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2nd
Prize

"Helped"
a good deal
I suspect

Probably as good as any: but
for comparison with Percatou.

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An Appreciation of the Writings of Rudyard Kipling.

Summary:

1. Kipling the man.
 - (a) His life and his work.
 - (b) Why some people do not appreciate him.
 - (c) The variety of his subjects.
 - (d) His admiration for the "trade-spirit."
2. Kipling the poet.
 - (a) Verse or Poetry?
 - (b) "McAndrew's Hymn" and "The Mary Gloster."
3. The journalist.
 - (a) The Simla stories.
 - (b) Mrs. Hawksbee.
 - (c) The abandonment of Simla as a setting.
4. The Imperialist.
 - (a) How he came to be regarded as such.
 - (b) His gift of word and phrase.
5. The lover of machinery.
6. The writer of children's stories.
 - (a) His motive for writing them.
 - (b) His success.

7. The Novelist.

- (a) "The light that Failed"
- (b) "The Naulakha."
- (c) "Captains Courageous" - the trade-spirit again.
- (d) "Kim."

Author, poet, journalist, and Imperialist — Rudyard Kipling was all of these, and his life is reflected in his works. It is true that there are some who refuse to accept Kipling as a great writer, on the grounds that his works do ^{not} appear to be anything out of the ordinary, but these are generally people who have tried to read a lot of Kipling's work in a short time. Because of his wide range of subject matter and ideas, the mind is liable to be overwhelmed by the very variety, so that Kipling's works are seldom appreciated ~~they~~ unless they are read as they were meant to be read. Kipling's works were essentially written for individual publication in various magazines and newspapers, and there are few who, reading them as such, will not recognize their author as a genius. Kipling was able to write well on any subject, from the stories of social life at Simla to such weird stories of the supernatural as "The Mark of the Beast" and "At the End of the Passage." He could describe with amazing insight the feelings of the average British soldier, and those of the world's workers, as seen in "The Day's Work." But there was nothing that he described with more relish than the process whereby some raw cut is ~~the~~ licked into shape by the trade-spirit. This is the theme of his novel "Captains Courageous," and of such short stories as "Pharaoh and the Sergeant" and "The Centaurs." It is contained in all his army stories and his sea stories, and is allegorically expressed in "The Ship that Found Herself."

The man who with his pen can describe with remarkable detail anything from the mechanical workings

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of a ship's engine to the feelings of man in love is a true literary genius, and Kipling could do this with ease.

As a poet, Kipling was very popular, but he was really more a writer of verse than a true poet. Those who disliked him often said that he wrote nothing but jingles, but this is definitely too harsh a judgement. It is far more fair to class Kipling as a writer of verse, some of which achieved recognition as poetry. His best known poems are probably "The Ballad of East and West" and "Recessional." The latter of these was written to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and is often sung as a hymn today. It is hard to say which are his best poems, but I would choose "McAndrew's Hymn" and "The Mary Gloster" as his finest efforts. Of the two, perhaps the former is more popular, but it is difficult to say why. Although both poems are monologues, the presence of the rapacious old shipowner's silent son gives to "The Mary Gloster" a dramatic quality that is absent in "McAndrew's Hymn." However, in spite of this, it is probable that Kipling himself put more enthusiasm into the writing of "McAndrew's Hymn" because of his great love of steam, machinery, and technical detail.

But although most of Kipling's verse was very popular when it was written, his subjects were mainly topical, and comparatively few of his poems ever attained the high standard or the lasting quality of his prose. So it is as a writer of prose that Kipling is best known.

At the age of twenty-two, Rudyard Kipling annexed India for his own literary purposes, but his earlier efforts, being simply tales of India, were purely journalism. They lacked the deep insight into the land and her people which characterized his later work. Using to advantage his talent for observing details and expressing his thoughts in admirably simple phrases, as a journalist he succeeded in getting out of India the maximum of

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literary effect. Coolly and competently, Kipling exploited all the mystery of India, and the difficulty with which she is administered by the sahib, but he made his points with the precision and clarity of one to whom the whole affair was an exercise in technical adequacy.

