

THE WAY THROUGH THE WOODS

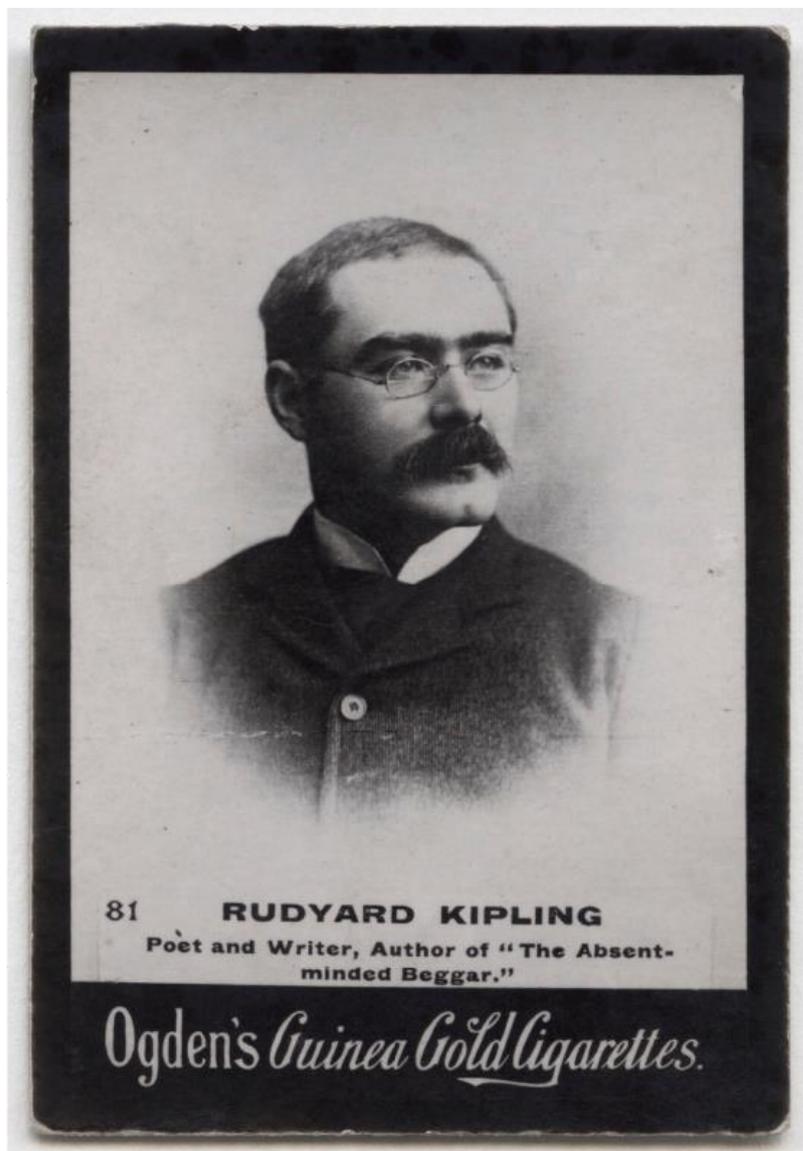


They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods,
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools
Where the otter whistles his mate,
(They fear not men in the woods,
Because they see so few.)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods...

But there is no road through the woods.

Rudyard Kipling



A cigarette card

Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay in 1865, but was sent by his parents to England when he was 5, and then to school at the United Services College, Westward Ho!, North Devon, which he famously depicted in the schoolboy tales *Stalky & Co.* He worked as a journalist in India, and many of his early poems and short stories were published in newspapers or for the Indian Railway Library.

He married an American, Carrie Balestier, and lived with her in Vermont for six years, before they returned to England and settled in Bateman's, a beautiful 17th century house in Sussex. Their daughter died aged 6, and their son was killed in the First World War.

Kipling's output was vast and varied. He was a natural writer, and his use in prose and verse of colloquial speech impressed many but alienated others. His early tales of the Raj, praised for their cynical realism, were compared to Maupassant, but his growing reputation as the poet of the Empire came to haunt him. Kipling retained his popularity with the common soldier and reader, and his verse has added many phrases to the language, but he was increasingly accused of jingoism.

His most uncontroversial and durable achievements are his tales for children (*The Jungle Book*, *Just So Stories*, *Puck of Pook's Hill*) and his picaresque novel *Kim*, generally considered his masterpiece, which presents a vivid picture of India, its teeming populations, religions and superstitions, and the life of bazaars and the road.

Margaret Drabble, The Oxford Companion to English Literature