

When the World Shook

By

H. Rider Haggard

WHEN THE WORLD SHOOK

Being an Account of the Great Adventure of Bastin, Bickley and Arbuthnot

by H. Rider Haggard

DEDICATION

Ditchingham, 1918.

MY DEAR CURZON,

More than thirty years ago you tried to protect me, then a stranger to you, from one of the falsest and most malignant accusations ever made against a writer.

So complete was your exposure of the methods of those at work to blacken a person whom they knew to be innocent, that, as you will remember, they refused to publish your analysis which destroyed their charges and, incidentally, revealed their motives.

Although for this reason vindication came otherwise, your kindness is one that I have never forgotten, since, whatever the immediate issue of any effort, in the end it is the intention that avails.

Therefore in gratitude and memory I ask you to accept this romance, as I know that you do not disdain the study of romance in the intervals of your Imperial work.

The application of its parable to our state and possibilities--beneath or beyond these glimpses of the moon--I leave to your discernment.

Believe me,

Ever sincerely yours,

H. RIDER HAGGARD.

To

The Earl Curzon of Kedleston, K.G.

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WHEN THE WORLD SHOOK

Chapter I. Arbuthnot Describes Himself

I suppose that I, Humphrey Arbuthnot, should begin this history in which Destiny has caused me to play so prominent a part, with some short account of myself and of my circumstances.

I was born forty years ago in this very Devonshire village in which I write, but not in the same house. Now I live in the Priory, an ancient place and a fine one in its way, with its panelled rooms, its beautiful gardens where, in this mild climate, in addition to our own, flourish so many plants which one would only expect to find in countries that lie nearer to the sun, and its green, undulating park studded with great timber trees. The view, too, is perfect; behind and around the rich Devonshire landscape with its hills and valleys and its scarped faces of red sandstone, and at a distance in front, the sea. There are little towns quite near too, that live for the most part on visitors, but these are so hidden away by the contours of the ground that from the Priory one cannot see them. Such is Fulcombe where I live, though for obvious reasons I do not give it its real name.

Many years ago my father, the Rev. Humphrey Arbuthnot, whose only child

I am, after whom also I am named Humphrey, was the vicar of this place with which our family is said to have some rather vague hereditary connection. If so, it was severed in the Carolian times because my ancestors fought on the side of Parliament.

My father was a recluse, and a widower, for my mother, a Scotswoman, died at or shortly after my birth. Being very High Church for those days he was not popular with the family that owned the Priory before me. Indeed its head, a somewhat vulgar person of the name of Enfield who had made money in trade, almost persecuted him, as he was in a position to do, being the local magnate and the owner of the rectorial tithes.

I mention this fact because owing to it as a boy I made up my mind that one day I would buy that place and sit in his seat, a wild enough idea at the time. Yet it became engrained in me, as do such aspirations of our youth, and when the opportunity arose in after years I carried it out. Poor old Enfield! He fell on evil fortunes, for in trying to bolster up a favourite son who was a gambler, a spendthrift, and an ungrateful scamp, in the end he was practically ruined and when the bad times came, was forced to sell the Fulcombe estate. I think of him kindly now, for after all he was good to me and gave me many a day's shooting and leave to fish for trout in the river.

By the poor people, however, of all the district round, for the parish itself is very small, my father was much beloved, although he did practise confession, wear vestments and set lighted candles on the

altar, and was even said to have openly expressed the wish, to which however he never attained, that he could see a censer swinging in the chancel. Indeed the church which, as monks built it, is very large and fine, was always full on Sundays, though many of the worshippers came from far away, some of them doubtless out of curiosity because of its papistical repute, also because, in a learned fashion, my father's preaching was very good indeed.

For my part I feel that I owe much to these High-Church views. They opened certain doors to me and taught me something of the mysteries which lie at the back of all religions and therefore have their home in the inspired soul of man whence religions are born. Only the pity is that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he never discovers, never even guesses at that entombed aspiration, never sinks a shaft down on to this secret but most precious vein of ore.