Most of the stories contained in "Plain Tales from the Hills" fall into this category. They are exercises in the writer's craft rather than the results of genuine inspiration, beginning and ending in sheer literary virtuosity. One feels on reading these studies of the social world at Simla that Kipling had no intuitive call to write them; the stories show only his power to create an illusion of reality by sheer finish of style. His originality remains yet to be discovered. Mrs. Hawksbee, for instance, is not an original character. In literary fiction she is the Indian counterpart of the witty, flirtatious ladies of the English comedy theatre. She talks as all fashionable women talk in the best of books, and does so with a volubility and resourcefulness that almost has us believing in her existence, but not quite. This is because Kipling did not really believe in her himself. In the Simla stories, he assumed that Mrs. Hawksbee was a charming woman, made the other characters assume it, and obviously expected his readers to do likewise. It says much for his cunning as a writer that in most cases the reader is prepared to assume it for the sake of the story. For Mrs. Hawksbee is not a charming woman. She is really little more than an anthology of witty phrases.

Mrs. Hawksbee is typical of the majority of Kipling's characters in the Simla stories. There is something about them that does not ring true. Kipling's success with this kind of story was remarkable, but the stories themselves were barren. Kipling himself realised this, and soon abandoned Simla as a setting for his stories, preferring to seek new subjects and fresh themes.

It was about this time that Kipling began to

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write a new kind of story; stories which dealt with the men who held India for England — the men of the Indian Civil Service, and the common and often despised soldier. The peculiar charm and merit of these stories lies in the manner in which Kipling depicts the character and life of the Anglo-Indian soldiers and civilians. Those stories contained in the book "Soldiers Three and Other Stories" are good examples of his new style of writing. Intimate glimpses into the lives of Anglo-Indians, they show the wisdom and folly, courage and patience, initiative and fatalistic philosophy of the men, both civil and military, ~~of the men~~ who held and administered India. And it was these stories that were mainly responsible for a misconception which dogged Kipling all through his subsequent career, and which completely changed his outlook on life.

Because Kipling wrote tales of the British Army, portraying the average soldier as he had never been shown before, he was termed a militarist. Because Kipling realised that Government officials often appear slow and unwise to the men who face emergencies, he appeared to some people to be a lover of the high hand and of brutal and irregular courses. Because he tried to show that men who lived there, and understood the natives, usually knew more about India than the fatuous fools who tried to administer that country from their comfortable armchairs in Whitehall, he was described by politicians as a reviler of the free and democratic institutions of Great Britain. And because of all these things, and because he praised the daring, courage, resource, and initiative of the pioneers he was assumed to be a fanatical Imperialist.

The grain of truth in these deductions is heavily outweighed by the complete absurdity of regarding them as in any way to be essentially correct. But the erroneous belief spread, and eventually had its effect

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on Kipling himself, who was encouraged to believe that what was really an accident of his career was the essence of his works. Thus he came to regard himself as a sort of Imperial Laureate, the High Priest of Empire.

In such stories as "Tod's Amendment" and "The Head of the District" he had tried to show that plans which on paper seem perfectly sound to Government officials are by no means always practicable. On account of these and similar stories he was often referred to as a political pamphleteer, and this was by no means true. At a time ^{when} most of his literary contemporaries were speaking from the platform, Kipling's works were remarkably free from political bias. His false fame as a politician arose from the fact that in writing of the Empire and of the Army, he wrote of these things as he saw them, and not as a pamphleteer on the side of any particular Party.

Once, however, he had convinced himself that he was the Bard of Empire, Kipling began to travel so that he might learn more about the British Empire. He published an account of his travels in two volumes entitled "From Sea to Sea," and the poem "Song of the Cities" ^{also} describes the cities through which he passed. Once again his flair for the observation of detail and his ability to express his thoughts in wonderfully compact phrases stood him in good stead. What else could have expressed, as Kipling did in "Recessional," all that the Empire means and is to England in the single line "Dominion over palm and pine"? That feat alone made Kipling worthy of recognition as a genius.

Rudyard Kipling used to delight in mechanical things, and much research must have gone into the writing of such stories as "The Ship that Found Herself," ".007," "Between the Devil and the Deep Sea," "With the Night Mail," and the poem "McAndrew's Hymn."

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These are all masterpieces of technical writing, and if the detail with which the themes are worked out is extravagant, it is the inspired extravagance of the true lover of machinery. Kipling's machines were probably more alive to him than were his men and women, and if his readers fail to understand the working of machinery, it matters nothing at all. Nor does it matter how or where Kipling got his inspiration for these stories. So long as an author succeeds in getting into a fervent condition that prompts him to write, it is of small moment how his enthusiasm is kindled. And in order to appreciate an author's enthusiasm, it is by no means necessary to understand ~~the~~ its object. So it is with Kipling. If one is prepared to be carried along, thrilled, on the surging wave of Kipling's passion for machinery, it makes no difference if one cannot tell a piston-rod from a cylinder-cover.

