

*Morton N. Cohen*

RUDYARD KIPLING TO ANDREW LANG:  
AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER IN VERSE

RUDYARD KIPLING'S EARLY MONTHS IN LONDON, when he was trying to establish himself with the English public, are least well documented. We know that he left India early in 1889, at twenty-three, "ripe for change."<sup>1</sup> He took the long route to Liverpool, by way of Rangoon, Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States, and arrived in an English downpour on Saturday, October 5. His first London lodgings were on Villiers Street in Embankment Chambers, whence he could look out over the Thames and walk down Fleet Street to meet the newspaper men he knew in town.

But while he was still without a literary reputation in England, he somehow met a distinguished circle of literary men and with ease won their support and friendship. These men were Edmund Gosse, Henry James, Rider Haggard, "F. Anstey", W. E. Henley, and others, all members or frequent visitors in the Savile Club, a small establishment in Piccadilly, where, as George Saintsbury would later write, aspiring literary lights waited until the Athenaeum beckoned.<sup>2</sup> Editors from all the important weeklies and monthlies met at the little Savile and rumour had it that the *Saturday Review* was virtually run from there.

Andrew Lang was a member. He had read an Indian edition of Kipling's verse, years before it appeared in England, and had written about it in his monthly column in *Longman's Magazine*.<sup>3</sup> Whether Kipling made a point of getting in touch with the eminent critic or whether their paths crossed accidentally is not certain, but we know that they were soon acquainted. It was, in all probability, Lang who steered Kipling to the Savile, even as he introduced him to publishers who would print his work.

On October 26, exactly three weeks after Kipling arrived in London, he wrote to Lang, not an ordinary letter, but a verse parody in the manner

of Bret Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful James", set in the context of the Savile Club gossip about Haggard and Lang's year-old collaboration on *The World's Desire*, a romance about Odysseus' latter-day wanderings. Kipling may well have intended Lang to read his parody aloud at the Savile to amuse the inner literary circle. At any rate, the letter suggests that when Kipling had last spoken to Lang, perhaps earlier in the day at the club, they had joked about a lecture tour through the United States that Haggard and Lang might take together in 1890 to help publicize their forthcoming book. In the parody, Truthful James, Harte's crusty commentator on the American scene, tells of the confusion that results when the American public mistakes Lang for Haggard and Haggard for Lang.

The Grange,

West Kensington, W.<sup>1</sup>

Oct: 26. 89

Dear Mr. Lang,

No. There were no adventures. What happened after your tour was told in March 1890 by Bret Harte in the *Argonaut*<sup>5</sup> in this manner:—

I reside at Table Mountain and my name is Truthful James  
I am not versed in lecturin' or other sinful games.  
You will please refrain from shooting while my simple lyre I twang  
To the tale of Mister Haggard and his partner Mister Lang.

They were high toned literateurs and two most unhappy men  
For they started to enlighten our enlightened citizen;  
And thanks to the reporter who the interviewing fixed  
Mister Lang and Mister Haggard got inextricably mixed.

Now our sunward-gazing nation gets its information slick  
From the daily mornin' journal—an' it reads darnation quick  
So if that information be inaccurately wild  
Some eighty million citizens are apt to be beguiled.

In the ears of Mister Haggard whom they hailed as Mister Lang  
The societies of Boston ethnologically sang  
And they spoke of creature-legends, and of totem, myth and sign  
And the stricter laws of Metre—Mister Haggard answered "*Nein.*"

Then emboldened by his silence which was painful and extreme  
They discoursed of gnome and kelpie and the imp that steals the cream  
And of pornographic poems (which the same he never knew)  
And they bade him chaunt a rondel—Mister Haggard then withdrew.

