

**RUDYARD
KIPLING**

THE EYES OF
ASIA

Редъярд Киплинг

The Eyes of Asia

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Rudyard Kipling

The Eyes of Asia

A RETIRED GENTLEMAN

From Bishen Singh Saktawut, Subedar Major, 215th Indurgurh [Todd's] Rajputs, now at Lyndhurst, Hampshire, England, this letter is sent to Madhu Singh, Sawant, Risaldar Major [retired] 146th [Dublana] Horse, on his fief which he holds under the Thakore Sahib of Pech at Bukani by the River, near Chiturkaira, Kotah, Rajputana, written in the fifth month of the year 1916, English count.

Having experienced five months of this war, I became infected with fever and a strong coldness of the stomach [rupture]. The doctor ordered me out of it altogether. They have also cut me with knives for a wound on my leg. It is now healed but the strength is gone, and it is very frightened of the ground. I have been in many hospitals for a long time. At this present I am living in a hospital for Indian troops in a forest-reservation called "New," which was established by a King's order in ages past. There is no order for my return to India. I do not desire it. My Regiment has now gone out of France – to Egypt, or Africa. My officer Sahibs are for the most part dead or in hospitals. During a railway journey when two people sit side by side for two hours one feels the absence of the other when he alights. How great then was my anguish at being severed from my Regiment after thirty-three years! Now, however, I am finished. If I return to India I cannot drill the new men between my two crutches. I should subsist in my village on my wound-pension among old and young who have never seen war. Here I have great consideration. Though I am useless they are patient with me.

Having knowledge of the English tongue, I am sometimes invited to interpret between those in the hospital for the Indian troops and visitors of high position. I advance eminent visitors, such as relatives of Kings and Princes into the presence of the Colonel Doctor Sahib. I enjoy a small room apart from the hospital wards. I have a servant. The Colonel Doctor Sahib examines my body at certain times. I am forbidden to stoop even for my crutches. They are instantly restored to me by orderlies and my friends among the English. I come and go at my pleasure where I will, and my presence is solicited by the honourable.

You say I made a mistake to join the war at the end of my service? I have endured five months of it. Come you out and endure two and a half. You are three years younger than I. Why do you sit at home and drill new men? Remember:

The Brahman who steals,
The widow who wears ornaments,
The Rajput who avoids the battle,
Are only fit for crows' meat.

You write me that this is a war for young men? The old are not entirely useless. The Badshah [the King] himself gave me the medal for fetching in my captain from out of the wires upon my back. That work caused me the coldness in my stomach. Old men should not do coolie-work. Your cavalry were useless in France. Infantry can fight in this war – not cavalry. It is as impossible for us to get out of our trenches and exterminate the enemy as it is for the enemy to attack us. Doubtless the cavalry brigades will show what they are made of in Egypt or Persia. This business in France is all Artillery work and mines. The blowing up of the Chitoree Bastion when Arjoon went to Heaven waving his sword, as the song says, would not be noticed in the noise of this war.

The nature of the enemy is to go to earth and flood us with artillery of large weight. When we were in the trenches it was a burden. When we rested in the villages we found great ease. As to our food, it was like a bunnia's marriage-feast. Everything given, nothing counted. Some of us – especially among your cavalry – grew so fat that they were compelled to wrestle to keep thin. This is because there was no marching.

The nature of the enemy is to commit shame upon women and children, and to defile the shrines of his own faith with his own dung. It is done by him as a drill. We believed till then they were some sort of caste apart from the rest. We did not know they were outcaste. Now it is established by the evidence of our senses. They attack on all fours running like apes. They are specially careful for their faces. When death is certain to them they offer gifts and repeat the number of their children. They are very good single shots from cover.

It is the nature of the enemy to shower seductions from out of their air-machines on our troops in the lines. They promised such as would desert that they would become Rajahs among them. Some of the men went over to see if this were true. No report came back. In this way we cleaned out five bad characters from our Company exactly as it used to be in the little wars on the Border. May the enemy be pleased with them! No man of any caste disgraced our Regiment.

