The Father of the Son

John Lockwood Kipling
Edited by Julius Bryant & Susan Weber
Yale, 580 pages, $75

BY MAXWELL CARTER

RUDYARD KIPLING'S FATHER, Lockwood, is little remembered today. Growing up, however, I came across him in Rudyard's Great Game masterpiece, "Kim" (1901), the Anglo-Indian curiator in which was modeled on Lockwood; in "Quest for Kim" (1996), Peter Hopkirk's study of the novel's real-life bases; and finally, in connection with Endicott Peabody, the founder of Groton School. In 1899, the Rector, as Peabody was known, received Lockwood's opinion on the school's seal, undistinguished, inappropriate and dull. (The design has since been altered.) Yet I never knew what to make of the senior Kipling. Only now, with the beautiful and illuminating catalogue, "John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London," which accompanies an exhibition presently moving from London's Victoria and Albert Museum to the Bard Graduate Center Gallery in New York, do I fully appreciate the man, his art and his eye.

Each of the 17 chapters has its charms, but the first two by the V&A curators, Julius Bryant and co-editor (with Susan Weber, of Bard), are essential reading. The first explores Lockwood's fascination with and expatriation to India. While British interest in Indian art and design didn't reach the fever pitch of Egyptomania, the effect of the Great Exhibition of 1851 was profound. Previously, South Asian miniatures, textiles and artifacts collected by officers of the East India Co. were to be found in private residences or the Company's London headquarters. At the Crystal Palace, the public experienced 30,000 square feet of "spectacular" Indian displays. These included, Mr. Bryant writes, "carpets, embroideries, Kashmir shawls, saris from Benares... carvings in wood, ivory, and stone... swords, daggers, musical instruments, and... two great diamonds: the Darya-i-Noor ('Sea of Light') and the Koh-i-Noor ('Mountain of Light')." (The former was auctioned in 1852; the latter, said in the 16th century to be worth "the whole world's expenditure for half a day," is the pride of the Crown Jewels.) Jostling in the captivated throng was the teenage John Kipling, who would add his father's maiden name, Lockwood, in his early 20s.

Lockwood was born in Yorkshire in July 1837, two weeks after Queen Victoria ascended to the throne. An unhappy student, he was, Mr. Bryant suggests, "destined for the life of an itinerant preacher" until his path-altering visit to the Great Exhibition. Thereafter, he attended art school and apprenticed for the ceramics manufacturer Pincher, Bourne and Hope in Staffordshire. He wed Alice Macdonald, sister-in-law of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, in March 1865 and, "despite his new professional and social prospects in South Kensington," left for Bombay the next month to teach at the recently established Sir J.F. School of Art and Industry. Alice was pregnant with Rudyard on the voyage; he would be born in December.

Whatever Lockwood's prospects in London, Bombay was booming in the mid-1860s. India's expanding railway network and the blockade of Confederate ports had tripled cotton exports from western India to Lancashire mills. Increased revenue flowed, in part, to the cultural institutions that attracted and employed Lockwood and his peers. He relocated to Lahore in 1870 to become the principal of its new art school, his stated object "to revive crafts now half forgotten, and to discourage as much as possible the crude attempts at reproduction of the worst features of Birmingham and Manchester work now so common among natives." Noted for his eclectic talents, keen eye, "natural charm" and humor—his personal motto was "Fumus Gloriae Mundi," or "Smoking, the Glory of the World"—he juggled curating, teaching, writing, design and family for the next 18 years.

With the exception of five extended furloughs, Lockwood resided in India between 1865 and 1893. He retired from Lahore for health reasons at 55 and settled quietly in Wiltshire in 1895, avoiding London's intellectual circles and controversy. Alice died in November 1900; Lockwood, two months later. George Birdwood, who poetically campaigned against British art education in India, remembered him in 1915 as "one of the noblest of Englishmen that ever served their country in India."

Further sections of "John Lockwood Kipling," which highlight his achievements as sculptor, designer, collector, educator, conservationist, journalist, illustrator, "Pater" and teacher, leave no doubt about his powers or versatility.

The book's detail (Lockwood's laborious illustrations for "The Jungle Book" were carved in relief, then photographed for publication) and insight (to Lockwood, there was "no pure, timeless art or truly authentic traditional ornamentation") are interwoven with rich, contextual images. Reproduced here are Valentine Prisoner's rendering of the 1877 "Proclamation" Durbar (an over-the-top public ceremony at which Victoria was proclaimed empress of India), for which Lockwood oversaw the amphitheater, lighting and banners; sepia-toned classroom, workshop and exhibition interiors; Rudyard's intricate Tibetan pen case and Lockwood-fashioned bookplate; and, my favorite, an exquisite copper ever featured among the "Mughamadan relics" Lockwood sought to preserve.

Lockwood's hands-on conservativeness and sympathetic character set him apart from William Morris, with whom he is often compared. "John Lockwood Kipling" captures this essential vigor and warmth and happiness that doesn't falter. If Lockwood was "aesthetic" and narcissistic to the strident movement to discredit all things British in India. Good art is good art and good writing; good writing. On the merits, the works of Kipling, father and son, should be valued irrespective of the Raj and the moral and political failings they sometimes reflected.

Alas, Lockwood's obscure brush with Groton didn't make its way into the text. At any rate, the Peabody link was Harvard professor Charles Eliot Norton, whom the Kiplings stayed with en route to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. Lockwood's life spanned the Victorian and Edwardian ages; his career, fittingly, was bookended by the wonders of the Crystal Palace and the White City. He did many things and did them well; traveled the world; enjoyed 45 years of loving and collaborative matrimony; and left an impossibly varied legacy—missions, disciples and, not least, Rudyard. In other words, Lockwood's life was every bit as remarkable and rewarding as his art.

"Mr. Carter is the head of the Impressions and Modern Art Department at Christie's in New York."

For patients, her advice is to use reliable online resources to shop for the items. At any rate, the Peabody link was Harvard professor Charles Eliot Norton, whom the Kiplings stayed with on route to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. Lockwood's life spanned the Victorian and Edwardian ages; his career, fittingly, was bookended by the wonders of the Crystal Palace and the White City. He did many things and did them well; traveled the world; enjoyed 45 years of loving and collaborative matrimony; and left an impossibly varied legacy—missions, disciples and, not least, Rudyard. In other words, Lockwood's life was every bit as remarkable and rewarding as his art.

"Mr. Carter is the head of the Impressions and Modern Art Department at Christie's in New York."

The Wall Street Journal • 04/29/2017
RUDYARD KIPLING'S FATHER, Lockwood, is little...