

Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARCH

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In the past, critics have been remarkably intense in their distaste or admiration for the writings of Rudyard Kipling. This was largely provoked by his outspoken political and social commentary, but now that Kipling has been dead for 30 years, and his work isolated from his times, there has been a revived interest in (and probably a calmer reaction to) his legacy. The too-little-known poem below reflects both the unmatched musical quality of his verse and his belief that man's salvation lies in action, not dreams.

TOMLINSON

by Rudyard Kipling

Now Tomlinson gave up the ghost in his house in
Berkeley Square,
And a Spirit came to his bedside and gripped him
by the hair—
A Spirit gripped him by the hair and carried him
far away,
Till he heard as the roar of a rain-fed ford the roar
of the Milky Way,
Till he heard the roar of the Milky Way die down
and drone and cease,
And they came to the Gate within the Wall where
Peter holds the keys.
'Stand up, stand up now, Tomlinson, and answer
loud and high

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'The good that ye did for the sake of men or ever
ye came to die—
'The good that ye did for the sake of men in little
earth so lone!
And the naked soul of Tomlinson grew white as
a rain-washed bone.
'O, I have a friend on earth,' he said, 'that was
my priest and guide,
'And well would he answer all for me if he were by
my side.'
—'For that ye strove in neighbour-love it shall be
written fair,
'But now ye wait at Heaven's Gate and not in
Berkeley Square:
'Though we called your friend from his bed this
night, he could not speak for you,
'For the race is run by one and one and never by
two and two.'
Then Tomlinson looked up and down, and little
gain was there,
For the naked stars grinned overhead, and he saw
that his soul was bare:
The Wind that blows between the worlds, it cut
him like a knife,
And Tomlinson took up his tale and spoke of his
good in life.
'This I have read in a book,' he said, 'and that was
told to me,
'And this I have thought that another man thought
of a Prince in Muscovy.'
The good souls flocked like homing doves and
bade him clear the path,
And Peter twirled the jangling keys in weariness
and wrath.
'Ye have read, ye have heard, ye have thought,' he
said, 'and the tale is yet to run:
'By the worth of the body that once ye had, give
answer—what ha' ye done?'
Then Tomlinson looked back and forth, and little
good it bore,
For the Darkness stayed at his shoulder-blade and
Heaven's Gate before:

'Oh, this I have felt, and this I have guessed, and
this I have heard men say,
'And this they wrote that another man wrote of a
carl in Norrøway.'
'Ye have read, ye have felt, ye have guessed, good
lack! Ye have hampered Heaven's Gate;
'There's little room between the stars in idleness to
prate!
'Oh, none may reach by hired speech of neighbour,
priest, and kin,
'Through borrowed deed to God's good meed that
lies so fair within;
'Get hence, get hence to the Lord of Wrong, for
dome has yet to run,
'And . . . the faith that ye share with Berkeley
Square uphold you, Tomlinson!'

The Spirit gripped him by the hair, and sun by sun
they fell
Till they came to the belt of Naughty Stars that
rim the mouth of Hell:
The first are red with pride and wrath, the next are
white with pain,
But the third are black with clinkered sin that
cannot burn again:
They may hold their path, they may leave their
path, with never a soul to mark,
They may burn or freeze, but they must not cease
in the Scorn of the Outer Dark.
The Wind that blows between the worlds, it nipped
him to the bone,
And he yearned to the flare of Hell-gate there as
the light of his own hearth-stone.
The Devil he sat behind the bars, where the desperate
legions drew,
But he caught the hasting Tomlinson and would not
let him through.
'Wot ye the price of good pit-coal that I must
pay?' said he,
'That ye rank yourself' so fit for Hell and ask no
leave of me?

