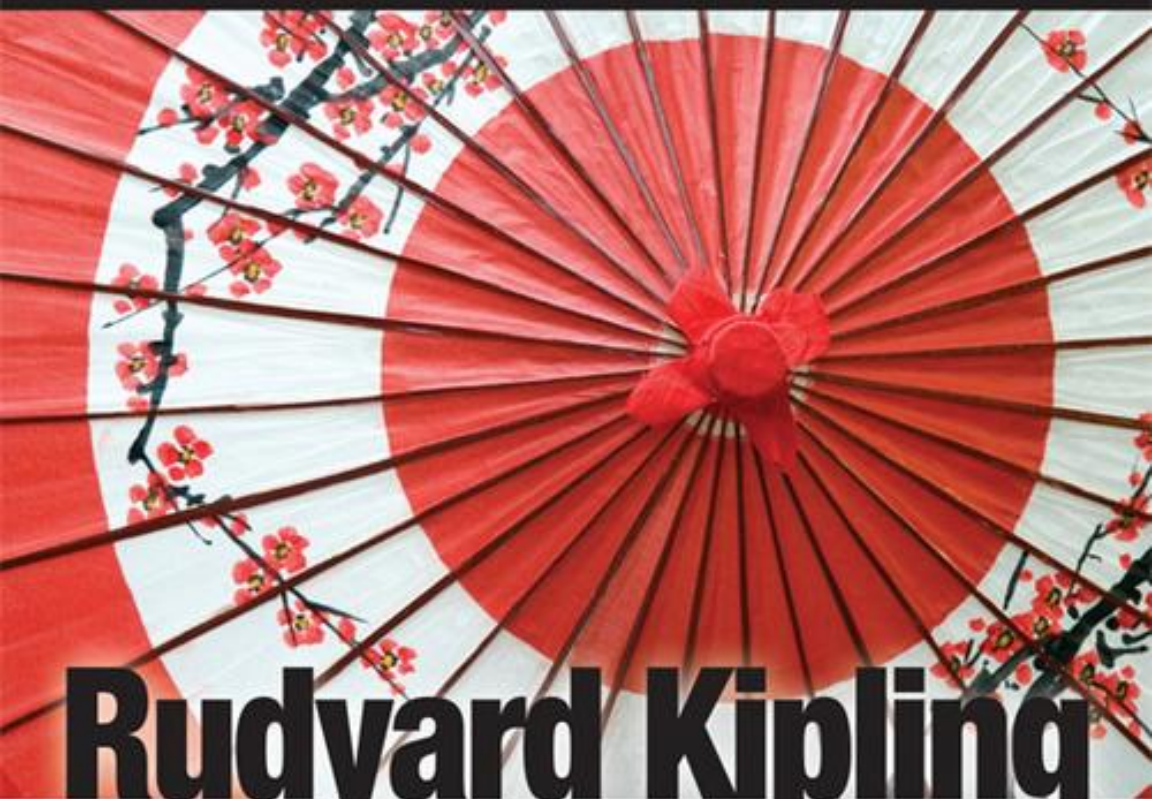


Travel Classics Enhanced



Rudyard Kipling

**The Edge
of the East**

The Editors of New Word City



The Edge of the East

Rudyard Kipling



THE EDGE OF THE EAST

RUDYARD KIPLING, THE LIFE

RUDYARD KIPLING, THE QUOTATIONS

COPYRIGHT

NEW WORD CITY

THE EDGE OF THE EAST

Editor's Note: From 1892 to 1913, Rudyard Kipling traveled the globe, reporting on his adventures for a number of British newspaper.

This piece, which was originally published in London's *Morning Post*, recounts his experiences in Japan.

The mist was clearing off **Yokohama** harbor and a hundred junks had their sails hoisted for the morning breeze, and the veiled horizon was stippled with square blurs of silver. An English **man-of-war** showed blue-white on then haze, so new was the daylight, and all the water lay out as smooth as the inside of an oyster shell. Two children in blue and white, their tanned limbs pink in the fresh air, sculled a marvelous boat of lemon-hued wood, and that was our fairy craft to the shore across the stillness and the mother o' pearl levels.

