

## 28 The God of the Copybook Headings? October 2020

(in honour of my friend Ag's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday)

I can't tell you how depressed it made me recently to pick up a book called something like *The Nation's Favourite Poems* in Waterstone's in Llandudno. There, I found my worst suspicions confirmed: the "nation" really *had* voted for "If" by Rudyard Kipling as its No 1 favourite poem. Not that it is a totally bad poem in itself; I shall even allow it to grace my pages and submit it for your scrutiny in due course. I am, after all, something of a Kipling enthusiast, but I have important reservations and qualifications about much of his poetry, and particularly *that* one. I shall come to it presently.

We live in an age which is very quick to condemn previous ages, and perhaps that is entirely natural and in the nature of things. British imperialism was certainly a dark blot on our history, as was even more so our leading role in the slave trade, and way back, of course the Crusades. Unfortunately, Rudyard Kipling set himself up as *the* apologist of Empire. If you read "The White Man's Burden" (what a title!) or another riot of rhetoric, "The English Flag", you will find how easy it is to be swept off your feet by the sheer force of Kipling's full-blown versifying in support of the British Empire. (But someone tell me why the Union Jack is the "English" flag rather than that of the United Kingdom...?)

### The English Flag

*Above the portico a flag-staff, bearing the Union Jack, remained fluttering in the flames for some time, but ultimately when it fell the crowds rent the air with shouts, and seemed to see significance in the incident.*

— DAILY PAPERS.

WINDS of the World, give answer! They are whimpering to and fro—  
And what should they know of England who only England know?—  
The poor little street-bred people that vapour and fume and brag,  
They are lifting their heads in the stillness to yelp at the English Flag!

Must we borrow a clout from the Boer—to plaster anew with dirt?  
An Irish liar's bandage, or an English coward's shirt?  
We may not speak of England; her Flag's to sell or share.  
What is the Flag of England? Winds of the World, declare!

The North Wind blew:—"From Bergen my steel-shod vanguards go;  
I chase your lazy whalers home from the Disko floe;  
By the great North Lights above me I work the will of God,  
And the liner splits on the ice-field or the Dogger fills with cod.

"I barred my gates with iron, I shuttered my doors with flame,  
Because to force my ramparts your nutshell navies came;  
I took the sun from their presence, I cut them down with my blast,  
And they died, but the Flag of England blew free ere the spirit passed.

“The lean white bear hath seen it in the long, long Arctic night,  
The musk-ox knows the standard that flouts the Northern Light:  
What is the Flag of England? Ye have but my bergs to dare,  
Ye have but my drifts to conquer. Go forth, for it is there!”

The South Wind sighed:—“From the Virgins my mid-sea course was ta’en  
Over a thousand islands lost in an idle main,  
Where the sea-egg flames on the coral and the long-backed breakers  
croon  
Their endless ocean legends to the lazy, locked lagoon.

“Strayed amid lonely islets, mazed amid outer keys,  
I waked the palms to laughter—I tossed the scud in the breeze—  
Never was isle so little, never was sea so lone,  
But over the scud and the palm-trees an English flag was flown.

“I have wrenched it free from the halliard to hang for a wisp on the Horn;  
I have chased it north to the Lizard—ribboned and rolled and torn;  
I have spread its fold o’er the dying, adrift in a hopeless sea;  
I have hurled it swift on the slaver, and seen the slave set free.

“My basking sunfish know it, and wheeling albatross,  
Where the lone wave fills with fire beneath the Southern Cross.  
What is the Flag of England? Ye have but my reefs to dare,  
Ye have but my seas to furrow. Go forth, for it is there!”

The East Wind roared:—“From the Kuriles, the Bitter Seas, I come,  
And me men call the Home-Wind, for I bring the English home.  
Look—look well to your shipping! By the breath of my mad typhoon  
I swept your close-packed Praya and beached your best at Kowloon!

“The reeling junks behind me and the racing seas before,  
I raped your richest roadstead—I plundered Singapore!  
I set my hand on the Hoogli; as a hooded snake she rose,  
And I flung your stoutest steamers to roost with the startled crows.

“Never the lotus closes, never the wild-fowl wake,  
But a soul goes out on the East Wind that died for England’s sake—  
Man or woman or suckling, mother or bride or maid—  
Because on the bones of the English the English Flag is stayed.

“The desert-dust hath dimmed it, the flying wild-ass knows,  
The scared white leopard winds it across the taintless snows.  
What is the Flag of England? Ye have but my sun to dare,  
Ye have but my sands to travel. Go forth, for it is there!”

The West Wind called:—"In squadrons the thoughtless galleons fly  
That bear the wheat and cattle lest street-bred people die.  
They make my might their porter, they make my house their path,  
Till I loose my neck from their rudder and whelm them all in my wrath.

"I draw the gliding fog-bank as a snake is drawn from the hole,  
They bellow one to the other, the frightened ship-bells toll,  
For day is a drifting terror till I raise the shroud with my breath,  
And they see strange bows above them and the two go locked to death.

"But whether in calm or wrack-wreath, whether by dark or day,  
I heave them whole to the conger or rip their plates away,  
First of the scattered legions, under a shrieking sky,  
Dipping between the rollers, the English Flag goes by.

"The dead dumb fog hath wrapped it—the frozen dews have kissed—  
The naked stars have seen it, a fellow-star in the mist.  
What is the Flag of England? Ye have but my breath to dare,  
Ye have but my waves to conquer. Go forth, for it is there!"

The poem is surely in some ways aimed *against* petty, nationalistic supremacism, but the tone is terribly bombastic and crudely hyperbolic (why use a word like "whelm"?). The British Empire covers the globe and the English must leave their little, sheltered isle and "go forth" to defend it (or *increase* it?).



Kipling, in my view however, was never very good on ideas and while he set great store by them, they were sometimes tawdry and unclear. His big ideas don't get much bigger than in the poem he wrote at the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, when London celebrated "The Jewel

in the Crown" – India and all the other far-flung colonies with enormous 'pomp and circumstance'. Yet, the poem, "Recessional", while typically rhetorical, verges on pompous clap-trap with its repeated refrain of "lest we forget...". Forget what? Forget that Britain might be getting too big for its boots? That all empires inevitably wane? If he believed that, why not say it? The poem's ambiguity, inherent in the title, which is to do with processing out of the "church" at the end of the service, ie withdrawing, retiring, is perhaps its saving grace. Kipling *was* suggesting that unless the Empire lived up to its responsibilities, then it deserved to decline (or that it might actually be in decline right

now!). It comes across, therefore as a ‘solemn’ warning, but surely a somewhat smugly delivered warning: ‘We *are* the Lords of the Universe and we must be worthy of the task’.

