



The Five Nations

KIPLING RUDYARD

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Kipling became intensely involved in the war between Britain and the Boer republics which took place between 1899 and 1902, years during which a number of the poems in this collection were composed. He was unquestioning, not to say fanatic, in his support of British policies in southern Africa. Others have been more critical: for many years it was believed that a desire on the part of financiers like Cecil Rhodes to control the gold mines of the Transvaal underlay England's declaration of war against the Boers. More recent thinking has focussed instead on the strategic interests of Britain within Africa, where as early as 1815 Britain had taken possession of the crucially situated Cape Colony. For thirty years previous to the Anglo-Boer War Britain had been pursuing a programme of annexations, taking over Basutoland, southern Bechuanaland, Zululand and Togoland, in a drive to contain the Boer republics and deny them direct access to the Indian Ocean. It was intended to prevent them from operating entirely outside the sphere of British influence, lest, with increasing wealth from their mineral assets, they should come to pose a threat to any future expansion of British interests in Africa. Direct military intervention on the part of Britain was only the logical conclusion of this policy. Around the world, however, liberal opinion, as distinct from the views of other empire-building governments, condemned Britain for its attempt to crush these two small nations, which had chosen to govern themselves as republics

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