

## Rider Haggard and reincarnation

(Script of a talk given to the Rider Haggard Society, 26 September 2009)

I feel I should tell you first of all that I've been experiencing what appear to be past life flash backs all my life, the most powerful of which was part of a near death experience during my daughter's birth.

Many of my flashbacks, have involved Egypt, and have been incorporated into my novel '*Torn Clouds*'. Like Rider Haggard, I feel I *belong* to Egypt.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as a result of this, I've made an extensive study of reincarnation experiences and the evidence for rebirth and for the last thirty five years I've worked as a karmic counsellor and regression therapist, looking at past life themes in a birth chart and taking people back to explore and heal other lives.

By now, for me personally, reincarnation a fact of life. But rather than exploring whether the concept of reincarnation is true or not, what I'd like to do here is to look at what Haggard said about reincarnation in fact and fiction. More than thirty five years have elapsed since my previous reading of his work. I did so then at the instigation of my mentor Christine Hartley, who'd been Dion Fortune's literary agent and magical colleague. Christine was firmly of the opinion that Haggard was drawing on his own past lives for his novels, which is a possibility I'd like to explore.

In *She*, Haggard sets out a classical exposition of reincarnation when he says:

"It seems that there are still things upon the earth of which thou knowest naught. Dost thou still believe that all things die...? I tell thee that nothing dies. There is no such thing as Death, though there be a thing called Change. See' and she pointed to some sculptures on the rocky wall. 'Three times two thousand years have passed, since the last of the great race that hewed those pictures, fell before the breath of the pestilence which destroyed them, yet they are not dead. Even now they live, perchance their spirits are drawn towards us at this very hour' and she glanced round. 'Of a surety, it sometimes seems to me that my eyes can see them'.

'Yes, but to the world they are dead'.

'Aye, for a time; but even to the world they are born again and yet again'.

Haggard was most certainly psychic. I'm sure most of you are familiar with his dream concerning the death of the dog Bob about which he wrote to The Times and he practised psychometry and other psychic skills. In a forward to *She*, Stuart Cloete says that Haggard 'lifted the garment of an Africa that was then virgin, and in fictional adventure-romances described events and scenes which have since been proved to be historical reality'. In this, Haggard appears to have displayed prescient knowledge of both the past and the future.

He had, for instance, never heard of the Zimbabwe ruins (they'd been lost to history for a thousand years) nor did he know that diamonds would be found outside Kimberley, but he put such things in his books and they were later substantiated. My suggestion is that he went further than that and incorporated past life memories in his books, especially the Alan Quartermain material and others I'll mention.

I know that Shirley Addy would disagree with me as in her book *Haggard and Egypt* she comes to the conclusion that Haggard didn't believe in reincarnation even though she quotes his nephew Godfrey Haggard as saying that 'Rider believed that he had lived before'.

She puts Haggard's ability to engage so fully in the time and place, down to well-developed intuition and the ability to step into the atmosphere of a period – to read the collective record (what believers in reincarnation call the Akashic Record). This is what I did when I had the experience on which I based 'Prelude in Valdemossa', a short story that was runner-up in the annual Rider Haggard writing competition and which led to the invitation to speak to the Society. When visiting the Real Cartjuga monastery in Mallorca, I stepped back in time to observe Chopin writing 'Little drops of rain'. It was a revisiting, not a reliving.

But, in his piece 'On Religion', written in 1912 on board a ship off Aden when he was 56, Haggard sets out, what, from my viewpoint is, a clear indication that, although he was a devout Christian, he also believed that souls could take on new bodies: in other words, souls could reincarnate.

Haggard states that, in his private opinion, 'some of us already have individually gone through this process of coming into active *Being* and departing out of *Being*, more than once — perhaps very often indeed — though not necessarily in this world with which we are acquainted.

In short, like the Buddhists, I am strongly inclined to believe that the Personality which animates each of us is immeasurably ancient, having been forged in so many fires, and that, as its past is immeasurable, so will its future be.

This is in some ways an uncomfortable faith or instinct..' says Haggard. '...thus I, for one, have no wish to live again upon our earth.'

He continues 'I cannot find that it conflicts with the doctrines of Christianity; see, for instance, the passage in which our Lord refers to Elijah as having returned to Earth in the person of John the Baptist.

