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## The Kipling Collection at Syracuse

Thomas Pinney  
*Pomona College*

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# The Kipling Collection at Syracuse

BY THOMAS PINNEY

*The following is an edited transcript of the talk given by Professor Pinney to the Syracuse University Library Associates on 25 September 1992. Professor Pinney is the editor of The Letters of Rudyard Kipling.*<sup>1</sup>

THOUGH KIPLING is known to have visited New York State, it is unlikely that he ever saw the streets of Syracuse. However, he is notably present in the city now through the large, important, and growing collection of his letters and printed works assembled here in the George Arents Research Library for Special Collections.<sup>2</sup> There are other important Kipling collections in the United States. Kipling's great popularity in this country meant that his work, and everything connected with it, was eagerly sought after from the beginning of his career. As a result, considerable collections are now to be found in libraries throughout the country—in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, the Ransom Library of the University of Texas, and the Bancroft Library of the University of California, to name only a few. But the Syracuse collection is not only the peer of these rivals, it is the most actively growing of them all.

Of course it has some of those *rarissima* that every Kipling collector strives to acquire: a copy of the privately-printed *Schoolboy Lyrics*, for example, Kipling's first book, printed in Lahore by his parents while Kipling was yet a schoolboy in England; or the rare pamphlet texts of his stories printed in tiny editions of twenty or twenty-five copies in the United States in order to secure American copyright.

Kipling was an exceedingly polymorphic literary creature; and almost all of his forms are exhibited in the Syracuse collection. It

1. Thomas Pinney, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 2 vols. (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1990).

2. It was Chancellor William P. Tolley who started and sustained the Kipling collection with his generous gifts.



has been said that no other English author presents so large and complicated a bibliographic tangle as Kipling does, and I can well believe it. For more than forty years he was a world-famous writer of almost unparalleled popularity. He wrote at a time when the commerce of literature had become truly international, so that his work was published in a bewildering variety of English, American, and Imperial editions, not to speak of translations into an uncounted number of foreign languages. (Flora Livingston's compilation made in 1938 lists 35 different languages, including Catalanian, Esperanto, Latvian, and Yiddish, and her list makes no pretense to completeness.)<sup>3</sup> Kipling himself was shrewdly aware of the value of special editions and of limited printings, and so his work abounds in items of that kind as well. In her recent bibliographical study, Barbara Rosenberg estimates that some 6000 distinct editions of Kipling's work have already been produced.<sup>4</sup> Also to be remembered is his copious output as a young journalist in India, so much of which, both verse and prose, appeared anonymously. The effort of identifying it has been in progress for a long time and will no doubt continue for a longer time yet.

Manuscripts are a different question. Up to the time of his marriage to an American woman in 1892 Kipling was careless of his manuscripts; most of them before that date seem simply to have disappeared. His wife, however, was a jealous guardian of his work in all its forms, and she made it a rule that no manuscript of his stories and poems should ever leave the house. Everything for editor and printer was typed by a secretary. The manuscript itself was then richly bound in green leather by Maggs Brothers and carefully stored away lest profane hands acquire it and put it up for sale. Only one major manuscript seems to have escaped: the manuscript of *Captains Courageous* was given to Kipling's Vermont friend, Dr. James Conland, to whom the book is dedicated, and was later acquired by the Morgan Library in New York City, where it now is.

3. Flora V. Livingston, *Supplement to the Bibliography of the Works of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1938). Her *Bibliography of the Works of Rudyard Kipling* was published in 1927 (New York: Edgar H. Wells and Co.).

4. Barbara Rosenberg and Pamela White, *The Index of English Literary Manuscripts 1800-1900*, vol. 4, pt. 2 (London and New York: Mansell, 1990).

All of the others—from the *Jungle Book* of 1894 to *Debits and Credits* in 1926—were kept as I have described.