I have said that my father was learned; but this is a mild description, for never did I know anyone quite so learned. He was one of those men who is so good all round that he became pre-eminent in nothing. A classic of the first water, a very respectable mathematician, an expert in theology, a student of sundry foreign languages and literature in his lighter moments, an inquirer into sociology, a theoretical musician though his playing of the organ excruciated most people because it was too correct, a really first-class authority upon flint instruments and the best grower of garden vegetables in the county, also of apples--such were some of his attainments. That was what made his sermons so popular,

since at times one or the other of these subjects would break out into them, his theory being that God spoke to us through all of these things.

But if I began to drift into an analysis of my father's abilities, I should never stop. It would take a book to describe them. And yet mark this, with them all his name is as dead to the world to-day as though he had never been. Light reflected from a hundred facets dissipates itself in space and is lost; that concentrated in one tremendous ray pierces to the stars.

Now I am going to be frank about myself, for without frankness what is the value of such a record as this? Then it becomes simply another convention, or rather conventional method of expressing the octroon kind of truths with which the highly civilised races feed themselves, as fastidious ladies eat cakes and bread from which all but the smallest particle of nourishment has been extracted.

The fact is, therefore, that I inherited most of my father's abilities, except his love for flint instruments which always bored me to distraction, because although they are by association really the most human of things, somehow to me they never convey any idea of humanity. In addition I have a practical side which he lacked; had he possessed it surely he must have become an archbishop instead of dying the vicar of an unknown parish. Also I have a spiritual sense, mayhap mystical would be a better term, which with all this religion was missing from my father's nature.

For I think that notwithstanding his charity and devotion he never quite got away from the shell of things, never cracked it and set his teeth in the kernel which alone can feed our souls. His keen intellect, to take an example, recognised every one of the difficulties of our faith and flashed hither and thither in the darkness, seeking explanation, seeking light, trying to reconcile, to explain. He was not great enough to put all this aside and go straight to the informing Soul beneath that strives to express itself everywhere, even through those husks which are called the World, the Flesh and the Devil, and as yet does not always quite succeed.

It is this boggling over exteriors, this peering into pitfalls, this desire to prove that what such senses as we have tell us is impossible, is in fact possible, which causes the overthrow of many an earnest, seeking heart and renders its work, conducted on false lines, quite nugatory. These will trust to themselves and their own intelligence and not be content to spring from the cliffs of human experience into the everlasting arms of that Infinite which are stretched out to receive them and to give them rest and the keys of knowledge. When will man learn what was taught to him of old, that faith is the only plank wherewith he can float upon this sea and that his miserable works avail him nothing; also that it is a plank made of many sorts of wood, perhaps to suit our different weights?

So to be honest, in a sense I believe myself to be my father's superior,

and I know that he agreed with me. Perhaps this is owing to the blood of my Scotch mother which mixed well with his own; perhaps because the essential spirit given to me, though cast in his mould, was in fact quite different--or of another alloy. Do we, I wonder, really understand that there are millions and billions of these alloys, so many indeed that Nature, or whatever is behind Nature, never uses the same twice over? That is why no two human beings are or ever will be quite identical. Their flesh, the body of their humiliation, is identical in all, any chemist will prove it to you, but that which animates the flesh is distinct and different because it comes from the home of that infinite variety which is necessary to the ultimate evolution of the good and bad that we symbolise as heaven and hell.

Further, I had and to a certain extent still have another advantage over my father, which certainly came to me from my mother, who was, as I judge from all descriptions and such likenesses as remain of her, an extremely handsome woman. I was born much better looking. He was small and dark, a little man with deep-set eyes and beetling brows. I am also dark, but tall above the average, and well made. I do not know that I need say more about my personal appearance, to me not a very attractive subject, but the fact remains that they called me "handsome Humphrey" at the University, and I was the captain of my college boat and won many prizes at athletic sports when I had time to train for them.

Until I went up to Oxford my father educated me, partly because he knew that he could do it better than anyone else, and partly to save school

expenses. The experiment was very successful, as my love of all outdoor sports and of any small hazardous adventure that came to my hand, also of associating with fisherfolk whom the dangers of the deep make men among men, saved me from becoming a milksop. For the rest I learned more from my father, whom I always desired to please because I loved him, than I should have done at the best and most costly of schools. This was shown when at last I went to college with a scholarship, for there I did very well indeed, as search would still reveal.

