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 **The Boy Doctor of Empire: Malaria and Mobility in Kipling's
*Kim***

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**The Boy Doctor of Empire:
Malaria and Mobility in Kipling's *Kim***

Jessica Howell (bio)

Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim* depicts an Anglo-Indian boy who serves both as a Tibetan lama's disciple and as a spy for the British Raj. As he travels through India, Kim treats the ill and is in turn cared for by others when he falls sick. These episodes of sickness and healing lend insight into Kim's nascent sources of colonial authority and influence the structure of the narrative. Specifically, Kim's repeated experiences with malarial fever punctuate a cyclical plot development. Rather than focusing on the eponymous character curing malaria, the novel instead provides a model of adaptation to the disease. Kim's white body has been "seasoned" by fever, and this both reflects and contributes to his intimate knowledge of India.

Kim first meets the lama in Lahore, and decides to accompany him on a quest to find the River of the Arrow, the river of enlightenment. Though Kim adopts the identity of a Buddhist "chela" (disciple) during their initial travels, his white Irish heritage is soon discovered and he is sent to be educated as a "sahib" at St. Xavier's boarding school in Lucknow. Meanwhile, he also receives training from Anglo as well as Indian members of the British Secret Service, such as Mahbub Ali, Hurree Babu, Colonel Creighton, and Lurgan Sahib. After his schooling is complete, Kim reassumes the identity of chela, but now also gathers information for the Raj. He steers the lama's quest towards the northern hill country of India in order to assist Hurree Babu in the "Great Game" of Britain's cold war with Russia. He and Babu successfully sabotage the fact-finding mission of two spies, one Russian and one French. Rather than following a direct course, however, both Kim's travels and the novel's development wander, crossing and re-crossing geographic and cultural borders. The cyclical structure of *Kim* **[End Page 158]** illustrates that narrative forms can be associated with and adaptable to shifts in conceptions of disease, in this case malaria.

Kim's ability to treat malaria is central to the book's unfolding plot. The Buddhist lama believes that Kim obtained medical knowledge through the course of his formal schooling, but Kim was also tutored in how to apply this knowledge in order to gain Indian subjects' trust by

Lurgan Sahib, who taught him the “names and properties of many native drugs, as well as the runes proper to recite” when he administers them.¹ Such training is explicitly a tool of colonial power, allowing Kim to assume the useful disguise of an itinerant healer or apothecary. “[M]ore to the point” are Lurgan’s lessons on how Kim should care for “his own body” and cure fever in himself and others. Medical knowledge clearly is key to a colonist’s survival (143). The book assumes that Kim has been and will be sick during the course of his travels.

Kim successfully begins his role as an imperial spy by curing a “fever fit.” As he and the lama first depart from Lucknow, a Punjabi farmer, referred to as the “Jat,” approaches Kim with a plea to heal the man’s son. Kim proudly performs medical learnedness, aware of being watched by both the lama and the anxious father as he conducts an “abstracted, brow-puckered search through the tabloid bottles, with a pause here and there for thought and a muttered invocation between whiles” (159). Kim concludes by giving the man quinine tablets and meat lozenges in order to counteract the boy’s malaria and malnutrition.

The quinine and meat lozenges are tools of colonial medicine, in that Kim is able to deploy more potent remedies than rural Indians would have had access to at this time in order to gain trust and admiration from his observers. Yet the application of these remedies is made possible through Kim’s first-hand experience of local illnesses: “It was as much as Kim could remember of his own treatment in a bout of autumn malaria—if you except the patten he added to impress the lama” (159). Disease...

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