Recessional  
(1897)

GOD of our fathers, known of old,  
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,  
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine  
Lord God of Hosts be with us yet,  
Lest we forget - lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;  
The Captains and the Kings depart:  
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart.  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget - lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;  
On dune and headland sinks the fire:  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget - lest we forget!

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose  
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,  
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,  
Or lesser breeds without the Law  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget - lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust  
In reeking tube and iron shard,  
All valiant dust that builds on dust,  
And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,  
For frantic boast and foolish word  
Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!

In thinking about “If”, however, (if we want to *think* about it at all...) it might be helpful to consider one of Kipling’s lesser-known rants, “The Gods of the Copybook Headings”, which has some bearing on my argument.

## The Gods of the Copybook Headings

AS I PASS through my incarnations in every age and race,  
I make my proper prostrations to the Gods of the Market Place.  
Peering through reverent fingers I watch them flourish and fall,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings, I notice, outlast them all.

We were living in trees when they met us. They showed us each in turn  
That Water would certainly wet us, as Fire would certainly burn:  
But we found them lacking in Uplift, Vision and Breadth of Mind,  
So we left them to teach the Gorillas while we followed the March of Mankind.

We moved as the Spirit listed. They never altered their pace,  
Being neither cloud nor wind-borne like the Gods of the Market Place,  
But they always caught up with our progress, and presently word would come  
That a tribe had been wiped off its icefield, or the lights had gone out in Rome.

With the Hopes that our World is built on they were utterly out of touch,  
They denied that the Moon was Stilton; they denied she was even Dutch;  
They denied that Wishes were Horses; they denied that a Pig had Wings;  
So we worshipped the Gods of the Market Who promised these beautiful things.

When the Cambrian measures were forming, They promised perpetual peace.  
They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would cease.  
But when we disarmed They sold us and delivered us bound to our foe,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "*Stick to the Devil you know.*"

On the first Feminian Sandstones we were promised the Fuller Life  
(Which started by loving our neighbour and ended by loving his wife)  
Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "*The Wages of Sin is Death.*"

In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all,  
By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;  
But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "*If you don't work you die.*"

Then the Gods of the Market tumbled, and their smooth-tongued wizards withdrew  
And the hearts of the meanest were humbled and began to believe it was true  
That All is not Gold that Glitters, and Two and Two make Four  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings limped up to explain it once more.

As it will be in the future, it was at the birth of Man  
There are only four things certain since Social Progress began.  
That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the Sow returns to her Mire,  
And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire;

And that after this is accomplished, and the brave new world begins  
 When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins,  
 As surely as Water will wet us, as surely as Fire will burn,  
 The Gods of the Copybook Headings with terror and slaughter return!

This has plenty of “sound and fury” but what on earth is he banging on about? Well, copybooks were books for pupils to practise their handwriting. There was a proverb or maxim at the top, such as “Children should be seen and not heard”, that would drive some moral sense into young minds. These, like ‘lines’ in school as a punishment, were to be copied out *beautifully* down the page, thus instilling good handwriting *and* good morals at the same time. Here, however, Kipling is on the satirical attack against *new* ideas, such as the emancipation of women or the value of trades unions, particularly in the mining industry – hence the heavy irony on “Feminian sandstones” and the “Carboniferous Epoch”. The “Gods of the Marketplace”, too, the ‘gods’ of capitalism, are equally lambasted. What Kipling wants is for the world to switch back to ‘good, old, ordinary common-sense’. Or something like that.

The poem was first published in 1919, just after the devastation of the First World War, where Kipling, having already lost his young daughter to illness, had now lost his son on the Western Front (having, himself, enthusiastically urged John, his short-sighted son, to join up and fight) and one can sense a heavy bitterness throughout the poem. Like Eliot, perhaps, Kipling was casting around for “fragments” to shore up against his “ruin”. But, seriously, such “copybook” conservatism was surely no way to face up to the modernist, post-apocalyptic problems of the Twentieth Century, surely.

Here, then, if you *have* to have it, is “If” – (B. Johnson take note!?)

IF you can keep your head when all about you  
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
 But make allowance for their doubting too;  
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
 If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;  
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
 And treat those two impostors just the same;  
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings

And never breathe a word about your loss;  
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
 Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
 ' Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,  
 if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
 If all men count with you, but none too much;  
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
 And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

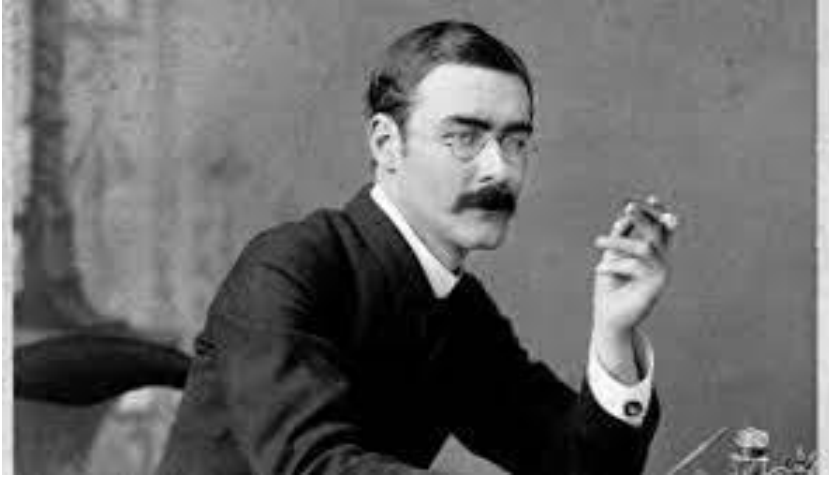
Here is what Kipling himself had to say about the poem in *Something of Myself*

*Among the verses in "Rewards" was one set called 'If--', which escaped from the book, and for a while ran about the world. They were drawn from Jameson's character, and contained counsels of perfection most easy to give. Once started, the mechanization of the age made them snowball themselves in a way that startled me. Schools, and places where they teach, took them for the suffering Young - which did me no good with the Young when I met them later. ('Why did you write that stuff? I've had to write it out twice as an impot.' They were printed as cards to hang up in offices and bedrooms; illuminated text-wise and anthologized to weariness. Twenty-seven of the Nations of the Earth translated them into their seven-and-twenty tongues, and printed them on every sort of fabric.' (Something of Myself)*

FYI Dr L. S. Jameson (1853-1917), friend and colleague of Cecil Rhodes, led the disastrous Jameson Raid of 1895 against the Boer Republic of the Transvaal, after which he was tried and imprisoned but shortly afterwards released. He was later Prime Minister (1904-8) of the Cape Colony.

