

A Lesson for English Boys during the Pre-war Era: Baden-Powell's Joyous Venture and Kipling's Return to England

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Baden-Powell and Kipling

During the Edwardian period, English people grew more self-conscious as far as the question of the Empire was concerned. Other imperial nations such as Germany and America had become the threatening competitors and challenged the military and industrial supremacy of England. While these nations were developing into economic and military powers, the British Empire exposed its military incompetency to all over the world at the time of the Boar War. The English were shocked at what was thought to be the sign of their physical deterioration: in 1902, sixty percent of Englishmen were found unfit for service and were rejected as recruits. The sense of the decline of the English race permeated the country. People suspected that the nation could not be sustained if a war against other European countries broke out because of their enfeebled physical state.⁽¹⁾ According to Samuel Hynes, the cause of the frailty was due to the deterioration of the urban poor and the appalling conditions of their life in metropolitan slums. Hynes points out that this “deterioration quickly became interchangeable with degeneracy or decadence, thus adding an implication of moral decline to the idea of physical worsening” (23-24).

What was needed to be invigorated were not only the body of the metropolitan

population but also the English nation and its spirit, for the decline of the English people's health was analogically associated with that of the nation state. Among the numerous attempts to restore the national health, I shall focus on the Boy Scout movement founded by Robert Baden-Powell and the several works of Rudyard Kipling. Both men were actively engaged in a kind of social reformation of England and its Empire through the inculcation of English boys' bodies and minds. The aim of this paper is to explore how these two men worked during the age of anxiety in similar ways which were nevertheless significantly different in some details.

Both Baden-Powell and Kipling engaged in the physical and moral training of English boys in order to prepare them for the future. It turned out, however, that the strategy of ex-General was less concrete than that of the poet because the former was tinged with childishness and an escapist tendency. Through the reading of *Scouting for Boys* (1908), the official manual of the movement, we will explore how Baden-Powell refused to reach maturity. In order to perpetuate utopian childhood, Baden-Powell eventually fails to achieve the original purpose of the foundation of his youth organisation: the question of the nation's uncertain future.

Kipling also attempted to cultivate the character as well as the fitness of English boys. He was fully aware, however, not only of necessity but also of difficulty of training them to be future members of the renovated Empire. In order to consider Kipling's willingness and hesitancy concerning the education of the English youth, I want to examine his military propaganda, "The Army of a Dream" (1904), and his historical fantasies for children, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910). It can be observed that Kipling envisions the physical training of boys in "The Army of a Dream", and the moral training in two Puck books. Unlike Baden-Powell who discourages children to come to adulthood, Kipling seeks the way to lead them to their maturity. Yet his attempt entails a bitter remorse because all he can imagine is a bleak future of English boys, for, as he believes, they are destined to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their community.

The Scouts in a Dream

John Springhall argues that the main goal of the Boy Scouts is to establish “a form of moral and physical training to prevent national decadence” (59). The Boy Scouts is at once a panacea for the physical and moral deterioration of the English race. But in fact, reading of the *Scouting for Boys* reveals that what Baden-Powell really means by his famous motto, “Be Prepared”, remains obscure; it is not easy to discern what he was preparing for. Such an ambiguous attitude of the Chief Scout is remarkable in a chapter titled “Patriotism or Duties as Citizens”, where Baden-Powell insists that the British Empire must be defended: “Every boy should prepare himself, by learning how to shoot and to drill, to take his share in defence of the Empire, if it should ever be attacked” (277). Here it seems obvious that the motto of the movement is a call for the security of England and its colonies. Yet the ensuing sentence in *Scouting for Boys* might make the reader confused: “If our enemies saw that we were thus prepared as a nation, they would never dare to attack, and peace would be assured” (277). Baden-Powell’s boys are trained not for an actual battle, but for a demonstration against the other countries which plan to invade England. This inconsistency seems to partly stem from Baden-Powell’s effort to deny an accusation that his movement was based on militarism. It is certain that there was a military tendency in the earliest version of the Boy Scout schemes, however, Baden-Powell was at great pains to maintain that the purpose of his youth organisation is not the training of soldiers or the Territorials.⁽²⁾

