

Wise (and Timeless) Advice from Rudyard Kipling

In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, two towns 100 miles apart boast different names but nonetheless were named for the same person—though he never set foot in either one. The towns are Kipling and Rudyard, and the honored individual was Rudyard Kipling. A re-reading of a poem he first published 106 years ago is a good way to end one year while planning for the next. I'll share it with you in a moment, but first a few words about the man.

He was born a British subject in Bombay, India, on this date (December 30) in 1865, and is remembered mainly for his significant contributions to English literature. His novels, short stories, and poetry earned him an immense following the world over, rekindled recently with the release of the Kipling-inspired 2016 film, "The Jungle Book." In 1907, at the age of 42, he was awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature, the first English-language recipient to ever win the award. And 71 years after his death, he remains the youngest Nobel laureate in Literature ever.

He was also an unofficial Poet Laureate of Great Britain—unofficial only because he could have had the title but declined it. He wasn't much for awards and fancy appellations; he even turned down a knighthood.

It was early in the 1890s when his fame prompted one Frederick D. Underwood to name two stations on a railroad route through Michigan's Upper Peninsula after his favorite author. As general manager of the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad (known as the "Soo Line"), Underwood certainly had that right, but local townspeople enthusiastically approved. The tiny settlement at the head of Green Bay on the northern end of Lake Michigan became the town of

Kipling. About 30 miles south of America's third-oldest city, Sault Ste. Marie, the hamlet of Pine River saw its name changed to Rudyard.

When the young, esteemed author learned of the honor, he immediately wrote to Underwood to thank him, saying “. . . I write to beg you to send me a photograph if possible, of either Rudyard or Kipling or preferentially both. I shall take a deep interest in their little welfares.”

Rejection of Socialism

He may have appreciated the irony of the town of Kipling being situated next to the larger city of Gladstone, named for the [famous classical liberal](#) British prime minister of the late 19th century. Kipling the author didn't much care for Gladstone the politician. The former was an unabashed advocate of British imperialism while the latter worked to scale back the costly reaches of the British Empire.

Rudyard Kipling's outspoken views on the foreign and domestic policies of his day guaranteed him some powerful enemies and sometimes rattled his friends. He coined the phrase, “white man's burden,” when he urged the United States to take a more active role in civilizing “backward” regions of the world. He so vehemently criticized America's “belated” entry into World War I, a conflict that would take the life of his beloved son John, that the governments of Britain and France publicly disavowed his remarks.

While his foreign policy views were too interventionist and militaristic for my tastes, on issues at home he was much more to my liking. Indeed, he was outspoken in favor of liberty in general and classical liberalism in particular. Along with two other prominent Brits in 1920, he co-founded the Liberty League with the express purpose of advancing classical liberal ideas. When his cousin Stanley Baldwin became a Conservative prime minister of Great Britain in 1923, Kipling publicly

chastised him as “a socialist at heart.”

Sound of Weeping

Kipling detested communism, especially the Soviet variety from its inception under Lenin in 1917. With the Bolshevik rise to power, one sixth of the world, he wrote, had “passed bodily out of civilization.” In a 1918 poem, Kipling depicted the USSR as a sanctum of evil that replaced what good there once was in Russia with “the sound of weeping and the sight of burning fire, and the shadow of a people trampled into the mire.” Moscow banned his writings for decades long after his death in 1936.

In 1895, when he was 30 years of age, Kipling penned a poem with the single-word title of “If.” He set it aside for 15 years before authorizing its publication in 1910. Seen by literary critics as an example of “[Victorian-era stoicism](#),” it remains well-known and popular across Britain today.

It was adapted into song by Roger Whittaker in 1972 under the title “[A Song for Erik](#)” and by [Joni Mitchell](#) in 2007 on her album “Shine.”

As a New Year beckons, I commend “If” to you here. It offers timeless advice from an accomplished poet. We would all do well to adapt its spirit to our lives in 2017.

If

By Rudyard Kipling

*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 'em 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.*

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This article was originally published on FEE.org. Read the [original article](#).

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