Here I had better set out some of my shortcomings, which in their sum have made a failure of me. Yes, a failure in the highest sense, though I trust what Stevenson calls "a faithful failure." These have their root in fastidiousness and that lack of perseverance, which really means a lack of faith, again using the word in its higher and wider sense. For if one had real faith one would always persevere, knowing that in every work undertaken with high aim, there is an element of nobility, however humble and unrecognised that work may seem to be. God after all is the God of Work, it is written large upon the face of the Universe. I will not expand upon the thought; it would lead me too far afield, but those who have understanding will know what I mean.

As regards what I interpret as fastidiousness, this is not very easy to express. Perhaps a definition will help. I am like a man with an over-developed sense of smell, who when walking through a foreign city, however clean and well kept, can always catch the evil savours that are inseparable from such cities. More, his keen perception of them

interferes with all other perceptions and spoils his walks. The result is that in after years, whenever he thinks of that beautiful city, he remembers, not its historic buildings or its wide boulevards, or whatever it has to boast, but rather its ancient, fish-like smell. At least he remembers that first owing to this defect in his temperament.

So it is with everything. A lovely woman is spoiled for such a one because she eats too much or has too high a voice; he does not care for his shooting because the scenery is flat, or for his fishing because the gnats bite as well as the trout. In short he is out of tune with the world as it is. Moreover, this is a quality which, where it exists, cannot be overcome; it affects day-labourers as well as gentlemen at large. It is bred in the bone.

Probably the second failure-breeding fault, lack of perseverance, has its roots in the first, at any rate in my case. At least on leaving college with some reputation, I was called to the Bar where, owing to certain solicitor and other connections, I had a good opening. Also, owing to the excellence of my memory and powers of work, I began very well, making money even during my first year. Then, as it happened, a certain case came my way and, my leader falling ill suddenly after it was opened, was left in my hands. The man whose cause I was pleading was, I think, one of the biggest scoundrels it is possible to conceive. It was a will case and if he won, the effect would be to beggar two most estimable middle-aged women who were justly entitled to the property, to which end personally I am convinced he had committed forgery; the

perjury that accompanied it I do not even mention.

Well, he did win, thanks to me, and the estimable middle-aged ladies were beggared, and as I heard afterwards, driven to such extremities that one of them died of her misery and the other became a lodging-house keeper. The details do not matter, but I may explain that these ladies were unattractive in appearance and manner and broke down beneath my cross-examination which made them appear to be telling falsehoods, whereas they were only completely confused. Further, I invented an ingenious theory of the facts which, although the judge regarded it with suspicion, convinced an unusually stupid jury who gave me their verdict.

Everybody congratulated me and at the time I was triumphant, especially as my leader had declared that our case was impossible. Afterwards, however, my conscience smote me sorely, so much so that arguing from the false premise of this business, I came to the conclusion that the practice of the Law was not suited to an honest man. I did not take the large view that such matters average themselves up and that if I had done harm in this instance, I might live to do good in many others, and perhaps become a just judge, even a great judge. Here I may mention that in after years, when I grew rich, I rescued that surviving old lady from her lodging-house, although to this day she does not know the name of her anonymous friend. So by degrees, without saying anything, for I kept on my chambers, I slipped out of practice, to the great disappointment of everybody connected with me, and took to authorship.

A marvel came to pass, my first book was an enormous success. The whole world talked of it. A leading journal, delighted to have discovered someone, wrote it up; other journals followed suit to be in the movement. One of them, I remember, which had already dismissed it with three or four sneering lines, came out with a second and two-column notice. It sold like wildfire and I suppose had some merits, for it is still read, though few know that I wrote it, since fortunately it was published under a pseudonym.

Again I was much elated and set to work to write another and, as I believe, a much better book. But jealousies had been excited by this leaping into fame of a totally unknown person, which were, moreover, accentuated through a foolish article that I published in answer to some criticisms, wherein I spoke my mind with an insane freedom and biting sarcasm. Indeed I was even mad enough to quote names and to give the example of the very powerful journal which at first carped at my work and then gushed over it when it became the fashion. All of this made me many bitter enemies, as I found out when my next book appeared.

It was torn to shreds, it was reviled as subversive of morality and religion, good arrows in those days. It was called puerile, half-educated stuff--I half-educated! More, an utterly false charge of plagiarism was cooked up against me and so well and venomously run that vast numbers of people concluded that I was a thief of the lowest order. Lastly, my father, from whom the secret could no longer be kept, sternly disapproved of both these books which I admit were written from a very

radical and somewhat anti-church point of view. The result was our first quarrel and before it was made up, he died suddenly.