The nature of the enemy in this war is like the Nat [juggler] who is compelled to climb a pole for his belly's sake. If he does not climb he starves. If he stops he falls down. This is my thought concerning the enemy.

Now that our troops have gone out of France, the war is entirely between the enemy and the English, etc., etc. Both sides accordingly increased the number and the size of their guns. The new wounded officers in the English hospital say that the battles of even yesterday are not to be compared with the battle of to-day. Tell this to those who have returned and who boast. Only fools will desire more war when this war is ended. Their reward will be an instant extinction on account of the innumerable quantity of arms, munitions, etc., etc., which will be left in the hands of the experts. Those who make war henceforward will be as small jackals fighting beneath the feet of elephants. This Government has abundance of material, and fresh strength is added every hour. Let there be no mistake. The foolish have been greatly deceived in these matters by the nature of the English which is in the highest degree deceptive. Everything is done and spoken upside-down in this country of the English. He who has a thousand says: "It is but a scant hundred." The possessor of palaces says: "It is a hut," and the rest in proportion. Their boast is not to boast. Their greatness is to make themselves very small. They draw a curtain in front of all they do. It is as difficult to look upon the naked face of their achievements as in our country upon the faces of women.

It is not true there is no caste in England. The mark of the high castes, such as Ul or Baharun [Earl or Baron] is that they can perform any office, such as handling the dead, wounds, blood, etc., without loss of caste. The Maharanee of the Nurses in the English Hospital which is near our Hospital is by caste Baharanee [Baroness]. I resort thither daily for society and enlightenment on the habits of this people. The high castes are forbidden to show curiosity, appetite, or fear in public places. In this respect they resemble troops on parade. Their male children are beaten from their ninth year to their seventeenth year, by men with sticks. Their women are counted equal with their men. It is reckoned as disgraceful for a Baharanee to show fear when lights are extinguished in the hospital on account of bomb-dropping air-ships, as for an Ul to avoid battle. They do not blacken each other's faces by loud abuse, but by jests spoken in a small voice.

The nature of the young men of high caste is as the nature of us Rajputs. They do not use opium, but they delight in horses, and sport and women, and are perpetually in debt to the moneylender. They shoot partridge and they are forced to ride foxes because there are no wild pig here. They know nothing of hawking or quail-fighting, but they gamble up to the hilt on all occasions and bear losses laughing. Their card-play is called Baraich [Bridge?]. They belittle their own and the achievements of their friends, so long as that friend faces them. In his absence they extol his deeds. They are of

cheerful countenance. When they jest, they respect honour. It is so also with their women. The Nurses in the Hospital of my Baharanees where I resort for society jest with me as daughters with a father. They say that they will be stricken with grief if I return to India. They call me Dada which is father also in their tongue. Though I am utterly useless they are unwearied of me. They themselves hasten to restore me my crutches when I let them fall. None of these women lament their dead openly. The eldest son of my Baharanees at the English Hospital where I am made welcome, was slain in battle. The next morning after the news my Baharanees let loose the plate-pianos [turned on the gramophones] for the delectation of the wounded. It comes into my mind to suggest to you that our women are unable to stand by themselves.