He goes on to produce a list of indications which may be said to support reincarnation:

' vague memories,

affinities with certain lands and races,

irresistible attractions and repulsions, at times amounting in the former case to intimacies of the soul ... so strong that they appear to be already well established, such as have drawn me so close to certain friends, and notably to one friend recently departed, '

At the same time Haggard qualifies this with the observation that, and I quote, 'none of this is proof- like everything else that has to do with spirit'

The same lack of proof, he says, appertains to'...'The revelations of persons who seem to have access to certain stores of knowledge denied to most men, for these may be anything or nothing'.

And he refers to 'that strong conviction of immemorial age which haunts the hearts of some of us.'

Haggard sets out what those of us who work with past life memories and regression techniques regard as the basis for our belief in reincarnation, when he says:

'No, there is *no proof*, and yet reason comes to the support of these imaginings. Unless we have lived before, or the grotesque incongruities of life are to be explained in some way unknown to us, our present existence, to my mind, resembles nothing so much as a handful of what is known as "printer's pie" cast together at hazard and struck off for the reader to interpret as he will or can.

Or perhaps in this case a better example would be to compare the world to a great ball-room wherein a Puck-like Death acts as Master of Ceremonies.

Here the highly born, the gifted and the successful are welcomed with shouts of praise, while the plain, the poorly dressed, the halt, are trodden underfoot; here partners, chosen at hazard, often enough seem to be dancing to a different time and step, till they are snatched asunder to meet no more; here, one by one the revellers of all degrees are touched upon the shoulder by the Puck-like Death who calls the tune, and drop down, down into an impenetrable darkness, while others who knew them not, are called to take their places.

But if we admit that every one of these has lived before, and danced in other rooms, and will live again and dance in other rooms, then meaning informs the meaningless.

Then those casual meetings and swift farewells, those loves and hatings, are not of chance; then those partners are *not* chosen at hazard after all.

Then the dancers who in turn must swoon away beneath that awful, mocking touch, do not drop into darkness but into some new well of the water of Life.'

Then what we behold, continues Haggard, 'is but 'a few threads, apparently so tangled, that go to weave the Sphinx's seamless veil, or some stupendous tapestry that enwraps the whole Universe of Creation which, when seen at last, will picture forth the Truth in all its splendour, and with it the wondrous story and the meaning of our lives.

He goes on to say: Such, put shortly and figuratively, seems to me one of the strongest arguments for the continuity of our personal existence through various phases. It may be, however, that it is no argument at all — that there is some other explanation (beyond that of blind, black, brutal chance), perhaps so simple that we cannot grasp it, which accounts for everything.

One contention, however, I find hard to accept — namely, that man appearing here for the first time through an accident of the flesh is placed and judged eternally in accordance with his deeds of at most about thirty waking, conscious years (even if his life be long), for, childhood and the time spent in sleep must be excluded.

To me such a thing is almost incredible. Final judgment I can understand after many lives of growing towards the good or towards the ill — and, indeed, the faith I follow declares it — but not an eternity of anything decreed on the deeds of ten or twenty or thirty years passed among the surroundings in which we happened to be born, weighted with the infirmities and inherited tendencies of a flesh and nature that we did *not* choose.'

It may well be that Haggard's acceptance of the belief of the return of the soul was something which grew over time although he is clearly well versed in the concept, when, at age 30, he writes *She*.

In 1918, following the death of Kipling's son, Haggard records a conversation with Kipling about the 'possibility (and probability) of reincarnation' and in 1923 he discussed with Kipling, writing a book about a 'Jew who incarnates time and again through many periods of life as he seeks redemption after an initial separation from God', in other words expiating his karma. Certainly by 1924 when at Karnak, Haggard is able to write in his diary:

'It is not difficult for the imagination to repeople those pillared halls and courts with the thousands of priests and priestesses who filled their sacred offices in them for uncounted generations.

It is impossible to refrain from wondering where these are today, and, *if they live*, with what feelings they look upon their desecrated fanes. Are they angry – or just contemptuous – having learned the truth and thereby acquired charity?'

Haggard is presumably suggesting here that they might have reincarnated and be able to see what has happened to their temple, or that they can view it from the spirit world. I know that when he was 18 years old Haggard attended Spiritualist séances. He tells us so in his autobiography.

