office tried to ban the performance of Godfrey's hostile sketch "On Tramp" because it deterred potential recruits. What needs equal emphasis is that while such critical acts might well have slowed recruitment, the songs of urgent patriotism did nothing to stimulate it: recruiting sergeants who stalked the halls when Macdermott was in full cry met with no success at all.<sup>23</sup> But then the glorification of the soldier in arms had plainly not dispelled a long standing aversion to army service as a last resort for the self-respecting working-man. A song from 1895 "When they found I was a soldier" evinces disbelief and distaste for a new recruit with its chorus 'There's another good man gone wrong'. In 1907 the Home Secretary issued instructions to Chief Constables to ensure theatre and music hall managers understood the undesirability of permitting on stage anything calculated to cast ridicule on the wearers of His Majesty's uniform or any tendency to interfere with recruiting – "The Galloping Major" syndrome.<sup>24</sup>

Resolving the contradictions of popular enthusiasms has less to do with political specifics than the self-consciously theatrical nature of much of music hall patriotism. Whatever real identification there was with the actual sentiments of song and spectacle, much of the exuberance of audiences was due to their enthusiastic embrace of the role of performers themselves, assigned to them in the ritual antiphony of posture and response inherited from melodrama with its hagio-demonology of heroes and villains. That the performers on stage expected this as common practice is shown in a report from the 1890s of the unusual phenomenon of an audience needing prompting in its cues.

I have heard a comic singer stop the orchestra and say to the audience: 'I don't think you could have understood that last verse. The line was 'And drive these German boors away!' Some of you applauded: you mustn't do that. You must hiss that line. Now we will try that over again; and don't forget to hiss.' At which he'd repeat the verse, and the audience would hoot and hiss at the appropriate sentiment.<sup>25</sup>

At other times audiences put their own interpretation on an act, tipping the see-saw between heroic and anti-heroic to the surprise of the

performer. In a song-sketch "A Lucky Shilling" in 1890 (G.W. Hunt again) Godfrey played a young man anxious for the action and distinction that enlistment might bring, enquiring earnestly of the sergeant who tempts him to take the shilling 'Is there likely to be any fighting?' According to the reviewer, 'the audience imagined that caution and not ardour dictated the inquiry and received Mr Hunt's very appropriate line with a roar'.

Most music hall audiences were well rehearsed in their appropriate roles, particularly the young males. Working class youth in big cities such as Birmingham and Manchester used the galleries as rallying points for their gangs; young clerks in London formed roaming bands that moved from hall to hall in search of excitement. 'There is', said *The Era* (the leading trade paper) in 1885, 'a certain class of youth, which may be found at places of public amusement in large quantities which cares nothing at all about the questions of the day, but is perfectly ready to exercise his lungs to any extent in favour of his side.' Here was another distinctive property of music hall patriotism, its declamatory tribalism, a form of incantatory collective self-admiration among audiences flushed with enthusiasm for themselves. 'The people who shout themselves hoarse . . . in snobbishly proclaiming England's omnipotence,' remarked another witness, 'know that they are complimenting themselves, and they like the operation'. These audiences, observed an upmarket periodical, 'revelling as they do in the consciousness that they are never likely to be called on to fight in defence of their country, yell . . . with the true belligerency of the non-combatant'. These were the same people observed rushing to the exits before the national anthem concluded the night's programme.<sup>26</sup>

The music halls of the late century provide ample evidence of the regular production of a bellicose nationalism edged with an increasingly defensive imperialism which met with considerable enthusiasm among its many and diverse audiences, displaying a reflexive pugnacity that ran long and deep in the popular mentality. Yet this exercise in theatricalised aggro was regularly undercut by mockery, cynicism and suspicion in a potentially cathartic double register that was perhaps no more than residually ideological. What seems plain is that the crowd responded as much to people as to policies, particularly where the people in question were personified as 'one of us', a form of collective identification achieved by Kipling's "Absent-Minded Beggar".

Thus a key element in the appeal of Kipling's text was its connection with the values of fraternity and mutual self-help entrenched in music hall's socially intensive subculture of artisanal and small business origins. The self-generated amateur entertainment of the pub 'free and easy' from which the halls derived was embedded in a nexus of

clubs, lodges, trade and friendly associations combining mutual protection against the bad times and ready occasions for the good times, combining business and conviviality, saving and feasting. The publicans who were the early music hall entrepreneurs continued the practice in the benefit night, an institution with a parallel history in the theatre. Performers gave their services for free, adding their earnings to audience donations for the victims of local and national calamities – the painter who broke his leg, the victims of mine disasters and shipwrecks, the unemployed.<sup>37</sup> The increasing scale and bureaucratization of music hall in the late century diminished its community function but the benefit night spoke to traditional sentiments re-energised in the industry's promotion of Kipling's appeal for funds for servicemen's dependents. It spoke too to a more generalized public conscience reawakened to its social obligations with the sensational revelations of big city poverty in the 1880s and '90s. "The Absent-Minded Beggar" drew on the new sympathy for the soldier and the reservist as his vital auxiliary in language that echoed that of the benefit night and the recurrent motif of friendship and camaraderie in music hall song. Such tropes became all the more insistent as a night out at the music hall, like big city life in general, lost its ready sense of community, requiring constant reassurance to the contrary. Hence the long running success of Tom Costello's song "Comrades" from 1890, the slogans of the new variety theatres – 'We're all pals at the Palace' – and the pals and chums of popular literature ('Thank God for a trusty one', as Kipling wrote), sentiments translated into action in 1914 with the formation of the pals' battalions.

The authenticity of Kipling's colloquial style has been doubted but there is much in his language and sensibility that accords with prime elements of music hall's distinctive idiom, learned no doubt from his own forays into London music halls and pubs in the early nineties where he listened as much as he looked, mingling with the soldiers in the audience and entertaining a whiskey soaked 'Lion Comique' in his chambers. In a short story from 1890, Kipling assumes the character of an 'ethnological' visitor and aspirant song writer scouting the smaller halls to learn how the star performer wins his audience. The visitor's studies pay off when his own attempt at a music hall hit draws rapturous applause as the chorus 'went home with a crisp click'. Preparing Alfred Harmsworth, the proprietor of the *Daily Mail* for his submission of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" in 1899, Kipling informed him that the verses, written on 'strictly music hall lines', had been 'on the stocks for some time'. The poem shows this. It has the presumptuous, almost badgering cheek of the cockney performer hailing his audience. Its soldier subject is presented in a tone of deprecating idealism typical of

music hall's back-handed humanity, pre-empting yet incorporating elements of parody in another of the hall's double registers. Tommy is actually a bit of a bastard but that is the inescapable, indeed admirable condition of his readiness to 'save the Empire', the fulfillment of an unspoken contract with his audience. As fraternal elements of the great British people, all are called to account, reconstituted as 'his mates (that's you and me)'. The poem calls the bluff of the usual music hall braggadocio – 'Killing Kruger with your mouth' – demanding that its public put their money where their mouth is, catching the rhythmic echo of innumerable music hall choruses in the staccato admonition 'pay—pay—pay!' That the poem was initially delivered by Maud Beerbohm Tree, a leading lady of the legitimate theatre, then put to music by Sullivan flattered the crowd while speaking to the halls' aspirations to artistic legitimacy and respect.<sup>28</sup>

As a modern culture industry music hall was a potent engine of promotion and dissemination for its product, particularly one of such topical appeal as Kipling's "The Absent-Minded Beggar". The work gripped its audiences on several levels. It spoke to the exultant cum skeptical double register of music hall patriotism, it re-energised traditions of fraternity and mutual self help in working life, and generated a sense of collective purpose and identity among its atomized contingent of petty bourgeois suburbanites. The Palaces and Empires of the music hall industry were the perfect bully pulpit for Kipling's urgent message of empire, emergency and good fellowship.

