The Master of Wonder House

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John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London

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an exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center, New York City.


First published in 1913, The Master of Wonder House is an essential text for understanding the life and work of John Lockwood Kipling, the father of the poet Rudyard. The book explores Kipling's influence on the world of art and design, focusing on his work in the Punjab and London. Through detailed analysis of his designs and writings, Fenton reveals the innovative and influential role Kipling played in the development of modern design.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of Kipling's work. The chapters cover topics such as the inspiration for his designs, the techniques he used, and the impact his work had on the world.

The book is richly illustrated with images of Kipling's designs, as well as photographs of his work in the Punjab and London. The text is well-researched and written in an engaging style, making it accessible to both scholars and the general reader.

Overall, The Master of Wonder House is an essential read for anyone interested in the history of art and design, particularly in the context of the British Empire.

The book is available for online purchase at the following link: [The Master of Wonder House](https://www.amazon.com/dp/081089524X)
2.

The story of the British encounter with Indian art and architecture is full of surprises. For instance, it was discovered not so long ago that the playwright and architect (of Blenheim Palace and Castle Howard) Sir John Vanbrugh spent a part of the 1680s (his “missing years”) in Surat, Gujarat, working for the East India Company, where he is said to have been influenced by the architecture of the local cemeteries. Thomas Babington Macaulay, the historian, went to India in the 1830s to write the Indian Penal Code, but found time to begin the Lays of Ancient Rome (one of the most popular volumes of English poetry ever) in the hill station of Ootacamund. Macaulay looked at the old forts of India and was reminded of Oxford—some of the shabbier colleges, he says. He looked at the rural architecture around Madras and was reminded of the small town of Llanerw in North Wales (a more difficult comparison to grasp). “There are some signs,” he adds, “that the people in those fortresses have more than the mere necessities of life. The timber over the door is generally carved, and sometimes with a taste and skill that reminded me of the wood-work of some of our fine Gothic Chancels and Cathedrals.”

About the villas of European in India, Macaulay makes a pregnant observation:

“They are large and sometimes very shewy. But you may see at a glance that they and the residences of people who do not mean to leave them to their children or even to end their own days in them. There is a want of repair—a slovenliness…which marks that the rulers of India are pilgrims and sojourners in the land. You will see a fine portico spoiled by a crack in the plaster which a few rupees would set to rights—gaps in hedges—breaches in the walls—door off the hinges, and so on. As no Englishman means to die in India…nobody pays the attention to his astonishment which should pass to a family house. It is curious that the nearest and most carefully kept houses which I have observed are those of half-casts and Armenians, who mean to end their days here.

If it was true that no Englishman—as an individual—meant to die in India (Macaulay himself got out the moment he had served his three years), the British as a nation were determined to hold on to the subcontinent at all costs—something they demonstrated not only by their thorough and bloody suppression of the Uprising or Revolt of 1857–1858 but also by the complete reorganization of the Indian government in its relation to the Crown.

John Lockwood Kipling: Toomai of the Elephants, circa 1897.

The shock delivered by the Indian Mutiny (as the British dubbed it) can be sensed in the opening pages of the first lecture in John Ruskin’s The Two Paths, which he delivered at the V&A in 1858–1859, and which Lockwood Kipling would have either heard at the time or read shortly afterward. Ruskin asks his audience how it comes about that a land devoid of visual arts, such as the Scottish Highlands, can produce people of exemplary virtue, while a country notable for its love of subtle ornament and design, India, goes in the opposite direction. He is thinking of the gratitude the British owe to the Scottish regiments in their strous form. To all facts and forms of nature it wisely and resolutely opposes itself; it will not draw a man at gunpoint or an eight-armed monster; it will not draw a flower, but only a spiral or a zigzag.

And so the Indians are cut off from all healthy knowledge and natural delight. Aside from the notable ignorance of Ruskin’s remarks, there is a strain of madness running in the family here. The decorative arts of India had long been known and valued in the West. It seems that Indians fine arts, by contrast, were slow to receive appreciation. Gandharan sculpture, in the Greco-Buddhist tradition, was one thing. But the Hindu temples—the great sandstone temple reliiefs, architectural elements, and the statues of the gods—they probably more than anything else inspired a kind of horror in those who cared to look at them. They were also often obscene. Sir George Birdwood, the “Art Referee for the Indian Section of South Kensington Museum” (renamed the Victoria and Albert in 1899), wrote as late as 1880 that “the monstrous shapes of the Puranic [that is, Hindu] deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown, as fine arts, in India.”

3.

Lockwood Kipling, born in 1837 into a Methodist family in the North of England, was inspired by a visit to the Great Exhibition of 1851 to become an artist and a craftsman. He served an apprenticeship with a ceramics manufacturer, Pin- der, Bourne and Hope—not exactly a household name, and not one that I have thought of before. He blackened Stoke-on-Trent, a promising but impoverished city, for five years and then passed for architecture in British India:

“Since the race of man began its course of sin on this earth, nothing has ever been done by so significant of all bestial and lower forms of life, nothing has ever been done by it exactly a household name, and not one that I have thought of before. He blackened Stoke-on-Trent, a promising but impoverished city, for five years and then passed for architecture in British India:

The architecture imported by the British—French and Italian Gothic buildings, French and Italian Renaissance buildings, buildings of strange, exuberant eclecticism, with Venetian façades and metal structures resembling tram sheds or railway stations. One such was the South Kensington Museum itself. As recently as 1982, when John Physick wrote his history of the museum, he could explain why Lockwood’s portrait, in mosaic, is included on the original front entrance in a procession of dignitaries. The answer is that Kipling had helped Godfrey Sykes model most of the terra-cotta decoration of the exterior, but that somehow it had slipped from the record.

