



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
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[South African Republic, Orange Free State, Natal, Basutoland, etc.] The Absent-Minded Beggar

Stock#: 59944
Map Maker: Daily Mail
Date: 1900 circa
Place: London
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 18 x 18 inches
Price: \$375.00



Description:

A Famed Bit of Boer War Ephemera -- With Poem By Rudyard Kipling and Song by Sir Arthur Sullivan

Rare commemorative handkerchief, printed with a map of South Africa at the time of the Boer War.

To the left is the text of Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Absent-Minded Beggar", a score by Sir Arthur Sullivan, and portraits of Queen Victoria and Lord Roberts.

The map shows the Transvaal and Orange Free State, including rail lines and roads.

The handkerchief was sold to raise money for the Soldiers' Families Fund after the outbreak of the Second Boer War (1899-1902). The poem was specially commissioned for the Fund, and first appeared in *The Daily Mail* on October 31, 1899. It was given a musical score by Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert & Sullivan fame).

Despite Roberts' portrait being entwined in the title, the absent-minded beggar of Kipling's poem is the British "Tommy," forgetfully leaving their dependents in need to go off to fight for their country. The chorus of the song exhorted its audience to "pass the hat for your credit's sake, and pay, pay, pay!" The



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patriotic poem and song caused a sensation and was constantly performed throughout the war and beyond.

The illustrations are drawn by Richard Caton Woodville.

The Daily Mail paid Kipling £250 for the poem, which he donated to the fund, as did Sullivan with his £100 payment. Soon afterwards Kipling was offered a knighthood, which he declined. It was not Kipling's favorite work: in his autobiography he wrote that it "lacked poetry" and became "wedded... to a tune guaranteed to pull teeth out of barrel-organs". This did not stop it being a huge success, giving the fund the nickname, "the Absent-Minded Beggar Relief Corps", and helping it raise £340,000 by the time it was wound up in 1903.

Not only was it published worldwide (the New York Journal paid \$25 for the privilege), it was recited by actresses including Lily Langtree and Lady Maud Beerbohm Tree. Organizing the fund was a coup for the *Daily Mail*, which had been founded only in 1896. This campaign capitalized on the jingoistic mood of the British public and the paper's circulation soared to over a million issues a day by 1902, the highest in the world.

The handkerchief is probably the most famous item of British ephemera produced during the South African War.

Detailed Condition:

Printed on linen.