Haggard was a freemason and was a close friend of the Egyptologist Wallis Budge, who, if Haggard and others are to be believed, was well acquainted with fortune tellers and astrologers in Victorian Egypt. His good friend Andrew Lang, to whom *She* was dedicated, was president of the Society for Psychical Research in 1911 and had an extensive knowledge of reincarnation and all matters psychic. Lang was one of the friends with whom Haggard said he was in 'supreme sympathy' and it was Lang who suggested to Haggard that:

'I might have been a monk of Ely and you might have flayed me and composed a saga at first hand. It would have been a good saga but I could not stand being flayed.'

In other words, he was suggesting that they might have shared a previous incarnation some thousand years previously.

Haggard and Lang cooperated in 1880 on the fantasy 'The World's Desire' which featured reincarnation. My question at this point is: Did they merely share the Victorian and

Edwardian gentleman's fascination with the occult per se or did their interest take them into contact with any of the esoteric organisations such as the Golden Dawn?

Haggard knew Sir Oliver Lodge, a firm believer in survival after death – the continuous existence of the human soul is one of the Seven Principles of Spiritualism – and, as we've seen, Haggard discussed reincarnation with Rudyard Kipling. In 1923 he records a conversation with Kipling in his diary and says:

'We talked of many things and as usual I found that our views were practically the same. He is now convinced that the individual human being is not a mere flash in the pan, seen for a moment and lost forever, but an enduring entity that has lived elsewhere and will continue to live, though for a while memory of the past is blotted out.'

I believe I have established beyond doubt that Haggard, despite being a staunch Christian - did come to believe philosophically in reincarnation but what I haven't been able to ascertain are the sources of his information – esoteric, Theosophical, Buddhist or other eastern religions via Andrew Lang - or the exact time-frame in which his ideas developed, and if anyone has any information on this I'd be most grateful to receive it. [My thanks to members who did indeed offer further clues for me to follow up after the talk.]

Haggard mentions reincarnation several times in his autobiography and tells us that 'someone' – sadly he doesn't give a name - told him about three of his incarnations after the launch of *She* in 1887 when he was 31. *She*, of course, is the two thousand year old woman who said:

'I wait now for one I loved to be born again' ... 'Following the law that is stronger than any human plan, he shall find me here, where once he knew me'.

In his autobiography, after telling us that he'd been fascinated with ancient Egypt from boyhood, Haggard says:

'A friend of mine who is a mystic of the first water amused me very much not long ago by forwarding to me a list of my previous incarnations, or rather of three of them, which had been revealed to him in some mysterious way. Two of these were Egyptian, one as a noble in the time of Pepi II who lived somewhere about 4000 BC and the second as one of the minor Pharaohs. In the third according to him I was a Norseman of the seventh century, who was one of the first to sail to the Nile, he returned but to die in sight of his old home. After that, saith the prophet, I slumbered for twelve hundred years until my present life.'

It sounds to me as though his mystic friend read the Akashic Record – something I do when preparing a karmic reading for clients.

Haggard goes on to say at that time: 'I cannot say that I have been converted to my friend's perfectly sincere beliefs, since the reincarnation business seems to me to be quite insusceptible of proof. If it could be proved, how much more interesting it would make our lives. ... Still it is a fact that some men have a strong affinity for certain lands and periods of history, which of course, may be explained by the circumstances that their direct ancestors dwelt in those lands and at those periods. Thus I love the Norse people of the saga and pre-saga times. But I have good reason to believe that my forefathers were Danes. I am however unable to trace any Egyptian ancestor...

[but] with the old Norse and the old Egyptians I am at home. I can enter into their thoughts and feelings. I can even understand their theologies...

Whatever the reason, I seem to myself to understand the Norse fold of anywhere about 800 AD and the Egyptians from Menes down to the Ptolemaic period, much better than I understand the people of the age in which I live. They are more familiar to me.... I positively loathe the Georgian period... on the other hand I have the greatest sympathy with savages. Zulus, for instance, with whom I always get on extremely well. *Perhaps my mystical friend has left a savage incarnation out of his list.*

So, at the time of writing his autobiography in 1913, Haggard seems open to the idea of having had past lives even though he's not totally convinced, and he's expressing feelings and dilemmas that are common today.