Now again fastidiousness and my lack of perseverance did their work, and solemnly I swore that I would never write another book, an oath which I have kept till this moment, at least so far as publication is concerned, and now break only because I consider it my duty so to do and am not animated by any pecuniary object.

Thus came to an end my second attempt at carving out a career. By now I had grown savage and cynical, rather revengeful also, I fear. Knowing myself to possess considerable abilities in sundry directions, I sat down, as it were, to think things over and digest my past experiences. Then it was that the truth of a very ancient adage struck upon my mind, namely, that money is power. Had I sufficient money I could laugh at unjust critics for example; indeed they or their papers would scarcely dare to criticise me for fear lest it should be in my power to do them a bad turn. Again I could follow my own ideas in life and perhaps work good in the world, and live in such surroundings as commended themselves to me. It was as clear as daylight, but--how to make the money?

I had some capital as the result of my father's death, about £8,000 in all, plus a little more that my two books had brought in. In what way could I employ it to the best advantage? I remembered that a cousin of my father and therefore my own, was a successful stock-broker, also

that there had been some affection between them. I went to him, he was a good, easy-natured man who was frankly glad to see me, and offered to put £5,000 into his business, for I was not minded to risk every thing I had, if he would give me a share in the profits. He laughed heartily at my audacity.

"Why, my boy," he said, "being totally inexperienced at this game, you might lose us more than that in a month. But I like your courage, I like your courage, and the truth is that I do want help. I will think it over and write to you."

He thought it over and in the end offered to try me for a year at a fixed salary with a promise of some kind of a partnership if I suited him. Meanwhile my £5,000 remained in my pocket.

I accepted, not without reluctance since with the impatience of youth I wanted everything at once. I worked hard in that office and soon mastered the business, for my knowledge of figures--I had taken a first-class mathematical degree at college--came to my aid, as in a way did my acquaintance with Law and Literature. Moreover I had a certain aptitude for what is called high finance. Further, Fortune, as usual, showed me a favourable face.

In one year I got the partnership with a small share in the large profits of the business. In two the partner above me retired, and I took his place with a third share of the firm. In three my cousin, satisfied

that it was in able hands, began to cease his attendance at the office and betook himself to gardening which was his hobby. In four I paid him out altogether, although to do this I had to borrow money on our credit, for by agreement the title of the firm was continued. Then came that extraordinary time of boom which many will remember to their cost. I made a bold stroke and won. On a certain Saturday when the books were made up, I found that after discharging all liabilities, I should not be worth more than £20,000. On the following Saturday but two when the books were made up, I was worth £153,000! L'appetit vient en mangeant. It seemed nothing to me when so many were worth millions.

For the next year I worked as few have done, and when I struck a balance at the end of it, I found that on the most conservative estimate I was the owner of a million and a half in hard cash, or its equivalent. I was so tired out that I remember this discovery did not excite me at all. I felt utterly weary of all wealth-hunting and of the City and its ways. Moreover my old fastidiousness and lack of perseverance re-asserted themselves. I reflected, rather late in the day perhaps, on the ruin that this speculation was bringing to thousands, of which some lamentable instances had recently come to my notice, and once more considered whether it were a suitable career for an upright man. I had wealth; why should I not take it and enjoy life?

Also--and here my business acumen came in, I was sure that these times could not last. It is easy to make money on a rising market, but when it is falling the matter is very different. In five minutes I made up

my mind. I sent for my junior partners, for I had taken in two, and told them that I intended to retire at once. They were dismayed both at my loss, for really I was the firm, and because, as they pointed out, if I withdrew all my capital, there would not be sufficient left to enable them to carry on.

One of them, a blunt and honest man, said to my face that it would be dishonourable of me to do so. I was inclined to answer him sharply, then remembered that his words were true.

"Very well," I said, "I will leave you £600,000 on which you shall pay me five per cent interest, but no share of the profits."

On these terms we dissolved the partnership and in a year they had lost the £600,000, for the slump came with a vengeance. It saved them, however, and to-day they are earning a reasonable income. But I have never asked them for that £600,000.