



Handkerchief published to raise money for the families of Boer War Soldiers

DAILY MAIL PUBLISHING.  
The Absent-Minded Beggar.

London, the Daily Mail Publishing Co. Ltd, c.1899. Linen handkerchief printed in blue, c. 440 x 440mm.

£380

A printed handkerchief published by the Daily Mail to raise funds for the 'Soldiers' Families Fund' after the outbreak of the Second Boer War (1899-1902), the first charitable effort for a war. The map shows the theatre of war, around the South African Republic (the Transvaal) and the Orange Free State. The two portraits are of Lord Roberts, commander of the British Troops, and Queen Victoria, the British Monarch for the first half of the war. The poem, 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' by Rudyard Kipling, was specially commissioned for the Fund, and 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' (private soldier), forgetfully leaving their dependents in need while fighting for their country. 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 favourite 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



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£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. Organising the fund was a coup for the Daily Mail, which had been founded only in 1896. This campaign capitalised 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 was published by The Graphic and is probably the most famous item of British ephemera produced during the South African War.

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