Yes, these are, in fact 'copybook headings' – stylishly set out, vigorously common-sensical, in a manly sort of way – and, in fact, just the *right sort of stuff* to hang up over the players' entrance to Centre Court at Wimbledon. But, *please*, not Jameson and the Transvaal and wretched Cecil Rhodes! The Jameson Raid led to the Second Boer War and eventually to South African 'independence' and their awful policies of apartheid.

Leave it out!



Much of this inevitably has to do with Kipling's background and the terrible start he had in life. He grew up in Bombay, where his father worked as a sculptor and was head of department in an art college. His parents were artistic and intellectual and his first years were idyllic. But he found himself expelled from this paradise and taken at the age of 6 (his

little sister 'Trix' was 3!) to board with a couple in Southsea, Portsmouth, his so-called "House of Desolation". His parents had little idea that this was so cruel – it was exactly what British parents in India did in those days - 'for the good of the children'.

*Then came a new small house smelling of aridity and emptiness, and a parting in the dawn with Father and Mother, who said that I must learn quickly to read and write so that they might send me letters and books. (Something of Myself)*

The children stayed for nearly 6 years (6 years!!!) in what became a hell-hole of abuse before they next saw their parents. Kipling wrote in his autobiography *Something of Myself* (whose brilliant introduction by Richard Holmes in the Penguin Classics edition I strongly recommend):

*It was an establishment run with the full vigour of the Evangelical as revealed to the Woman. I had never heard of Hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors—I and whatever luckless little slavey might be in the house, whom severe rationing had led to steal food. Once I saw the Woman beat such a girl who picked up the kitchen poker and threatened retaliation. Myself I was regularly beaten. The Woman had an only son of twelve or thirteen as religious as she. I was a real joy to him, for when his mother had finished with me for the day he (we slept in the same room) took me on and roasted the other side.*

*If you cross-examine a child of seven or eight on his day's doings (specially when he wants to go to sleep) he will contradict himself very satisfactorily. If each contradiction be set down as a lie and retailed at breakfast, life is not easy. I have known a certain amount of bullying, but this was calculated torture – religious as well as scientific. Yet it made me give attention to the lies I soon found it necessary to tell: and this, I presume, is the foundation of literary effort.*

What saved Kipling's sanity, he writes, were the month-long Christmases spent at his aunt's house in Fulham. His mother's sister was lovely, kind Georgiana Burne-Jones, married to the brilliant artist Edward Burne-Jones (of William Morris fame). Kipling tells the story of Morris (known as 'Topsy') coming once to the house and, unable to find any adults to respond to his latest Norse saga, entertaining the children instead, rocking himself on their creaking rocking-horse as he recounted a fantastic story of a man condemned to dream bad dreams.

But Kipling continued to be cruelly beaten and bullied, both physically and mentally by the 'Woman' and her son over many years.



*“Often and often afterwards, the beloved Aunt would ask me why I had never told anyone how I was being treated. Children tell little more than animals, for what comes to them they accept as eternally established. Also, badly-treated children have a clear notion of what they are likely to get if they betray the secrets of a prison-house before they are clear of it.”*

Eventually, with so much punishment at the ‘House of Desolation’, the little boy suffered a complete nervous breakdown and nearly went blind. When his mother finally arrived from India on a rescue mission and reached out to comfort him, he shrank away from her, he says, expecting the customary cuff. He was taken by her to a farm in Epping where he was allowed to run wild with almost total freedom.

*My Mother drew the line at my return to meals red-booted from assisting at the slaughter of swine or reeking after the exploration of attractive muck heaps. These were the only restrictions I recall.*

Kipling then went on to be educated at the United Services College in Westward Ho! near Bideford in Devon, and he didn’t find boarding school easy at first. His parents were later unable to get him into Oxford, so Kipling’s father, who was now Principal of the Mayo College of Art and Curator of the Lahore Museum, obtained a job for his son in Lahore. Rudyard was to be assistant editor of a local newspaper, the Civil and Military Gazette.

There was always, therefore, going to be some sort of disconnect between Kipling, who knew and loved India, and Britain with its ‘Little Island’ mentality, ruling its empire in a state of ignorance largely from the other side of the globe.

So, here is my thesis. Try and forget about Rudyard Kipling’s *ideas*. Where he comes into his own, in terms of literary importance, is as a teller of stories, when he considers *people*. He is a little like Dickens in this. *Hard Times*, with its savage denunciation of the horrors of industrialisation, is not very deep on a political level, when dealing with the trades unionists, for example, but Dickens has enormous fun with his characters: Bounderby, Mrs Sparsit, the Gradgrinds, et alia. Where Kipling is at his finest is when he is, like Dickens, reaching into his imagination for characters and people who engage his and our sympathies.

I’m in the middle right now of re-reading *Kim* and discovering one of the finest of novels. It is intensely poetic with vivid descriptions and celebrations of *Indian* life. The characterisation is particularly surprising, nuanced and non-judgmental, and the empire figures in an ambiguous way. Kim, the eponymous hero, is white, but most of the time lives and thinks as an Indian boy reared in the Lahore bazaars. He could be, a bit like Mowgli, an idealised fantasy of Kipling himself, a reluctant mongrel-creature.

In fact, a lesser known side of Kipling’s own ‘persona’, which appears nowhere in *Something of Myself*, evolved while Kipling was in Lahore as a young reporter. He “explored” the shadier lives of the white (and often thoroughly scandalous) British lives, at the Punjab Club in Lahore and up in Simla, and he ended up frequenting Indian courtesans and experimenting with opium in the exciting dens of the city well beneath the official radar. In the end, however, although he was making a name for himself as a writer with his (scandalous) stories in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, he was ordered to return to Britain. He’d become a bit of a liability.