His subsequent adventures form no part of this concern—  
It is to the other person Mister Rangard Hang we turn;  
Our sunward-gazing nation fell upon him in a mass  
Demanding little stories of his friend Umloppagas.<sup>6</sup>

The Prohibition Party made him lecture on the fate  
Of the female Cleopatra<sup>7</sup> who imbibed her poison straight  
While the Theosophic centres were revolving round his knees  
And suggesting further volumes of some forty further "Shes."

But the straw that broke that camel was Chicago's mild request  
For a Zulu dance in character—appropriately dressed  
And vain is approbation when the path to glory leads  
Through a wilderness of war-whoops and a wardrobeful of beads.

In the "Iroquois" at Buffalo<sup>8</sup> that partnership broke up  
To the melancholy music of a six-shot boudoir Krupp  
And the waiters on the staircase counted pistol shot and oath  
While the partners argued hotly if the States could hold 'em both.

They collaborate in Yarrup where men know them who from which  
And by latest information they are striking of it rich  
But when evening lamps are lighted and the evening paper rustles  
Still they pick forgotten bullets from each other's gluteal muscles.

Yours very penitently,  
Rudyard Kipling.<sup>9</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself* (1937), p. 75.
2. "A Little Place To Wait In", *A Second Scrap Book* (1923), pp. 326-39.
3. "At the Sign of the Ship," VIII (October, 1886), 672-78.
4. The Grange, on North End Road, Fulham, was the home of Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones, Kipling's aunt and uncle and two of his dearest relatives. See Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*, pp. 11-15; Angela Thirkell, *Three Houses* (1931), pp. 15-27.
5. The San Francisco *Argonaut*, a popular weekly, would be a likely place for a set of Truthful James verses to appear, and Kipling is easily able to recall the name of the paper from his visit to the United States. Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful James", known also as "The Heathen Chinee", was first published in 1870 and soon became his best-known poem. His work had made a deep impression on the young Kipling (see *Something of Myself*, p. 35).
6. Haggard's spelling of his African hero's name is Umslopogaas.

7. The allusion is to Haggard's *Cleopatra* (1889).
8. The Iroquois Hotel was, when Kipling wrote, the newest hotel in downtown Buffalo, and he may have seen it under construction when he visited Buffalo earlier in the year. (W. E. J. Martin, "Kipling View of Buffalo as Pre-Kim", *Buffalo Courier*, CXVI [January 14, 1961], Section D, pp. 7-8; "Lakefront Enchanted Kipling on Visit to Buffalo in 1889," *Buffalo Evening News*, CXXXI [April 10, 1946], 39.)
9. Haggard visited the United States three times; Lang never. In 1889 "The Lounger," an American columnist writing in the *Critic*, publicly invited Lang to "come and see" America. Lang replied in his monthly column ("At the Sign of the Ship," *Longman's Magazine*, XXXII [June, 1898], 186): "Alas, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Like this hospitable author, I make a real distinction between visitors who come to make money by talking, 'and visitors who come for human pleasure.' I could not pretend to regard my 'talk' as an equivalent for dollars, and the American public might take the same view, above all if, as is too probable, they could not hear the talk, the talker being 'roopy,' as Steerforth said about David Copperfield." To which "The Lounger" replied (*Critic*, XXIX [N.S., June 25, 1898], 417), "It is not necessary to talk, my dear Mr. Lang; come and let us look at you—we will do the talking." And to that, another columnist added: "How little the 'Lounger' knows Mr. Lang. America's talking powers are just what he dreads." ("News and Notes", *Academy*, LIV [July 9, 1898], 37)

## END OF THE FALL

*Robert Stewart*

Down windy streets through leaves that fly I walk  
 while over all Connecticut October  
 is turning sober.  
 Drunkard of seasons, now let's sit and talk.

The step here looks presentable and warm  
 (west wind is chilly but this house will break it)  
 so why not take it  
 kindly, as offers made for love not form.

Will you excuse me if I seem abrupt,  
 I am not looking for a monstrous moral  
 and do not quarrel  
 with your intoxication—interrupt