When the Badshah commanded me to his Palace to receive the medal, I saw all the wonders and entertainments of the city of London. There was neither trouble nor expense. My Baharanees gave orders I should inhabit her own house in that city. It was in reality a palace filled with carpets, gilt furniture, marbles, mirrors, silks, velvets, carvings, etc., etc. Hot water ran in silver pipes to my very bedside. The perfumed baths were perpetually renewed. When it rained daily I walked in a glass pavilion filled with scented flowers. I inhabited here ten days. Though I was utterly useless they were unwearied of me. A companion was found me. He was a Risaldar of Dekkani Horse, a man of family, wounded in the arms. We two received our medals together. We saw the King's Palace, and the custom of the Guard Mount in the mornings daily. Their drill is like stone walls, but the nature of the English music is without any meaning. We two saw the great temple, Seyn Pol [St. Paul's?], where their dead are. It is as a country enclosed in a house. My companion ascended to the very roof-top and saw all the city. We are nothing beside these people. We two also saw the Bird Garden [Zoological Gardens] where they studiously preserve all sorts of wild animals, even down to jackals and green parrots. It is the nature of the English to consider all created beings as equal. The Badshah himself wears khaki. His son the Shahzada is a young man who inhabits the trenches except when he is forbidden. He is a keen son of the sword.

It is true that trains run underneath the city in all directions. We descended into the earth upon a falling platform [lift] and travelled. The stopping-places are as close as beads on a thread. The doors of the carriages are guarded with gates that strike out sideways like cobras. Each sitter is allowed a space upon a divan of yellow canework. When the divans are full the surplus hang from the roof by leathers. Though our carriage was full, place was made for us. At the end of our journey the train was halted beyond its lawful time that we might come forth at ease. The trains were full of English soldiers. All castes of the English are now soldiers. They are become like us Rajputs – as many people so many soldiers.

We two saw houses, shops, carriages, and crowds till our souls were broken. The succeeding days were as the first, without intermission. We begged at last to be excused from the sight of the multitudes and the height of the houses.

We two agreed that understanding is most needful in this present age. We in India must get education before all things. Hereafter we Rajputs must seriously consider our arrangements in all respects – in our houses as well as in our fields, etc., etc. Otherwise we become nothing. We have been deceived by the nature of the English. They have not at any time shown us anything of their possessions or their performances. We are not even children beside them. They have dealt with us as though they were themselves children talking *chotee boli* [little talk]. In this manner the ill-informed have been misled. Nothing is known in India of the great strength of this people. Make that perfectly clear to all fools. Why should we who serve the Government have the blood of the misinformed on our heads when they behave foolishly? This people have all the strength. There is no reason except the nature of the English that anything in their dominions should stand up which has been ordered to lie down. It is only their soft nature which saves evil from destruction. As the saying is, "We thought it was only an armed horseman. Behold, it is an elephant bearing a tower!"

It is in my mind that the glory of us Rajputs has become diminished since the old days. In the old days, our Princesses charged in battle beside their men, and the name of the clans was great. Then all Rajputs were brothers and sisters. How has this come about? What man of us now relies upon the advice of his womenkind in any matter outside? In this country and in France the women understand perfectly what is needful in the day of trial. They say to their men: "Add to the renown of your race. We will attend to the rest through the excellent education which this just Government has caused us to receive." Thus the men's hearts are lightened when they go to the war. They confide securely in their well educated women. How is it with our horses? Shape and size from the sire: temper and virtue from the dam. If the mare endures thirst, the colt can run without water. Man's nature also draws from the spindle-side. Why have we allowed forgetfulness to impair our memory? This was well known in the old days. In this country arrangements for washing clothes exist in almost every house, such as tubs, boards, and irons, and there is a machine to squeeze water out of the washed clothes. They do not conceal their astonishment at our methods. Our women should be taught. Only by knowledge is anything achieved. Otherwise we are as children running about naked under the feet of grown men and women.

