

Kipling put Oregon on the map

By **DOUGLAS PERRY**
The Oregonian

To the 21st-century ear, the name Rudyard Kipling sounds as old-fashioned and misconceived as his paeans to the British Empire. Yet some 120 years ago, it meant high quality, excitement.

The Nobel Prize-winning author dominated bookshelves and literary-salon conversations like no one ever had, thanks to the novel "Kim," the story collection "The Jungle Book" and propulsive poems that offered timeless, manly advice.

And even though Kipling was an Englishman born in India, Oregon boosters enthusiastically claimed him.

The reason: the 1891 travelogue "American Notes."

At the first stop on the U.S. tour that produced the book, Kipling ended up deeply unimpressed with San Francisco and its inhabitants. "I never intended to curse the people with a provincialism so vast as this," he wrote. He'd have similar thoughts about Chicago: "Having seen it, I urgently desire never to see it again."

Offered one wag upon the book's publication: "No reading between the lines is required to gather that Kipling didn't think Britain lost much in 1776."

Yet Kipling did have quite a time in Oregon.

"I have lived!" the 25-year-old author belatedly recounted a fishing expedition on the Clackamas River that reached its apex when a large stretch of "living silver leaped into the air far across the water. Eleven-and-one-half pounds of fighting salmon!"



Brent Wojahn/The Oregonian

Author Rudyard Kipling reportedly caught 16 salmon near this spot on the Clackamas River. A rock wall that rises out of the water is known as Kipling Rock.

The fishing party returned to Portland, he wrote, "weeping tears of pure joy."

Kipling's fame traversed the globe in those last years of the 19th century, and so Oregonians reveled in his fish story. (Some of them even tried to improve on it. One man who was part of Kipling's Clackamas River expedition pointed out a mistake in the published narrative, insisting the Englishman used a spinner for his impressive catch, not a "gaudy fly." It's also now believed, by the way, that the group caught steelhead that day, not salmon.)

Whatever the case, some two decades after the event, The Oregonian remained proud that a "lusty" local fish had "attached itself to the Kipling line, thereby winning immortality for its fighting qualities as well as for its habitat."

A boulder near where the catch occurred long has been known as Kipling Rock.

With his recounting of the experience in print, Kipling helped stamp Oregon in the popular imagination, making clear to his many readers across the world, wrote one advocate, that a man who had "never felt the strike and seen the leap of an Oregon salmon had never really lived and was cheated of his birthright." This was no small endorsement at a time when most Americans knew nothing about the sparsely populated state.

But what are we supposed to think of Kipling himself all these years later?

Not much. He's widely derided as an Anglo nationalist, an imperialist and a racist. In 2018, students at England's Manchester University blotted out a campus mural that featured his iconic poem "If," replacing it with a work by Maya Angelou.

That Kipling was "a prodigiously gifted

writer who created works of inarguable greatness hardly matters anymore," The New Yorker wrote the following year.

That greatness was especially inarguable during Kipling's prime, when he was the highest-paid — and possibly the most prolific — author in the land.

Oscar Wilde enthused that Kipling "revealed life by flashes of vulgarity."

Winston Churchill, who, like Kipling, has been downgraded by historical reevaluation (and for many of the same reasons), proclaimed that "no one has ever written like Kipling before."

Mark Twain said Kipling "knew more than any person I had met."

That was then.

Even though the beloved "Jungle Book" continues to be reimagined by each generation (the most recent film version arrived just five years ago), Kipling has been considered dated for a very long time. Edmund Wilson way back in 1941 wrote that the English writer had "dropped out of modern literature."

In fact, Wilson was late to that conclusion. In 1916, when Kipling was only 50, another American critic declared that over the previous decade-plus "Kipling has worked industriously but has produced nothing that anyone cares very much about."

And yet such was the power of his early work that Kiplingisms were familiar to almost everyone who spoke English: "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" ... "You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!" ... "If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same" ... "A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke."

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Y V Z M B H R V O B O Z J R C E E A
W V Q B D R F L R W D V S B O V H A , L
F L E E P B R C R Z J R W - C M W B .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: NOVEL ABOUT THE SURPRISING GROWTH OF UNCULTIVATED CABBAGELIKE PLANTS: "THE KALE OF THE WILD."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals B

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H Z C R O P N R P S H O Z Q D S J B S
B N B Y Y R Y F P M Z Z P D B O S F I Q A B O
M F Y J M F P Y : S J R C R P S O B A
F P S R A A F H R P I R B H R P I W .
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