

## A GLIMPSE ON R. KIPLING'S MILITARY BALLAD 'BOOTS'

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Kipling's poetry differs very much from the usual classical British poetry. And it can be easily recognized. He doesn't use bookish words. His language is simple. His poems sound like ballads, like songs composed by ordinary people. He uses a lot of slang words and colloquialisms. His verse is akin, vivid, rough and spiced with slang and dialect. It was difficult but he managed to prove that even in these songs and ballads, written with the use of slang words of officials and soldiers there can live genuine poetry. There is much attraction in the descriptions of his brave heroes. His poems give a reader a very delicate and keen feeling of the writer's thought. Kipling's finest works are devoted to those lesser and obscure servants of the Empire – soldiers, sergeants, mechanics, sailors. He writes of their courage and selfless devotion, of their honour and patriotism. He criticises the big wigs who do not sufficiently appreciate and respect these humble heroes. The poet enters into their feelings and describes in their own language the hardships they have to endure for the grandeur of the Empire.

His well-known poem "Boots" is a typical example. It was first published in 'The Five Nations' in 1903.

Kipling wrote "Boots" under the impression of the Anglo-Boer War, which he was a direct eyewitness. On the recommendation of doctors and at the invitation of his close friend, the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony Cecil Rhodes, starting in 1898, Kipling spent several winters in South Africa. The war that began in October 1899, caught him just there.

60,000 soldiers of British army under the command of Lord Roberts covered the distance of 1,500 kilometers by June, 1900, capturing the largest cities of the Boer republics – Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria. The writer went there as a war correspondent, at the request of Roberts, a week after the capture of Bloemfontein in early March, 1900. The infantry columns on the march he saw during this trip, struck him so much that he couldn't stop visualizing them all the time. [1] And after the end of the war, in 1903, he wrote a ballad which really became one of his most famous poetic works. One can feel the rhythm of a march in it:

We're foot—slog—slog—slog—sloggin' over Africa —

Foot—foot—foot—foot—sloggin' over Africa —  
(Boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again!)  
There's no discharge in the war!

Seven—six—eleven—five—nine-an'-twenty mile to-day —  
Four—eleven—seventeen—thirty-two the day before —  
(Boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again!)  
There's no discharge in the war!

Don't—don't—don't—don't—look at what's in front of you.  
(Boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again);  
Men—men—men—men—men go mad with watchin' 'em,  
An' there's no discharge in the war!

Try—try—try—try—to think o' something different —  
Oh—my—God—keep—me from goin' lunatic!  
(Boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again!)  
There's no discharge in the war!

Count—count—count—count—the bullets in the bandoliers.  
If—your—eyes—drop—they will get atop o' you!  
(Boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again) —  
There's no discharge in the war!

We—can—stick—out—'unger, thirst, an' weariness,  
But—not—not—not—not the chronic sight of 'em —  
Boot—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again,  
An' there's no discharge in the war!

'Taint—so—bad—by—day because o' company,  
But night—brings—long—strings— o' forty thousand million  
Boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again.  
There's no discharge in the war!

I—'ave—marched—six—weeks in 'Ell an' certify  
It—is—not—fire—devils, dark, or anything,  
But boots—boots—boots—boots—movin' up an' down again,  
An' there's no discharge in the war! [ 2, p.185]

Наш слід – туп – туп – туп – тупаєм крізь Африку –  
Бумс – бумс – бумс – бумс – тупіт на всю Африку –  
(Бутси – бутси – бутси – бутси – знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Від війни немає втеч!

Сім – шість – одинадцять – п'ять – двадцять дев'ять миль на день –

Три – дванадцять – та сімнадцять – вчора тридцять дві було –  
(Бутси – бутси – бутси– бутси –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Від війни немає втеч!

Тільки – тільки – тільки – тільки – не дивись поперед ти.  
(Бутси – бутси – бутси– бутси –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Люди – люди – люди – люди – з глузду з'їдеш через них!  
Від війни немає втеч!

Спробуй – спробуй – спробуй – спробуй – думати й ти інакше –  
О – мій – боже – збережи – глузд та пам'ять мої краще!  
(Бутси – бутси – бутси– бутси –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Від війни немає втеч!

Лі – чи – лі – чи – в патронташі залишок куль.  
Як – сон – взяв – верх – всі задні вмиють тебе зімнуть!  
(Бутси – бутси – бутси– бутси –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Від війни немає втеч!

Для – нас – ні – що – голод, спрага, втомлення,  
Крім – крім – крім – крім – маршируючих чобіт –  
(Бутси – бутси – бутси– бутси –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Від війни немає втеч!

Вдень – ми – всі – разом – і тому не важко так,  
Та – вніч – все – знов – і сорок тисяч йдуть підряд  
(Бутсів – бутсів – бутсів– бутсів –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
Від війни немає втеч!

Я – йшов – крізь – смерть – пекла тижнів шість й скажу,  
Що – там – нема – чортів – темряви й вогню,  
(Крім бутсів – бутсів – бутсів– бутсів –знов та знов вниз-вверх!)  
І від війни немає втеч! [3]

Even without the aid of music there is a natural rhythm in these words which reminds of the basic training route marches. In the days when Kipling was writing this the main method of troops moving was by marching and he would have been alongside troops in his correspondent role. Thus, he was able to articulate the genuine grievances of men marching for hours in hot climate.

The poems by R.J.Kipling were extremely popular in the former Soviet Union till the end of the 1930s. Since then almost all his works but for his fairy-tales disappeared from the bookshops of the USSR. Neither Kipling's prose nor poetry, with the exception of those for children and those included in the translators' collections, no longer appeared in print. It was only in 1980 when they at last came back.

Poems like "Boots" (and they are numerous with Kipling) are ment to arouse a fellow-feeling for men who could go through hell to do their duty. Kipling appeals to any man's admiration of courage, energy and stoicism. The feelings he glorifies always have universal value. In the poem we see soldiers on a long distance march. We read about a real soldier's life, his feelings and thoughts. This poem makes us feel the dust on the teeth. Soldiers of different countries are alike. And that's why we, Ukrainians can take this poem close to our hearts because it reminds us of the life of our Ukrainian soldiers.

### References:

1. Kipling R. The Five Nations. METHUEN AND CO., London, 1903. 185 p.
2. Kipling R. Something of myself URL:  
[https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.525263/2015.525263.Something-Of\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.525263/2015.525263.Something-Of_djvu.txt) (дата звернення: 28.04.2023).
3. Talia: BOOTS (INFANTRY COLUMNS OF THE EARLIER WAR) /RUDYARD KIPLING/ - ВІПШ, Вірші, поезія. Клуб поезії URL:  
<http://www.poetryclub.com.ua/getpoem.php?id=981378> (дата звернення: 28.04.2023).