Kipling and his wife, Alice, were both of Methodist stock, and both came to reject the religion of their upbringing—Alice with a mild, reasonable gesture. She was a teenager when, family legend had it, she came upon a lock of John Wesley’s hair—a pious souvenir of the great preacher. This she “triumphantly” threw in the fire, with the gaily offensive words: “See! a hair of the dog that bit Christ! I count it an artsic” (a term then used for women who dressed somewhat unconventionally) and related by marriage to Edward Poynter. She wrote, but only pseudonymously. She seems to have been ambitious, like her husband, and going to India, as a young pregnant wife, was perhaps a sign of ambition. Those who seem to have liked them a great deal. Others found something unpleasant in their company—something no doubt to do with the frustrations of class.

India, when the Kiplings arrived in 1865, the buildings that had once struck Macaulay as being so ill-kept had been mostly Palladian in design. But after the Revolt of 1857 the English style for the public buildings in Bombay was Gothic, and the Bard catalogues says that “today, in Bombay, you can boast the world’s finest assembly of Victorian Gothic architecture, much of it encrusted with sculpture modeled and carved by Kipling and his pupils.”

Lockwood and Alice had come to take advantage of the boom city. Bom- day in the 1860s profited from the blockade of the American South and was growing rich through the export of Indian cotton to the Lancashire mills, as well as in the export of opium to China. The couple began their Bombay residence in tents on the Esplanade, and Lock- wood taught sculpture in a temporary shed nearby, which led to the employment, the Sir Jammeejeejeeb School of Art and Industry, being designed (back in England) by the no- table medieval-minded architect William Burges. Kipling was critical of what had passed for architecture in British India:

The architecture imported by the English has...done more grievous injury than any other, because it brought with it calmsness. Barracks, churches, and houses, designed for the most part by people who have had no education in architecture in any kind, but who are at best fair engineers, are looked on by natives as authoritative examples, and their blank ugliness is copied with evaporating fidelity. There are many who think that the tall clock tower in nineteenth-century British Gothic in the centre of a native city have taken a serious step in the march of civilization.

This might be read as a barb aimed at many a Bombay project, including several to which Lockwood had
After President Trump fired former Army general Michael Flynn as national security adviser in February 2017, hope reigned that his replacement, Army Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, would bring order and professionalism to the vital office that Flynn—who has since pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his activities as national security adviser designate—had abused. To generate sound advice as national security adviser designate had abused. To generate sound policy, the interagency process led by McMaster seemed to be just that, enlightened realists tend to make decisions systematically. He has a particular interest to protect the country against disinformation to the vital office that Flynn’s rationale—or at least his rationalization—and McMaster were deployed.”

That policy called for systematically inducing Hanoi to stop supporting the Vietcong through calibrated US military operations. The intent was in part to reduce the US public’s sense of nuclear dread by demonstrating precise American crisis management and military control in Vietnam. McMaster argued that the policy, as applied, failed to present a unified strategy for winning the war. This was hardly a new approach to national security in which strategies were “based on what the purveyor prefers rather than what the situation demands.” His point was that policymakers too often ignored uncomfortable facts that conflicted with the results they were determined to achieve.

McMaster was known for speaking truth to power, and he appeared to have the organizational skills and command bearing befitting a three-star general. His unblinking academic criticism of national security officials reflected a conviction that officers were obliged to avoid repeating the mistakes of their predecessors, even if it meant challenging their superiors. This was not just armchair posturing. The publication of Dereliction of Duty had hurt his career, and only General David Petraeus’s intervention enabled him to be promoted to general.

One year ago, the optimistic view—I held it, as did others—was that McMaster would stand up to Trump and the anti-establishment then White House chief strategist Steve Bannon. There was an entrenched bureaucratic means of doing so—namely, by coordinating the recommendation of the secretary of state, secretary of defense, CIA director, and other principals through a smoothly functioning NSC staff so as to inform and reinforce the president’s thinking. Brent Scowcroft, himself a former Air Force general, had set the standard for this kind of NSC stewardship during the administration of George H.W. Bush, a savvy and experienced president. But Trump, unlike most postwar presidents, is not interested in a process whereby national security officials make decisions systematically. He has little use for the NSC unless it caters to his idiosyncrasies and reinforces his preconceptions.

Retired vice-admiral Robert哈ward, Trump’s first choice to replace Flynn, was alert to this attitude. He declined Trump’s offer, candidly labeling himself a hardliner. His appointment as national security adviser, McMaster was an IISS consulting senior fellow as well as editor of Survival. I am currently an IISS senior fellow as well as editor of Strategic Comments and a contributing editor of Survival.