

The Wizard

By

H. Rider Haggard

DEDICATION

To the Memory of the Child

Nada Burnham,

who "bound all to her" and, while her father cut his way through the hordes of the Ingobo Regiment, perished of the hardships of war at Buluwayo on 19th May, 1896, I dedicate these tales--and more particularly the last, that of a Faith which triumphed over savagery and death.

H. Rider Haggard.

Ditchingham.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Of the three stories that comprise this volume[*], one, "The Wizard," a tale of victorious faith, first appeared some years ago as a Christmas Annual. Another, "Elissa," is an attempt, difficult enough owing to the scantiness of the material left to us by time, to recreate the life of the ancient Poenician Zimbabwe, whose ruins still stand in Rhodesia, and, with the addition of the necessary love story, to suggest circumstances such as might have brought about or accompanied its fall at the hands of the surrounding savage tribes. The third, "Black Heart and White Heart," is a story of the courtship, trials and final union of a pair of Zulu lovers in the time of King Cetywayo.

THE WIZARD

CHAPTER I

THE DEPUTATION

Has the age of miracle quite gone by, or is it still possible to the Voice of Faith calling aloud upon the earth to wring from the dumb heavens an audible answer to its prayer? Does the promise uttered by the Master of mankind upon the eve of the end--"Whoso that believeth in Me, the works that I do he shall do also . . . and whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do;"--still hold good to such as do ask and do believe?

Let those who care to study the history of the Rev. Thomas Owen, and of that strange man who carried on and completed his work, answer this question according to their judgment.

The time was a Sunday afternoon in summer, and the place a church in the Midland counties. It was a beautiful church, ancient and spacious; moreover, it had recently been restored at great cost. Seven or eight hundred people could have found sittings in it, and doubtless they

had done so when Busscombe was a large manufacturing town, before the failure of the coal supply and other causes drove away its trade. Now it was much what it had been in the time of the Normans, a little agricultural village with a population of 300 souls. Out of this population, including the choir boys, exactly thirty-nine had elected to attend church on this particular Sunday; and of these, three were fast asleep and four were dozing.

The Rev. Thomas Owen counted them from his seat in the chancel, for another clergyman was preaching; and, as he counted, bitterness and disappointment took hold of him. The preacher was a "Deputation," sent by one of the large missionary societies to arouse the indifferent to a sense of duty towards their unconverted black brethren in Africa, and incidentally to collect cash to be spent in the conversion of the said brethren. The Rev. Thomas Owen himself suggested the visit of the Deputation, and had laboured hard to secure him a good audience. But the beauty of the weather, or terror of the inevitable subscription, prevailed against him. Hence his disappointment.

"Well," he thought, with a sigh, "I have done my best, and I must make it up out of my own pocket."

Then he settled himself to listen to the sermon.

The preacher, a battered-looking individual of between fifty and sixty years of age, was gaunt with recent sickness, patient and unimaginative

in aspect. He preached extemporarily, with the aid of notes; and it cannot be said that his discourse was remarkable for interest, at any rate in its beginning. Doubtless the sparse congregation, so prone to slumber, discouraged him; for offering exhortations to empty benches is but weary work. Indeed he was meditating the advisability of bringing his argument to an abrupt conclusion when, chancing to glance round, he became aware that he had at least one sympathetic listener, his host, the Rev. Thomas Owen.

From that moment the sermon improved by degrees, till at length it reached a really high level of excellence. Ceasing from rhetoric, the speaker began to tell of his own experience and sufferings in the Cause amongst savage tribes; for he himself was a missionary of many years standing. He told how once he and a companion had been sent to a nation, who named themselves the Sons of Fire because their god was the lightning, if indeed they could be said to boast any gods other than the Spear and the King. In simple language he narrated his terrible adventures among these savages, the murder of his companion by command of the Council of Wizards, and his own flight for his life; a tale so interesting and vivid that even the bucolic sleepers awakened and listened open-mouthed.

"But this is by the way," he went on; "for my Society does not ask you to subscribe towards the conversion of the Children of Fire. Until that people is conquered--which very likely will not be for generations, seeing that they live in Central Africa, occupying a territory that

white men do not desire--no missionary will dare again to visit them."

At this moment something caused him to look a second time at Thomas Owen. He was leaning forward in his place listening eagerly, and a strange light filled the large, dark eyes that shone in the pallor of his delicate, nervous face.

"There is a man who would dare, if he were put to it," thought the Deputation to himself. Then he ended his sermon.

That evening the two men sat at dinner in the rectory. It was a very fine rectory, beautifully furnished; for Owen was a man of taste which he had the means to gratify. Also, although they were alone, the dinner was good--so good that the poor broken-down missionary, sipping his unaccustomed port, a vintage wine, sighed aloud in admiration and involuntary envy.

"What is the matter?" asked Owen.

