**Sir Henry Rider Haggard**

Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856 – 1925). Public servant, reformer, commissioner and wellknown storyteller, Rider Haggard was the author of thirty-four adventure novels.

Rider Haggard was born at Bradenham in Norfolk in 1856. He was the sixth son of a lawyer and was educated in Ipswich. In 1875 his father procured for him the post of junior secretary to the Governor of Natal, Sir Henry Bulwer. He set sail for South Africa and spent six years there, fascinated by its landscape, wildlife, tribal society and mysterious past. Powerful, intense and visually magnificent, “She” was written in Africa in six weeks in 1886. Rider Haggard published “She” in London in 1887. By then he was thirty-one year old, an established writer with his own fixed and hard-won ways, who had written three first-rated novels: “King Solomon’s Mines”, “Allan Quatermain”, and “Jess”. No other writer has absorbed into his work as much knowledge and experience as Haggard had. He produced a whole series of spellbinding and extravagant romances set in far-flung corners of the world: Iceland, Constantinople, Mexico, Ancient Egypt and, of course, Africa.

Travelling widely fueled Haggard’s imagination and helped him get acquainted with exotic placed and people, their old languages, laws, traditions, the deepest corners of their ancient history and antiquity.

The events described in the novel take place first at Cambridge, then in Central Africa, and refer to the period of the beginning of the 19th century. “She” takes a reader to the deepest interior of Africa, searching not for treasure but for treasure but for the secrets of a woman’s love. In Rider Haggard’s greatest romance a father’s mysterious legacy to his son brings Leo Vincey and his two fellow-adventurers to Africa. Travelling through crocodile – infested rivers, across volcanic plains and marshes they reach the vast, eerie catacombs of the Kingdom of Kór, where they encounter She, the white Queen of the Amahagger people. A woman of legendary beauty, bewitching and destructive, She has waited two thousands years for the rebirth and return of the man she loved. And this man, she believes, is Leo Vincey.

The story begins one rainy night, when a man of twenty-two Ludwig Horace Holly was sitting in his room at Cambridge, grinding away at some mathematical work. At last, wearied out, he flung his book down and happened to catch sight of his countenance in the glass. As he stood and stared at himself in the glass Horace Holly thought about his physical deficiencies. Most men of twenty-two are endowed at any rate with some share of the comeliness of youth, but to him even this was denied. Short, thick-set, and deep chested almost to deformity, with long arms, heavy features, deep-set gray eyes, a low brow half overgrown with black hair he was strikingly ugly person. It seemed that he was branded by Nature with iron strength and intellect. Ludwig Horace Holly was so ugly that the spruce young men of his College, though they were proud enough of his endurance and physical powers, did not want even to be seen walking with him. Women called him a “monster”. He had neither father, nor brother. And that is why it was not surprising that Horace Holly became sullen, lonely person, who had no wife, no children, no friends.

Suddenly, there came a knock at the door… A tall man of about thirty, with the remains of great personal beauty, came hurrying in, carrying a massive iron box. The man looked ill and was coughing with blood. Horace Holly recognized his only friend from College Mr. Vincey, whom he knew for about two years. The man said that he was dying and that is why he asked Mr. Holly to become a tutor for his five-year-old child, Leo Vincey. Before leaving he handed Horace the iron chest and said: “On the twenty-fifth birthday of my son your guardianship will end and you will then, with the keys I give you now, open the box and let Leo…” see and read the contents, which will tell the boy about his ancestors and about the ancient dynasty of Kallikrates that he belongs to.” The next day Mr. Vincey died and Mr. Holly became a guardian to his son.

Years flew by, the child grew into the young man. As he grew his beauty and the beauty of his mind grew with him. Leo got a good education, took a respectable degree at College and became the handsomest man in the University. Young Leo looked like a statue of Apollo, he was very tall, very broad, had a look of an abnormal power and grace. His face was almost without flaw – a good face as well as a beautiful one, and his head was covered with little golden curls. Women called Leo “the Greek God” for his beauty. Leo Vincey was altogether too good-looking, and, moreover, he had none of that consciousness and conceit about him, which usually spoils handsome men and makes them disliked by their fellow, was his real son, and they became faithful friends.

At last, the day of Leo’s twenty-fifth birthday came and Horace Holly with Leo opened the iron box, that Leo’s father had given Mr. Holly on the night of his death. There was a magnificent silver casket with a letter, parchment and a very large ancient potsherd of a dirty yellow color. From the letter and the uncial Greek writing on the potsherd they got to know that Leo Vincey was the only representative of one of the most ancient families in the world. His sixty-sixth lineal ancestor was an Egyptian priest of Isis, though he himself was called Kallikrates. This man fled from Egypt with a princess of Royal blood, who had fallen in love with him, and they were finally wrecked upon the coast of Africa. There they met the mighty and immortal Queen of a savage people. This Queen fell in love with Kallikrates. It was an unrequited love, so she used her magic and killed him.

On reading this writing Leo Vincey was determined to go Africa and find the mysterious woman in order to revenge his ancestor and to investigate the greatest mystery in the world – the secret of eternal Life and Youth. So, he and his two fellow-voyagers (Horace Holly and Job) went to Africa. On the ocean, not far from the place of their destination they were seized by the horrible squall. Only four people were saved and all the remainder of their company was destroyed. These four men, who were brought to the shore by the wave from the very jaws of Death, were: Leo Vincey, his guardian and true friend Horace Holly, their faithful servant Job, and swarthy Arab Mohammed.