Here is what appears to be a youthful and quite personal poem, written apparently in 1880 when the precocious young Kipling was sailing out to India at the age of 16. He adored reading and adored poetry, and he can already be seen as a canny versifier having immersed himself in Browning and Tennyson.

## Amour de Voyage

And I was a man who could write you rhyme  
 Oust so much for you-nothing more),  
 And you were the woman I loved for a time—  
 Loved for a little, and nothing more.  
 We hall go our ways when the voyage is o'er,  
 You with your beauty and I with my rhymes,  
 With a dim remembrance rising at time  
 (Only a memory, nothing more)  
 Of a lovely face and some worthless rhymes.  
 Meantime till our comedy reaches its end  
 (Its comic ending, and nothing more)  
 I shall live as your lover who loved as a friend—  
 Shall swear true love till Life be o'er.  
 And you, you must make believe and attend,  
 As the steamer throbs from shore to shore.

And so, we shall pass the time for a little  
 (Pass it in pleasure, and nothing more),  
 For vows, alas! are sadly brittle;  
 And each may forget the oaths that we swore.  
 And have we not loved for an age, an age?  
 And was I not yours from shore to shore?  
 From landing-stage to landing-stage  
 Did I not worship and kneel and adore?  
 And what is a month in love but an age?  
 And who in their senses would wish for more?

Here at last we are miles away from the tub-thumping of Kipling's 'ideas'.

I shall not give you "Gunga Din" as it's too well known (but I'll put it in the Appendix below as it is still a wonderfully exuberant piece of writing).

You might find "MacAndrew's Hymn", a lengthy, Browningsque dramatic lyric about a Scottish ship's engineer and his view of the world about him, rather too dense to attend to. I would, however, urge you to read it (again in the Appendix below), as Kipling went to a lot of trouble writing it and he pocketed \$500 at the time (1894) from the American printing – a record price paid for a poem in the USA. Like Browning's lyrics, it's an exhilarating piece of writing and it develops an interesting character, an engineer whose enthusiasm for his ships' engines derives from or leads him towards wider sympathies. (You may, however, be less interested in ships' engines than Kipling was!)

Instead, here is a lovely poem which I came across by accident recently. It's the story of Cain and Abel told in a funky, Brett Harte-ish, "Western" style. (To be performed out loud, please!)

## Cain and Abel (Western Version 1934)

Cain and Abel were brothers born.

*(Koop-la! Come along, cows!)*

One raised cattle and one raised corn.

*(Koop-la! Come along! Co-hoe!)*

And Cain he farmed by the river-side,  
So he did not care how much it dried.

For he banked, and he sluiced, and he ditched and he led

*(And the Corn don't care for the Horn) O-*

A-half Euphrates out of her bed

To water his dam' Corn!

But Abel herded out on the plains

Where you have to go by the dams and rains.

It happened, after a three-year drought,

The wells, and the springs, and the dams gave out.

The Herd-bulls came to Cain's new house

*(They wanted water so! O!)*

With the hot red Sun between their brows,

Sayin' 'Give us water for our pore cows!'

But Cain he told 'em 'O, No!'

The Cows they came to Cain's big house

With the cold white Moon between their brows,

Sayin' 'Give some water to us pore cows!'

But Cain he told 'em 'O, No!'

The li'l Calves came to Cain's fine house

With the Evenin' Star between their brows,

Sayin' 'Give us water an' we'll be cows!'

But Cain he told 'em, 'O, No!'

The Herd-bulls led 'em back again,

An' Abel went an' said to Cain,

'Oh, sell me water, my brother dear,

Or there will be no beef this year.'

And Cain he answered, 'O, No!'

'Then draw your hatches, my brother true,  
An' let a little water through.'

But Cain he answered: 'O, No!'  
'My dams are tight an' my ditches are sound,  
An' not a drop goes through or round  
Till she's done her duty by the Corn.

I will not sell, an' I will not draw,  
An' if you breach, I'll have the Law,  
As sure as you are born!

Then Abel took his best bull-goad,  
An' holed a dyke on the Eden road.

He opened her up with foot an' hand,  
An' let Euphrates loose on the land.

He spilled Euphrates out on the plain,  
So's all his cattle could drink again.

Then Cain he saw what Abel done,  
But, in those days, there was no Gun!

So he made him a club of a hickory-limb,  
An' halted Abel an' said to him:

'I did not sell an' I did not draw,  
An' now you've breached I'll have the Law.

'You ride abroad in your hat and spurs,  
Hell-hoofin' over my cucumbers!

'You pray to the Lord to send you luck  
An' you loose your steers in my garden-truck:

'An' now you're bust, as you ought to be,  
You can keep on prayiní but not to me!'

Then Abel saw it meant the life;  
But, in those days, there was no Knife:

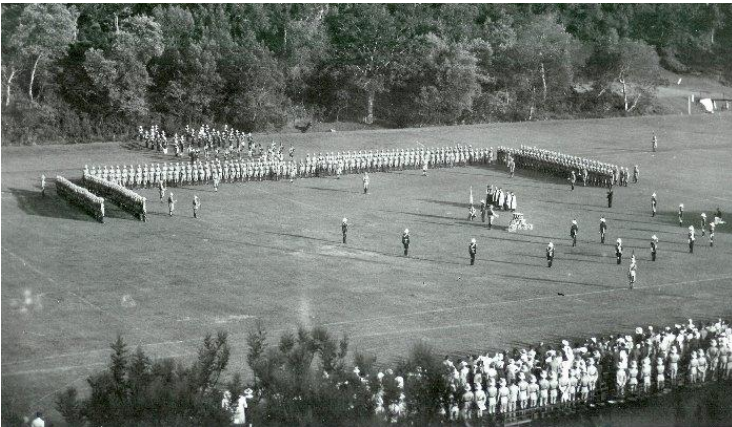
So he up with his big bull-goad instead,  
But, Cain hit first and dropped him dead!

The Herd-bulls ran when they smelt the blood,  
An' horned an' pawed in that Red Mud.  
The Calves they bawled, and the Steers they milled,

Because it was the First Man Killed;  
An' the whole Herd broke for the Land of Nod,  
An' Cain was left to be judged by God!

But, seein' all he had had to bear,  
I never could call the Judgment fair!

