

RUDYARD KIPLING IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

BY R. THURSTON HOPKINS

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EVERY, or nearly every, morning in the summer months there appears on the hills of Burwash a sturdy man, whose skin has been tanned by sun and wind to the rich brown of the Sussex country-folk he loves so well; his forehead is round and fairly high, his pale blue eyes and the brow above them give his expression a piercing appearance. For the rest, his voice is firm and resonant, and his brown hair and stubbly moustache are partially shot with gray. He wears a battered soft felt hat and a homespun suit of plus-fours. Generally he carries an ash stick, and the average stranger meeting him would guess that he is a Sussex farmer.

That guess would be most inadequate, for this usually solitary figure is that of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, who lives in an old farmhouse, has land under cultivation, but is, above everything else, one of the greatest of living story-writers, and Poet of the British Empire. The idea that he is a farmer, simply because he makes his home in an ancient farmhouse and owns land round about it, is of course fantastic.

After twenty-five years of residence at Burwash, Kipling has become so much a part of his agricultural background that people passing him on the road take no notice of him. Kipling, like the partridge squatting among the stubble, has become so toned to the weather-beaten farm where he lives as to be invisible.

This corner of Sussex is Kipling's idea of the fourth dimension. Here he stands upon ground that is essentially

his own. Here he is at home, at peace, unassailed. To him the charm of the countryside is centuries deep. As he wrote in a preface to a book on motoring, some years ago, 'You know in Africa or America one has only to speed up and put the miles under, but here it is different . . . the dead, twelve-coffin-deep, clutch hold of my wheels at every turn. . . . If I want petrol I must either pass the place where Sir John Lade lived or the garden where Jack Cade was killed. Sometimes I wonder that the very road does not bleed.'

Not far from the village of Burwash is Kipling's fine Tudor mansion, called 'Batemans.' It lies in a valley, and as you descend from the hill where the little church stands you pass into a cooler stratum of air. In summer the fields around the farm are spread with irregular patterns formed by clusters of dwarfed orchids, and the gleaming chalices of buttercups are uplifted in the mowing-lands. From the meadows comes a heavy chorus of bleating from sheep and lambs, and from the copses and the wild tangled depth of Kipling's old-world garden the numberless notes of birds. In the twilight the distant contralto of cuckoos, forming a continuous chain of sound, comes faintly from the woods. Nearer at hand there is a nightingale singing — a song which always draws Kipling from his study. He once said to a friend, 'That bird is a blackguard with a gift of music in his throat that he can't control, a noisy, swashbuckling blackguard of the gar-

den. He comes here every night and proceeds to abuse all his enemies for all he's worth. It's feathered profanity in a disguise of harmony, and he gets so worked up over it that he finally ends in an inarticulate gurgle.'

Burwash Church is greatly admired by artists as well as by antiquarians, and it is faithfully described by Kipling in his volume of stories, *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Even nowadays the church is much as it was when wicked John Collins, the ironmaster, hid his guns in the church tower before sending them down to Port of Rye to sell to the King's enemies. Climbing up the narrow dark stairs to the bell loft the more than usually imaginative pilgrim will remember that old Collins the iron founder gave the church a new chime of bells — that is if we are to believe Kipling's story. After having been caught red-handed smuggling guns to Sir Andrew Barton, this crafty old forgermaster wriggled out of the hangman's hands and became filled with religious zeal — until the scandal had abated. He was somewhat of a wag, was Collins, and appreciated the humor of the situation. When the ringers had 'rung the new chime in' the old fellow pinched the bell rope: 'Sooner she was pulling yon clapper than my neck,' he said. That was all! Kipling remarks, 'That was Sussex. . . silly Sussex for ever-lasting!'

The most remarkable possession of the old church is the very rare ironwork slab which commemorates this waggish ironmaster. The inscription in long-tailed characters is much injured by long exposure to the tread of feet, but one can still make out the words: *Orate p. . . annema John Colines*. Because this iron slab has been placed upright in the wall of the south aisle it is said that the ironmaster left directions that he was to be buried standing up in the wall, 'neither in the church nor out of

it,' so that his master, 'the old 'un' (the Devil), could not get him when he died. Perhaps his side-sellings and by-dealings with the King's enemies weighed heavily on his conscience and would have prevented him from lying quietly in the usual grave like other good folk.

The sexton of Burwash Church is a part of the natural scene. The churchyard is his garden, and the pilgrim will generally find him there leaning on his broom or scythe. This old man with closely shaven, sunken lips is a humorist who pokes his joke at you coyly. His phrase for burials is 'putting 'em to bed with a spade.' He has many amusing anecdotes, and one is of an old-fashioned squire.

'I was gravedigger and Jack-at-a-pinch for all jobs in those days, and one morning I received a note from Squire Hussey to have the family vault opened to receive the body of his good mother who had departed this life. Lady Hussey, she was mightily respected, you mind, but she was cruelly suspected of being overmuch fond of a glass of genuine Jamaica. Well, then, when I opened the vault I found it so chuck-full of the old Hussey coffins that there would be no room for another of 'em. So I wrote a note to the Squire telling him Her Ladyship could not rest there as there was no room. But not being much of a scholar I wrote "rum" instead of "room." It was not long before the Squire was round to see me, with my note in his hand. I can see him now as he sat in my chair, booted and spurred, and wearing white-leather breeches. How he did laugh, too. "Anthony," he said to me, "this note of yours is funny enough to knock a lark out o' the sky. Oh Lord! Her Ladyship will not be wanting any more rum yet awhile!"'

