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## 2. Macdonalds and Kiplings

The obvious villain of this childhood story is Aunty Rosa. The less obvious, although hardly hidden villain, is the mother, Alice Kipling. It was her decision to reject the offers of her many relatives and to leave the children with strangers. To send children, whose parents were living in India, back to England was standard practice. The climate of India was not good for European children, and the dangers of disease were real. For these reasons English parents were accustomed to send their very young children back to England to be raised and educated. The Kiplings were especially sensitive to the health hazards of the subcontinent, as they had lost their third child, John at birth in April 1870. With their class consciousness and snobbery, they were also aware of the social advantages of sending children back to England. Like most of the English living abroad, they believed it was next to impossible to bring up English children in India. Close contact with native servants—the pampering care of a bearer or ayah—was a bad influence on children. They would not learn self-reliance and self-discipline. The greatest danger was the chi chi accent—the term used for English contaminated by a native tongue. The fear was that once acquired, the accent would be hard to erase, even after years of later life in England. Pure speech was essential for an Englishman or woman. Schools for English children existed in India, but they were frequented by undesirable types, including lower-class English and foreigners. Anyone who could afford to send children away did so.

If relatives or friends back in England were asked to take children in, they usually obliged. But the Kiplings chose to board the children with strangers located from a newspaper advertisement. Family members on both sides were able and willing, if not enthusiastic, to take Rudyard and Trix. The little Kiplings could have been left with either of their grandmothers, the Kipling grandmother in Skipton or the Macdonald

grandmother at Bewdley. Alice had the choice of her several sisters. Her three younger married Macdonald sisters all offered suitable homes for the children. Her sister Georgiana was married to pre-Raphaelite painter, Edward Burne-Jones; Agnes was married to Edward Poynter, a fashionable painter and member of the Royal Academy; and Louisa was married to Alfred Baldwin, a wealthy iron manufacturer. The fourth sister, Edith, remained unmarried. At the time Trix and Rudyard were left with the Holloways, the three married sisters all had children who would have been appropriate playmates for Ruddy and Trix. The Burne-Joneses had two children, Philip and Margaret, aged ten and five. The Poynters' son, Ambrose, and the Baldwins' son, Stanley, were both four.

On a previous visit, when Alice had come to England in 1868 for Trix's birth, the three-year-old Rudyard had earned the reputation of being a troublesome little boy. Alice's sisters, Louisa and Edith, thought he had turned the house into a bear-garden. His screaming temper tantrums made Grandfather Macdonald, already old and ill, far worse and perhaps hastened his death. He died only days after the departure of the Kiplings. The sisters were thankful to see the ill-ordered child on his way.

When Alice brought the two children to England before leaving them at Southsea, the aunts and uncles were enchanted by Trix, already a beauty at three. But Ruddy was a problem who upset the households he visited. When the children stayed with the Baldwins at Wilden House, Alfred was especially charmed by Trix and tried to persuade Alice and Lockwood to leave her with him. She would have made a great companion for the Baldwins' son Stanley, who was just nine months older. Trix was sharp enough to share Stanley's lessons. She would have had a lovely life with a garden and a pony and aunts and uncles who cherished her. Ruddy was to have been shared between Uncle Fred Macdonald, his godfather, and his uncle and aunt the Burne-Joneses until he would be old enough for a day school. Brother and sister were always to spend holidays together.

Alice rejected this sensible plan, because it included separating the children from each other for periods of time. She was opposed to any plan that kept brother and sister apart. It was bad enough that they were to be parted from their parents; they shouldn't have to be parted from each other. Alice also claimed to be concerned about the stability of the

Burne-Jones' marriage, which several years earlier had been threatened by Edward's love affair with one of his models. Alice remained hurt by her sisters' criticisms of Ruddy's behaviour on his earlier visit and was offended that they had not been more enthusiastic to take him in.

Alice told loyal family friend, Edith Plowden that she thought the plan of leaving the children with strangers was 'a good arrangement'. 'She had never thought of leaving her children with her own family, it led to complications: the children were quite happy—much she knew!—and she was able to be with John and help him with his work'.

'It led to complications' was Alice's vague explanation. The complication she feared most was that her children would come to love their aunts more than herself. Alice often expressed her concern that someone might take her place in her children's affections. The chance that someone might be one of her own sisters was not a pleasant possibility. To safeguard her own position as her children's best beloved, Alice chose not to send them to live with her sisters. But why she also chose to reject her sisters' well-informed recommendations of another suitable place for the children is harder to understand. She simply could not tolerate her sisters' participation in the raising of her children. Stubborn and self-centred, Alice sent her babes to their hideous fate.

Earlier, competition among the sisters had, not surprisingly, focused on prospective husbands. Alice, the oldest, had been expected to make the most spectacular match, but surprisingly had made the least brilliant. In the 1870s, the husbands of Alice's three married sisters were rising in prominence and wealth far more rapidly than Lockwood, who advanced slowly in his undistinguished job in a distant outpost of the empire. To Alice, the least well situated of the four married Macdonald sisters, her sisters' kindness and generosity felt like condescension, even charity. It wounded Alice's pride to feel financially or emotionally beholden to her sisters. Although the expense of boarding Rudyard and Trix abroad strained the slender Kipling finances, Alice insisted that they take it on.