#### NOTES

1. University of Bristol, 19 June 2010. My thanks to John Lee and the present-day music hall artist Chris Harris for their input and enthusiasm. For the phenomenal reach and effect of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" see other articles in this issue.
2. D.F. Cheshire, *Music Hall in Britain* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1974); Peter Bailey (ed.). *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); J.S. Bratton (ed.). *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986; Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Dave Russell, "Varieties of Life: The Making of the Edwardian Music Hall", in Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan (eds.), *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). pp. 61-85; Tracy C. Davis. *The Economics of the British Stage. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
3. Brian Walker (ed.), *Frank Matcham: Theatre Architect* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980); Terry Hallett, *Bristol's Forgotten Empire* (Westbury: Badger Press, 2000).

- Bristol boasted two of the new model variety theatres: the Empire, opened 1893, demolished 1963. and the Hippodrome, designed by Matcham, opened 1912, still extant.
4. Andrew Horrall, *Popular Culture in London, c. 1890-1918: The Transformation of Entertainment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
  5. Bailey, "Theatres of Entertainment/Spaces of Modernity: Rethinking the British Popular Stage, 1890-1914", *Nineteenth Century Theatre*, 26/1 (Summer 1998), pp. 5-24.
  6. Max Beerbohm, *Herbert Beerbohm Tree: Some Memories* (London: Hutchinson, 1920), pp.112-3.
  7. Percy Burton, "How a Variety Theatre is Run: A Day at the Palace Theatre with Mr Alfred Butt", *The Strand*, May 1909, pp.510-19.
  8. Thomas Burke, *London in My Time* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1934).
  9. Bailey, "White Collars, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited", *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), pp.273-290; Beatrice Potter, "Pages from a Working-Girl's Diary", *Nineteenth Century*, 24 (September 1888), pp.301-14.
  10. Barry J. Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity: The Late Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2004); Bailey, "Entertainmentality! Liberalising Modern Pleasure in a Victorian Leisure Industry" in Simon Gunn and James Vernon (eds.). *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 176-95.
  11. John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.xv: Arnold Bennett, *Buried Alive* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp.87-89.
  12. Hugh Cunningham, "Jingoism in 1877-1878", *Victorian Studies*, 14 (1971), pp.429-53; Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900", *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974), pp.460-509, reprinted in Jones, *Languages of Class*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 179-238; Laurence Senelick, "Politics as Entertainment: Victorian Music Hall Songs", *Victorian Studies*, 19(1975), pp. 149-180; Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914", *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), pp.8-33; Penny Summerfield, "Patriotism and Empire: Music Hall Entertainment, 1870-1914", in John M. Mackenzie (ed.). *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 17-48; Dave Russell, "'We Carved Our Way To Glory': The British Soldier and Music Hall Song and Sketch, c. 1880-1914", in Mackenzie (ed.). *Popular Imperialism and the Military* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.50-79.
  13. Bernard Porter, *The Absent Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The title echoes John Seeley's famous remark of 1883 in his best seller *The Expansion of England* that the British Empire was acquired in a fit of absence of mind. Cf. on music hall, Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005).
  14. Bratton, (ed.), *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).
  15. *Entr'acte*, 15 June 1878; *Era*, 3 February, 14 July 1878.
  16. J.M. Brereton, *The British Soldier: A Social History. 1661 to the Present* (London: Bodley Head, 1986); Edward M. Spiers, "War", in Francis O'Gorman (ed.),

- Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.80-100.
17. Examples from *Entr'acte*, 21 May 1881 (Birmingham); *Era*, 16 December 1882, 19 January 1889.
  18. Quoted in Russell, "We Carved Our Way to Glory", p.59, who usefully identifies three basic characterizations of the soldier: Romeo, fighting man, veteran.
  19. Cunningham, "Jingoism". For Macdermott, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
  20. *Era*, 27 May 1877; *Birmingham Daily Globe*, 10 December 1879.
  21. For the latter point, see Russell, "We Carved Our Way to Glory".
  22. For Godfrey, see obituary *Era*, 31 March 1900.
  23. *Entr'acte*, 29 June 1878.
  24. *Performer*, 23 May 1907.
  25. Richard Harding Davis, *Our English Cousins* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1894), pp. 179-84. The Germans in question were waiters and musicians allegedly cutting Englishmen out of jobs; other foreign workers were also targeted.
  26. *Entr'acte*, 27 December 1879; "The Music Hall", *Cornhill Magazine* 60 (1889), pp.68-79.
  27. Bailey, "A Community of Friends: Business and Good Fellowship in London Music Hall", in Bailey (ed.), *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure*, pp33-52.
  28. Rudyard Kipling, "My Great and Only" (1890), reprinted in Kipling, *Abaft the Funnel* (New York: B.W. Dodge, 1909), pp.292-304; Kipling, *Something of Myself* (1937) (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp.79-81, 87; Colin Maclnnes, "Kipling and the Music Halls" in John Gross (ed.) *Rudyard Kipling: The Man, His Work And His World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp.57-61. Kipling to Harmsworth, 22, 25 October 1899. My thanks to John Lee for reference to the correspondence.



This songsheet does not have a publication date, nor a copyright date. However the British Library Integrated Catalogue suggests the year of 1899 for this work. – Ed.

AN IMPERIAL MEDIA EVENT:  
THE "ABSENT-MINDED BEGGAR" TRAVELS THE  
BRITISH WORLD

By Dr SIMON J. POTTER

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THE DEEP-SEA CABLES  
(A SONG OF THE ENGLISH)  
Rudyard Kipling (1896)

The wrecks dissolve above us; their dust drops down from  
afar—

Down to the dark, to the utter dark, where the blind white sea-  
snakes are.

There is no sound, no echo of sound, in the deserts of the deep,  
Or the great grey level plains of ooze where the shell-burred  
cables creep.

Here in the womb of the world—here on the tie-ribs of earth  
Words, and the words of men, flicker and flutter and beat—  
Warning, sorrow, and gain, salutation and mirth—  
For a Power troubles the Still that has neither voice nor feet.

They have wakened the timeless Things; they have killed their  
father Time;

Joining hands in the gloom, a league from the last of the sun.  
Hush! Men talk to-day o'er the waste of the ultimate slime,  
And a new Word runs between: whispering, "Let us be one!"

## I

In May 1902, the *New Zealand Tablet* told the story of a Zulu child who had been named 'M'forsana E Kohlaio' by his parents, reportedly a translation of the title of Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Absent-minded Beggar".<sup>1</sup> Even if apocryphal, this transnational tit-bit, linking a British poem, a Zulu child and a New Zealand Catholic newspaper, captured a wider truth that was perhaps largely self-evident to contemporaries: the publication of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" was not just a UK media event, but also an imperial one. The poem's dissemination overseas reflected and expressed, and in a modest way reinforced, a global British identity and sense of imperial cultural interconnection.