To get the full flavour of this poem, you have to throw away all your inhibitions and chant it out as if you were that weird cowboy “dude” - the narrator in “The Big Lebowski” (or perhaps James Stewart in “Destry Rides Again”?).



One of Kipling's true masterpieces in ballad form is “Danny Deever”. I've already included it in a previous posting of Pre-2018 about “The Noose” in poetry, but it deserves a place here as well. The poem is almost certainly based on the military execution of Private Flaxman in 1887 at Lucknow for murdering a fellow-soldier. Kipling would have read the reports but there's no evidence that he witnessed it. In Britain executions

were no longer carried out in public, but military executions were still performed before the whole battalion, lined up. This photograph, taken in 1912-14 in at Secunderabad shows exactly how a battalion of around 900 men would have been drawn up, in a hollow square with officers standing behind the ‘files’ of common soldiers – the gibbet would have replaced the battalion colours, which can be seen in the middle of this ‘open’ square.

## Danny Deever

"WHAT are the bugles blowin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.

"To turn you out, to turn you out," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What makes you look so white, so white?" said Files-on-Parade.

"I'm dreadin' what I've got to watch," the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can hear the Dead March play  
The regiment's in 'ollow square - they're hangin' him to-day;  
They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away,  
An' they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

"What makes the rear-rank breathe so 'ard?" said Files-on-Parade.

"It's bitter cold, it's bitter cold," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What makes that front-rank man fall down?" said Files-on-Parade.

"A touch o' sun, a touch o' sun," the Colour-Sergeant said.

They are hangin' Danny Deever, they are marchin' of 'im round,  
They 'ave 'alted Danny Deever by 'is coffin on the ground;  
An' e'll swing in 'arf a minute for a sneakin' shootin' hound;  
O, they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'!

" 'Is cot was right-'and cot to mine," said Files-on-Parade.

" 'E's sleepin' out an' far to-night," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"I've drunk 'is beer a score o' times," said Files-on-Parade.

" 'E's drinkin' bitter beer alone," the Colour-Sergeant said.

They are hangin' Danny Deever, you must mark 'im to 'is place,

For 'e shot a comrade sleepin' - you must look 'im in the face;

Nine 'undred of 'is county an' the Regiment's disgrace,

While they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

"What's that so black agin the sun? " said Files-on-Parade.

"It's Danny fightin' 'ard for life," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What's that that whimpers over'ead? " said Files-on-Parade.

"It's Danny's soul that's passin' now," the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're done with Danny Deever, you can 'ear the quickstep play

The regiment's in column, an' they're marchin' us away;

Ho! the young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their beer to-day,

After hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

There is a very fine balance here between the stark objectivity and discipline of the ballad form and the rhythms and hidden emotions that build up in the poem. It's an impressively weighted drama that implicitly argues against the horrors of capital punishment.

And, since Kipling enjoyed using the ballad form so much, please forgive a quick digression, for here is a wonderful parody of the "Kipling Ballad" by Don Marquis. If you don't already know of Archy the Cockroach, then you have a BIG treat in store for you. Archy is a New York cockroach who aspires to be a poet. Because he can only type simple letters (by banging the keys with his head) and cannot use the SHIFT key at the same time, he is forced into modernism and free verse in his poetic outpourings of unrequited love for Mehitabel, a New York alley cat who, despite all the evidence against her, believes she is a "lady" and even, possibly, a reincarnation of an Egyptian goddess. Here, however, is Archy's take on Kipling.

#### **archy experiences a seizure**

"Where have you been so long? And what on earth do you mean in coming in here soused?" we asked Archy as he zigzagged from the door to the desk.

He climbed onto the typewriter keys and replied indignantly:

soused yourself i havent had a drink  
and yet i am elevated i admit it i have  
been down to a second hand book  
store eating a lot of kiplings earlier  
poetry it always excites me if i eat  
a dozen stanzas of it i get all lit up  
and i try to imitate it get out of my  
way now i feel a poem in the kipling  
manner taking me

And before we could stop him he began to but on the keys:

the cockroach stood by the mickle  
wood in the flush of the astral dawn

We interrupted. "Don't you mean Austral instead of Astral?"

Archy became angered and wrote peevishly:

I wrote astral and i meant astral  
you let me be now i want to get this  
poem off my chest you are jealous if  
you were any kind of sport at all  
you would fix this machine so it could  
write it in capitals it is a poem about  
a fight between a cockroach and a  
lot of other things get out of my way  
im off

the cockroach stood by the mickle  
wood in the flush of the astral dawn  
and he sniffed the air from the hidden  
lair where the khyber swordfish spawn  
and the bile and belch of the glutton  
welsh as they smelted their warlock cheese  
surged to and fro where the grinding  
floe wrenched at the headlands knees  
half seas over under up again  
and the barnacles white in the moon  
the pole stars chasing its tail like a pup again  
and the dish ran away with the spoon

the waterspout came bellowing out of  
the red horizons run  
and the grey typhoon and the black  
monsoon surged forth to the  
fight with him  
with three fold might they surged to  
the fight for they hated the great  
bull roach  
and they cried begod as they lashed  
the sod and here is an egg to  
poach  
we will bash his mug with his own raw  
lug new stripped from off his  
dome  
for there is no law but teeth and claw  
to the nor nor east of nome  
the punjab gull shall have his skull

ere he goes in the burning ghaut  
 for there is no time for aught but crime  
 where the jungle lore is taught  
 across the dark the afghan shark is  
 whining for his head  
 there shall be no rule but death and  
 dule till the deep red mauve are  
 fed  
 half seas under up and down  
 again  
 and her keel was blown off in a  
 squall  
 girls we misdoubt that we ll ever  
 see town again  
 haul boys haul boys haul

"Archy," we interrupted, "that haul, boys, is all right  
 in the eye, but the ear will surely make it hall boys.  
 Better change it."

you are jealous you let me alone im off again

the cockroach spat and he tilted his  
 hat and he grinned through the  
 lowering mirk  
 the cockroach felt in his rangoon belt  
 for his good bengali dirk  
 he reefed his mast against the blast  
 and he bent his mizzen free  
 and he pointed the cleats of his bin  
 nacle sheets at the teeth of the  
 yesty sea  
 he opened his mouth and he sluiced  
 his drouth with his last good  
 can of swipes  
 begod he cried they come in pride  
 but they go home with the  
 gripes  
 begod he said if they want my head it  
 is here on top of my chine  
 it shall never be said that I doffed my  
 head for the boast of a heathen  
 line  
 and he scorned to wait but he dared  
 his fate and loosed his bridle rein  
 and leapt to close with his red fanged  
 foes in the trough of the  
 screaming main  
 from hell to nome the blow went home  
 and split the firmament  
 from hell to nome the yellow foam



blew wide to veil the rent  
and the roaring ships they came to  
grips in the gloom of a dripping mist

"Archy," we interrupted again, "is there very much more to it? It seems that you might tell in a very few words now who won the fight, and let it go at that. Who did win the fight, Archy?"

