

Rudyard Kipling's "At the End of the Passage"

This tale was first published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in August 1890; first book publication was in Kipling's collection *Life's Choices* (1891).

General Considerations:

Kipling opens this tale by quoting a partial line ("life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness") from the Declaration of Independence, a document associated, obviously, with the foundation of the United States of America, its self-declared end of its colonial status and the beginning of its independent existence. Why would a British author, writing a story about British men in the most important colony (India) of the British Empire, quote from this, of all documents?

Kipling of course was indelibly associated, in the public mind of the 1890s, with India, which was indeed the pre-eminent colony of the Victorian British Empire. Consider that the 4 men in this tale are **all** associated directly with that Empire: Mottram is a surveyor, Lowndes is a bureaucrat with the Indian Civil Service, Spurstow is a doctor taking care of native workers, Hummil is an engineer involved in laying out a railway line. So.... what's Kipling doing here? What role does all this "Empire" business play in shaping the theme(s) of this story?

Don't look for Kipling to hand us any simple answers in this story, and don't be surprised if the story's meaning or point seems elusive at first – that may well be just what Kipling intended. Read a few more of his ghost stories and you'll see that he is often rather indirect in his supernaturalist tales – a fact which may be surprising to those who know him primarily as a writer of children's tales (*The Jungle Book*, *Just-So Stories*, etc). He's not Henry James – few people are, thank goodness – but he's capable of more subtlety and indirection than people often give him credit for.

Given that Kipling is a master craftsman in the short story form – and he is, unquestionably – readers would do well to pay attention to the mentions of Jevins in this tale. He committed suicide, right? Are you sure?

Sources used in this StudyGuide:

"OED" = *Oxford English Dictionary*

punkah = "A large swinging fan made of cloth stretched on a rectangular frame, suspended from the ceiling or rafters, and worked by a cord so as to agitate and freshen the air in hot weather." (OED)

railway-sleepers = "A piece of timber or other material used to form a support (usually transverse) for the rails of a tramway or railway." (OED)

bumblepuppy = "An old game resembling bagatelle, but played out of doors with marbles or 'dumps' of lead; nine-holes. **b.** Applied humorously to whist played unscientifically. Also of bridge." bagatelle is a game vaguely related to billiards, played on a table w/ a semi-circular end which has 9 holes. 2. "A game in which a ball slung to a post is struck with a racket by each

player in opposite directions, the object being to wind the string entirely round the post; also, the post so used." (OED)

vestrymen = minor lay church official, akin to council or board member

King's Peg = a drink made of cognac or brandy and champagne

Heidsieck = a brand of champagne

play ducks and drakes = to skip flat stones across the water; here, to play w/ and waste, to squander

Pashtan = ethnic people of south-east Afghanistan and north-west Pakistan (now commonly "Pashtun")

chlorodyne = "A drug, popular as a narcotic and anodyne, composed of chloroform, morphia, tincture of Indian hemp, prussic acid, and other substances." (OED)

bricks to the feet = a common treatment (or part thereof) for various maladies in the C19, including the diarrhetic effects of cholera and other intestinal disorders; see, for example, <http://www.celticcousins.net/irishiniowa/epidemics.htm>

burning-ghaut = "A level spot at the top of a river ghat on which Hindus burn their dead; a funeral pyre." (OED) A "river ghat" or ghaut is a flat place near a river, often on a levee or raised bank

black cholera = an archaic term for melancholy, Kipling is here using a common term for cholera, which often caused corpses to turn dark. Cholera was endemic in India in the C19. Kipling also refers to "black cholera" in "Without Benefit of Clergy," another story set in the Indian subcontinent.

"very like Chucks in his language" = ? very proper, to the point of pretentiousness ?

babu = while a title of respect, when applied by Englishmen to native Hindus it is denigratory, mocking what the English perceive as a superficial "English" education of a native

skittles = originally the bowling-like game of nine-pins; used also to refer to something as nonsense

gold mohur = "A gold coin, originally Persian, but used in India from the 16th c. onward. Subsequently, 'the official name of the chief gold coin of British India' (Yule), weighing 180 grains troy, and containing 165 grains of pure gold; its value was 15 rupees. Usually gold mohur." (OED)

David / Saul = biblical; David played music to soothe the anger of King Saul, as Mottram's playing the piano calmed the mood among the irritable men (see 1 Samuel 16: 14-23).

"Glory to thee, my God, this night" = a hymn (the first line is the title) written by Thomas Ken in 1692. "The Grasshopper Polka" is a well-known polka tune.

cockchafer = a large greyish-brown beetle common in Europe (and England); aka "maybug" for its appearance in large numbers in May

"the blessed Jorrocks" = John Jorrocks is a character created by the British essayist, novelist, and editor R. S. Surtees (1803-1864); Jorrocks appears in several Surtees' novels and short stories, mostly in connection with hunting and in a humorous fashion; collections featuring the Jorrocks tales were popular in the late C19 and early C20.

bromide of potassium = a C19 medicine; bromides (of various sorts) were prescribed for nervousness, anxiety, "hysterical mania," spasms, and other nerve disorders, among other ailments. Also used, in early photography, in the developing process.

"twelve-bore rifle" = refers to diameter of the barrel; a 12-gauge rifle, which is relatively large and powerful.

express = "*express rifle*: a rifle constructed to discharge a bullet with a high initial velocity and a low trajectory." (OED)

swingeing medical certificate = not a typo; one of the meanings of "swinge" is "To have free scope or course, to indulge one's inclination" (OED). Spurstow will provide Hummil with medical leave, in other words, temporarily absolving him from any duties or responsibilities.

billet = in this sense, an assignment or "post" (a job)

"salted, in a sort of way" = "seasoned" in the sense of being toughened or hardened, particularly in reference to disease but Hummil may be referring to his ability to stand the severe Indian weather better than Burkett or his wife.

"reeving and unreeving" = reeving is passing a rope through a block or pulley; here, the bedframe (which consists of cloth ribbons or 'tapes' woven through a wooden frame) is being dismantled, the loosened tapes causing the corpse to be lowered to the floor in preparation for removal from the house.

"when a tiger chivvied him" = usually "knifed," chivvied here refers to being "stuck" by a tiger's claws.

"Things in a dead man's eye." = the final moments of this story make use of the belief, popular in the late C19, that the last thing seen by a dying person remains "imprinted" on the retina of the eye. See "[Optograms and Fiction: Photo in a Dead Man's Eye](#)" by Arthur B. Evans for more info, including brief discussion of Kipling's story.

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