1887-03-30 to the Editor of the Court and Society Review

Printed letter, *Court and Society Review* (30 March 1887, page 305), 1,105 words

Sir,

The papers are very full of Mr. Rider Haggard, his travels, his plagiarisms, and the number of editions sold. In Saturday's *Pall Mall*, Mrs. Rider Haggard writes that her husband not only had never read, but had never even heard of, Moore's *Epicurean*. Mr. J.C. Longman corroborates this statement, and Mr. Stanley Little corroborates Mrs. Rider Haggard in an explanation she gives concerning the presence of some verses in one of her husband's novels. I would ask if this asseveration and denial are necessary; for if we may regard anything as proven, if anything may be taken for granted, it is that no man ever did read, or even so much as heard of, any book which he is accused of borrowing from. Therefore, *a priori*, Mr. Rider Haggard is an innocent man; but even if we separate his case from the eternal truths which guard it, I say there is no reason, absolutely no reason, why we should doubt his word when he says, what his better half and his publisher say, that he never read the *Epicurean*; indeed, there is no book that could be readily named that I would have the slightest difficulty in believing that he had not read. On the subject of Mr. Haggard's reading, my difficulty lies, not in exoneration of him from having read this or that book, but in conceiving him to have read anything, saving, perhaps, the *London Journal*.

I have heard, too, and this time through the medium of the *Court and Society Review*, that Mr. Rider Haggard holds the Realistic School in very slight esteem, and is much more favourably inclined to the Romantic. I have heard, too, in drawing-rooms, and elsewhere, that Mr. Rider Haggard is only slightly, if at all, inferior to R.L. Stevenson, who, if he will forgive me for calling him names, I will call the Shelley of modern prose. For three or four years now I have heard his name coupled with Romance, and mine with Realism. I could fain believe he is tired of it. Romance — Realism: the words have no literary application. True it is that there are two schools, but Mr, Rider Haggard, like a hundred before him, misnames them. They are the literary school and the illiterate school. In the literary school, among many others, will be found these names — John Ruskin, A.C. Swinburne, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, Edmund de Goncourt, Walter Pater, R.L. Stevenson. With the names of those who belong to the illiterate school, I confess I am not so well acquainted, but here are a few which chance has brought into prominent notice. Rider Haggard, Hugh Conway, and the author of *The House on the Marsh*. Now what I wish to make clear is, that just as Swinburne and Balzac are brothers in Art, so divorce as absolute and complete as between a worm and a star exists between Rider Haggard and Stevenson: their thought does not move in the same circles, nor do they write the same language.

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As a diamond merchant can tell at a single glance the crystal from the paste, so can the artist, undisturbed by the thousand variations in temperament, say this is Art, this is Manufacture. Almost without reading a line, he can tell if his author be of the true race and lineage, or a mongrel to be kicked out of sight forever. When I opened *She*, when I saw that horrible pot covered with mystic characters, and the size and weight given underneath, I knew what to expect; nor was I mistaken. I read a paragraph, and found it on a par with the pot. And to save myself from any accusation of unfairness, I give here the passage in question. I place next to it a passage taken from Mr. Stevenson's last book, and I ask the young ladies in Bayswater, the *Saturday Review*, the *Spectator*, and Mr. Andrew Lang, to place their hands on their hearts, and say that they cannot distinguish between the two.

> The moon went slowly down in chastened loveliness, she departed like some sweet bride into her chamber, and long veil-like shadows crept up the sky through which the stars peeped shyly out. Soon, however, they too began to pale before a splendour in the east, and then the quivering footsteps of the dawn came rushing across the newborn blue, and shook the planets from their places. Quieter and yet more quiet grew the sea, quiet as the soft mist that brooded on her bosom, and covered up her troubling, as the elusive wreaths of sleep brood upon a brain-racked mind, causing it to forget its sorrow. From the east to the west sped the angels of the Dawn, from sea to sea, from mountain top to mountain top, scattering light with both their hands. On they sped out of the darkness, perfect, glorious, like spirits of the just breaking from the tomb, etc. [*She,* 1887, p.56]

From this we pass to Mr. Stevenson.

> Within, Rorie and the black were asleep together in the kitchen; outside was a wonderful clear night of stars, with here and there a cloud still hanging, last stragglers of the tempest. It was near the top of the flood, and the Merry Men were roaring in the windless quiet of the night. Never, not even in the height of the tempest, had I heard their song with greater awe. Now, when the winds were gathered home, when the deep was dandling itself back into its summer slumber, and when the stars rained their gentle light over land and sea, the voice of these tide-breakers was still raised for havoc. [*The Merry Men*, 1887, pp.66-67]

To conclude, I will say that Mr. Rider Haggard is Progress — progress as understood in wood paving, electric lighting, country boards, cheap dinners and *fêtes* at the Crystal Palace; he is the illustrious confrère of Gus Harris and General Booth; his is the literature of gross excitements, of vulgar display — in a word, the literature and the outcome of democracy. I predict for Rider Haggard a brilliant future. As time goes on, he will sell innumerable editions of his books; he will sell as Holloway's pills and as Pears soap sell; he will become great and famous; he will buy a yacht, and a house in Grosvenor Square. He may be made a knight or a lord; but there is one thing he will never do — he will never obtain our literary esteem.

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