Job has been serving Mr. Holly and Leo for twenty years, he loved his job and could always be relied upon. He was a simple-minded, devout man with prejudices. Not really brave or courageous, he was frightened by thrilling adventure and unexplored lands, though he agreed to go with Mr. Holly, Leo and dark-skinned sailors, whose manners and customs scared him to death. Later the savages named this man the Pig on account of his fatness, round face and small eyes. Job could not stand severe ordeals of the trip, shattered by all he had seen and undergone, his nerves had utterly broken down and he had died of terror.

Travelling though deep forests and marshes, the heroes of the book endured great hardship, but at last they were entertained by “She-who-must-be-obeyed”, the mighty Queen of a savage people. While woman, She ruled savages, was seldom seen by them, but was reported to have power over all things living and dead. The Queen was a magician, had knowledge of all things, and life and loveliness that does not die. She had no regular army, but to disobey her was to die. This mysterious woman had a powerful intellect, which she always enriched by studying languages and different sciences. She was two thousand years old and, of course, knew history and studied all religions of the world. Ayesha (this was her name) even had her own philosophy. She was a great chemist, indeed chemistry appears to have been her amusement and occupation. Ayesha had one of the caves fitted up as a laboratory.

She was a woman of peculiar beauty. “Never may the man to whom her beauty is once unveiled put it from his mind.” Ayesha looked like a young woman of certainly not more than thirty years in perfect health. Her white and rounded arms, ankles, snowy argent breast, perfect and imperial shape, gracious forms were more perfect than ever sculptor dreamed of. “Her grace was more than human.” This woman had the great changing eyes of deepest, softest black, marble face, broad and noble brow, lovely smile and delicate, straight features. One who ever saw her surpassingly beautiful and pure face, was amazed and blinded by its beauty.

At the end of the story Ayesha decided that Leo Vincey was the man she has waited for. She thought that Leo really was a reincarnation of her beloved Kallikrates, because their likeness and resemblance amazed her. This woman wanted to make Leo Vincey immortal in order he could marry her. That is why he had to step into the Eternal Fire of Life… But Leo doubted how could he know that it wouldn’t utterly destroy him. So, Ayesha asked him: “Oh, my Kallikrates, if you see me stand in the flame and come out unharmed, will you enter then.” Leo agreed and said: “Yes!!!” And Ayesha stepped into the Fire and never came back.

So, this was the end of the first story about this mysterious woman. But When I read the second book, I found out that after a while She restored to life again.

This book was not written for any specific group or class. The author even does not insist on his point of view. He thinks that a reader must judge the history (the story) himself, that is why the story is presented like memories or the main hero – Horace Holly. But I think that the intended audience should be young broad-minded people, who has bright imagination and will be able to develop Haggard’s idea or, maybe on the contrary, - to dispute his opinion. A story that began more than two thousand years ago may stretch a long way into the dim and of the story is not reached yet. Haggard wrote an endless story and in it, he raised a question of Life and Death that has always occupied people minds. This is the question about rebirth of both, mind and body after death.

The purpose of this book is to make a man reflect on the purport of life and make him try to solve the most important problem for humanity – the question about life prolongation.

The message of the book is to make a man believe that his life after death does not come to an end, but after a while the rebirth of soul and body will be and “to the world his is born again and again.”

Rider Haggard wrote this book with an intention to share with a reader his thoughts and ideas about Past, Present and Future of mankind. He wanted to bring up for discussion the subject of Immortality and Eternal Life.

Haggard in his novel uses specific literary method. He depicts all the events very brightly and thus a reader finds himself in the deepest jungle of civilization among the savages, in Africa. Excited about impending adventure, with his heart filled with mingled dread and curiosity the reader shares the adventures with the heroes. The main heroes of the story often turn over their minds the events that they experienced and share their thoughts with the reader.

The author often uses inversion as a quite unusual rhetorical device in order to lend the speech of the main heroes still greater importance.

Savages never called their Queen by name. Speaking about her they used to say: “She-who-must-be-obeyed!” This and many other expressions make Ayesha more powerful and majestic. Haggard uses many metaphors, epithets and comparisons. For example, in order to describe the difference between young handsome Leo and ugly appearance of Mr. Holly more vividly, the writer compares the heroes with Beauty and the Beast.

Rider Haggard uses many words from Uncial Greek, Old English and Latin languages. He even gives his heroes ancient Greek names. For example, Kallikrates (means the Beautiful in Strength) and his wife Amenartas. All these literary devices give the story a shade of antiquity and ancient times.

I found the book instructive and very interesting. Reading the novel I really experienced a fascinating adventure to Africa. I like the story because the author offers interesting insight into human nature. His idea differs from the Bible interpretation of this question. I consider Haggard’s thought very interesting because he thinks that not only soul exists after death, but body also revives.

The main hero of the story Ayesha appeals to me more than other ones. Her intellect and wisdom amaze me. I respect this woman and admire her inquiring nature, intellectual curiosity and diligence. Living two thousand years not everyone could resist the temptations of life, but She dedicated these years to studying different sciences and as a result of her endurance and hard work Ayesha reveled the Secret of Nature and got the enormous power over all things. I’m delighted with her devotion to the man she loved and waited for, all these years. Ayesha’s power, youth and beauty – are not magic, but her tireless work. The Queen even says: “There is no such thing as magic”, thought there is such thing as knowledge of Secrets of Nature.

As to my opinion this book will be interesting for everyone, because the questions of Life and Death, prolongation of Life and rebirth of body and soul are eternal questions for mankind. All people are interested in it. Little children ask their parents about Future, about life, as well as old people often turn over these questions in their minds. I recommend to read this book to everybody. I can’t say that after reading it you will be sure that Eternal life exists, but still the story leaves a hope…