But Archy was peeved, and went sadly away, after writing:

of course you won't let me finish i never saw as jealous a person as you are

Source: Archy's Life of Mehitabel by Don Marquis

This may have to be the last word on the subject of Kipling's ballads!

The Kipling Society have a brilliant online resource at <http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems.htm> and I urge you to explore the *people* (or stories) rather than the *ideas*. IF you are able, try, please, to forget all about "If" and its trite copybook maxims in honour of someone who facilitated apartheid in South Africa (though B. Johnson might do well to heed the moral directives!).

## APPENDIX

Here is "Gunga Din", based on a humble water-carrier to the army out in India.

### Gunga Din

You may talk o' gin and beer  
When you're quartered safe out 'ere,  
An' you're sent to penny-fights an' Aldershot it;  
But when it comes to slaughter  
You will do your work on water,  
An' you'll lick the bloomin' boots of 'im that's got it.  
Now in Injia's sunny clime,  
Where I used to spend my time  
A-servin' of 'Er Majesty the Queen,  
Of all them blackfaced crew  
The finest man I knew  
Was our regimental bhisti, Gunga Din.  
He was "Din! Din! Din!"  
"You limpin' lump o' brick-dust, Gunga Din!"  
"Hi! Slippy *hitherao!*"  
"Water, get it! *Panee lao*"  
"You squidgy-nosed old idol, Gunga Din."

The uniform 'e wore  
 Was nothin' much before,  
 An' rather less than 'arf o' that be'ind,  
 For a piece o' twisty rag  
 An' a goatskin water-bag  
 Was all the field-equipment 'e could find.  
 When the sweatin' troop-train lay  
 In a sidin' through the day,  
 Where the 'eat would make your bloomin' eyebrows crawl,  
 We shouted " Harry By!"  
 Till our throats were bricky-dry,  
 Then we wopped 'im 'cause 'e couldn't serve us all.  
 It was "Din! Din! Din!"  
 "You 'eathen, where the mischief 'ave you been?  
 "You put some *juldee* in it  
 "Or I'll *marrow* you this minute  
 "If you don't fill up my helmet, Gunga Din!"

'E would dot an' carry one  
 Till the longest day was done;  
 An' 'e didn't seem to know the use o' fear.  
 If we charged or broke or cut,  
 You could bet your bloomin' nut,  
 'E'd be waitin' fifty paces right flank rear.  
 With 'is mussick' on 'is back,  
 'E would skip with our attack,  
 An' watch us till the bugles made "Retire,"  
 An' for all 'is dirty 'ide  
 'E was white, clear white, inside  
 When 'e went to tend the wounded under fire!  
 It was "Din! Din! Din!"  
 With the bullets kickin' dust-spots on the green  
 When the cartridges ran out,  
 You could hear the front-ranks shout,  
 "Hi! ammunition-mules an' Gunga Din!"

I sha'n't forgit the night  
 When I dropped be'ind the fight  
 With a bullet where my belt-plate should 'a' been.  
 I was chokin' mad with thirst,  
 An' the man that spied me first  
 Was our good old grinnin', gruntin' Gunga Din.  
 'E lifted up my 'ead,  
 An' he plugged me where I bled, An' 'e guv me 'arf-a-pint o' water green.  
 It was crawlin' and it stunk,  
 But of all the drinks I've drunk,  
 I'm gratefulest to one from Gunga Din.  
 It was "Din! Din! Din!  
 "'Ere's a beggar with a bullet through 'is spleen"  
 "'E's chawin' up the ground,  
 "An' 'e's kickin' all around:  
 "For Gawd's sake git the water, Gunga Din!  
  
 'E carried me away  
 To where a dooli lay,  
 An' a bullet come an' drilled the beggar clean.  
 'E put me safe inside,  
 An' just before 'e died,  
 "I 'ope you liked your drink" sez Gunga Din.  
 So I'll meet 'im later on  
 At the place where 'e is gone  
 Where it's always double drill and no canteen.  
 'E'll be squattin' on the coals  
 Givin' drink to poor damned souls,  
 An' I'll get a swig in hell from Gunga Din!  
 Yes, Din! Din! Din!  
 You Lazarushian-leather Gunga Din!  
 Though I've belted you and flayed you,  
 By the livin' Gawd that made you,  
 You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

*Note on vernacular expressions*

*bhisti* - water-carrier  
*hitherao* - come here  
*panee lao* - bring water  
*Harry By* - O Brother  
*juldee* - quickly  
*marrow* - hit