A further consequence of having rejected familial help was the aunts' subsequent careless appraisal of how the children were being treated. When Grandmother Hannah Macdonald and aunts Georgie (Lady Burne-Jones), Aggie (Mrs Edward Poynter) with her five-year-old son

<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Baldwin, The Macdonald Sisters (London: Peter Davies, 1960) p. 115.

Ambrose, and Louie (Mrs Alfred Baldwin) travelled to Lorne Lodge in late August and early September 1872, one year into the children's captivity, they found nothing amiss. They had several visits with Rud and Trix, including a jolly outing to the beach. They thought the children very well and happy, improved in every way. Mr Holloway seemed kind and Mrs Holloway seemed a very nice woman. After this one trip, they never visited Lorne Lodge again. They saw nothing worrisome in Rudyard's behaviour when he visited on holidays, until, after more than five years, he started furiously striking out at the trees with a stick. His eyesight, which steadily deteriorated over the years, did not attract their attention until it was almost completely ruined.

The aunts did recognize that the Holloway house was bare and gloomy compared to their own homes, which were ablaze with decoration and design, but they chose not to focus on this. The aunts wanted the situation to be good for the children, and they were prepared to find it so. It would have been simply unkind to recognize and report an unhappy situation that could not be easily remedied. The sisters may also have been (unconsciously) punishing Alice for choosing to send the children to the Holloways rather than to them. They and other family members had offered; she had demurred. Let her and her unfortunate children suffer the consequences. The children never complained and, being good actors, may have misled their relatives. Certainly, Mrs Holloway was practiced at disguising her true disposition and character. The aunts never visited after Mr Holloway's death, when the situation for the children worsened. They had no reason to believe that the later years at Lorne Lodge were different from the first.

While the children never blamed their mother directly for their unhappy childhoods, they made it clear in many ways that they felt her to have been responsible. However much they tried to justify and excuse her actions to themselves and to others, they knew she was the one who had consigned them to their fate and left them to it. The children couldn't be angry with their parents, who wrote to them often and always said how much they loved and missed their little boy and girl. 'A fat lot of good that does us', 2 was Rudyard's later bitter response to these reassurances.

<sup>2</sup> Trix Kipling, 'Through Judy's Eyes', p. 362.

Both Rudyard and Trix, when writing of their unhappy childhood experience, gave their mother a large and confused role. As Rudyard tells the story in 'Baa Baa, Black Sheep', the two children, Punch and Judy, are five and three years old. When their parents in India discuss sending them away to England, the mother prays, 'Let strangers love my children and be as good to them as I should be, but let **me** preserve their love and their confidence for ever and ever. Amen'.<sup>3</sup> (The selfish emphasis on **me** is in the story.) The mother's final and most passionate appeal to Punch, as he and his infant sister are sent away, is to never let Judy forget Mamma. Judy promises to 'bemember Mamma,' Ruddy assures her. Aside from remarking that this prayer is 'slightly illogical', Punch makes no comment. Without explicitly remarking on the selfishness and short-sightedness of the prayer, he makes certain that a reader will mark it.

What sort of woman would do this to her children? Alice Macdonald was, by all accounts, a remarkable woman. She was one of seven surviving children of George and Hannah Macdonald. George, a Methodist minister, travelled the circuit, preaching in different cities, including Manchester and Birmingham, for three-year stints while his family grew. In 1853, he settled into a good living in Chelsea, London. The Macdonalds ran an unconventional and artistic household where they welcomed their children's unusual friends. There, the lively sisters met their brothers' classmates. Alice, the oldest (born in 1837) was beautiful, brilliant, witty, rebellious, and fascinating to men. Still a teenager, she became engaged to William Fulford, a schoolboy friend of her brother Harry's, studying divinity at Oxford. She broke off this engagement while her younger sister Georgiana became engaged to another friend of her brother's, the artist Edward Burne-Jones. This engagement led eventually to marriage in 1860 and to close ties with the Pre-Raphaelite circle, including William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Ruskin, Ford Maddox Brown, and William Holman Hunt. Alice attended parties with this group of intellectual young men, hoping to meet men of literary, artistic, and romantic interest. She met and enthralled several, including Anglo-Irish poet William Allingham, to whom she was engaged for a month.

<sup>3</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'Baa Baa, Black Sheep', p. 162.



Fig. 4 Photograph of Alice Macdonald by J. Craddock.

In 1862, George Macdonald was transferred to Wolverhampton, while Harry, having failed to take a degree at Oxford, moved to New York in the hope of making his fortune. Alice's younger and more sober brother Frederick was beginning his duties in the Methodist ministry in Staffordshire. When he invited Alice to visit him in Burslem, she readily accepted. There, she was introduced to Frederick's new friend, John Lockwood Kipling. They met at a picnic at Rudyard Lake in the summer of 1863 and immediately fell in love. Although engaged almost at once, they waited until March of 1865 to marry, when Lockwood was appointed as an artist craftsman at the Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy School of Art in Bombay. Alice had turned down many suitors and broken several engagements before happily settling on John Lockwood Kipling.

