

Review

Haggard, H Rider (2000) *Diary of an African Journey: the return of Rider Haggard* Stephen Coan (ed). Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

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Haggard scholarship appears to be undergoing something of a renaissance: this year sees two important publications with Stephen Coan's edition of Rider Haggard's *Diary of an African Journey*, and Laura Chrisman's book *Rereading the Imperial Romance* (Clarendon Press) which looks at British imperialism and South African resistance in Haggard, Schreiner and Plaatje. This interest is possibly not surprising as Haggard, together with some other writers of Empire, well fits the post-colonial preoccupation with ambivalence and contradiction.

Though Haggard is remembered for his African romances or adventure stories, he himself valued his numerous writings on the land, on agriculture, on projects to resettle the urban poor and returning soldiers on the land, far more. From his first work specifically on the land, *A Farmer's Year* in 1899, to *A Gardener's Year* in 1905 and his numerous, meticulously researched reports on the state of rural England runs a concern with the primacy of land in developing a people's character and, therefore, how an exodus from the land bled away a nation's vitality. This concern forms a serious counterpoint to Haggard's popular romances, though an appreciation of, particularly African, land and landscape is never absent from his fiction. During his 1905 visit to the United States as Government Commissioner to investigate the feasibility of the Salvation Army's 'Labour Colonies' as a model for British colonies, he lamented: 'It is a hard thing, in the first place, to live down the reputation of being a writer of fiction... Still, humbly, imperfectly, I did attempt it. I have not done much. Yet I have done something' (1926, vol 2:265). Part of the 'something' that this best-selling writer of farfetched tales set in exotic parts did in service to his country was to serve on the Dominions Royal Commission after his knighthood in 1912. The Commission's task was to report on the state of

various parts of the Empire including India, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. The Southern African leg of this trip in 1914 forms the material for *Diary of an African Journey* and details both the official business, and unofficial nostalgic, stops made by Haggard, his wife, Louie, and daughter, Liliias, who accompanied him.

Though some of Haggard's novels like *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), *She* (1886) and *Allan Quatermain* (1887) have never been out of print, it is noteworthy when a writer dead 75 years interests publishers enough to secure a new first edition publication. This is the coup that Coan has achieved and Haggard scholars should be grateful to him (though Haggard's engaging style and Coan's fascinating annotations will appeal to more than just academics). For the past few decades, since Morton Cohen's first biography of Haggard was published in 1960, researchers have had to travel to the Norfolk Records Office in Norwich to read the typescript of Haggard's 1914 diary of his African trip. Other copies are held by Cmdr Mark Cheyne, Haggard's grandson in Norfolk, and in the Africana collection of the late Frank Barlow in Stellenbosch, though the last item has only recently come to light.

The value of this publication lies not only in its being published for the first time, but also in the 'new' photographs and maps with which Coan accompanies the text, and most importantly, in Coan's extensive notes and introduction which flesh out Haggard's account: there are brief biographies of men and women Haggard met on the trip, descriptions of places he visited, the historical context of the Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer battles referred to by Haggard, translations of Zulu and Afrikaans words, modern day spelling of place names, botanical details of vegetation remarked upon by Haggard, ever the farmer, etc. Innovative, too, is Coan's division of what in the typescript version is one long narrative into ten chapters corresponding to progressive stages of the journey recorded in the diary - from awaiting the *Kinfaus Castle* in Madeira at the beginning of the diary, to revising his jottings aboard the *Gaika* off Suez at its end. Of historical interest are the three Appendices attached by Coan to the diary entries: two are newspaper articles by journalists covering Haggard's visit, whilst the first contains Haggard's private musings sent to the Right Hon Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State to the Colonies, on Rhodesia:

Only the passage of time, say, a hundred years, can tell us whether or no Rhodesia will make a good home for the descendants of the present settlers. The question is one much debated, and all that can be said is

that as yet it is impossible to speak of Rhodesia as a land suitable to the permanent establishment and reproduction of Europeans, as we do, let us say, of the Cape Peninsula or Natal. (Coan 2000:284)

and on Zululand:

At the present moment the Reverend J Dube, himself an educated Zulu with considerable power among his people and the President of the South African Native National Congress, is, I believe, on his way to England with a deputation to lay a hopeless petition before the King for the disallowal of the Natives Land act of 1913...they deserve every consideration, since their misfortunes have been many, and for their wrong-doings they have paid in tears and blood full measure and running over. (2000:305)

These patronising but perceptive words, certainly for 1914 and from a member of a colonial commission, mark Haggard as one sensitive to issues of land and race in the far flung corners of an unraveling Empire. They also make this book of interest to us grappling with the very same issues today in sub-Saharan Africa. Coan is to be highly praised for seeing this last unpublished work of Haggard's into print, and for creating out of the raw diary material such an engaging and complete record of Haggard's 1914 visit to Southern Africa.

References

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- Cohen, M (1960) *Rider Haggard: his life and works*. London: Hutchinson.
- Haggard, H R (1926) *The Days of My Life*. 2 vols. London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd.