



## PAPER

### Bro. Joseph Rudyard Kipling

**Summary:** Rudyard Kipling – a Masonic literati.



*Portrait of Rudyard Kipling (1895) from the biography  
by John Palmer  
Elliott & Fry [Public domain]*

Kipling was born in Bombay in India on December 30th 1865 to gifted parents. His father had gone to India to accept the post of Principal of a School of Art. His mother was a sparkling and elegant lady whose sister was the mother of Stanley Baldwin. He was affectionately known in the family as Ruddy and was taught to speak Hindustani as his first language by an Indian servant who brought him up.

At the age of five, Rudyard was brought to England and spent five unhappy years with a foster family in Southsea. There, he lived a life of misery due to mistreatment, beatings and general victimisation, as a result, he suffered from insomnia and poor health for the rest of his life. From there, he went on to The United Services College at Westward Ho! in north Devon, where he remained until his school years were over. The English schoolboy's deep-rooted code of honour, duty and fair play deeply affected his views and his writings in later life.

At the age of 17 he returned to India and began his life's work writing, beginning as a sub-editor of *The Civil and Military Gazette*

and *Pioneer* in Lahore. It was this experience that interested him in the romance and adventure of Great Britain's colonial expansion and which led him, in later life, to becoming a leading supporter of The British Empire, and in consequence, a very controversial figure.

In his twenty-first year, he began to produce the verse and stories that were to make him famous and which attracted attention from the outset. Between 1887 and 1889 he travelled extensively in Asia and America. He lived for four years in Vermont, and in 1892 married an American girl Caroline Starr Balestier. Whilst in America, he also met Mark Twain and they became lifelong friends. In 1907, both he and Twain received an Honorary Degree for Literature at Oxford University; the same year he became the first English writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.<sup>1</sup>

Tragically, in February 1899 during a trip to New York, his daughter Josephine caught pneumonia and died at the age of just six. This was not the end of it. Their only son John was killed in action in Belgium in 1915, just six weeks after his eighteenth birthday. As a result, Kipling gave unstintingly of his time and effort as a member of The Imperial War Graves Commission, and is credited with the authorship of the inscription seen in every cemetery, *'Their Name Liveth for Evermore'*.

Kipling's admission into Freemasonry was remarkable and his Masonic career was, as one might expect, extremely active and influential. His membership of our Fraternity also had a profound effect upon his writings. Many, too numerous to mention here, are the Masonic allusions which coloured his poems and intriguing short stories. In his 1937 autobiography, *Something of Myself* (prepared for publication by his wife), Kipling writes:

*'In '85 I was made a Freemason by dispensation (Lodge Hope and Perseverance 782 E.C.), being under age, because the Lodge hoped for a good Secretary. They did not get him, but I helped, ... So yet another world opened to me which I needed.'*<sup>2</sup>

We get a little more detail in a letter written by Kipling to the London Times some years later on 28th March 1935:

*'In reply to your letter I was Secretary for some years of The Lodge of Hope and Perseverance No. 782, English Constitution which included Brethren of at least four different creeds. I was Entered by a member of the Brahma Samaj (a Hindu), Passed by a Mohammedan, and Raised by an Englishman. Our Tyler was an Indian Jew. We met of course on the level and the only difference that anyone could notice was that at our banquets, some of the Brethren who were debarred by caste rules from eating food not ceremoniously prepared, sat over empty plates.'*<sup>3</sup>

However Ruddy was being naughty! - (Let's call it a bit of embellishment or 'literacy licence')

According to his Lodge records - he was Initiated on 5th April 1886. Passed to the Degree of a Fellowcraft the following month on 3rd May 1886 and Raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason on 6th December the same year. These Ceremonies took place under the direction of two Englishmen, The Worshipful Master W.Bro. Colonel G.B. Wolseley, assisted by W.Bro. Colonel O. Menzies, who was actually Kipling's proposer. A few months later he delivered a lecture to his Brethren on The Origins of Masonry and the First Degree in Particular. He soon became a joining member of Independence with Philanthropy Lodge No. 391 in Bengal.

Later, upon his return to England, his involvement in Freemasonry rapidly developed. He joined, as an honorary member, the Motherland Lodge No. 3861 in London. He was also a member of The Authors' Lodge No. 3456, and a founder member of The Lodge Builders of the Silent Cities No. 4948, which was connected with the War Graves Commission mentioned earlier. Another Masonic association was formed when he became 'Poet Laureate' of the very famous Scottish Lodge in Edinburgh, Canongate, Kilwinning Lodge No. 2. This was a great honour since the previous incumbent was none other than Robert Burns. Years later, he accepted a Fellowship of The Philalethes Society, an organisation of Masonic writers formed in The United States of America in 1928. The Society closed its membership list on the appointment of Kipling as the fortieth member.

Upon his return to England the Kipling family settled in the family home known as Batemans near the village of Burwash, in Sussex, where they lived for over thirty years.<sup>4</sup> At the same time as the growing recognition of his artistry as a writer, he became widely acclaimed and highly honoured. Popularly regarded as unofficial Poet Laureate, he was hailed as the literary heir to Charles Dickens. *The Jungle Book*, maybe one of his greatest works, was made into a sell-out motion picture.

What is interesting is the fact that he refused all honours, including The Order of Merit, and only accepted those of a literary nature. Between the years of 1922 and 1925, he was a rector at The University of St. Andrews. His popularity is illustrated by a report that Kipling himself might have titled, *The Bank Balance that would not diminish*. For a time, the author could not understand why the cheques that he wrote in payment of his bills were not being cashed. Upon investigation he discovered that they were being framed and sold to the general public for considerably more than the cash value of the cheque. A brisk business in Kipling autographs had kept his Bank balance from decreasing, this so infuriated his wife that she destroyed anything in the house with Kipling's signature upon it.

Kipling's works span over five decades, with Tennyson and Browning still writing, and Hardy and Yates unheard of. A complete and scholarly catalogue of all his works which carry Masonic allusions and references has yet to be accomplished. Suffice it to say his literary work which carries deep rooted Masonic thoughts and expressions is unparalleled, and its content is formidable. What is set out below is a guide to such research, far from complete, but a sample of the titles that can be positively labelled as 'Masonic'.

#### Short Stories and Novels:

The Man who would be King (Wee Willie Winkie)	Traffics and Discoveries
Plain Tales from the Hill	Kim
On the Great Wall	The Winged Hat
The Mother Lodge	Hal o' the Draft
In the Interests of the Brethren (Debits and Credits)	The City Wall
With the Main Guard	The Carpenter
Debits and Credits	The Janeities
A Friend of the Family	Madonna of the Trenches
The Butterfly that Stamped (Just So Stories)	

#### Poems

Dedication	The Palace	The Banquet Night
The Widow of Windsor	Rough Ashlar	Mother Lodge (The Seven Seas)

This short List but scratches the surface of his work.

In conclusion, is included Kipling's poem *If*.

#### IF

*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 them 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!*

Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936)

## References

1. The Nobel Prize in Literature 1907, "in consideration of the power of observation, originality of imagination, virility of ideas and remarkable talent for narration which characterize the creations of this world-famous author." NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2019. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1907/summary> [Accessed 27 Nov 2019]
2. The actual Lodge Minutes recording his Initiation were written in Kipling's own handwriting!
3. Kipling seems to be expressing the non- sectarian joy and pleasure from our Order.
4. Batemans is now held by The National Trust retaining much of the character of the family. It can be visited between April and October.
5. Harper, Paul, Famous Freemasons - A Prologue, <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=2084>

## Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
  - Followed by 'any questions'
  - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
  - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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