A fascination with certain places is seen as one of the indications of having possibly lived there previously, as is a revulsion against a place. If Haggard were one of my client's I'd suggest he'd had a difficult Georgian life, the memory of which his soul had tried to wipe from the record as a loathesome period.

I'd also agree with Rudyard Kipling who, according to Cohen, suggests that *The Wanderer's Necklace*, a Norse saga of reincarnation, showed that Haggard had the ability to think or dream himself back into a previous incarnation, even though it may not necessarily have been an incarnation of his *own*.

Ancestral memory, which Haggard mentions with regard to his Norse connections, is one of the explanations put forward for alleged past life memories and, of course, it is difficult to rule it out. But it is equally difficult to say that it is the only explanation.

It's the same with crypto-amnesia or para-amnesia – a kind of false remembering built out of what has been read before – and Haggard certainly read his share of Egyptology from a very young age. His description of writing of *She* is one that will be familiar to many novelists, the sense of being taken over by the story as though you were merely a channel for it or, as Kipling called it, a telephone wire.

As Kipling put it to Haggard:

*'You didn't write She, you know'.. something wrote it through you.'*

As Haggard describes it:

*'the whole romance was completed in a little over six weeks. Moreover, it was never rewritten, and the manuscript carries but few corrections. The fact is that it was written at white heat, almost without rest, and that is the best way to compose.'*

*Again I find myself identifying with Haggard, for this is the way most of my novel Tom Clouds was written. The first five thousand words or so were scribbled down in less than an hour in Luxor during a sandstorm that triggered memories for me. One of which was being stretched out full length in front of a statue of the goddess Sekhmet with my skin being flayed by stinging sand. In my present life I can't imagine making this kind of obeisance to anyone, but when I went to her temple the next day, it was all I could do to refrain from throwing myself out in front of her. The remaining 90,000 or so words of my novel were written in three weeks, when the character of Megan took over.*

*Megan borrowed many of my memories but added a story of her own. The historical novelist Joan Grant wrote in this way and believed she was recording her own past lives, as did Barbara Erskine and Anya Seton.*

*My experience accords with Haggard who says:*

*'I remember that when I sat down to the task my ideas as to its development were of the vaguest. The only clear notion that I had in my head was that of an immortal woman inspired by an immortal love. All the rest shaped itself round this figure. And it came — faster than my poor aching hand could set it down.'*

Ancestral memory was something Haggard would return to as a possible explanation when writing his autobiography in 1912 together with other explanations, as we'll see - one of which was that he was relaying pictures of his own incarnations:

To quote Haggard in 1912 yet again:

'As I am touching on mystical subjects, probably for the last time, I will instance here a series of imaginings which developed themselves in my mind at intervals over a period of several months early in the present year. I noted them down at the time and, except for an addendum to No. 4, give them without alteration, as I think it best not to interfere with the original words, on which, perhaps unconsciously, I might attempt to improve. Indeed it would be easy to make a story out of each of these mind-pictures. At the head of them I have stated the alternative explanations which occur to me. Personally I favour — indeed I might almost say that I accept — the last.' [ - subconscious invention]. '

What he describes are images that are typical in the hypnopompic state - the state between sleeping and waking - which some people believe can access the collective unconscious or the Akashic Record.

Haggard again - and this is another long quote – says: 'During the past few months there have come to me, generally between sleeping and waking, or so it seemed, certain pictures. These pictures, it would appear, might be attributed to either of the three following causes:

- (1) Memories of some central incident that occurred in a previous incarnation.
- (2) Racial memories of events that had happened to forefathers.
- (3) Subconscious imagination and invention.

Probably the last of these alternatives is the one which most people would accept, since it must be remembered that there is nothing in any one of these tableaux vivants which I could not have imagined — say as an incident of a romance.

Now, before I forget them, I will describe the pictures as well as I can.

1. A kind of bay in a thicket formed of such woods as are common in England today, especially hazel, as they would appear towards the end of June, in full leaf but still very green. A stream somewhere near. At back, in a tall bank, something like the Bath Hills, the mouth of a cavern. About thirty feet from this a rough hut made of poles meeting on a central ridge (I have forgotten how it was thatched). In front of the hut a fire burning, and an idea of something being cooked by a skin-clad woman, I standing by, a youngish man, tall; children playing round, and notably a boy of about ten standing on the hither side of the fire, his nakedness half covered by the pelt of some animal, his skin, as he lifts his arms, very white. A general sense of something about to happen.