Baden-Powell insists that the aim of the Scout movement is to bring up his boys as “peace scouts”. The antonym of “peace scout” is not a “military man” but a “Tenderfoot”, a man spoiled by the over-civilised society. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell defines peace scouts as “men accustomed to live on their own resources, taking their lives in their hands, brave and loyal to their employers, chivalrous and helpful to each other, unselfish and reliable; MEN, in fact, of the best type” (300). Peace scouts are not pacifists or spokesmen for anti-violence, but primitive frontiersmen,

such as imperial pioneers and hunters. The peace scout is, as it were, a man of action like the hero of imperial romance written by H.R. Haggard or G. A. Henty. The hero of an adventure story as the focus of the Scout movement is attractive enough to appeal to potential young scouts. "Without the frontier myth the movement," as Robert H. MacDonald acutely suggests, "might have appealed to adults as a sensible and worthy institution, but it would have made little impact on its intended recruits or their scoutmasters" (26). Under the spell of the hero of Mafeking, boys can imagine themselves as backwoodsmen and enjoy exciting but harmless adventures.

If scouting is a kind of imaginative game, it is assumed that Baden-Powell's appraisal of the spirit of the mythic frontiersman is tainted with emotional immaturity. It is often said that the Scout movement and its founder had the tendency to refuse to enter adulthood. Tim Jeal points out that for many men, including Baden-Powell, "the Boy Scouts provided a blessed illusion of reclaiming their stolen childhood" (571). Piers Brendon also affirms that the youth movement was founded by an immature man who surreptitiously enjoyed youth for ever: "It was appropriate that a society which was not prepared to grow up should have worshipped a hero whose motto is 'Be Prepared' [...], a motto at once so stirring as an adolescent challenge and so twaddling as an adult exhortation" (204–205). Baden-Powell takes his boys to the imagined frontier where they can take refuge from reality. Put in another way, his youth organisation embodies the wish-fulfilling aspects of imperial romance; participants do not recognize that youth must come to an end.

What is significant is that Baden-Powell refuses the smooth development of youth which characterises the temporality of nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*. According to Franco Moretti, the objective of *Bildungsroman* is to curb the dynamism of "youth" which must grow and change form by introducing the notion of "maturity". Though the young protagonist of the classical *Bildungsroman* has unlimited mobility which enables him to indentify himself with modern capitalism, he is always encouraged to accept the limits of the outer world in the end. In other words, the insatiable young hero is made to compromise and recognise "happiness" of the external world as his own. *Bildungsroman* "acts like a hinge between the two worlds:

here youth is already full, and maturity not yet drained; the young hero already 'modern', but the world not yet" (28). While Moretti observes that the trope of youth signifies capitalism that never rests, Jed Esty suggests that its opposing symbolic equivalence which can stop developmental time is the discourse of the nation. The dynamic tension between youth and maturity in the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* plays out as the unlimited temporality of capitalism and the bounded temporality of the nation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the function of the genre is symptomatically disrupted because of imperialism; an increasingly global model of imperialism "brings the bildungsroman and its humanist ideals into the zone of uneven development, breaking the Goethean bond between biographical and 'national-historical time'" ("Virginia Woolf's Colony" 76). *Bildungsroman* at the age of imperialism, therefore, incessantly fails to bring its protagonist a happy adulthood and consolidate the unstoppable time of capitalism with the bounded time of nation state. Consequently, the heroes or heroines of the late *Bildungsroman* are perpetually trapped by stunted adolescence, which seems abominable state to the reformist like Kipling.

Kipling firmly believes that the supremacy of the English cannot be held unless the youth are properly led to maturity through the military and moral instruction. Therefore, we can assume that the purpose of Kipling's struggle to bring up boys is to restore the temporality of the national discourse which was quickly disappearing from England and its Empire at the turn of the century. In Kipling's texts, becoming adult corresponds to becoming a trained soldier and obtaining the English identity. The aim of "The Army of a Dream" is to establish a social organisation which accommodate the grown-up, and that of two Puck books are to discover/invent the national time by establishing a firm link between the present and the past.

It is also remarkable that, in the historical exploration of the English countryside observed in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, Kipling turns away from imperial settings and takes up investigation of a history of rural England. His return to England, in a sense, anticipates an "anthropological turn" in the late Modernism. In his account of modernism and imperialism in the 1930s, Esty defines the anthro-

pological turn as “the discursive process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture” (2). The English modernists like T.S. Eliot or Virginia Woolf, according to Esty, became more and more concerned with the national culture in order to seek English social and cultural revival at the time of British decline. Whereas the late modernists envision the nation becoming minor, Kipling struggles to restore the British hegemony over her vast Empire through the representation of Englishness.