"Nothing, Mr. Owen;" then, of a sudden thawing into candour, he added: "that is, everything. Heaven forgive me; but I, who enjoy your hospitality, am envious of you. Don't think too hardly of me; I have a large family to support, and if only you knew what a struggle my life is, and has been for the last twenty years, you would not, I am sure. But you have never experienced it, and could not understand. 'The labourer is worthy of his hire.' Well, my hire is under two hundred a

year, and eight of us must live--or starve--on it. And I have worked, ay, until my health is broken. A labourer indeed! I am a very hodman, a spiritual Sisyphus. And now I must go back to carry my load and roll my stone again and again among those hopeless savages till I die of it--till I die of it!"

"At least it is a noble life and death!" exclaimed Owen, a sudden fire of enthusiasm burning in his dark eyes.

"Yes, viewed from a distance. Were you asked to leave this living of two thousand a year--I see that is what they put it at in Crockford--with its English comforts and easy work, that you might lead that life and attain that death, then you would think differently. But why should I bore you with such talk? Thank Heaven that your lines are cast in pleasant places. Yes, please, I will take one more glass; it does me good."

"Tell me some more about that tribe you were speaking of in your sermon, the 'Sons of Fire' I think you called them," said Owen, as he passed him the decanter.

So, with an eloquence induced by the generous wine and a quickened imagination, the Deputation told him--told him many strange things and terrible. For this people was an awful people: vigorous in mind and body, and warriors from generation to generation, but superstition-ridden and cruel. They lived in the far interior, some

months' journey by boat and ox-waggon from the coast, and of white men and their ways they knew but little.

"How many of them are there?" asked Owen.

"Who can say?" he answered. "Nearly half-a-million, perhaps; at least they pretend that they can put sixty thousand men under arms."

"And did they treat you badly when you first visited them?"

"Not at first. They received us civilly enough; and on a given day we were requested to explain to the king and the Council of Wizards the religion which we came to teach. All that day we explained and all the next--or rather my friend did, for I knew very little of the language--and they listened with great interest. At last the chief of the wizards and the first prophet to the king rose to question us. He was named Hokosa, a tall, thin man, with a spiritual face and terrible calm eyes.

"'You speak well, son of a White Man,' he said, 'but let us pass from words to deeds. You tell us that this God of yours, whom you desire that we should take as our God, so that you may become His chief prophets in the land, was a wizard such as we are, though grater than we are; for not only did He know the past and the future as we do, but also He could cure those who were smitten with hopeless sickness, and raise those who were dead, which we cannot do. You tell us, moreover, that by faith

those who believe on Him can do works as great as He did, and that you do believe on Him. Therefore we will put you to the proof. Ho! there, lead forth that evil one.'

"As he spoke a man was placed before us, one who had been convicted of witchcraft or some other crime.

"Kill him!' said Hokosa.

"There was a faint cry, a scuffle, a flashing of spears, and the man lay still before us.

"Now, followers of the new God,' said Hokosa, 'raise him from the dead as your Master did!'

"In vain did we offer explanations.

"Peace!' said Hokosa at length, 'your words weary us. Look now, either you have preached to us a false god and are liars, or you are traitors to the King you preach, since, lacking faith in Him, you cannot do such works as He gives power to do to those who have faith in Him. Out of your own mouths are you judged, White Men. Choose which horn of the bull you will, you hang to one of them, and it shall pierce you. This is the sentence of the king, I speak it who am the king's mouth: That you, White Man, who have spoken to us and cheated us these two weary days, be put to death, and that you, his companion who have been silent, be

driven from the land.'

"I can hardly bear to tell the rest of it, Mr. Owen. They gave my poor friend ten minutes to 'talk to his Spirit,' then they speared him before my face. After it was over, Hokosa spoke to me, saying:--

"Go back, White Man, to those who sent you, and tell them the words of the Sons of Fire: That they have listened to the message of peace, and though they are a people of warriors, yet they thank them for that message, for in itself it sounds good and beautiful in their ears, if it be true. Tell them that having proved you liars, they dealt with you as all honest men seek that liars should be dealt with. Tell them that they desire to hear more of this matter, and if one can be sent to them who has no false tongue; who in all things fulfills the promises of his lips, that they will hearken to him and treat him well, but that for such as you they keep a spear."

"And who went after you got back?" asked Owen, who was listening with the deepest interest.

"Who went? Do you suppose that there are many mad clergymen in Africa, Mr. Owen? Nobody went."

"And yet," said Owen, speaking more to himself than to his guest, "the man Hokosa was right, and the Christian who of a truth believes the promises of our religion should trust to them and go."

"Then perhaps you would like to undertake the mission, Mr. Owen," said the Deputation briskly; for the reflection stung him, unintentional as it was.

Owen started.

"That is a new idea," he said. "And now perhaps you wish to go to bed; it is past eleven o'clock."