

Preface



THOMAS PINNEY

The idea of this selection from Rudyard Kipling's many poems is to contrast the familiar with the unfamiliar: the list includes 26 of the first kind, and 74 of the second. Any collection will have those first 26; no other collection will have all 74 of the other kind – probably not more than one or two, if any. They come from many different sources, a few of them unpublished, none of them ever reprinted by Kipling himself. They have rested, unvisited, in inaccessible Indian newspapers, in manuscript, in the files of long-dead magazines.

The poems both old and new are arranged in chronological order; the range is from 1882 to 1935. The only requirement for inclusion among the “old” poems is that they be familiar. The uncollected poems have been chosen to be, one hopes, interesting; they are certainly varied.

The very familiar poems are a source of well-known quotations: “You’re a better man than I am”; “the White Man’s burden,” “If you can keep your head when all about you / Are losing theirs”; “the female of the species is more deadly than the male.” That was one of Kipling’s undeniable gifts – the gift for the striking phrase, or, as he once put it, the power to find the “necessary word.” Such poems run the danger of becoming over-familiar, so that it is no longer possible to take them in.

The unfamiliar poems don’t run that risk. For one reason or another Kipling never chose to reprint them, so they will be quite new to most readers. They are of great variety in form and mood – ballads, lyrics, epigrams, narratives, playful, satirical, sober, written to amuse children or to scold the public or for any other reason. They are of course uneven: some were certainly dashed off in a moment; others show careful workmanship. All are interesting as the work of a highly

original and accomplished poet. And in a setting of unfamiliar poems perhaps the very familiar ones will take on new aspects.

The texts of all these poems are taken from *The Cambridge Edition of the Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, published in three volumes by the Cambridge University Press in 2013. It is the first genuinely complete edition of Kipling's poems and includes several hundred previously uncollected poems with full bibliographical information.