Kipling is very faithful to the ancient names of the Sussex people, and employs them with a sure sense of portraiture of

place in his books. Hal o' the Draft in *Puck of Pook's Hill* tells his friends that 'the Dawes have been buried for six generations' in Burwash Church. This name still lingers in the neighborhood, and the Dawes have always been noted for their skill in craftsmanship. The beautiful iron gates in the porch of Burwash Church were made by Master Dawe, a blacksmith at Franchise Farm, for the restoration of the church in 1856.

The small shingled spire of the church is quaint. The 'shingles' are wooden tiles made of hard butt oak pinned to the spire with oak pegs. During a dry summer they grow loose and will rattle in a most alarming way in the eddies of the wind. But they will never blow away. Every summer for two hundred years the wind has tried to displace them, but every summer they have held on till the rain has come to tighten them once again.

The old mill by Kipling's house will not fail to arrest attention. It appears in 'Below the Mill Dam' in his *Traffics and Discoveries*, and in several of the Puck stories. Alas, the old order changes! It is with feelings of genuine regret that we find a turbine in place of the old wheel which had clacked and ground her corn 'ever since Domesday Book.' The turbine now drives the electric-light plant for Kipling's house. It was in this mill that the wheel objected to being considered mechanically after she had been painted by five Royal Academicians!

The Dudwell, which flows at the back of 'Batemans,' supplies the water to the mill, and often in the winter time

invades the gardens and lower rooms of the houses. The farmer who once had the Dudwell at the bottom of his garden has more often, in days of flood, his garden at the bottom of the Dudwell. Such a flood is described in the story, 'Friendly Brook.'

The glassy milldam with its dripping willows often reflects the pensive figure of Kipling with his rod searching for the crafty trout which abound in this pool. He enjoys the voluptuousness of the solitude here, which he has described as 'a sort of thick, sleepy stillness smelling of meadowsweet and dry grass.'

Under a wagon-shed near at hand stand several Sussex wains — a type of wagon which has not changed during the last five hundred years. With their gondola-shaped fronts and enormous wheels they look more in keeping with the wooden warships of a bygone age than with the motor-ploughs of a nineteenth-century farm. They are all inscribed: Kipling, Batemans Farm, Burwash. It was such wains as these that Sir John Pelham, of the story 'Hal o' the Draft,' sent to Burwash to carry the serpentines and demicannon to Lewes.

The fields roll up from Kipling's house to Pook's Hill as he has described in 'Weland's Sword' — and beyond the ground 'rises and rises for five hundred feet, till at last you climb out on the bare top of Beacon Hill . . . and the naked South Downs.' And is it not in one of the mighty hills of the Downs that Kipling confesses his soul to be: —

I've given my soul to the Southdown grass,
And sheep-bells tinkled where you pass.
Oh! Firlie and Ditchling an' sails at sea,
I reckon you keep my soul for me.

MORE LOST CLASSICS

BY HAROLD STANNARD

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THOUGH the reported discovery of the lost books of Livy has turned out a fiasco, it has stimulated interest in other classics that have disappeared. Greek literature as known to us forms but a fraction of Greek literature as known to a cultured Roman citizen of the second century A.D., and scholars have naturally asked whether the chances of time may not have destroyed greater masterpieces than they have preserved.

To this question it is possible to give a reassuring answer. The creative period of Greek literature ended with the age of Alexander, that is, about 300 B.C., and until thought became preoccupied with religious speculation some five centuries later, the work of the great Greek writers commanded the attention of the best critical minds throughout the Mediterranean world. The immense volume was sifted and its special achievements picked out, and it is these selected masterpieces which have mainly come down to us just because they were most widely read and therefore stood the best chance of survival.

This comforting argument can actually be tested. The three great tragic poets of Greece, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, each wrote about a hundred plays, from which ancient criticism selected in each case seven as outstanding. Apart from a few fragments, our knowledge of Æschylus and Sophocles is limited to the seven plays; but to the ancients, as to us, Euripides appeared peculiarly modern, and was therefore very popular, and one volume of a complete library edition has come down to

us. By further good fortune the twelve plays which it contains do not include any of the selected seven. We are thus in a position to estimate the quality of ancient criticism, and there can be no doubt as to its soundness. It is true that one of the twelve plays, the *Trojan Women*, is occasionally given upon the modern stage. But that is because its theme, the futility of war, appeals strongly to our present mood. As a piece of drama the play is not in the same class with such a masterpiece as the *Medea*, one of the selected seven.

We may then feel reasonably satisfied that we have got the best of the Greek drama. But the plums are lamentably few, and we should specially appreciate the recovery of a complete manuscript of Æschylus, whom we can enjoy rather more fully than the ancients because of his spiritual kinship with the Hebrew prophets. As to the comic drama, we can only accept the ancient view that Aristophanes stands alone. We have nothing to judge him by, and should be thankful for a play or two by his leading rivals, and also for some specimens of the later comedy at present only known to us through the Latin translations made by Plautus and Terence.

The ancients were no archæologists. We know a great deal more about the origins of Greece and Rome than was known by the Greeks and Romans themselves, and if one of the scholars who worked in the Alexandrian library could come to life again he would be amazed at the attention now paid to in-