But Kipling could also write delightful stories for children with the same ease and fluency that he used in describing the workings of a ship's engine. With his fertile imagination it was no trouble at all for him to write such favourites of childhood as "Wee Willie Winkie," "Just So Stories," "Puck of Pook's Hill," and the "Jungle Books." In fact, some of Kipling's best work is contained in the "Jungle Books." But these stories are more than just charming little tales written to amuse children; Kipling's real purpose in writing them was to teach to children in their formative years some of the traditions that were their heritage, and to instil into them a pride that they were English. He succeeded admirably, and these books were equally popular with both children and parents.

Although Kipling was justifiably famed as a writer of short stories, his critics refused to believe that he was a novelist worthy of mention. In 1891 he had published his first novel, "The Light that Failed," the story

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of Dick Helder, a ~~fast~~ painter who goes blind. But the characters in the story lacked realism, and it is not surprising that the book was never popular. In fact, critics often referred to it as "The Book that Failed." In 1892 Kipling had again attempted a novel, "The Naulekha," which was the story of the search for a fabulous jewel. As a novel it was even less successful than his first.

Somewhat discouraged by his failures, Kipling wrote no more novels for some time, and it was not until 1897 that he published a more successful novel, "Captains Courageous." Here again Kipling showed his admiration for the manner in which the trade-spirit is able to lick a raw cut into shape. The story concerns a snobbish and somewhat supercilious youth who becomes a decent man, having been forced by circumstance to work for a season in the Grand Banks fishing fleet. It depicts the arduous life of the fisherman, and shows very realistically the hardships and suffering they endure while out at sea in their small boats. It is quite a good book, but it met with a lot of criticism, by no means the least of which came from the very heroes of the book, the fishermen themselves.

In 1901, however, Kipling completely confounded his critics by producing his masterpiece, "Kim." This is the story of a young English orphan who was left to be brought up by low-caste Hindus; it tells of how he joins the secret service in search of adventure and his subsequent life. In addition to the ^{very} original plot and the ~~very~~ ^{extremely} realistic characters, "Kim" also shows in amazing perspective the India of which Kipling had only hinted in his earlier work.

"Kim" is the story of the India which may be ruled by the resolute and challenged by the brave, but which may never be completely understood. It is the story of an India who physically crows her people with dust and fever and heat, and who is served to the death

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without reward. It is the story of an India who strikes out of a burning sky, a land where successive civilizations have perished and a hundred religions decayed, leaving the air heavy with old exhalations. The burning land where only the mountains are cool, and where danger lurks behind every bush in the heavy jungle; this is the India portrayed in "Kim."

Slowly Kipling's versatile pen reveals to us the whole pageant of Imperial India. Priest and peasant, soldier and civilian, the women of the shrouded palanquin and of the bazaar, Hindu and Mohammedan, all pass before us in a never ending procession. At first one is dazzled and bewildered by the diversity of the picture presented to us, then gradually, out of all this diversity comes the growing conviction that India at heart is unimaginably simple.

Throughout "Kim" are passages of descriptive writing almost unsurpassed in the English language. The minds of thousands of readers must have been sweetened and enriched by having encountered the fine old Lama with his simple faith and the trust that he had in the charity of man. Without doubt "Kim" is one of the few really beautiful stories in modern literature. It was also Rudyard Kipling's greatest achievement, and the work of a true artist of the pen.

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Books read in preparation for this essay:

Captains Courageous.

Kim.

Soldiers Three and Other Stories

From Sea to Sea.

The Jungle Book.

The Second Jungle Book.

Puck of Pook's Hill

Stalky and Co.

and various short stories

Rudyard Kipling.

A Choice of Kipling's Verse with an essay on Rudyard Kipling,
by T. S. Eliot!

Kipling's World - an essay by C. Lewis.

Kipling's Prose and Verse. an essay by Guy ~~Born~~ Pocock.

Rudyard Kipling, a biography by R. Thurston Hopkins.

Rudyard Kipling, a biography by Edward Shanks.