Beginning about 1925, Kipling and his wife started a series of formal presentations of his manuscripts to a carefully selected list of libraries: either they went to national institutions, such as the British Library in England, or to the National Library of Australia; or they were bestowed on institutions from which Kipling had received honorary degrees: Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh, St. Andrews, and McGill, for example. Each of the manuscripts was accompanied by a solemn injunction from the author: the manuscript must never be used “for purposes of collation”—and so far, none has been, though I imagine that the prohibition will not be maintained forever. Although Syracuse has no bound Kipling manuscript, it does have the page proofs, corrected by the author, for his last volume of short stories, the *Limits and Renewals* volume of 1932, for which the manuscript seems to have disappeared, so in this case Syracuse has the closest thing to the manuscript itself.

For the most part, then, the manuscripts of the stories and poems are not accessible to the builders of collections. There is, however, another form of Kipling manuscript which *is* still to be found in the marketplace: his letters. The Syracuse collection has 700 of them. Kipling was an excellent letter writer by any standard. The energy, the imagination, the vivid expressiveness that one admires in his fiction and poetry come through in his letters, so that in addition to documenting his life and work with unparalleled detail and authority, they are good reading and a real contribution to the canon of a great author’s work. The letters reveal the variety of Kipling’s experience—the many places he knew, the wide range of people with whom he was connected, and his multifarious activities.

The collection of his letters effectively begins in 1890, the year in which Kipling, only recently returned to London, suddenly became famous through the publication of *Barrack-Room Ballads* and through the discovery by the English public of the Indian work that already lay behind him—such collections as *Soldiers Three*, *In Black and White*, *The Phantom Rickshaw*, and *Wee Willie Winkie*. This unlooked-for success made Kipling one of the most hunted lions in London, and to find peace he had to take defensive mea-

tures. The first of these was to declare his allegiance to the Imperial, English-rooted side of English letters symbolized by W. E. Henley, in opposition to the French-imported aesthetic side symbolized by Oscar Wilde, just then rising into the ascendant. This measure put him out of fashion in the London salons, though it did not affect his popularity among readers. The letters to Henley from Kipling at Syracuse provide a clear record of this commitment. The second defensive measure was to get an agent, which Kipling did almost as soon as he arrived in London. The literary agent was then a new and suspicious thing: there was much arguing about what an agent did or did not do and whether what he did was worth it. Kipling, having no doubt in the matter, put his affairs in the hands of one of the very earliest agents, the firm of A. P. Watt, which is still active today. Kipling stayed with the firm to the day of his death some forty-six years later.

The years just after Kipling's return to London are meagerly documented. Syracuse's few letters to Watt are important in that they help to establish the context of the young Kipling's life and work in the London of the 1890s. Among other letters from this period there are, for example, one to the editor of the *Athenaeum*, the venerable literary weekly for which Kipling wrote a little; and another to Edmund Gosse, the well known man of letters and literary gossip, who was always on the lookout for rising young talent and who took a special interest in Kipling.

The next phase in Kipling's life began with his marriage to Caroline Balestier, of Brattleboro, Vermont, and his move to Brattleboro, where he lived from 1892 to 1896, where he built a house, and where the first two of his three children were born.<sup>5</sup> During these years he produced some of the stories of *Many Inventions*, the first and second *Jungle Books*,<sup>6</sup> many of the poems in *The Seven Seas*,

5. The house was purchased by the English Landmark Trust in 1992—almost a hundred years since Kipling built it. The furnishings that Kipling provided are no longer there, but the house is structurally unaltered. The plans of the trust have not yet been made public.

6. The fact that Kipling never saw a jungle in India and that he wrote the *Jungle Books* with four feet of snow outside his Vermont window is one of my favorite literary circumstances.

and the better part of *Captains Courageous*. The Syracuse collection includes, from these American years, Kipling's letters to Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of *St. Nicholas* magazine, for which many of the stories in the *Jungle Books* were written. (Later, Kipling would send some of the *Just So Stories* to Mrs. Dodge for publication in *St. Nicholas*.) As evidence of his busy career, there are letters to his several publishers and editors: H. H. McClure of the McClure syndicate and magazine, the most energetic and persuasive editor of his day; to Richard Watson Gilder of the *Century Magazine*; and to Edward Bok, the Dutch-born editor of the *Ladies Home Journal*, who published some of Kipling's most interesting stories and remained a friend for life.