There are ways and ways of entering Japan. The best is to descend upon it from America and the Pacific - from the barbarians and the deep sea. Coming from the East, the blaze of **India** and the insolent tropical vegetation of **Singapore** dull the eye to half-colors and little tones. It is at **Bombay** that the smell of All Asia boards the ship miles off shore, and holds the passenger's nose till he is clear of Asia again. That is a violent and aggressive smell, apt to prejudice the stranger, but kin none the less to the gentle and insinuating flavor that stole across the light airs of the daybreak when the ferry boat went to

shore - a smell of very clean new wood; split bamboo, wood-smoke, damp earth, and the things that people who are not white people eat – a homelike and comforting smell. Then followed on shore the sound of an Eastern tongue, that is beautiful or not as you happen to know it. The Western races have many languages, but a crowd of Europeans heard through closed doors talk with the Western pitch and cadence. So it is with the East. A line of **rickshaw coolies** sat in the sun discoursing to each other, and it was as though they were welcoming a return in speech that the listener must know as well as English. They talked and they talked, but the ghosts of familiar words would not grow any clearer till presently the Smell came down the open streets again, saying that this was the East where nothing matters, and trifles old as the **Tower of Babel** mattered less than nothing, and that there were old acquaintances waiting at every corner beyond the township. Great is the Smell of the East! Railways, telegraphs, docks, and gunboats cannot banish it, and it will endure till the railways are dead. He who has not smelt that smell has never lived.

Three years ago Yokohama was sufficiently Europeanized in its shops to suit the worst and wickedest taste. Today it is still worse if you keep to the town limits. Ten steps beyond into the fields all the civilization stops exactly as it does in another land a few thousand miles further West. The globe-trotting, millionaires anxious to spend money with a hose on whatever caught their libertine fancies, had explained to us aboard ship that they came to Japan in haste, advised by their guidebooks to do so, lest the land should be suddenly civilized between steamer-sailing and steamer-sailing. When they touched land they ran away to the curio shops to buy things which are prepared for them - mauve and magenta and blue-vitriol things. By this time they have a “Murray” under one arm and an electric-blue eagle with a copperas beak and a yellow *E pluribus unum* embroidered on apple-green silk, under the other.

THE EDGE OF THE EAST

We, being wise, sit in a garden that is not ours, but belongs to a gentleman in slate-colored silk, who, solely for the sake of the picture, condescends to work as a gardener, in which employ he is sweeping delicately a welt of fallen cherry blossoms from under an azalea aching to burst into bloom. Steep stone steps, of the color that nature ripens through long winters, lead up to this garden by way of clumps of bamboo grass. You see the Smell was right when it talked of meeting old friends. Half-a-dozen blue-black pines are standing akimbo against a real sky - not a fog-blur nor a cloud-bank, nor a gray dish-cloth wrapped round the sun - but a blue sky. A cherry tree on a slope below them throws up a wave of blossom that breaks all creamy white against their feet, and a clump of willows trail their palest green shoots in front of all. The sun sends for an ambassador through the azalea bushes a lordly swallow-tailed butterfly, and his squire very like the flitting "chalk-blue" of the English downs. The warmth of the East, that goes through, not over, the lazy body, is added to the light of the East - the splendid lavish light that clears but does not bewilder the eye. Then the new leaves of the spring wink like fat emeralds, and the loaded branches of cherry-bloom grow transparent and glow as a hand glows held up against flame. Little, warm sighs come up from the moist, warm earth, and the fallen petals stir on the ground, turn over, and go to sleep again. Outside, beyond the foliage, where the sunlight lies on the slate-colored roofs, the ridged rice-fields beyond the roofs, and the hills beyond the rice fields, is all Japan - only all Japan; and this that they call the old French Legation is the Garden of Eden that most naturally dropped down here after the Fall. For some small hint of the beauties to be shown later there is the roof of a temple, ridged and fluted with dark tiles, flung out casually beyond the corner of the bluff on which the garden stands. Any other curve of the leaves would not have consorted with the sweep of the pine branches; therefore, this curve was made, and being made, was perfect.