See what our women have already accomplished by education! The Thakore Sahib of Philawat was refused leave from the Government to go to the war, on account of his youth. Yet his sister, who wedded the Rana of Haliana had prepared a contingent of infantry out of her own dower-villages. They were set down in the roll of the Princes' contingents as stretcher-bearers: they being armed men out of the desert. She sent a telegram to her brother, commissioning him to go with them as Captain of stretcher-bearers: he being a son of the Sword for seventy generations. Thus cleverly he received permission from the Government to go. When they reached France he stole them out of the camp, every one of his sister's men, and joined himself to the Rajah of Kandesur's contingent. Those two boys together made their name bright in the trenches. The Philawat boy was hit twice and came to hospital here. The Government sent him a sealed letter by messenger where he lay. He had great fear of it, because what he and Kandesur had done was without orders. He expected a reprimand from the Government and also from his uncle because of the succession. But the letter was an announcement of decoration from the Shahzada himself, and when he had read it, the child hid his face beneath the sheets and wept for joy. I saw and heard this from my very bed in the hospital. So his Military Cross and the rest was due to the Maharanee of Haliana, his sister. Before her marriage she attended instruction in England at the great school for maidens called Ghatun [Girton?]. She goes unveiled among Englishmen, laying hold upon her husband's right arm in public assemblies in open daylight. And Haliana is sunborn.¹ Consider it! Consider it!

Do not be concerned if I do not return. I have seen all the reports of all the arrangements made for burial, etc., etc., in this country. They are entirely in accordance with our faith. My youth and old age have been given to the service of the Government, and if the Government can be served with the dust of my bones it is theirs, Now that my boy is dead in Arabia I have also withdrawn my petition to the Government for a land-grant. What use? The house is empty.

Man does not remain in the world
But his name remains.
Though Jam and Suliman are gone
Their names are not lost.

When that arrives, my Maharanee Baharanee will despatch to you *posh-free par parshel-posh* [post-free per parcel-post] my Cross that the Badshah gave me, and a letter from my Captain Sahib's Mother with whose brother I served when I was a man. As for my debts, it does not trouble me in

¹ The royal clans of the Rajputs derive their descent from the Sun.

the least that the moneylenders should be so troubled about them. But for the Army and the Police the people would have killed all moneylenders. Give my duty to the Rana of Pech, for his line were my father's overlords from the first. He can hang up my sword beside my father's.

Do not be concerned for whatever overtakes me. I have sifted the sands of France: now I sift those of England. Here I am held in the greatest kindness and honour imaginable by all whom I meet. Though I am useless as a child yet they are unwearied of me. The nurses in my Maharanee Baharanee's Hospital, which is by day a home and a house to me, minister to me as daughters to a father. They run after me and rebuke me if I do not wear a certain coat when it rains daily. I am like a dying tree in a garden of flowers.

THE FUMES OF THE HEART

Scene. Pavilion and Dome Hospital, Brighton – 1915.

What talk is this, Doctor Sahib? This Sahib says he will be my letter-writer? Just as though he were a bazar letter-writer at home?.. What are the Sahib's charges? Two annas? Too much! I give one... No. No! Sahib. You shouldn't have come down so quickly. You've forgotten, we Sikhs always bargain... Well; one anna be it. I will give a bond to pay it out of my wound-pension when I get home. Sit by the side of my bed...

This is the trouble, Sahib. My brother who holds his land and works mine, outside Amritsar City, is a fool. He is older than I. He has done his service and got one wound out of it in what they used to call war – that child's play in the Tirah years ago. He thinks himself a soldier! But that is not his offence. He sends me postcards, Sahib – scores of postcards – whining about the drouth or the taxes, or the crops, or our servants' pilferings or some such trouble. He doesn't know what trouble means. I want to tell him he is a fool... What? True! True! One can get money and land but never a new brother. But for all that, he is a fool... Is he a good farmer? Sa-heeb! If an Amritsar Sikh isn't a good farmer, a hen doesn't know an egg... Is he honest? As my own pet yoke of bullocks. He is only a fool. My belly is on fire now with knowledge I never had before, and I wish to impart it to him – to the village elders – to all people. Yes, that is true, too. If I keep calling him a fool, he will not gain any knowledge... Let me think it over on all sides! Aha! Now that I have a bazar-writer of my own I will write a book – a very book of a letter to my fool of a brother... And now we will begin. Take down my words from my lips to my foolish old farmer-brother: —

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