“The Army of a Dream”

At the end of 1900, when the British Army was still suffered from the effects of war with the Boer guerrillas, Kipling was engaged in writing a draft on the Army reformation on board a ship bound for Cape Town. As a result of this labour, “The Army of a Dream”, a lengthy story which explored the idea of desirable military training, came out in 1904 and collected in *Traffics and Discoveries*. The story was re-published as a pamphlet in 1905 in an attempt to influence public opinion for military preparedness. This propaganda story introduces the system of an imagined army called the Imperial Guard Battalion which offers every able-bodied man a free military training. In the fictional society in which “[m]en don't like to be chucked out on medical certificate much”, it is stressed that every English boy should learn to drill regardless of the vocation he chooses in the future (210). The early start of training is encouraged, for the longer the boys are trained, the fitter their bodies become: in Kipling's scheme, boys are to learn basic drills and tactics as soon as they become six years old. One of the officers who describe their innovative training method to the narrator of the story insists that this kind of conscription is to be accepted as a natural course to pursue.

“My dear boy, there's no compulsion. You've *got* to be drilled when you're a child, same as you've got to learn to read; and if you don't pretend to serve in some corps or other till you're thirty-five or medically chucked, you rank

with lunatics, women, and minors. That's fair enough". (italics original; 216-17)

It is argued that military training is as mandatory and fundamental for children as acquiring literacy. If a man refuses to join the Army although he is old and healthy enough for training, he will be condemned as useless, like "lunatics, women, and minors". "The Army of a Dream" dreams a new normality of another England, where every boy is adequately trained to be a fit soldier. Yet Kipling does not perceive his idea of new army as an enduring one. The elaborate scheme of the army reformation explained by the narrator's friends, who turn out to be the soldiers fell in the Boer War, melts away when the narrator is awakened from his slumber in the Club smoking-room where he meets one of them: "I waked brushing a fly from my nose, and saw the Club waiter lay out the evening papers on the table" (241). It could be argued that Kipling has to bring his story to an abrupt close because it is impossible for him to describe how the boys who have learned to drill from six reach adulthood. Like Baden-Powell's boys, they never grow up in the unfinished dream of the new Army. In the next section, I shall turn to Kipling's moral lesson for English boys located in the particular site, rural England, where the English identity is promised to every subject.

Kipling's England

Kipling's focus on the theme of England is partly influenced by his biographical background. In 1902, immediately after the end of the Boer War, Kipling purchased a Jacobean house called "Bateman's" in the village of Burwash, Sussex. Discovering the beauty of England, according to Charles Carrington, Kipling remarked in a letter to C.E. Norton that England "is the most marvellous of all foreign countries that I have ever been in" (369). Kipling's celebration of the Land and its history culminated in his two children's books, *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*. With the guidance of a spirit of the Land called Puck, Dan and Una, the children of the

present landowner, are introduced several narrators who tell the history of the Land which the children are going to inherit. The aim of this section is to connect Kipling's interest in the English countryside with his prescription for national decline and to explore how he develops the notion of England dominated by the stable linear temporality.

In the late nineteenth century, the English countryside was "discovered" as the repository of the English morality. In that period, the national self-image established itself in the south of England whose nature was idyllic, traditional, and stable, which were considered to be the best qualities of the English people. The period saw a rush of books, pamphlets, and articles which concerned the idealised rural England. It was considered that genuine Englishness was found in rural England where one could excavate the continuous national history, which was supposed to constitute the foundation of the nation-state.

Phillip Mallett aptly observes that Kipling's "role as spokesman for an essential Englishness was inevitably equivocal, less a matter of celebrating his roots than an attempt to will them down to the English soil" (257). As T.S. Eliot, who is also a stranger trying to settle down in the heart of England, points out, Kipling "is more concerned with the problem of the soundness of the *core* of empire; this core is something older, more natural and more permanent" (italics original; 27). At the centre of the Empire, Kipling discovers the Land where its continuing history bolsters the creation of new England ruled by the smooth biographical time of a nation state.

Ian Baucom explores the concept of an identity-preserving land and Englishness created by it in his discussion of relationship between the formation of the English identity and the Empire. According to Baucom, the role of place is more significant than that of race in determining the national identity. "Englishness" is conceived as an identity automatically given by the contact with the particularly English places: "English space, [...], reforms the identities not of all Britons but of all those, whatever their ancestry or birth, who are exposed to it" (18). Anyone can establish himself as an English citizen by virtue of contact with the location which influences the

identities of subject who comes under its spell without fail. Englishness is secured in the authentic spaces where the past and the present of England intersect.