## McAndrew's Hymn

Lord, Thou hast made this world below the shadow of a dream,  
 An', taught by time, I tak' it so - exceptin' always Steam.  
 From coupler-flange to spindle-guide I see Thy Hand, O God -  
 Predestination in the stride o' yon connectin'-rod.  
 John Calvin might ha' forged the same - enormous, certain, slow -  
 Ay, wrought it in the furnace-flame - my "Institutio."  
 I cannot get my sleep to-night; old bones are hard to please;  
 I'll stand the middle watch up here - alone wi' God an' these  
 My engines, after ninety days o' race an' rack an' strain  
 Through all the seas of all Thy world, slam-bangin' home again.  
 Slam-bang too much - they knock a wee - the crosshead-gibs are loose;  
 But thirty thousand mile o' sea has gied them fair excuse....  
 Fine, clear an' dark - a full-draught breeze, wi' Ushant out o' sight,  
 An' Ferguson relievin' Hay. Old girl, ye'll walk to-night!  
 His wife's at Plymouth.... Seventy-One-Two-Three since he began -  
 Three turns for Mistress Ferguson.... an' who's to blame the man?  
 There's none at any port for me, by drivin' fast or slow,  
 Since Elsie Campbell went to Thee, Lord, thirty years ago.  
 (The year the 'Sarah Sands' was burned. Oh roads we used to tread,  
 Fra' Maryhill to Pollokshaws - fra' Govan to Parkhead!)  
 Not but they're ceevil on the Board. Ye'll hear Sir Kenneth say:  
 "Good mornn, McAndrew! Back again? An' how's your bilge to-day?"  
 Miscallin' technicalities but handin' me my chair  
 To drink Madeira wi' three Earls - the auld Fleet Engineer,  
 That started as a boiler-whelp - when steam and he were low.  
 I mind the time we used to serve a broken pipe wi' tow.  
 Ten pound was all the pressure then - Eh! Eh! - a man wad drive;  
 An' here, our workin' gauges give one hunder' fifty-five!  
 We're creepin' on wi' each new rig - less weight an' larger power:  
 There'll be the loco-boiler next an' thirty mile an hour!  
 Thirty an' more. What I ha' seen since ocean-steam began  
 Leaves me no doot for the machine: but what about the man?  
 The man that counts, wi' all his runs, one million mile o' sea:  
 Four time the span from earth to moon.... How far, O Lord, from Thee?  
 That wast beside him night an' day. Ye mind my first typhoon?  
 It scoughed the skipper on his way to jock wi' the saloon.  
 Three feet were on the stokehold floor - just slappin' to an' fro -  
 An' cast me on a furnace-door. I have the marks to show.  
 Marks! I ha' marks o' more than burns - deep in my soul an' black,  
 An' times like this, when things go smooth, my wickudness comes back.  
 The sins o' four and forty years, all up an' down the seas,  
 Clack an' repeat like valves half-fed.... Forgie's our trespasses.  
 Nights when I'd come on deck to mark, wi' envy in my gaze,  
 The couples kittlin' in the dark between the funnel stays;  
 Years when I raked the ports wi' pride to fill my cup o' wrong-  
 Judge not, O Lord, my steps aside at Gay Street in Hong-Kong!  
 Blot out the wastrel hours of mine in sin when I abode -  
 Jane Harrigan's an' Number Nine, The Reddick an' Grant Road!  
 An' waur than all - my crownin' sin - rank blasphemy an' wild.  
 I was not four and twenty then - Ye wadna judge a child?

I'd seen the Tropics first that run - new fruit, new smells, new air -  
 How could I tell-blind-fou wi' sun-the Deil was lurkin' there?  
 By day like playhouse-scenes the shore slid past our sleepy eyes;  
 By night those soft, lasceevious stars leered from those velvet skies,  
 In port (we used no cargo-steam) I'd daunder down the streets -  
 An' ijjit grinnin' in a dream - for shells an' parrakeets,  
 An' walkin'-sticks o' carved Bamboo an' blowfish stuffed an' dried -  
 Fillin' my bunk wi' rubbishry the Chief put overside.  
 Till, off Sumbawa Head, Ye mind, I heard a landbreeze ca'  
 Milk-warm wi' breath o' spice an' bloom: "McAndrews, come awa'!"  
 Firm, clear an' low - no haste, no hate - the ghostly whisper went,  
 Just statin' eevidential facts beyon' all argument:  
 "Your mither's God's a graspin' deil, the shadow o' yoursel',  
 "Got out o' books by meenisters clean daft on Heaven an' Hell.  
 "They mak' him in the Broomielaw, o' Glasgie cold an' dirt,  
 "A jealous, pridefu' fetich, lad, that's only strong to hurt,  
 "Ye'll not go back to Him again an' kiss His red-hot rod,  
 "But come wi' Us" (Now, who were 'They?') "an' know the Leevin' God,  
 "That does not kipper souls for sport or break a life in jest,  
 "But swells the ripenin' cocoanuts an' ripes the woman's breast."  
 An' there it stopped: cut off: no more; that quiet, certain voice -  
 For me, six months o' twenty-four, to leave or take at choice.  
 'Twas on me like a thunderclap - it racked me through an' through-  
 Temptation past the show o' speech, unnamable an' new -  
 The Sin against the Holy Ghost? . . . An - under all, our screw.

That storm blew by but left behind her anchor-shiftin' swell,  
 Thou knowest all my heart an' mind, Thou knowest, Lord, I fell -  
 Third on the 'Mary Gloster' then, and first that night in Hell!  
 Yet was Thy hand beneath my head: about my feet Thy care-  
 Fra' Deli clear to Torres Strait, the trial o' despair,  
 But when we touched the Barrier Reef Thy answer to my prayer...  
 We dared na run that sea by night but lay an' held our fire,  
 An' I was drowzin' on the hatch - sick-sick wi' doubt an' tire:  
 "Better the sight of eyes that see than wanderin' o' desire!  
 Ye mind that word? Clear as our gongs-again, an' once again,  
 When rippin' down through coral-trash ran out our moorin'chain;  
 An' by Thy Grace I had the Light to see my duty plain.  
 Light on the engine-room - no more - bright as our carbons burn.  
 I've lost it since a thousand times, but never past return.

Obsairve! Per annum we'll have here two thousand souls aboard -  
 Think not I dare to justify myself before the Lord,  
 But-average fifteen hunder' souls safe-borne fra port to port-  
 I am o' service to my kind. Ye wadna' blame the thought?  
 Maybe they steam from grace to wrath - to sin by folly led -  
 It isna mine to judge their path - their lives are on my head.  
 Mine at the last - when all is done it all comes back to me,  
 The fault that leaves six thousand ton a log upon the sea.  
 We'll tak' one stretch - three weeks an' odd by any road ye steer -  
 Fra' Cape Town east to Wellington - ye need an engineer.  
 Fail there - ye've time to weld your shaft - ay, eat it, ere ye're spoke,

