Kipling's journey to India took him through the Suez Canal, just a few weeks after the defeat of Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir and the beginning of what the British envisaged as the temporary occupation of Egypt. Their intention was to protect the Canal, which had come under threat from Arabi’s supporters, restore the more compliant Khedive to power, and then quietly withdraw. In the event, they were still there seventy years later, until another nationalist leader, Gamal Nasser, compelled them to leave. By one of the ironies of history, the expeditionary force had been sent out by a Liberal government, despite Gladstone’s declared policy of non-intervention. In command was Sir Garnet Wolseley, whose exploits in the Zulu wars had made him the nation’s leading soldier, while Frederick Roberts, soon to be one of Kipling’s heroes, marked time in Madras. These ironies were lost on the young Kipling, but in the four days he had to wait at Port Said he did have time to take in the atmosphere of a base-camp only fifty miles from the scene of battle. Ten years later he was to draw on these impressions for parts of *The Light that Failed*.

He reached Suez on 7 October 1882. It was at Suez, he wrote afterwards, that the first-time traveller had to face ‘the black hour of homesickness’, but only eleven days later, on 18 October, he landed in Bombay, and at once found himself speaking in the vernacular ‘sentences whose meaning I knew not’ (*SM* 25).1 His English years ‘fell away, nor ever, I think, came back in full strength’. He felt a sense of return rather than of dislocation, and his arrival in Lahore, after a long journey northwards on the rapidly expanding railway system, was a joyous homecoming, made all the sweeter when Trix came out at the end of 1883 to complete the Family Square.

The elder Kiplings had been in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, since 1875. Their position cannot have been quite comfortable.
Lockwood’s salary was adequate, if modest, but he was not a member of the Indian Civil Service, and in a community where precedent and protocol counted for a good deal they were clearly of minor rank, and sometimes reminded of the fact. There was even an unpleasant rumour that Rudyard was a half-caste. None of this is allowed to disfigure *Something of Myself*, where the emphasis is on the happiness and self-sufficiency of the Family Square. But fifty years later, in the revenge farce ‘Beauty Spots’, the victim is a retired Major and his tormentor a young man who has suffered under the same accusation.

Soon after his arrival, Kipling was elected as the youngest member of the Punjab Club, among some seventy white civilians, all ‘picked men at their definite work’, and each ‘talking his own shop’. These men, together with the officers stationed at the fort and in the military cantonment at Mian Mir – altogether only a few hundred in number – were his immediate audience, as the readers of the *Civil & Military Gazette*. From the first, what was impressed upon him was the need for solidarity. The Punjab had been annexed into the Raj as recently as 1849, and still had the character of a frontier province. The Anglo-Indians who lived and worked there were an inward-looking community, suspicious of the government at home, and opposed to talk of progress and reform. They insisted on the absolute superiority of the British, and the essential unchangingness of the Indians. For the most part they preferred to emphasise the ‘old’ rural India of princes and peasants, and in consequence seriously underestimated the power of the emerging middle-class India of the National Congress. Kipling never directly challenged these ideas, though in his fiction they form only one part of his imaginative vision. But even in *Kim*, the warmest and most generous of his Indian stories, his views on the task of ruling India are shaped by what he heard in the Punjab Club.

In the first half of the nineteenth century that task had been debated in terms of the Evangelical programme to regenerate Indian society by reforming its morality, and the Utilitarian programme to improve its morality by reforming its social structure: hence, on the one hand, the suppression of suttee in the 1820s, the campaign against the Thugs in the 1830s, and the abolition of slavery in 1843, and, on the other, the work done by Macaulay in the 1830s and by Fitzjames Stephen in the 1870s to establish and then to revise the Indian Penal Code. But the principles underpinning both programmes were shaken by the Rebellion of 1857. Increasingly it was argued that the evils of Indian society were not contingent on its history, but the irremediable expression of an inherent Indian character. From the late 1840s, physical