2. A round hut, surrounded by a fence, standing on a grassy knoll, no trees about. A black woman moving within the fence and, I think, some children; myself there also, as a black

man. An alarm below, which causes me to take a spear and run out. A fight with attackers; attackers driven off, but I receive a spear-thrust right through the middle below the breast, and stagger up the slope mortally wounded back into the enclosure round the hut, where I fall into the arms of the woman and die.

3. A great palace built in the Egyptian style. Myself, a man of about thirty, in quaint and beautiful robes wound rather tightly round the body, walking at night up and down some half-enclosed and splendid chamber through which the air flows freely. A beautiful young woman with violet eyes creeps into the place like one who is afraid of being seen, creeps up to me, who starts at seeing her and appear to indicate that she should go. Thereon the woman draws herself up and, instead of going, throws herself straight into the man's arms.

4. An idea of boundless snows and great cold. Then the interior of a timber-built hall, say forty feet or more in length, a table by a doorway and on it three or four large dark-coloured trout, such as might come from a big lake. Wooden vessels about, brightly painted. A fire burning in the centre of the hall, with no chimney. On the farther side of the fire a bench, and on the bench a young woman of not more than two— or three-and-twenty, apparently the same woman as she of the Egyptian picture, or very like her, with the identical large violet eyes, although rather taller. She is clothed in a tight-fitting grey dress, quite plain and without ornament, made of some rough frieze and showing the outline of the figure beneath. The hair is fair, but I cannot remember exactly how it was arranged. The woman is evidently in great grief. She sits, her elbow resting on her knee, her chin in her hand, and stares hopelessly into the fire. Presently something attracts her attention, for she looks towards the door by the table, which opens and admits through it a tall man, who, I know, is myself, wearing armour, for I catch the sheen of it in the firelight. The woman springs from the bench, runs round the fire, apparently screaming, and throws herself on to the breast of the man.

The general impression left is that she had believed him to be dead when he, probably her husband, appeared alive and well.'

Haggard later adds an addendum:

'Some months later I was favoured with an impression of another scene set in the same surroundings. In this picture postscript, if I may call it so, the identical man and woman, now persons of early middle age, were standing together in bitter sorrow over the doubled-up

and fully-dressed body of a beautiful lad of about eighteen years of age. Although I saw no wet upon his clothes I think that he had been drowned.)

5. The mouth of a tunnel or mine-adit running into a bare hillside strewn with rocks and debris. Standing outside the tunnel a short, little woman of about twenty-five, with black hair, brown eyes, and brownish but not black skin, lightly clad in some nondescript kind of garment. Resting on her, his arms about her shoulders, an elderly man, very thin and short, with a sad, finely-cut face and sparse grizzled beard, wearing a dingy loin-cloth. The man's right foot covered with blood, and so badly crushed that one of the bones projects from the instep.'

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, using past-life-regression therapy we'd look very carefully at, and reframe, such an incident, since past life carryovers of injuries such as this, appear to cause a weakness in the present life. Haggard for example suffered from gout. Haggard goes on,

'The woman weeping. By his side on the ground a kind of basket filled with lumps of ore, designed to be carried on the back and fitted with two flat loops of hide, with a breast-strap connecting them, something on the principle of children's toy reins. Growing near by a plant of the aloe tribe, the bottom leaves dead, and some of those above scratched in their fleshy substance, as though for amusement.

Walking up the slope towards the pair a coarse, strong, vigorous, black-bearded man with projecting eyes. He is clothed in white robes and wears a queer-shaped hat or cap, I think with a point to it. From an ornamented belt about his middle hangs a short sword in a scabbard, with a yellowish handle ending in a knob shaped like to the head of a lion. He carries over his head a painted umbrella or sunshade that will not shut up, and is made either of thin strips of wood or of some kind of canvas stretched on a wooden frame.

Haggard notes that:

General idea connected with the dream is that this man is an overseer of slaves who is about to kill the injured person as useless and take the woman for himself. She might be the daughter of the injured man, or possibly a wife a good deal younger than he. In any case she is intimately connected with him. Further idea. That the injured man was once an individual of consequence who has been reduced to slavery by some invading and more powerful race.