A few of the letters from this era remind us that Kipling was now a householder as well as a famous writer: a letter to the firm of Messrs. Smith & Winchester, for example, inquiring about a new pump for his unsatisfactory water system; or a note to his Vermont neighbor and sometime handyman, old Mr. Nourse, whom Kipling treated with great respect. In 1895 he writes: "If you have nothing else to do, can you come over tomorrow morning and take a look round at our road and help us to decide what is to be done about our garden and so on?" One of the most interesting of Kipling's correspondents from this period is represented at Syracuse, the American teacher and writer Edward Lucas White. So far as is known the two men never met, but the correspondence they began in 1893 continued until 1927 and is notable for its concentration on literary matters. I will give you just a brief sample. Kipling writes to White in 1893:

I've been scandalously neglecting my duties to follow—Euterpe, I think, but it is one anyway of the nine harlots—these few weeks past experimenting with divers metres and various rhymes. The results serve excellent well to light fires<sup>7</sup> and the work amuses one while it goes on. There's a heap in verse though apt to get out of hand—some of it—very. Do you know to the extent you ought the

7. Kipling, who wrote copiously and for pleasure at all times of his life, destroyed by far the greater part of what he produced.

poems of Donne who was Browning's great-great-grandfather? I've been reading him again for the health of my spirit and—he is no small singer. Must have been a haughty and proud stomached individual in his life—with Robert Browning's temperament for turning his mind clean upside down as it were a full bottle and letting the ideas get out as they best could. He is not very accessible—all of him—by reason of his statements which are occasionally free. There were giants in those days and it is profitable to read 'em.<sup>8</sup>

Kipling left the United States in 1896 for complicated domestic and public reasons. After his return to England he enjoyed what were perhaps the peak years of his fame, just before and after the turn of the century, years that culminated in the publication of *Kim* in 1901. In those years he was of course in touch with a wide mix of correspondents from around the world, a mix that is richly illustrated in the Syracuse collection. He was also engaged in fierce quarrels with the American publishers who had pirated his work before the days of international copyright and who still persisted in doing so. Kipling spent large sums of money and inordinate amounts of time in vain suits against the pirates, a campaign that is fully illustrated at Syracuse not only by Kipling's letters on the subject but by those of his wife, who was an active partner in the fight, to the New York lawyer who represented Kipling in the American courts.

Two correspondents figure prominently among the post-American letters in the Syracuse collection. In 1900 Kipling revisited South Africa, where he had once been briefly early in the 1890s. The moment was crucial: the Boer War had just begun, the English armies had suffered a humiliating series of defeats, and the prestige of the Empire was very much at stake. The return to South Africa was deeply exciting to Kipling. There he became acquainted with Cecil Rhodes, and Rhodes' lieutenant, Dr. Jameson, and the whole set of Gold Bugs and Rand Lords whose great material interests in South Africa had done so much to set off the war. He also came to know Lord Milner, the German-born English high commissioner

8. *Letters* 2:115.



of South Africa, whose policies had led directly to the war. Kipling at once fell under the spell of these men and of their high imperial plans for Africa; he was especially under the spell of Lord Milner. His admiring correspondence with Milner is now in the Bodleian Library, but the Syracuse collection shows another connection that grew out of Kipling's South African experience. Among the fashionable and interesting English people who had come to the Cape to be en scène during the war was Lady Edward Cecil, the daughter-in-law of Lord Salisbury, the great Tory prime minister. Lady Cecil's husband happened to be shut up in the town of Mafeking while the Boers besieged the place; meantime Lady Cecil lived at Rhodes' house outside Cape Town, while Rhodes himself was also shut up by the Boers in the besieged town of Kimberley. Lady Cecil, alone in Cape Town, had occasion to improve her acquaintance with Lord Milner, the British pro-consul. Sixteen years later, on the death of her husband, Lady Cecil married Milner and ended her days, at a good age, in 1958, as the Countess Milner.