Such a media event is of clear relevance to scholars of the British world, an old term recently rehabilitated by historians to describe the constellation of white settler and other overseas communities that saw themselves as British, and that were linked in a multitude of ways with the imperial centre. The wanderings of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" around this British world may also be of interest to historians of the media, especially given the recent emphasis that they have placed upon the role of the modern mass media in creating a global order, within a framework conditioned by nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial interests. Histories of empire, communication and globalisation have started to inter-connect. Steam-powered shipping routes and railway lines carried letters and newspapers around expanding empires with greater speed, regularity and reliability. Subsequently, long range electric communication by telegraph and undersea cable and, later, radio, provided further infrastructural support for the globalisation of information and culture. Crucially, these channels of transnational communication were established in accordance with the commercial agendas of British and European companies, often exploiting opportunities for profit opened up by empire, and sometimes serving broader imperial interests. British and European (and, later, American) governments intervened to ensure that imperial communication links were developed in such a way as to serve the state as well as private needs. Like railways in India and roads in Africa, steamship routes, telegraph lines, cables and radio transmitters were imperial achievements, and were recognised as such by contemporaries.<sup>2</sup>

In his earlier poem "The Deep-Sea Cables", reproduced above, Kipling had mused on the potentially transformative effect of undersea cable telegraphy on long-distance communication. Uncanny, other-worldly, cables carried man's messages through a strange and alien realm. Communication over vast distances was now almost instantaneous. Father Time had been slain, the tyranny of distance overthrown and new communities, united by the cable, could now be forged. During the late nineteenth century, many other commentators were similarly

beguiled by the prospect that this new technology would 'annihilate space and time' and somehow draw together the globe's sundered peoples and nations. In particular, and as an obvious preliminary step towards global integration, cable telegraphy seemed to offer the prospect of uniting the British world, binding its already like-minded component parts together in a closer union. Yet, as it transpired, the effects of cable telegraphy were not quite as revolutionary as anticipated. Messages could indeed travel at great speed, but not necessarily in sufficient number to render older, slower, wider channels of imperial mass communication entirely obsolete. Here, the pioneering (if somewhat oracular) work of the Canadian economic historian Harold Innis is still of some interest. Innis argued that structures of communication and of political and economic organisation were inextricably linked, shifting over time in interaction with each other. The varying means of communication adopted by different empires reflected and changed how they functioned more generally. 'Monopolies of knowledge', which allowed privileged interest groups to exert control of communication for their own benefit, often played a role in how empires rose and fell. This emphasis on monopoly and inequality has also informed some more recent discussions of globalisation and communication. The media historian James Curran, for example, has rejected accounts that present the media as contributing to a largely benevolent process of globalisation, by which a more cosmopolitan, inter-connected world was ushered into existence. Such accounts, Curran argues, are based on a naive disregard for economic and institutional factors. Inequalities of power have been exacerbated, not ameliorated, by the global media. Similarly, the historian of Africa and empire, Frederick Cooper, has suggested that in thinking about global patterns of interconnection, we need to explore and acknowledge not just the achievements, but also the unevenness and limitations of such structures.

The world has long been – and still is – a space where economic and political relations are very uneven; it is filled with lumps, places where power coalesces surrounded by those where it does not, places where social relations become dense amid others that are diffuse. Structures and networks penetrate certain places and do certain things with great intensity, but their effects tail off elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The analysis that follows does not provide a full itinerary of the travels of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" around the British world. That would take more space than is available here, and involve the sort of comprehensive research that will hopefully be the outcome of the future study of the poem's dissemination now being led by John Lee. Rather, this

essay seeks to draw attention to some of the background issues that influenced how the poem was disseminated in the British world. The preliminary indications are that this imperial media event showed not just the possibilities of contemporary imperial communication, but also its limitations. At least as far as Australia and New Zealand were concerned, "The Absent-Minded Beggar" did not travel by cable through the primordial ooze. Like his comrades *en route* to South Africa, he went by ship, and took a fair amount of time to arrive at his destination.

## II

In Britain in the early nineteenth century, while the press was far from unsophisticated, newspapers generally remained small-scale operations, with limited circulations, and often serving a purely local clientele. Many competing viewpoints were expressed, and axes were ground with vigour and enthusiasm. During this period, a similarly 'free' press (driven primarily by the market mechanism, and with less and less direct state intervention or regulation) gradually began to be established in Britain's settler colonies in Canada, southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and also in India and those other colonies where a significant white English-speaking element was establishing itself. Kipling experienced the dying days of this older, fragmented world of the nineteenth-century press, through his own newspaper work in Lahore and Allahabad in the 1880s.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, newspapers around the British world were connected up with one another by slow and uneven flows of news, hindered by the haphazard and unreliable nature of overland and maritime mail routes. Nevertheless, within these constraints, the press was able to operate reasonably successfully as a medium of imperial communication. Reports for publication travelled in the form of hand-written letters and, more importantly, printed copies of other newspapers. Editors in the colonies eagerly gutted these sources for news, plagiarizing copy from UK and other overseas titles often without acknowledgement. By the 1840s, a 'steamship press' had also developed in London, ensuring an even more regular outward flow of printed news. Titles such as *Home News* and the *European Mail* published summaries of British and world news to coincide with the departure of the mails from Britain to the colonies.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, to establish a reciprocal set of news flows, colonial editors carefully constructed their own synopses of local news and opinion and printed them in time to catch the departing mail boats for Britain. This provided colonial editors with opportunities to highlight key points that they wished to communicate to audiences in the UK and in other colonies. London already acted as the empire's news hub, the centre of a wide-ranging, if slow-moving, set of channels through which information could flow.

The diverse, competitive and highly politicized nature of the press in Britain and the settler colonies meant that, where political conflict existed over imperial issues, opposing groups could use newspapers to form their own 'imperial networks', alliances forged across the empire's internal boundaries. These transnational groupings were relatively loose and informal, and subject to change. They not only linked the colonies to Britain but, as Tony Ballantyne has argued, connected different colonies with each other.<sup>5</sup> Alan Lester has examined how such networks facilitated early nineteenth-century debates about the treatment of indigenous peoples in Britain's settler colonies. As white settlement brought escalating frontier violence, settlers also had to defend themselves from concerted political warfare waged by humanitarians in Britain and in the colonies. These groups were able to form themselves into networks through the press, and to piece together information and arguments from around the empire into an overall critique of settler violence. In turn, settlers established their own imperial networks, communicating among the colonies and with Britain, in order to counter the accusations of humanitarians and to defend the 'Britishness' of their actions and policies. According to Lester, these networks played a key role in shaping thinking about race, Britishness and settler identity in the colonies and in Britain, helping to form a global sense of British identity, forged at various interconnected sites of colonisation.<sup>6</sup> Later, however, these networks began to lose some of their vitality. Few sympathetic voices were heard either in the colonies or in Britain when, after years of frontier war with white settlers and soldiers at the Cape of Good Hope, the Xhosa slaughtered their own cattle in response to millenarian prophecies, and a terrible famine ensued. The Indian Mutiny and Rising of 1857 met with a similar, unanimously hostile response from editors in Britain and the colonies. In such circumstances, when Britons at home and in the colonies closed ranks at times of imperial challenge, coverage tended to become homogenous: competing voices were simply not heard.<sup>7</sup>

Subsequently, during the later nineteenth century, technological, commercial and institutional changes influenced the press in ways that fundamentally reshaped possibilities for imperial communication. New means of long-distance electric communication by telegraph and cable were part of the broader technological transformation and industrialization of the press. As transport links improved, and urbanisation and suburbanisation continued, newspapers could cater to ever-larger potential markets, in which literacy was also increasingly the norm. Improved printing techniques allowed ever-larger print runs. As the scale of production increased, commercial preoccupations became more pronounced, and newspapers generally subordinated political considerations to the need to generate revenue by attracting advertisers.