It is obvious that Kipling endorses this localist view of the identification of English subjects and establishes Sussex as the location where any stranger becomes English by the place's beneficial influence. The source of the power bestowed on such a place is a memory buried in the ground and properly evoked by the revenant of people who once lived in the same Land. It should be emphasised that in Kipling's books on England and its history there is no indigenous inhabitant or native of England. That is, Kipling's Sussex is first and foremost the Land of immigrants. The only thing that preserves and guarantees Englishness is the place, not any particular race which temporally rules it. The Land impartially accepts any foreigner or foreign presence and transforms them into the English.

Nevertheless, the desire to establish a stable English identity stems from the awareness that such an identity does not exist. The identity-reforming magic of the English place, which is haunted by disenchantment, also reveals its unreliability and fluidity. On the one hand, the Land offers anyone the right to call himself English by affirming the continuity between the authentic English past and the less stable present. On the other hand, however, discovering the history provokes its disruptive power covered under the pastoral landscape of Sussex.

History, Water, and Gold

If an encounter with historical figures can be a beneficial experience for children, it seems unnecessary that Puck erases the memory of the encounter from children's minds every time they meet someone from the past. Puck apologetically explains the reason why the erasure of their memory is required: if children tell anyone what they saw and heard at home, adults will send for the doctor. Yet it is clear that Puck erases their memory because the children cannot tolerate the excessive impact of the local history. Since the process of historical inquiry is inseparable from that of exposing the children to the destructive chaos which cannot be restrained, they have to be

shielded from the roughness of the history of their Land.

In Kipling's text, the menacing force of history lurking in the soil of Sussex is described as an underground force with a watery character. In *Something of Myself* (1937), an autobiographical work, Kipling mentions that he happened to find the remnant of a past civilisation in his newly purchased Land when he was digging a well with the help of local farmers.

When we stopped, at twenty-five feet, we had found a Jacobean tobacco-pipe, a worn Cromwellian latten spoon and, at the bottom of all, the bronze cheek of a Roman horse-bit. (*Something of Myself* 138)

It is significant that the moment of discovery of local history coincides with the process of digging the well. Here drawing underground water is identified with inquiring into the hidden history of the Land. Similarly, "Weland's Sword", the first story of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, shows that the children invoke Puck from the split of the ground which they tear. When conjured by the children, Puck mentions that they have "broken the Hills" (45). Here the compulsion to go inward and downward is obvious. The inquisition into the continuing history does not mean an anthropological excursion of the present landscape and the local culture but the violent disruption of the surface, searching for the water vein of the past. The outcast who covets the English identity must dig deep into the ground as if he is looking for the buried treasure, which forms a figure of groundwater. It is the ability to control this mutable and ruthless watery force that Puck's stories encourage children to attain as proof of maturity.

The serial stories of the friendship and adventures of Richard the Norman and Hugh the Saxon explicitly depict the process of breaking the ground and conjuring the magic force. Arriving in England at the time of Norman Conquest, Richard becomes the lord of the manor which used to belong to Hugh, his old friend who hands over the Sword given by Weland, one of the local deities. The birth of a new England is declared when Richard marries Hugh's sister. Yet the narrative of two

young men cannot be stopped by the plot of marriage, a typical happy ending which *Bildungsroman* prepares for the young hero. In the third story of Richard and Hugh, “The Knights of the Joyous Venture”, the two heroes decide to leave the Land in pursuit of adventure even though they once settled down in the Land, which is supposed to be an ideal homeland for every foreigner. What is more, these courageous old men bring in a great deal of Gold from the nameless coast of Africa as a reward for fighting with a horde of orang-utans. The Gold taken “[o] ut of deep Water” of Dark Continent is brought to Sussex and thrown “[i] nto deep Water” (*Puck of Pook’s Hill* 116). That is, the Gold whose image cannot be separated from the turbulent nature of capitalism/imperialism is re-introduced to the Land and hidden at the bottom of an unused well of Pevensey castle.

