Kipling's America
edited by D. H. Stewart

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OVER TWENTY YEARS ago my interest in Kipling led me to Professor Alvice W. Yeats, a bibliographer and collector of Kipling’s works. He mentioned that a new edition of Kipling’s writing about the United States might be interesting to a generation of readers unfamiliar with his journalism. The appearance of *Kipling’s Japan*, edited by Hugh Cortazzi and George Webb (1988), which contained Kipling’s account of Japan the month before he sailed to America, and the initial volumes of *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, edited by Thomas Pinney (1990), confirmed the idea that interest in Kipling persists. During the past decade no fewer than six full-scale biographies and over a dozen book-length studies of his work have appeared, though none examines his writing about America.

*Kipling’s Japan* was a special case that focused on the author’s two visits to Japan (1889 and 1892) at a time when that nation was emerging on the international scene. Because late-nineteenth-century Japan was not well known to late-twentieth-century readers, the editors supplied extensive historical background and annotation—virtually a crash-course on Japanese culture. The book remains an excellent introduction to Japan at that time because of Kipling’s energetic prose and the editors’ erudition.

Kipling’s American “letters” (1889, 1892–1895) differ from his earlier travel writing. His accounts of trips to Rajasthan, Bengal and Asia, for example, are adventurous romps from place to place. He usually enjoyed himself (except in China), and his pleasure enlivens his prose. America filled him with misgivings. To be sure, he liked many Americans and predicted America’s future might as a world power. But Americans were neither English cousins as he imagined nor Anglo-Indian administrators as he hoped. As a result his tone is often polemical; but whether a given passage is contentious or complimentary, the reader will gain accurate, colorful, often funny insights about America then and now.

In addition to *Kipling’s Japan* and the *Letters*, the one indispensable model and resource for editing Kipling is *The Readers’ Guide to Rudyard Kipling’s Work*, edited by R. E. Harbord, et. al., 8 volumes.
(1961–1972). Although outdated and at times erroneous, this five thousand page “guide” is the supreme example of non-academic scholarship. The editors (people from many walks of life including academicians – a befitting aggregation for the study of Kipling) proceed book by book, line by line, defining obscure or foreign terms, identifying literary allusions, explaining historical references, and commenting humorously on inexplicable items. These three books together with Israel Kaplan’s “Rudyard Kipling’s ‘From Sea to Sea’” (Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1950) and Harold Orel’s edition of *Kipling: Interviews and Recollections* (1983) constitute a basic bibliography for the present volume. Orel’s *A Kipling Chronology* (1990) provides an accessible and generally accurate record of Kipling’s whereabouts and activities. In *Kipling in California* (1989), Thomas Pinney collected and annotated Letters Two through Six and the *San Francisco Chronicle* interview (2 June 1889) included in this volume.

Without the help and advice of several individuals, this book would not have been begun, let alone completed. I have mentioned A. W. Yeats and should add thanks to Elliot L. Gilbert and the late Norman Grabo, the latter an American literature specialist who corrected my stylistic lapses. John Burt, formerly at the Sussex University Library, Mr. Alan Jutzi, Rare Book Department, Huntington Library, Steven E. Smith, Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A&M University and Bruce Morton, Dean of Libraries at Montana State University provided essential texts. David Alan Richards, who is currently overhauling and recasting the Kipling bibliography as well as collecting first editions, explained exactly when and where certain “letters” were first published. George H. Webb, recently retired editor of *The Kipling Journal* and now engaged in producing a new, updated version of the *Readers’ Guide*, patiently answered my numerous questions and anticipated some never asked. Thomas Pinney, the editor of Kipling’s letters and America’s leading authority on Kipling, not only answered my questions but volunteered suggestions that guided my efforts. Robert Langenfeld at ELT Press is the most conscientious and helpful editor that any writer could want. I also appreciate the careful work of ELT Press’s editorial assistant, Nina Riggs.
My wife, Diane, had the unenviable task of reading aloud (punctuation included) the blurred copies from microfilm of every “letter” as I entered it in the computer. None of these individuals is responsible for the errors of commission or omission.

Bozeman, Montana

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