'I am all o'er-sib to Adam's breed that ye should
give me scorn,
For I strove with God for your First Father the day
that he was born.
'Sit down, sit down upon the slag, and answer loud
and high
The harm that ye did to the Sons of Men or ever
you came to die.'
And Tomlinson looked up and up, and saw against
the night
The belly of a tortured star blood-red in Hell-
Mouth light;
And Tomlinson looked down and down, and saw
beneath his feet
The frontlet of a tortured star milk-white in Hell-
Mouth heat.
'Oh, I had a love on earth,' said he, 'that kissed
me to my fall,
'And if ye would call my love to me I know she
would answer all.'
—'All that ye did in love forbid it shall be written
fair,
'But now ye wait at Hell-Mouth Gate and not in
Berkeley Square:
'Though we whistled your love from her bed to-night,
I trow she would not run,
'For the sin ye do by two and two ye must pay for
one by one!
The Wind that blows between the worlds, it cut him
like a knife,
And Tomlinson took up the tale and spoke of his
sin in life:
'Once I ha' laughed at the power of Love and twice
at the grip of the Grave,
'And thrice I ha' patted my God on the head that
men might call me brave.'
The Devil he blew on a brandered soul and set it
aside to cool:
'Do ye think I would waste mv good pit-coal on the
hide of a brain-sick fool?
'I see no worth in the hobnailed mirth or the jolt-
head jest ye did

'That I should waken my gentlemen that are sleeping three on a grid.'
Then Tomlinson looked back and forth, and there was little grace,
For Hell-Gate filled the houseless Soul with the Fear of Naked Space.
'Nay, this I ha' heard,' quo' Tomlinson, 'and this was noised abroad,
'And this I ha' got from a Belgian book on the word of a dead French lord.'
—'Ye ha' heard, ye ha' read, ye ha' got, good lack! And the tale begins afresh—
'Have ye sinned one sin for the pride o' the eye or the sinful lust of the flesh?'
Then Tomlinson he gripped the bars and yammered 'Let me in—
'For I mind that I borrowed my neighbour's wife to sin the deadly sin.'
The Devil he grinned behind the bars, and banked the fires high:
'Did ye read of that sin in a book?' said he; and Tomlinson said 'Ay!
The Devil he blew upon his nails, and the little devils ran;
And he said, 'Go husk this whimpering thief that comes in the guise of a man:
'Winnow him out 'twixt star and star, and sieve his proper worth:
'There's sore decline in Adam's line if this be spawn of earth.'
Empusa's crew, so naked-new they may not face the fire,
But weep that they bin too small to sin to the height of their desire,
Over the coal they chased the Soul, and racked it all abroad,
As children rifle a caddis-case or the raven's foolish hoard.
And back they came with the tattered Thing, as children after play,
And they said: 'The soul that he got from God he has bartered clean away.

'We have threshed a stook of print and book, and
winnowed a chattering wind
'And many a soul wherefrom he stole, but his we
cannot find:
'We have handled him, we have dandled him, we
have seared him to the bone,
'And sure if tooth and nail show truth he has no soul
of his own.'
The Devil he bowed his head on his breast and
rumbled deep and low:—
'I'm all o'er-sib to Adam's breed that I should bid
him go.
'Yet close we lie, and deep we lie, and if I gave him
place,
'My gentlemen that are so proud would flout me to
my face;
'They'd call my house a common stew and me a
careless host,
'And—I would not anger my gentlemen for the sake
of a shiftless ghost.'
The Devil he looked at the mangled Soul that
prayed to feel the flame,
And he thought of Holy Charity, but he thought of
his own good name:
'Now ye could haste my coal to waste, and sit ye
down to fry:
'Did ye think of that theft for yourself?' said he;
and Tomlinson said 'Ay!
The Devil he blew an outward breath, for his heart
was free from care:
'Ye have scarce the soul of a louse,' he said, 'but
the roots of sin are there,
'And for that sin should ye come in were I the lord
alone.
'But sinful pride has rule inside—and mightier than
my own.
'Honour and Wit, fore-damned they sit, to each his
priest and whore:
'Nay, scarce I dare myself go there, and you they'd
torture sore.
'Ye are neither spirit nor spirk,' he said; 'ye are
neither book nor brute—

'Go, get ye back to the flesh again for the sake of
Man's repute.
'I'm all o'er-sib to Adam's breed that I should mock
your pain,
'But look that ye win to worthier sin ere ye come
back again.
'Get hence, the hearse is at your door—the grim
black stallions wait—
'They bear your clay to place to-day. Speed, lest
ye come too late!
'Go back to Earth with a lip unsealed—go back
with an open eye,
'And carry my word to the Sons of Men or ever ye
come to die:
'That the sin they do by two and two they must pay
for one by one—
'And . . . the God that you took from a printed
book be with you, Tomlinson!'