The 'press barons' of the early twentieth century were certainly interested in exerting political influence, but they almost always put profit first.<sup>8</sup> Kipling was very familiar with this in his later years: he was after all the man who first accused the press barons of exercising 'power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages', a damning formulation subsequently deployed by his cousin Stanley Baldwin.

In the sphere of imperial communication, commercialisation and industrial concentration meant the emergence of international news agencies and press cartels, seeking to control transnational flows of news and thus make a profit. The introduction of telegraphs and cables did not simply reinforce or augment existing imperial networks. Rather, it reshaped and to some extent restricted them. Submarine telegraph cables were laid by large private companies, which subsequently charged users punishing transmission rates in order to recoup heavy fixed capital costs and pay generous dividends to shareholders. Such pricing policies were often made possible by the fact that certain companies enjoyed monopolies of direct electric communication with particular areas. The Eastern and Eastern Extension Telegraph companies (an interlocking groups of enterprises), for example, held a monopoly over telegraphic communication between Britain and Australia until 1902. The expense of using the cable system made it necessary for newspapers to share the costs of transmitting news. In the British case, Reuters Telegram Company was quick to spot the commercial opportunity that this offered, and occupied the niche created for the gathering and sale of syndicated cable news within the British empire. Together, the various international news agencies carved the world's news markets up into their own protected fiefdoms. This cartel agreement was mimicked lower down the food-chain, where the larger newspapers sought to restrict competition in local markets by controlling incoming flows of international news and denying supplies to their rivals. In Australia and New Zealand, for example, Reuters was obliged to work through the intermediary of a newspaper cartel, dominated by the large Australian dailies and managed by the Melbourne *Argus*. While some newspapers managed to bring in meagre supplies of supplementary news, in general a small number of news agencies and newspaper cartels came to exercise overwhelming control over the British empire's services of cable news. The news that flowed around the empire was thus reassuringly 'British' in terms of its sources, but the actual amount of information circulating within the protected imperial news market was extremely limited. Agencies and cartels had little interest in bargaining down cable rates to reduce the cost of cable news, for by doing so they might encourage potential rivals to breach their monopoly of knowledge, and thus allow profits to be competed away.<sup>9</sup>

Newspapers still published plenty of material that had arrived by mail, but increasingly found that the news value of such information had been compromised by the short syndicated summaries delivered by cable. When a combined British and Egyptian military force under the command of Herbert Kitchener was sent to re-impose imperial authority over Sudan in 1896-98, many British newspapers still despatched their own war correspondents to accompany it (the young Winston Churchill among them) in order to supplement syndicated cable news summaries with more detailed mailed accounts. However, as they discovered after the climax of the campaign, the battle of Omdurman, these mailed reports often reached Britain more than three weeks after outline accounts had arrived by cable. Kitchener had built a railway and telegraph line as he advanced, keeping him and the newspaper correspondents in near-instantaneous electric communication with Britain. The mailed reports, no matter how detailed and difficult to procure, were now old news, and it was hard to sustain interest in them. As Richard Jebb of the London *Morning Post* later noted, 'It is an incident of modern civilisation that people will not read the letters in their newspapers, however excellent those letters may be, with the same avidity as the cabled intelligence – they must have everything red-hot!'<sup>10</sup>

Syndicated cable news also compounded the tendency towards uniformity of coverage that had been evident even in the supposed heyday of diverse, competing imperial networks. A growing reliance on news agencies and cartels meant that editors had access to a less varied range of reports from overseas, even if the news they did have was more up-to-date. Imperial networks were displaced by something approximating an 'imperial press system', less fluid, and less open to multiple voices. Systematisation was never complete: during the South African war, for example, some British papers were able to make special arrangements with like-minded counterparts in South Africa to supply supplementary cable news, and thus reduce their reliance on Reuters. Yet this was not a major threat to the predominance of the empire's main news agency: much of the news about the war read in Britain, the British world and even further afield was filtered through Reuters. Uniformity was marked. Reuters carried the same reports by famous British war correspondents to papers all around the empire: in describing the relief of Ladysmith; for example, papers in Australia and New Zealand all drew on the same reports, provided by Winston Churchill of the London *Morning Post* and Bennett Burleigh of the London *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>11</sup>

These were the limitations imposed on mass communication within the boundaries of the British world, which comprised the empire's most prosperous and well-connected regions. On the margins of Britain's sphere of imperial influence, the obstacles were even more obvious. In

Sudan, Kitchener's new telegraph line stopped at Khartoum. When, shortly after the battle of Omdurman, he received word that an expedition seeking to assert France's own claims to mastery in the region had established a base further up the Nile, Kitchener was able to turn the limits of the contemporary communications infrastructure to his advantage. Steaming up the Nile, Kitchener's force confronted Captain Marchand's French expedition at Fashoda, and successfully confined it there. While it took Kitchener seven days to get his report of the encounter back to England, crucially, he was able to benefit from a monopoly of knowledge. He banned British newspaper correspondents from travelling to Fashoda, and also for a time denied Marchand the use of either the Nile or the telegraph line. It would have taken months to get a message back to Europe from Fashoda using any other route. This information gap gave the British government a useful advantage in its negotiations with the French: the only news coming from Fashoda was from Kitchener, and French policy-makers in Paris had to rely on what they were told by their British rivals. By the time that Marchand got his own report back to his superiors in Paris, the French government had already more-or-less decided to order his withdrawal and the abandonment of the French territorial claim. British and French newspapers had meanwhile whipped themselves up into a frenzy of jingoism, fuelled by the absence of reliable reports, and the nerve-wracking uncertainty of communication. The British prime minister, Lord Salisbury, thought that in Europe it was 'as difficult to judge what is going on in the Upper Nile Valley as to judge what is going on on the other side of the moon'.<sup>12</sup> The press debate over the rights and wrongs of British and French claims at Fashoda was based almost entirely on speculation and bombast.

### III

Given the limitations of the imperial press system as it existed at the close of the nineteenth century, the fact that "The Absent-Minded Beggar" did not travel the British world instantaneously by cable is a little less surprising than it at first seems. The London *Daily Mail* published the poem on 31 October 1899, and put £250 into a 'women and children's fund' in lieu of payment to Kipling. By the date of publication, other British and Irish newspapers had each paid five guineas to the patriotic fund for permission to publish the poem, as had three papers in the US (the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Journal* and the *New York World*). The *Arkansas Democrat* published it within two days of its appearance in London.<sup>13</sup> Kipling's voice carried clearly and quickly across the Irish Sea and the Atlantic. But, on the other side of the British world, the poem was only available for publication in Sydney on 8 December, in Perth on 9 December and in Christchurch

on 14 December. This five- to six-week delay corresponds with the amount of time it would have taken for a hardcopy of the poem to have travelled to Australia and New Zealand by steamship. Why this failure to feed the poem by cable? It was probably simply a matter of expense, with penny-pinching cable news cartels unwilling to pay the substantial bill that would have been incurred by cabling a poem of around five hundred words from Britain to their subscribers in Australia and New Zealand. After all, the cartels were at the time doing everything they could to keep down the cost of covering the war.<sup>14</sup>

The time-lag in publishing "The Absent-Minded Beggar" certainly did not reflect any lack of contingent of troops which had been sent to fight in South Africa. On 21 December, after publishing the poem, the Brisbane *Courier* established its colonial enthusiasm for participation in the war, either in body or in spirit. The poem was scheduled for recital before a paying audience within two days of its arrival in Sydney, and was subsequently recited before an audience of 1,500 in Launceston's Albert Hall, to raise money to support the Tasmanian own patriotic fund to assist members of the Queensland contingent. By the time the poem was published in Christchurch, the first contingent of New Zealand troops had already been in South Africa for about three weeks. A few days later, New Zealand forces engaged in combat overseas for the first time in the country's history, and sustained their first casualties. On 26 December, following UK precedent, the Christchurch *Star's* sister-paper, the *Lyttelton Times*, began to sell its own specially-printed copies of the poem for a shilling apiece, donating the proceeds to a locally-established patriotic fund.