The characteristics of the site of the picture remind me of Cyprus.'

Haggard goes on to describe the well-known Spiritualist Sir Oliver Lodge's reaction to these pictures, saying in the autobiography:

'I described these tableaux to Sir Oliver Lodge when I met him in the Athenaeum not long ago, and asked him his opinion concerning them. He was interested, but replied that if they had appeared to him he would have thought more of them than he did as they had appeared to me, because he said that he lacked imagination. *The curious little details such as that of the dark-coloured trout on the table in No. 4, and that of the scratchings on the aloe leaves in No. 5,* seemed to strike him very much, as did the fact that all the scenes were such as might very well, and indeed doubtless have occurred again and again in the course of our long human history, from the time of the cave-dwellers onwards. Probably if we could trace our ancestors back to the beginning, we should find that on one occasion or another they have happened to some of them. I may add that by far the prettiest and most idyllic of these pictures was that of the primitive family in the midst of its green setting of hazel boughs by the mouth of the cave. Only over it, as I have said, like a thunder-cloud brooded the sense of something terrible that was about to happen. I wonder what it was.'

Experiences such as these would be very familiar to people who experience *déjà vu* – a sense of having being in a place or event in another time, or who undergo spontaneous regression experiences to what appear to be their own past lives, or who are seemingly born with knowledge of their past lives. Such experiences carry a clarity of detail, like Haggard's scratches on an aloe leaf, detail that is not usually available in ordinary 'imaginings'. During hypnopompic imagery, such details quickly fade as waking consciousness takes over so it sounds to me that something more could be happening here, a breaking through of past life memories or an accessing of the Akashic Record.

An enormous amount of research has been carried out by scientists such as Professor Ian Stephenson into reincarnation memories, many of which contain uncanny coincidences between the different lives, if indeed coincidences they be and these 'imaginings' of Haggard's are typical of what occurs.

I was interested to see that in the preface to Shirley Addey's book on Haggard and Egypt, Haggard's grandson Mark Cheyne refers to 'the interpretation of the causes of these dreams' providing a 'logical explanation for his grandfather's uncanny ability to delve into the language and conditions of the circumstances of the people about whom he wrote so vividly'.

Unfortunately, Cheyne doesn't say to which of Haggard's three suggested causes of the images, he is referring - memories from previous incarnations, memories from events experienced by forefathers or thirdly, from subconscious imagination and invention.

But to return to my search for the source of Haggard's reincarnation material, material which incidentally also appears in *The Wanderer's Necklace*, *Morning Star* and other books.

Philip Carter of the Rosicrucian Society of Canada has suggested that the source of Haggard's reincarnation material comes from Theosophy. As Carter says 'certain passages in his work are pure theosophy'.

Unfortunately although I found the text of his talk, it didn't include the handout identifying the exact passages that were, allegedly, theosophical. It is clear that Madame Blavatsky, the Founder of the Theosophical Society, had read Haggard; she referred in 1887 to 'the thrice famous *She* by Rider Haggard' and Haggard himself refers in passing to Theosophy in his 'On Religion' essay. But this does not necessarily mean that he was a Theosophist or had a close knowledge of it. [According to a member of the Haggard Society, this was indeed the case and it is something I will be following up.] If he was, he is irritatingly reticent about it in his autobiography. As a member of the Athenaeum Club he would have had access to the club's extensive library and, with Lang's interest in all things psychical, and with members such as W.B. Yeats being part of the Golden Dawn and other esoteric organisations, it may be that the library or indeed, Haggard's own, included works by Blavatsky and other Theosophists.

At this stage, all I can say is that Haggard's experiences are very familiar to people working in the reincarnation field in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and indicate to me that in at least six of his novels, he incorporated reincarnational memories of the time.

But whether these were personal or collective it is difficult to ascertain without more information as to his sources and mode of working.

Perhaps we should leave the final word to Haggard in this continuation of the quotation from *On Religion* with which I began:

'Over a great period of many different existences, selected according to the elective fitness of the ego, matters and opportunities would equalise themselves, and that ego would follow the path it selected to its inevitable end. But one life of a maximum of thirty years full-stopped with *doom* !'

And he ends with an exclamation mark.