Or make Kerguelen under sail - three jiggers burned wi' smoke!  
 An' home again, the Rio run: it's no child's play to go  
 Steamin' to bell for fourteen days o' snow an' floe an' blow -  
 The bergs like kelpies overside that girn an' turn an' shift  
 Whaur, grindin' like the Mills o' God, goes by the big South drift.  
 (Hail, snow an' ice that praise the Lord: I've met them at their work,  
 An' wished we had anither route or they anither kirk.)  
 Yon's strain, hard strain, o' head an' hand, for though Thy Power brings  
 All skill to naught, Ye'll understand a man must think o' things.  
 Then, at the last, we'll get to port an' hoist their baggage clear -  
 The passengers, wi' gloves an' canes - an' this is what I'll hear:  
 "Well, thank ye for a pleasant voyage. The tender's comin' now."  
 While I go testin' follower-bolts an' watch the skipper bow.  
 They've words for everyone but me - shake hands wi' half the crew,  
 Except the dour Scots engineer, the man they never knew.  
 An' yet I like the wark for all we've dam' few pickin's here -  
 No pension, an' the most we earn's four hunder' pound a year.  
 Better myself abroad? Maybe. I'd sooner starve than sail  
 Wi' such as call a snifter-rod *ross* .... French for nightingale.  
 Commeesion on my stores? Some do; but I can not afford  
 To lie like stewards wi' patty-pans. I'm older than the Board.  
 A bonus on the coal I save? Och ay, the Scots are close,  
 But when I grudge the strength Ye gave I'll grudge their food to *those*.  
 (There's bricks that I might recommend - an' clink the fire-bars cruel.  
 No! Welsh-Wangarti at the worst - an' damn all patent fuel!)  
 Inventions? Ye must stay in port to mak' a patent pay.  
 My Deferential Valve-Gear taught me how that business lay,  
 I blame no chaps wi' clearer head for aught they make or sell.  
 I found that I could not invent an' look to these - as well.  
 So, wrestled wi' Apollyon - Nah! - fretted like a bairn -  
 But burned the workin'-plans last run wi' all I hoped to earn.  
 Ye know how hard an Idol dies, an' what that meant to me -  
 E'en tak' it for a sacrifice acceptable to Thee....  
*Below there! Oiler! What's your wark? Ye find her runnin' hard?*  
*Ye needn't swill the cap wi' oil - this isn't the Cunard.*  
*Ye thought? Ye are not paid to think. Go, sweat that off again!*  
 Tck! Tck! It's deeficult to sweer nor tak' The Name in vain!  
 Men, ay an' women, call me stern. Wi' these to oversee  
 Ye'll note I've little time to burn on social repartee.  
 The bairns see what their elders miss; they'll hunt me to an' fro,  
 Till for the sake of - well, a kiss - I tak' 'em down below.  
 That minds me of our Viscount loon - Sir Kenneth's kin - the chap  
 Wi' russia leather tennis-shoon an' spar-decked yachtin'-cap.  
 I showed him round last week, o'er all - an' at the last says he:  
 "Mister McAndrew, don't you think steam spoils romance at sea?"  
 Damned ijjit! I'd been doon that morn to see what ailed the throws,  
 Manholin', on my back - the cranks three inches off my nose.  
 Romance! Those first-class passengers they like it very well,  
 Printed an' bound in little books; but why don't poets tell?  
 I'm sick of all their quirks an' turns - the loves an' doves they dream -  
 Lord, send a man like Robbie Burns to sing the Song o' Steam!  
 To match wi' Scotia's noblest speech yon orchestra sublime

Whaurto - uplifted like the Just - the tail-rods mark the time.  
 The Crank-throws give the double-bass; the feed-pump sobs an' heaves:  
 An' now the main eccentrics start their quarrel on the sheaves.  
 Her time, her own appointed time, the rocking link-head bides,  
 Till - hear that note?-the rod's return whings glimmerin' through the guides.  
 They're all awa! True beat, full power, the clangin' chorus goes  
 Clear to the tunnel where they sit, my purrin' dynamoes.  
 Interdependence absolute, foreseen, ordained, decreed,  
 To work, Ye'll note, at any tilt an' every rate o' speed.  
 Fra skylight-lift to furnace-bars, backed, bolted, braced an' stayed,  
 An' singin' like the Mornin' Stars for joy that they are made;  
 While, out o' touch o' vanity, the sweatin' thrust-block says:  
 "Not unto us the praise, or man - not unto us the praise!"  
 Now, a' together, hear them lift their lesson - theirs an' mine:  
 "Law, Order, Duty an' Restraint, Obedience, Discipline!"  
 Mill, forge an' try-pit taught them that when roarin' they arose,  
 An' whiles I wonder if a soul was gied them wi' the blows.  
 Oh for a man to weld it then, in one trip-hammer strain,  
 Till even first-class passengers could tell the meanin' plain!  
 But no one cares except mysel' that serve an' understand  
 My seven thousand horse-power here. Eh, Lord! They're grand - they're grand!  
 Uplift am I? When first in store the new-made beasties stood,  
 Were Ye cast down that breathed the Word declarin' all things good?  
 Not so! O' that warld-liftin' joy no after-fall could vex,  
 Ye've left a glimmer still to cheer the Man - the Arttifex!  
 That holds, in spite o' knock and scale, o' friction, waste an' slip,  
 An' by that light - now, mark my word - we'll build the Perfect Ship.  
 I'll never last to judge her lines or take her curve - not I.  
 But I ha' lived an' I ha' worked. All thanks to Thee, Most High!  
 An' I ha' done what I ha' done - judge Thou if ill or well -  
 Always Thy Grace preventin' me.... Losh! Yon's the "Stand by" bell.  
 Pilot so soon? His flare it is. The mornin'-watch is set.  
 Well, God be thanked, as I was sayin', I'm no Pelagian yet.  
 Now I'll tak' on.... 'Morrn, Ferguson. Man, have ye ever thought  
 What your good leddy costs in coal? ...I'll burn em down to port.

*Of this Kipling wrote:*

*"... it may help you a little to know that the ship "McAndrew's Hymn" belongs to is the old Doric, once an Atlantic White Star I think, and now a Shaw, Savill, Albion boat running to New Zealand via the Cape of Good Hope and home round the horn. She'd be about the same type, in her engine fittings, as the Germanic or the Brittanic (sic) I should say - i.e., in no sense a new boat with any special gear. When I was on her her l(low).p(pressure). cylinder had a play of about an inch and a half on the columns and every piece of machinery had the muffled and protected look of a long-voyage boat. Not a bit like the shiny stuff on a racing Atlantic hotel; but lapped and swathed and junked up and all white with salt-crust."*

The 'gritty' Scot! I first read this ages and ages ago, barely understanding any of it. The Scottishness put me off, I think, but it's nevertheless a beautifully wrought portrait, in the

same way that Browning's dramatic lyrics create ambiguous characters and try to portray life-from-within. I don't like or admire McAndrew much, but there are still people like this all over the world! It's a bit like one of Alan Bennet's 'Talking Heads'.