Neither can the delay in publishing the poem be explained in terms of any hesitation to support UK troops. The *Sydney Morning Herald* proudly published the poem on the London *Daily Mail's* terms, making a five-guinea contribution to the UK-based fund. Although the *Lyttelton Times* passed on the proceeds of sales of its printing of the poem to a local Canterbury patriotic fund, it had already been decided to forward half the monies contributed to that fund to the Lord Mayor of London, for use in the UK. There was, after all, enough money raised to satisfy the *Daily Mail's* requirements, to send additional funds to Britain as a symbol of solidarity and to relieve those left behind by the colonies' own absent-minded beggars. Thus, as the poem made its way around Australia and New Zealand, scenes very familiar to newspaper-readers, music-hall-goers, and victims of the ubiquitous public recitations of the poem in the UK were re-enacted across these 'neo-Britains'. In March 1900, Christchurch's Theatre Royal was still packed for performances of a 'military drama' called *The Absent-minded Beggar*. And in April a Miss Wilkinson of Chertsey, near Ashburton, gave two shillings to the

Canterbury patriotic fund, raised by her own recitals of the poem. As the country press attests, many others around Australia and New Zealand contributed in similar small ways.<sup>15</sup>

#### IV

Echoing the arguments of Jürgen Habermas, it has been argued that in Britain during the later nineteenth century, the increasingly commercial and industrial nature of the press acted to restrict access to, and limit the scope of, the public sphere.<sup>16</sup> In much the same way, we might argue that if during the first half of the nineteenth century the press acted as a relatively open and multi-vocal medium of imperial mass communication, in turn creating a nascent imperial public sphere, then subsequent commercial and technological changes worked to limit participation and narrow the range of discussion in that arena too. A loud and well-known voice like Kipling's could echo around the globe, albeit after some delay. Other voices might scarcely be heard at all. The publication of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" was an imperial media event, but it was one that revealed some of the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the late-nineteenth-century infrastructure of imperial communications. Telegraphs and cables had not created a 'Victorian internet'.<sup>17</sup> We would be wise to remember this as we use today's world-wide web to help track down the global dissemination of Kipling's poem. Many online resources are now available, that can help us sift through the detritus of the past in exciting new ways. However, as we use these powerful tools, we should bear the contemporary context in mind, and read datelines. In towns and cities in Australia and New Zealand, readers had to wait many weeks for Kipling's poem. In the Australian outback, some would have waited many months.

In "The Deep-Sea Cables", Kipling had imagined communities united by the cable, 'joining hands in the gloom'. It is a little ironic that, a couple of years later, "The Absent-Minded Beggar" had to travel to Australia and New Zealand by ship. Yet even so, the extensive reach of Kipling's wartime poem surely was a sign and mild stimulant of the unity of the 'British peoples' at home and overseas, at a moment of challenge. Contemporaries contemplating the effects of the cable often argued that its significance as a creator of a new sense of community derived from the simultaneity of electric communication. Benedict Anderson's emphasis on the wider role of the press in encouraging individuals to imagine themselves as members of larger, impersonal national communities – newspapers could now be distributed quickly across ever-larger markets, allowing newspaper reading to become an 'extraordinary mass ceremony [involving] almost precisely simultaneous consumption' – is a variation on this older argument.<sup>18</sup> But the case

of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" indicates that too much can be made of simultaneity. Kipling's poem was not consumed simultaneously by readers in Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Nevertheless, it proved a clear marker of imperial unity. A significant time-lag did little to dampen the patriotic – or jingo – response to Kipling's long-distance call to alms.

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With acknowledgement to the National Library of New Zealand as the source of this illustration, which was copied from their website at: <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>. — Ed.

## KIPLING AND TOMMY ATKINS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

By Prof EDWARD M. SPIERS

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As an evocative writer about imperial warfare, and a chronicler of the values and attitudes of the British soldier, Rudyard Kipling had made his reputation long before the outbreak of the South African War on 11 October 1899. By spending seven formative years in India (1882-9), he both forged military contacts while at Lahore and learned much about frontier soldiering from his father's knowledge of India, his library, and the files and reference works of *The Civil and Military Gazette*. Although Kipling had written about African warfare with his memorable poem, "Fuzzy Wuzzy" (1892), the bulk of Kipling's military poetry had focused primarily upon India, most notably *Soldiers Three* (1890) and *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892). He had not seen a shot fired in anger, and would not do so until the battle of Karee Siding (29 March 1900), but he was already hugely popular with the military before the onset of the South African War and the remarkable impact of his poem "The Absent-Minded Beggar" (1899).<sup>1</sup> To assess the significance of Kipling's poetry and presence in South Africa as the war developed requires reflection upon the diverse feelings of soldiers as war unfolded in ways that had not been anticipated, a summary of the experiences on active service in a war that proved unexpectedly protracted, and some understanding of how the historical interpretations of this service have evolved.

For about seventy years commentators on the South African War took their cue from the 'lucidity and brilliance' of Leo Amery's writings, particularly in the seven-volume *Times History* that he edited. Amery provided a fierce critique of the early campaign in Natal, disparaging the generalship of Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., his staff, and the

performance of regimental officers and other ranks. The pre-war army, wrote Amery, was 'largely a sham', and the home army, in particular, was 'nothing more or less than a gigantic Dotheboys Hall' (an allusion to the notorious academy in *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens):

Neither in skill with the rifle, nor in individual intelligence and initiative, nor in physical and moral endurance, was the British soldier equal to the terribly exacting demands of modern warfare.<sup>2</sup>

Modern historiography has done much to correct the exaggerations of Amery's work and to modify the interpretations of an author determined to promote army reform by illustrating the 'supreme military incapacity' of Buller compared with the 'clearness of vision, undaunted resolution, and boundless energy' of his successor as commander-in-chief in South Africa, Lord Frederick S. Roberts, V.C..<sup>3</sup> Another notable account of Tommy Atkins still dwells upon evidence of his drinking, looting, whoring, periodic flight in battle and 'unflagging' desire to return home,<sup>4</sup> but the multitude of letters sent home paint a more rounded picture.<sup>5</sup>

The shock and impact of the South African War upon the British soldier has normally been expressed in two fundamental respects: first, that the British soldiers had learned little from defeat in the Anglo-Transvaal War (1880-1) and that they underestimated an enemy, often depicted as mere farmers or ill-disciplined citizen soldiers; and secondly, that they came to South Africa ill-equipped to engage in modern warfare with an enemy that had used its gold wealth to equip its soldiery with the latest field guns and magazine rifles. If there is much truth in the first observation, the second is debatable and the element of shock in either case derives from the immense self-confidence and high esteem with which British soldiers came to South Africa. That self-confidence and high self-esteem derived from the recent history of the British army. These soldiers were basking in the reflected glory of Omdurman (2 September 1898), where one of the largest and most formidable African armies of the late nineteenth century had been annihilated in a morning, and the storming of Dargai heights by the 1st Battalion, Gordon Highlanders (20 October 1897), an epic event celebrated across India, the United Kingdom, and by Caledonian societies across the empire, including those in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Hugely celebrated as feats of arms, they followed all the pageantry and military pomp of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (22 June 1897).<sup>6</sup> By 1899, therefore, British forces left India and the United Kingdom highly motivated and confident. Many left Britain, expressing their gratitude for the large, jingoistic and enthusiastic crowds that

had gathered to send them off to war, with county pride in local regiments mingling with national patriotism. They appreciated, too, the receptions from English-speaking communities in South Africa, and the continuing support from local folk at home during the campaign.