It is significant that the origin of the Gold, the symbol of the invisible power of the Land which guarantees the English identity, is not necessarily traced in Sussex. What is more, there is no clear difference between the therapeutic power of England and the chaotic river of the Gold. The strategy of a eulogistic evocation of English history may implode because the very history Kipling calls up is not the invariable English spirit but the ungovernable Power of the Gold itself. In Kipling’s England, the national time which enables youth to pass is swallowed up by the imperial time which is naturally unable to be confined. It is highly possible that Kipling is fully aware of the fact that fictionality of the genuine English identity and the Land which promises it; what is buried in the idyllic countryside is too destructive a force for the young listener who is expected to reach adulthood properly. Nevertheless, Kipling feels obliged to insist that what is required is impossible maturity: an ability to control the uncontrollable.

“What Else Could I Have Done?”

While *Puck of Pook’s Hill* endorses the significance of being mature, *Rewards and Fairies* is marked by the pain of maturity imposed on the boys of England. The delightful amnesia given to Dan and Una is not allowed to those who give up their

youth and dedicate themselves for the good of their community.⁽³⁾ Confronted with the destructiveness of the Land and the impossibility of suppressing it, Kipling cannot but imagine English boys becoming the disciplined youth marching to their doomed fate.

A sense of guilt is particularly explicit in "Gloriana", as confessed by Queen Elizabeth. She allows two devoted young men who are to sail to Virginia and assault Spanish ships to use "ships royal for their sinful thefts" (76). Nevertheless, because of the alliance between England and Spain, she has to forsake them when they are caught by the Spanish. The Queen asks the children, especially Dan, if there was another choice.

"D'you think they did right to go?" she [Elizabeth] asked.

"I don't see what else they could have done", Dan replied, after thinking it over.

"D'you think she did right to send 'em?" The lady's voice rose a little.

"Well", said Dan, "I don't see what else she could have done, either—do you?" (*Rewards and Fairies* 83)

The scruples of the Queen bear a close resemblance to those of Kipling who promoted the systematic training of English boys as soldiers for the outbreak of imminent war. Dan, as one of the English boys to whom the future of England is entrusted, consents to the Queen and her heartless choice because he is sure that there is nothing else to do. Like the two Elizabethan young men who never came back, it is highly possible that he will perish in some way or other when he grows up.

In his book on the Great War, Paul Fussell denounces pre-war literature of "traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language" for imbuing the youth with the ethos of service, of patriotic devotion and masculine honours (23). Along with Hardy, Haggard, Tennyson, and Henty, Fussell counts Kipling as one of the contributors of the old rhetoric. Yet as we have seen, Kipling's lesson for English boys in the first decade of twentieth century can be read as a warning against coming

of age as an obedient member of the nation state. A premonition of the tragedy of the youth trained to attain adulthood permeates the texts.

During his visit to France to inspect the Western Front in the spring of 1915, Baden-Powell's excitement was occasionally interrupted by a feeling of depression. When he saw hundreds of splendid male bodies fester in the fields, he declared in his diary that "Somebody ought to be hanged for it" (Jeal 453). He had no idea that he might be accused of complicity in producing the circumstances which led to those tragic bodies. On the other hand, Kipling, who regarded himself as the father of the English soldiers who were lost in the devastating war, succinctly expressed his despair in the year when the armistice was declared:

COMMON FORM

If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

(*The Definitive Edition of Rudyard Kipling's Verse* 390)

Notes

- (1) The period from the late nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War witnessed the spread of pervasive paranoia that England might be invaded by a foreign power, which yielded a large amount of fictional account of future war. See I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749* 93-130.
- (2) Historians who study the Boy Scouts are roughly divided into two groups: the scholars who call Baden-Powell a propagator of patriotic militarism, and those who argue that he was a promoter of peace. Both of historians seem to be obsessed by the necessity to reduce the nature of the complex institution into a single label, military or not. Michael Rosenthal, for example, denounces the Boy Scouts as a kind of factory which "churn [s] out admirably obedient lads" (6). Allen Warren postulates that the Boy Scouts contribute to the education of the future citizen insisting that Baden-Powell

emphasises the importance of “scouting training with its individual bias, its emphasis on personal character development and the moral influence of the small group or patrol, [...] and its vigorous antipathy to drill-based training” (387). Their arguments would be futile, however, as long as they overlook what Baden-Powell means by the term “peace scout”.

- (3) Although every child, especially every boy, has to prepare for a turbulent future, there is an exceptional character in the Puck stories. A son of Hobden the hedger, the Bee Boy is free from the agony of being mature because of the contract between his ancestor and Puck. However, the Bee Boy pays his debt by being mentally retarded.

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