Petite and attractive with blue eyes and fair hair, Alice played music and sang, composed songs, and wrote verses of a better-than-amateur standard. She possessed the nimblest mind and quickest wits of all her family. She delighted all her sisters and especially her brother Frederick, who said of her,

Her wit [...] on occasion was a weapon of whose keenness of point there could be no doubt, and foolish or mischievous people were made to feel it [...] She saw things in a moment, and did not so much reason as pounce upon her conclusions. Accuracy in detail was not so much her forte as swift insight, and the kind of vision that is afforded by flashes

of lightning. Her power of speech was unsurpassed—I might almost say unsurpassable—her chief difficulty being that she found language a slow-moving medium of expression that failed to keep up with her thought.<sup>4</sup>

Of the five Macdonald sisters, four made exceptional marriages. Georgiana married Edward Burne-Jones, later to be one the most famous painters of the time, a leading member of the pre-Raphaelites. Agnes married Edward Poynter, an artist well-respected in his day and a President of the Royal Academy. Louisa became the wife of Alfred Baldwin, a wealthy ironmaster, and the mother of Stanley Baldwin, a British Prime Minister. Edith, the fifth sister, never married, remaining the loyal maiden aunt to her many nieces and nephews. As for their two brothers, Harry, the elder, was a brilliant failure, while Frederick became a solid success in the Wesleyan Church.

To her sisters, Alice represented everything that was daring and unexpected. They never tired of discussing her exploits, admiring her poems and songs, and blushing over her flirtatious overtures. Although she was considered the most desirable of the sisters, Alice made the least striking match, going off with her artist husband, a few weeks her junior in age, to a minor position at an obscure Bombay art school. When she made her late and less than brilliant marriage, she disappointed the high expectations placed on her by her sisters and perhaps by herself. From the start and through her long and happy marriage, she suffered from the feeling that she had been bettered in the marital competition by her three less gifted sisters.

Like most Victorian wives, Alice considered her own needs and desires as secondary to her husband's. She followed Lockwood where his work took him. She fulfilled her roles as his wife, mother of his children, manager of his household, and mistress of his table. But she was a strong personality who demanded attention and worked to win favour, especially from men. On two occasions, Alice asserted her needs forcefully. She insisted on returning to England for the birth of Trix. And, of course, it was she who rejected the offers of family and arranged to board the children with the Holloways when it was time to send the children back home.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Macdonald. University of Sussex.

John Lockwood Kipling—born in 1837, referred to in the family as the 'Pater'—deferred to his talented and charming wife on most social and domestic matters, including arrangements for the children. While he was aware and sensitive to his children's thoughts and feelings, he allowed Alice to make decisions for them, which often appear to have been influenced more by social ambition, sisterly competition, and financial considerations than by maternal sympathy.



Fig. 5 Photograph of John Lockwood Kipling by J. Craddock.

He came from a less distinguished but similarly devout Wesleyan family in North Yorkshire. Schooled by severe Wesleyan ministers at The Woodhouse Grove School and later by encouraging teachers at the Stoke and Fenton School of Art, he early determined to become an artist. He claimed that his choice of profession of artist, sculptor, and architectural designer was influenced by a boyhood visit to the Great Exhibition of 1851, held at London's Crystal Palace. While working as an architectural designer at the Department of Science and Art at South Kensington, he travelled between London and the potteries in Staffordshire and there met Frederick Macdonald, who was just beginning his career as a Methodist minister at Burslem.

A less sparkling personality than his wife, John Lockwood Kipling was known for his patience, his deliberate judgment, gentle wisdom, wide-ranging interests and abilities, and exactness of taste. While

Alice worked to inspire admiration and excite envy, he cultivated and sustained long-lasting friendships. He was not only a talented teacher and able administrator but a brilliant artist in many mediums—oil, water, and mural painting, illustration, sculpture, architecture, sculptural decoration, stone carving, tapestry, and textile design. He was an early and influential champion of the revival of ancient Indian arts, crafts, and design. His beautiful and evocative drawings adorned many of his son's books as well as his own. He was a writer with a graceful prose style. In India, he carved out a distinguished career, and, after ten years at the Bombay School of Art, was appointed Curator of the Central Museum and Head of the School of Industrial Arts at Lahore. His sober worth was reflected in his serious demeanour—short, bearded, and balding, even in his early twenties.

Although less successful than the husbands of the other Macdonald sisters, Lockwood eventually earned the recognition and esteem of the family. And Alice adored him.



Fig. 6 Photograph of Alice and Lockwood together.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Bryant, Susan Weber et al. (eds.), John Lockwood Kipling: Arts & Crafts in the Punjab and in London, 14 January 2017–2 April 2017, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; September 15 2017–January 7 2018, Bard Graduate Center Gallery, New York (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2017). This is the catalogue of a show of Lockwood's work and influence.