Equally in evidence at the outset was the animus that many soldiers felt for the Boers, who had expelled the Uitlanders from the Transvaal and invaded northern Natal, looting the homesteads of British farmers. 'The civilian people', wrote a Leicestershire soldier, 'are all turned out of house and home, and are flying to us for protection. It is shameful to see the way they have been served. Women and children turned out in the road to starve in the rain. Some came into our camp yesterday that had walked over thirty-six miles in the heat of the day, which was about 110 in the shade. So it was awful to see them. . . . I don't think the Boers in the Transvaal will receive any mercy or pity from our men when we start.' These feelings would be compounded once the fighting began by the reports of the Boers misusing the white flag, firing on ambulance wagons often mistakenly, and using dum-dum bullets but equally apparent was a grudging recognition of the marksmanship, field craft and mobility of the enemy: skills acknowledged by Kipling in "Piet" (1901), 'I've known a lot of fellers shoot a dam' sight worse than Piet'.

Yet nothing had prepared British and imperial soldiers for the shock of the early military engagements: the outranging of British artillery other than the large guns operated by the Naval brigades; the inability to see an enemy, who proved adept at constructing entrenchments and reserving fire until the British forces came within range; the difficulties and heavy casualties incurred in trying to cross fire zones swept by smokeless, flat trajectory magazine rifles; and the frustrations of trying to out-flank or pursue a highly mobile adversary. The disorientation of the modern battlefield found reflection in a succession of humiliating surrenders, most notably at Nicholson's Nek (30 October 1899) when 37 officers and 917 soldiers surrendered to about 300 Boers. Worse still were the devastating defeats of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso, – the 'Black Week' of 10-15 December 1899 – and at Spion Kop (383 British deaths among the 1,733 casualties) as well as the costly victory at Paardeberg (348 deaths). As Britain had only thrice suffered more than 100 fatalities in a single action in all the colonial wars since 1857, these losses accounted for the considerable shock in the field and at home. As Major-General Neville Lyttelton observed,

Few people have seen two battles in succession in such startling contrast as Omdurman and Colenso. In the first 50,000 fanatics streamed across the open regardless of cover to certain death, while

at Colenso I never saw a Boer all day till the battle was over, and it was our men who were the victims.<sup>8</sup>

Despite relieving besieged towns of Kimberley, Ladysmith and Mafeking, defeating Boers in open battle (Paardeberg), and capturing their capitals of Bloemfontein and Pretoria, frustrations mounted: 'It has been one continual round of patrol & mounting guards', observed Trooper C. Mitchell, '& I am now on one of 24 hours, so that a soldier's life is not all glory, & easy work. That is the side you see in the papers . . .'<sup>9</sup> As the war spread into the hinterland of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, with British forces pursuing an elusive and mobile enemy, columns found themselves marching across vast distances, 'sloggin' over Africa' as Kipling would describe in "Boots" (1903). Feelings of isolation became increasingly common and persisted for the next two years: 'I am wearying very much for news from Stirling as well as from home', wrote Private Munro (Black Watch), 'You never saw such a dismal hole as this is. You never saw a more deserted place [Winburg], as all the men are at war, and it is Boer to the heart.'<sup>10</sup> Though fit, disciplined and adequately supplied, men despaired at times: 'We are still at Bloemfontein', wrote Private Tom Wood (Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry), 'but have to keep taking long and tedious marches into the surrounding country on the look-out for the enemy.'

Faced with a recalcitrant adversary, and one willing to renege or persuade others to renege on their oaths of neutrality, the British army instituted policies of coercion, first under Lord Roberts and then in a sustained manner under his successor, Lord Kitchener. The scorched earth policy involved the burning of Boer homes, the destruction of their crops and livestock, and then the herding of the displaced women and children into poorly run internment camps. The policy denied the Boers food and sustenance, a base from which to rest and recuperate, and a source of intelligence about British movements. For most, if not all, soldiers, this was thoroughly distasteful work: as a Cornish soldier observed, 'We are removing all the women and children off the farms, burning all food stuffs, and killing all the pigs and poultry... It is very disagreeable work, and the women, of course, take it badly – howling and crying.'<sup>11</sup> Ultimately Kitchener would refine this policy by complementing it with the construction of 8,000 blockhouses and 100,000 miles of barbed wire to protect the railways and compress the Boers' freedom of manoeuvre. With about one third of the soldiery actively pursuing the Boers, the remainder undertook all manner of support duties, including service in supply columns, garrisons and blockhouses. As each heavily protected blockhouse held about six or seven men, and

was about one mile from the next blockhouse, they rarely came under direct attack but the occupants had to maintain night-time alerts lest the Boers cut the wire and cross from one sector to another. For soldiers manning these blockhouses, the many months of duties became profoundly boring: it was, as Lance Corporal G. Hill (Somerset Light Infantry) stated, 'very quiet and monotonous' work.<sup>13</sup>

How then did soldiers cope with the isolation, frustrations and boredom of active service in South African conditions? As in other campaigns wherever men gathered in camp-sites, railway junctions and hospitals there were opportunities for gossip, 'irrepressible' humour,<sup>14</sup> the reading of letters and newspapers, and the writing of letters, even poetry. More formally, the rest and recreation would include sports, concerts and entertainments, with hunting for the officers; informally, whenever opportunities arose, there were incidents of drunkenness, looting (to supplement minimal and often half rations), and cohabitation with local women (though relations with Boer women were rarely cordial).<sup>15</sup>

What effect then does Kipling have upon the soldiery in South Africa? The letters and diaries of soldiers provide some evidence, albeit hardly extensive, of an awareness of Kipling's writing and poetry, and of his presence when he visited South Africa in 1900. These letters like correspondence from previous wars reflect a widespread use of the language and idiom popularized by Kipling. They also testify to an awareness of Kipling as a standard bearer and fund raiser on behalf of the ordinary soldier in the United Kingdom, not least through the astonishing success of "The Absent-Minded Beggar" (1899), a poem set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan and sung as part of an appeal by the *Daily Mail* to raise money for soldiers and their families. The chorus of the song exhorted its audience to 'pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay— pay— pay!' Kipling would build on this reputation when he came to South Africa, entertaining the troops and writing for an army newspaper, *The Friend*.

