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### ENGLAND'S ROMANCER.

A Glimpse of Rider Haggard at Home and in Society.

A LION IN LONDON SOCIETY.

An Interesting Review of the Famous Writer as seen by an American Woman—Etc., Etc.

Copyrighted, 1888.

Written for THE SUNDAY HERALD.

Last season, the Lion of London literary salons was Rider Haggard. While the *Pull Mall Gazette* was daily printing several columns to prove to the world his plagiarism, he was being feted at dinner and high tea.

There is a prevailing idea among the general public that the writer of "She," "King Solomon's Mines," and Allan Quartermain" must be one of those mysterious creatures living in a state of artificial exaltation, and evolving those weird fancies from a choral-heated imagination. To realize the desperate fallacy of such a theory, one needs to meet and observe a man who lends no external indications of importunate insight; not one of those nervous, fragile, unearthly entities, such a type as our Edgar Allan Poe vividly furnishes forth.

When I first met Mr. Haggard, I was most impressed with his simplicity of appearance, his self-poise, and air of speechless self-appreciation. I saw in a throng of three hundred authors, a tall, slender young man, accepting the worship of a diety with scarcely a propitiatory smile. He impressed me as one who had become familiar with applause rather than gayety.

His figure is interesting, and entirely wanting in eccentricity, but not, it is true, wanting in a certain kind of distinction that is almost plainness.

He is a blonde type of man, with a prevalence of those tints known as ashen. A sallow, colorless skin unlighted by warmer hues; hair darkened only by the mingling of the deeper drab shades, and a dull, blue eye which physicians are wont to associate with the anaemic temperament. His forehead is square and strong, his lips firm, his chin resistive, and his eyes full of clear, deep, concentrative force. An unemotional face, implying none of the lighter, tenderer moods; a face utterly lacking in strong pigment, but rich in puissance of modelling. In stature symmetrical, erect without pomposity—a physical structure held together and given motive power by sinews of spring-wire expressing sturdiness, endurance, and elasticity. His voice in speech is low, measured, and melodious.

He passes through a great drawing-room in a mood of complete absorption and complete abstraction, looking over the heads of people. When he is introduced to an hitherto unknown admirer—and there is at all times a galaxy of humbler satellites waiting to join the revolving circle and catch a glint from his splendor—with a vague manner of well-bred *ennui*, he listens to the fulsome and over-ful allusions to his books.

When he is in London, he lives quietly in bachelor artlessness; a figure at receptions, banquets, and lawn *parties*, yet never making his presence in great throngs too cheap. He belongs most pre-eminently to that easy and brilliant world, from a social point of view, known as Upper Bohemia. In social status, Mr. Haggard is not at the apex—not one of those artists in the drama, wielders of the brush, spinners of verse who have sons at Eton, houses in fashionable quarters, villas on the Thames, a moor rich in grouse, and a river abounding in salmon on the other side of the Tweed, horses, carriages, visiting-lists, fine friends—whatever, in fact, lends distinction and financial respectability to life.

When he deigns to reveal himself in a London drawing room, he is recognized and pointed out as Rider Haggard; one who has become a personage by right of superior gifts, and the important place he has suddenly leaped into among famous men of letters. Never, be it recorded to his honor, has he suggested the exclamation, "Who is that erratic person?" He is a man without a personal fad; possessing a nature free from the taint of that pernicious species of grotesque advertising, so generally resorted to by genius in these days, when to wear the crown of eccentricity points the swiftest and surest method of pleasing the fancy and impressing the memory of society.

He has not appealed to the vision by cultivating the Whistler lock of hair sprouting like a silver feather amid dark tresses, nor has he sought to create a sensation by endeavoring to give some professional beauty the golden key to those cipher black-letter inscriptions of Amenartas. After the fashion of Oscar Wilde, who made considerable reputation by teaching Mrs. Langtry Greek, before he founded the worship of the pining lily or the heroine herb.

He neither invites nor does he cordially entertain discussion of his theories and their successful results, yet is not invincibly silent on the subject of himself. Nor is he one of those who, when once detached in conversation from his special subjects, his methods, his superior relations, and himself, have nothing to say. He places a fair estimate upon himself, and his adorners pay homage accordingly.

Barely cordial to strangers, he cannot be classed among those brilliant raconteurs whose epigrams we are wont to associate with the names of Fox, Sheridan, and Dr. Johnson in London's social annals of the past, and with Labouchere and Yates to day. But when Mr. Haggard is the nucleus of an appreciative few at dinner, he is a cornucopia teeming with plans of serious anecdote. These tales are reports of bizarre experiences gained in those bizarre countries where he has traveled and laid the groundwork of his romances.

He himself is as different from Sir Edwin Arnold, Mr. Browning, or Philip Gilbert Hamerton as his work differs from the poignant paragraphs of those editors I have named. He is not only a facile scribe—he is a priest of mighty mysteries. A writer by profession, he is also a teacher and a preacher. He is in literature what Edward Burne-Jones is in art. His work is an evangelism which it is given only to a select minority of initiated votaries of Oriental lore

to understand aright. There is a subtle symbolism in every romance he submits to the public. How many of its readers, I ask, have penetrated the rare gospel so dextrously wrought out in "She?"

He has been particularly fortunate in not having those domestic embarrassments which handicap the most exaggerated genius in man or woman. While Mr. Haggard's productions may appear inspirational and visionary to the superficial reader, in reality they are the result of painstaking labor and studious research. From early boyhood, he possessed intuitive ken of eastern knowledge, and the current circumstances in which he soon found himself placed facilitated his studies of medieval dialects and the vast and secret traditions of Arabia. He is a profound student of the Scriptures, interpreting them in harmony with the teachings of Rabbinical wisdom. Wizard-like, he evolves unique and startling plots from the occult emblems engraved on the cartouch of Theban sarcophagi.

Truly it may be said of him, all time his hour and all place his workshop. Whether he be walking, riding in an omnibus, or waiting in an underground railway station, he seems oblivious of the external phases of life, and is ever busy with the looms and the yarns from which he weaves his fantastic fabrics. He carries a slender cane, and switches aimlessly objects right and left, as though the motor forces were stimulated with an energy in concurrence with his unbridled conceits.

"She" is not a recent composition, as many suppose. But not until day before yesterday was popular taste in the least degree attuned to the reish of pabulum spiced with the secret forces which animate the world. The dual personality, the interminable chain of reincarnated good and evil, the laws of reversion to type, and life the gift of life are precepts as old as the eternal hills and as fresh as the dawn.

I heard, in conversation, a lady object to "She" on the ground of vulgarity, and when I asked her to point to those offensive passages which had failed to send an extra thrill of warmth to my face, she explained that there was too much stress laid on the physical beauty of the divine Ayesha. That the description of that dazzling loveliness of brow, throat, and thigh, strong in love and in immortal youth, which could have revolutionized society and changed the destiny of generations, was a vicious doctrine.

Still, again, I stood nigh when a worthy dowager remarked of the much discussed and insufficiently understood "She": "What a lawless imagination the man possesses; it is absurd!"

I wonder if neither one of these well-meaning persons had caught a ray of that higher morality, those god-like truths which lie as an everlasting foundation for the emblematic eloquence of every chapter.

Ye gods! and these are they who read and sit in judgment on Rider Haggard.

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