Kipling made Lady Cecil's acquaintance in the first days of the Boer War, and so was brought into the world of high politics and aristocratic splendor to which she belonged: besides being a member of the family of Cecil, she was a part of Milner's circle; her brother edited the prominent Tory journal, the *National Review*; and she herself was a close friend of Clemenceau, the French statesman, to whom she introduced Kipling. Kipling's correspondence with Lady Cecil, running from 1902 to 1933, is now at Syracuse, and though it is as much domestic as political, it is none the less interesting for that.

The other prominent correspondent of Kipling's later years presents a side of Kipling that those who know him only remotely or superficially would not perhaps expect. In 1902 Kipling moved into a house near Burwash, Sussex. He would live there for the next thirty-four years, until his death in 1936. On the same day that Kipling moved to his new house, another gentleman moved into a house that he had just inherited in the same village of Burwash. This was a Colonel Henry Wemyss Feilden, who was born in 1838 and was therefore about the same age as Kipling's father. Feilden does not figure in any account of the important people of his time,

but he had had an eventful and varied life and he was, from all reports, a cultivated and experienced man. He had, for example, served in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and then in China; on leaving the army, he went to South Africa, where he had property and then, on the outbreak of the American Civil War, offered his services to the South. He became one of General Lee's aides-de-camp, and he married a southerner as the Confederacy was collapsing. He was also a distinguished explorer and had taken part in the British arctic expedition of 1875-76. An ornithologist and expert hunter, he had pursued his quarry into remote and difficult places around the world.

Throughout his life Kipling sought the friendship of older men. Perhaps this was because he had been deprived of his own father's presence from the time that his parents sent him off to England to school. As a young man growing famous in London he had depended heavily on Sir Walter Besant, then the leading figure of the literary establishment in London (there is a letter to Besant at Syracuse). In his American years, he had paid eager and respectful attention to Charles Eliot Norton, the distinguished Harvard professor who was perhaps the last of the great Boston Brahmins. During many years of close acquaintance and correspondence, Kipling continued to call Norton either "Mr. Norton" or "Sir". Again in South Africa, Kipling had magnified another older man, Lord Milner, and adopted Milner's causes as his own. Now, in his late thirties, a writer of almost unrivaled world fame, a family man, a wealthy man, a man sought after on every side and praised beyond measure, Kipling enjoyed making himself the humble and admiring servant of Colonel Henry Feilden.

Kipling's letters to Feilden, now gathered at Syracuse, run from 1904 until the Colonel's death in 1921. They are open and unrestrained to a degree quite unusual in Kipling's mature correspondence, and they show Kipling in a most attractive light: eager, observant, attentive to his correspondent's interests, always seeking to please in any way he can. Kipling always addressed the Colonel ceremoniously, mostly as "Colonel Sahib", but sometimes as "Honoured One" or by some other lofty epithet. There was nothing ironic in this: the elder man's qualities and achievements were such

as Kipling genuinely delighted to honor. He consulted the Colonel on details of local politics, on points of natural history, on the manners of the past, and on anything else that might come up and for which a wise experience was needed.

In his later years, after a life of strenuous travel, the Colonel was compelled by age to remain at home. Kipling, knowing this, served as the Colonel's eyes and ears on his own frequent travels. Following are some excerpts from a letter that Kipling wrote to the Colonel from Algeria in March of 1921, the last year of Feilden's life, which will suggest the character of their correspondence. At the time Kipling himself was far from well. He was already suffering from the undiagnosed ulcer that would ultimately kill him and, in their helpless groping about for the cause of his suffering, the doctors had just had all of Kipling's teeth pulled! It was thus in pain and depression that Kipling had gone off to Algeria in search of the sun. Nothing of that, however, gets into the letters to Feilden.

He begins by thanking the Colonel for keeping an eye on the Kipling house:

Many thanks for your tour of inspection. . . . It warms me to think that you found good places along the brook for future fly work. Allah being good to us, we will have some fun along it this summer. A camp-stool, which *I* will provide, and some whiskey, which *you* will provide, shall cheer us from the Black Bridge by the Seven Acre, even unto the Brick Bridge below Dudwell.