George Younghusband, who was promoted lieutenant-colonel in 1900, and had seen service in Afghanistan, the Sudan, Burma and the north-west frontier before serving in the South African War doubted that rankers had always spoken in the manner described by Kipling. He claimed, nonetheless, that they came to express themselves 'exactly like Rudyard Kipling had taught them in his stories!'<sup>16</sup> This was evident in previous wars where soldiers described their Sudanese enemies in the mid-1880s as rebels, blacks, savages, Arabs, sometimes correctly as Hadendowa Arabs but often in more derogatory terms: only during the reconquest of 1896-8, after the publication of Kipling's famous poem, do men use the term, 'Fuzzy Wuzzy'.<sup>17</sup> Similar usage of

Kiplingesque terms recurred in Natal, where Lance-Corporal J. A. Chinnery (1st Battalion, South Lancashire) recalled an occasion when his unit languished near a river as the rain fell in torrents: 'After remaining in this condition for about seven hours, one of the "Absent-Minded Beggars" asked why the baggage was not thrown off (to) make a bridge.'<sup>18</sup>

Kipling also embodied links with home. After living through the 118-day siege of Ladysmith, including the 12 hours of close-quarter fighting on Wagon Hill (6 January 1900), Corporal J. Roberts (2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders) like many other survivors desperately sought news and contact with home. He thought 'we were going back to India, but we ain't. We are a going to "feight" again, we are. Send another paper, also Rudyard Kipling's latest if you can.'<sup>19</sup> Moreover the soldiers, especially reservists with families at home, were all too aware of the fund-raising stimulated by "The Absent-Minded Beggar". They generally appreciated the gifts and presents sent from Britain but there were odd exceptions. C.F. Berry (Durban Light Infantry) welcomed the gifts of tobacco and matches sent by 'some kind and thoughtful friends':

But the pipes! There were second-hand wooden ones, and not a man would take one except as a curiosity... From what I can gather they were collected at some smoking concert or music-hall in London, being thrown on the stage while someone was reciting "The Absent-Minded Beggar". The men who had been smoking them might have been suffering from some loathsome disease. . .<sup>20</sup>

Some, too, were sceptical about how long the public support for the troops would endure. Corporal Arnold (2nd Battalion, Lincolnshire) claimed that

'Having done without it so long, Tommy Atkins is somewhat indifferent to public opinion and has his own notions as to its durability. Rudyard Kipling', he added, 'hits this off very well in one of his poems; I forget the exact words of it, but it runs something like this:-

In peace it's Someone fetch a policeman and turn these soldiers out!

But it's 'Thank you, Mr. Atkins', when the bullets fly about.

This insane "khaki craze" . . . has lasted long enough to make the public look like a lot of sensation-crazed asses.<sup>21</sup>

Soldiers certainly welcomed Kipling's presence when he came to South Africa in February 1900. He immediately began making morale-boosting visits to military hospitals, performing at smoking concerts and purveying comforts from the Absent-Minded Beggar Fund. At Wynberg Hospital near Cape Town. Frank Morrish (St John's Ambulance) recalled:

Rudyard Kipling has been here again this week: he came in my ward. . . There is not the least bit of pride in him. . . In the evening they got up a concert for the patients. . . They all encored him so much that he came back and asked them what they would like. They all shouted "The Absent-Minded Beggar", so he recited it, and it was a huge success.<sup>22</sup>

He also visited the Green Point camp near Cape Town in February 1900, taking a close interest in the weapons and lives of officers and men, and so ensured that subsequent writing captured those details and insights that gave it a real feel of authenticity. After travelling up to the railhead at the Modder River, the scene of heavy fighting, he returned in an ambulance train on 24 February and wrote a letter home for a soldier who had lost his right arm. When facsimiles of the letter were sold for war charities, Kipling disapproved strongly.<sup>23</sup>

Yet Kipling's appeal for Tommy Atkins extended beyond his concern for the welfare of soldiers and their families, his common touch, and his disdain for self publicity. It reflected the fact that his poetry and short stories, though clearly empathizing with their values, rarely lapsed into romantic sentimentality. He saw more injury, death and disease in South Africa than he had seen in India, and blamed the outbreaks of typhoid and dysentery upon 'our own carelessness, officialdom and ignorance'. Having spent only a couple of weeks working on the army newspaper, *The Friend* (21 March to 1 April 1900), he did not return to the front when he revisited South Africa in 1901 and in 1902. Even so, he composed some remarkably perceptive poetry about the nature of the war, and the changes wrought by war in South Africa, mostly in 1901 and published after the war, in *The Five Nations* (London: Methuen, 1903).

He captured the grinding frustrations of the counter-insurgency operations: 'There isn't much we 'aven't shared, since Kruger cut and run, The same old work, the same old skoff, the same old dust and sun;' ("The Parting of the Columns"). The distinctive challenges from 'the long-range Krupp be'ind the low-range hill' ("Ubique") and the highly mobile enemy – 'I've known a lot o' people ride a dam' sight worse than Piet!' ("Piet") – required the breaking up of traditional battalions

and the formation of mounted infantry units: 'I used to be in the Yorkshires once (Sussex, Lincolns, and Rifles once), Hampshires, Glosters, and Scottish once! But now I am M.I.' ("M.I."). Equally demanding was the need to operate across a massive theatre, and this had required the assembly of an army of unprecedented size, with reservists ("The Married Man") returning to the colours, Volunteers and colonial troops (like the Australians celebrated in "Lichtenberg"). While mobile columns, often operating at night, sought to catch the Boers unawares – 'Read their 'ome letters, their papers an' such, For they'll move after dark to astonish the Dutch, *With a section, a pom-pom, an' six 'undred men'* ("Columns") – many others defended the railway.

Kipling understood that the railway was probably the most distinctive feature of the war in South Africa as the railway sustained the entire war effort, bringing reinforcements, supplies, water, weapons and horses to the front while removing the wounded and prisoners. Protecting the railway from Boer attacks, therefore, and utilising it to sustain the imperial war effort while constraining the movements of the enemy, became an overriding pre-requisite of the war. In "The Way That He Took" (1900) he wrote of showing 'the loyal Dutch that there was artillery near the railway if any patriot thought fit to tamper with it'.<sup>24</sup> Kipling recognised, too, that soldiering had changed as a consequence: 'No, not combatants—only Details guarding the line' ("Bridge-Guard in the Karoo"). Kipling may not have produced 'the great South African book' but he understood the war, grasped its many changes and the profound effects it could have on the men involved whether Boer prisoners ("Half-Ballad of Waterval") or British deserters ("Wilful-Missing") or when soldiers returned to 'awful old England again' ("Chant-Pagan").<sup>25</sup>

Even if many, though not all, of these poems were published after the war, Kipling remained hugely popular among the troops. Soldiers composed affectionate parodies of his poetry:

When we've finished stopping Mausers, when we've fought  
 across the veldt;  
 I would like to just remind you, by the past slights that we've  
 felt,  
 That your kindness need not cease with what you gave,  
 For you're absent-minded "payers", you've our friendship  
 yet to gain,  
 'Cos you only value Tommy—when he's wanted;  
 'Cos we know that when the transports land us in your  
 towns again,

'Tis our faults, and not our fighting will be flaunted.  
 Sweep's sons, Snob's sons, in helmet or service cap  
 (Many thousand horse and foot homeward from Table  
 Bay);  
 Added a chapter to England's fame, also more red on the map,  
 But will you remember in time of Peace?  
 Now say! say! say!

This was only the first verse of a four-verse parody by 'George' of the 2nd Dorsets.<sup>26</sup>

Soldiers saw in Kipling a champion, a friend, an entertainer, and a fund-raiser. He reduced their sense of isolation and boosted their morale, briefly by his presence, but more fundamentally because he understood, and was able to interpret to others, their values and experiences. Though staunchly patriotic and committed to the empire, he appeared above the rank jingoism of 'killing Kruger with your mouth'; he sought tangible support for the 'absent-minded beggar' whose 'weaknesses are great' but whose 'reg'ment didn't need to send to find him' when he 'heard his country's call' ("The Absent-Minded Beggar"). If there were shortcomings exposed in South Africa, the fault lay, in Kipling's opinion, not with the troops but with officialdom, officers – the general who 'got 'is decorations thick' and the staff, who "ad D.S.O.s till we was sick' ("Stellenbosch") – an army that was 'the laughing stock of the Continent' ("The Comprehension of Private Copper"),<sup>27</sup> and peacetime illusions: 'We made an Army in our own image, on an island nine by seven' but the consolation was that 'We have had no end of a lesson: it will do us no end of good' ("The Lesson", 1901).

#### NOTES

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## SECRETARY'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SOME FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Wednesday 13 April 2011**, 5.30 for 6 p.m. in the Mountbatten Room, Royal Over-Seas League, **Professor Thomas Pinney** (editor of *Kipling's Letters*) on "Kipling and America, or 'the lawless golden horde'".

**Wednesday 4 May 2011**, 12.30 for 1 p.m. in the Hall of India and Pakistan, Royal Over-Seas League, **The Society's Annual Luncheon. The Rt. Hon. Lord Cope of Berkeley:** "'To Sing the Song o' Steam' – the Engineers' Poet and Pioneer Motorist". For details please see December flyer or contact Jane Keskar.

**Wednesday 6 July 2011**, 4.30 p.m. **Annual General Meeting** in the Mountbatten Room, Royal Over-Seas League. A complimentary tea will be served at 4.00 p.m. in the Wrench Room for members who inform the Secretary in advance. After the A.G.M., 5.30 for 6 p.m., also in the Mountbatten Room, actor **Geoff Hales** will perform his acclaimed one-man show "Private Kipling – a celebration of Kipling's life in his own verse and prose."

**Wednesday 7 September 2011**, 5.30 for 6 p.m. in the Mountbatten Room, Royal Over-Seas League, **Speaker to be announced.**

**Friday & Saturday 21 & 22 October 2011**, an **International Conference** at the Institute of English Studies, London, on "Rudyard Kipling: An International Writer", organised by **Prof Jan Montefiore** and **Dr Kauri Nagai** of the University of Kent, Canterbury. Please see page 7 in issue 340 (March 2011).

**Wednesday 9 November 2011**, 5.30 for 6 p.m. in the Mountbatten Room, Royal Over-Seas League, **Professor Harry Ricketts** on "Kipling and the War Poets".

## ANNÉE KIPLING-2011 VERNET-LES-BAINS

[This report is abstracted by the Editor from the Vernet websites mentioned below, and other sources supplied by Alan Mattingly. The story of "Why Snow Falls at Vernet" was reprinted in *Journal* No.294 (June 2000, pp.35-40) to which M. Mattingly added explanations in a "Letter to the Editor" in *Journal* No.310 (June 2004 pp.65-66). – Ed.]

A hundred years ago, in 1911, Rudyard Kipling and his wife spent a month in the spa town of Vernet-les-Bains, in the foothills of the eastern Pyrenees mountains, all described by Richard Duncan in *Journal* No. 340 (March 2011, pp. 17-32). Today, a century later, the town pays tribute to the author of *The Jungle Book* – and of the lesser-known but delightful tale "Why Snow Falls at Vernet" which he wrote during his 1911 visit. He described Vernet as "a lovely place" where one could enjoy "the quietest life under the sun". He was especially captivated by Canigou, "a magician among mountains".

More than fifty events are planned in 2011 to celebrate the centenary of one of the Kiplings' stays in the town. The theme of these events, which will take place from March to October, will be the personality and the works of Rudyard Kipling. This year, the local council will open two new self-guided trails, one around the historical "Belle Epoque" part of Vernet where Kipling stayed, and a second in the Winter Garden, a nearby former landscaped hillside where Kipling probably obtained inspiration for his short story about Vernet.

In addition to the new self-guided walks, the planned events include talks by senior lecturers of the University of Perpignan and by members of the Pyrénées-Orientales Historical Society, films, concerts, historical reconstructions, other walks in the area including strolls on the slopes of Canigou, and exhibitions.

The full programme of events is accessible on the internet at [http://www.vernet-les-bains.fr/iso\\_album/kipprogang.pdf](http://www.vernet-les-bains.fr/iso_album/kipprogang.pdf) (or go to the home page of [www.vernet-les-bains.fr](http://www.vernet-les-bains.fr), click on "Année Kipling 2011" at the top, then choose "Programme in English (PDF)").

There is also an English version of a press dossier for the French media. It also contains the programme of events, plus background information. It is accessible from the English section of the website at <http://www.vernet-les-bains.fr/vernet/english.asp>. The poster that has been designed to promote the occasion is alone well worth seeing and is currently on the home page of the Vernet website.

**CONTACT** : Office de Tourisme

2 rue de la chapelle, 66820 Vernet-les-Bains. Tel: 00 33 4 68 05 55 35  
email: [tourisme@ot-vernet-les-bains.fr](mailto:tourisme@ot-vernet-les-bains.fr) web: [www.vernet-les-bains.fr](http://www.vernet-les-bains.fr)

## ABOUT THE KIPLING SOCIETY

The Kipling Society is for anyone interested in the prose and verse, and the life and times, of Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). It is one of the most active and enduring literary societies in Britain and, as the only one which focuses on Kipling and his place in English Literature, attracts a world-wide membership. (Details from the Society's web-site and membership forms from the **Membership Secretary, Kipling Society, 31 Brookside, Billericay, Essex CM11 1DT**. The forms quote the minimum annual subscription rates. Some members contribute a little more.)

The Society is a Registered Charity and a voluntary, non-profit-making organisation. Its activities, which are controlled by a Council and run by the Secretary and honorary officials, include:

- maintaining a specialised Library in **City University, Northampton Square, London EC1V 0HB**,
- answering enquiries from the public (schools, publishers, writers and the media), and providing speakers on request,
- arranging a regular programme of lectures, and a formal Annual Luncheon with a Guest Speaker,
- running the web-site at **www.kipling.org.uk** for members of the Society and anyone else around the world with an interest in the life and work of Rudyard Kipling,
- and publishing the *Kipling Journal*, every quarter.

The *Journal* of the Society aims to entertain and inform. It is sent to subscribing paying members all over the world free of charge. This includes libraries, English Faculties, and 'Journal - only' members. Since 1927, the *Journal* has published important items by Kipling, not readily found elsewhere, valuable historical information, and literary comment by authorities in their field. By not being wholly academic, the *Journal* is representative of Kipling, whose own diverse interests and versatile talent covered a wide range of literary writing – letters, travel, prose and verse. For the serious scholar of Kipling, who cannot afford to overlook the *Journal*, a comprehensive index of the entire run since 1927 is available online to members or in our Library. Apply to: **The Librarian, Kipling Society, 72 Millbank, Headcorn, Ashford, Kent TN27 9RG, England or email to [jwawalker@gmail.com](mailto:jwawalker@gmail.com)**

The Editor of the *Kipling Journal* publishes membership news, Society events, and the texts of talks given by invited speakers. In addition, he is happy to receive letters and articles from readers. These may be edited and publication is not guaranteed. Letters of crisp comment, under 1000 words, and articles between 1000 - 4000 are especially welcome. Write to: **The Editor, Kipling Journal, 32 Merton Road, Harrow HA2 0AB, England or email to [davpag@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:davpag@yahoo.co.uk)**

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