He next describes a tour he has just made into the countryside, a description presented in a way that might interest a country man like the Colonel:

The whole littoral, below the forest, when we reached it at last, was one vast market garden, of beans, tomatoes, artichokes, onions, spinach and every early market fruit you ever heard of all grown on what seemed pure sea sand and each little bed protected by reed fences from two to four foot high. Behind the market gardens stretched solid vineyards—all exactly like the South of France, in every detail.

HOTEL ST-GEORGE

MUSTAPHA-SUPERIEUR

ALGER

March. 5. 1921.

Honoured one -

Yours of the 26th Feb come in a day or two ago, with the sad news about Bennett which grieves me a great deal, because he was really getting on and had his career made. Does it mean that his case is hopeless: or is there a chance of full recovery afterwards? It's a queer disease to get a foothold among whites: though, I am told, it is one of the many mysterious variants of cerebro-spinal meningitis.

Many thanks for your tower of inspection. C. said grumpily: - "But there ought to have been more than two fields scouted." I expect that Sands, like the bees, rejoiced in the fine weather - but, unlike them, "did no manner of work." It warms me to think that you found good places along the coast for future fly work. Allah being good to us, we will have some fun along it this summer. A camp stool, which I will provide, and some whiskey, which you will

The first two pages of a letter from Rudyard Kipling to Colonel Henry Wemyss Feilden, dated 5 March 1921. Rudyard Kipling Collection, Syracuse University Library.

provide, shall cheer us from the Black Bridge by the Seven Here, even unto the Black Bridge below Dudwell.

Did I tell you how on Tuesday, misled by the evening sun, we went a two hour motor trip to Bouzarea and Sidi-Farukh, a seaside plage where the French landed in 1830.<sup>2</sup> The wind was like an assortment of lancets, and C. went down with laryngitis on her return. She is better now, but not yet recovered. It is a Hell's own climate in respect of sun and cold together. The Sun lures you out and the cold lays you out. Our road lay at 1200 feet for some miles through a well kept, well cut, cedar forest, on the shoulders of hills that dipped sheer, it seemed, to the sea. Thus:-



There was no guard on the precipice side! a drop of anything you please; the turns here were short and sharp and the car's bonnet seemed to poke out into space for the most part but it was a most glorious drive - que drive.

He then defers to the Colonel's superior experience:

You know better than I how geologically and botanically Europe runs on up to the Sahara. I was not prepared for the extreme Mediterraneanism of the fringe of coast. The



olives and the vines make the likeness, together with the rich vineyard earth. . . . The local colonist (generally a South of France man) is a darker and hairier person, so it seems to me, than his pure French brother. He has the same low birthrate as the Frenchman: and, when he can he gets the Spaniard or the Italian to work for him. The Arab does not love work.

Then Kipling turns to the city:

The ex-mayor of Algiers took me round the native city on Wednesday. It is all built in steps, like Clovelly. No street is more than eight feet wide and the houses all but meet overhead. For beauty of color, mystery, darkness, blazing white minars and gaily tiled mosque fronts it was indescribable. I rejoiced in every minute of it but was dead-tired afterwards. All the same I am picking up and have much less pain every day. [We know that was not true: he was in much pain throughout the Algiers visit.] I only wish I had *your* physique. Apropos of that, St. Saens the musician dines at the next table to me. I know now why he does not carry himself as well as you. *If* he ate all his life as he eats now he is a miracle. I never saw such dejeunerers as he puts down. *Per contra* he walks with difficulty.

The letter then quietly concludes:

It has come on to rain—a soft warm rain with promise of more behind it. Damn these “blue sky” countries anyhow! A hot wind comes off the Sahara and condenses moisture. It’s all good for the crops but bad for the tourist. We all send you our love and I am

Ever affectionately,  
Rudyard Kipling.

In a note accompanying Kipling’s letters written to him on this trip, Colonel Feilden himself has set down the following statement:

These are a series of charming letters, written to me during the months of February, March and April 1921 by that most

kind and sympathetic of men, Rudyard Kipling, from Algiers and the south of France. He knew I was ill and depressed, and has done his *best* to cheer me up. That is saying a great deal.

I agree with the Colonel: that *is* saying a great deal.