

THE EVOLUTION OF AN ARTIST



If the literary map published some months ago in *THE Book-MAN* had been extended to include Africa, it would have shown us, in the southern portion of the peninsula, only

two names that can be considered as identified with the country. These names belong to Olive Schreiner (Ralph Iron, her former pseudonym, has now been abandoned) and H. Rider Haggard.

There is some excuse, perhaps, for the curiosity of our day as to the minutiae of an artist's life—his family and personal history, his manner of eating, sleeping and writing; since one seems, at least, in hearing of these things, always on the verge of something which shall throw a new light upon that essential hidden Self of the Artist which he has tried, more or less successfully, to express in his works. As a matter of fact, however, if the instinct which urges him to self-expression be associated with sufficient mental power to justify the title, it also supplies us with whatever external facts are necessary to the comprehension of the message, making further inquisitiveness needless, if not impertinent; so that to know, as certain of our own poets have said, that Mrs. Browning called her husband "Robert, and did not call him Bob," fails to render any material help toward the true and perfect understanding of the "Sonnets from the Portuguese." He that hath ears to hear will hear; he that hath none will not be helped by biographical details.

This is more evidently true if the message of the Artist be simple and free from complexity; in the case of Mr. Rider Haggard we need very little beyond his own statement in a preface, that he went out to Africa as a lad of about seventeen. His books give us the picture of the land he found there, the rest is written between the lines.

Naturally, these lines are at first a trifle uncertain. A lad of seventeen sees facts and objects clearly, sharply, but crudely; he discerns the outward nature of things rather than their genesis and spiritual relations. And there is very much of the

lad of seventeen in Mr. Haggard's earlier writing. His white is very white, indeed, and his black particularly sable. Vice, in his pages, is a monster of a mien that deserves a word of description, for it is the vice of the frontier, not of the centres of civilisation—rather vulgar, to tell the truth; the vice of a school-boy, rather than that of a Petronius. Take it for all in all, Mr. Haggard's colouring in such works as *Dawn* or *The Witch's Head* is hard and crude; judged by them alone, he would hardly be considered in estimating the artists in literature of our century.

The earliest production of his pen which attracted general attention from the literary world was *She*, a book which every one read at the time, and nobody has forgotten. And yet no one took it or its author very seriously. It was at once a little too impossible, and a little too horrible, in some of its details, to be carefully considered; the ceremony of "hot-potting," for example, was felt as a personal abrasion of our thin-skinned modern civilisation; it shculd have been relegated, we thought, to that world where schoolboys torture frogs and tie fire-crackers to the tails of cats and dogs. And yet the central conception of the book, the whirling earth-fire, conferring immortal youth, is one of striking originality and power; it misses grandeur only because of that crudeness and boyish delight in supping full of horrors, which we have already pointed out. For one can never quite comprehend how a second bath in the earth-fire can possibly have had the precise effect described, nor is there any analogy either in earth or sky to help us in the matter. Presumption, it may have been, to claim the second immersion; want of faith it assuredly was not, since the purpose of "*She*" was simply to encourage her lover to the attainment of immortality. "*She*" was like a child, playing with the things that were her own; her punishment was not at all undeserved or inadequate, but it was very inappropriate; one cannot at all understand the machinery of it; it offends by over-grotesquerie; and the catastrophe—for all stories of immortal youth must end with a catastrophe—should have been otherwise managed. That it could

have been brought about differently we see in *King Solomon's Mines*, where the monkey-like prototype of "She"—immortality, minus youth and beauty—is crushed beneath the stone that admits to the treasure chamber. This book has not half the originality of *She*, nor a third of its power; yet as a whole it is better proportioned, and decidedly less revolting.

It forms also a fitting introduction to another class of Mr. Haggard's writings; for his books may be said to fall into four classes or types, with some little overlapping. This class is particularly his own, since it relates to the history of Zululand, with which no other writer of importance in fiction has troubled himself; Kings Changa and Dingaan are as necessary to a complete history of the world, however, as Alfred the Great, or even George Washington; and the organisation of the Zulu "impi" should interest the student not much less than that of the Roman legion. Yet, regarded as fiction, one finds that these stories, of which we may take *Nada the Lily* as the type, leave something to be desired. Not very many of one's personal friends, it must be admitted, belong to a Zulu "impi," nevertheless, the author's Zulu warrior is far from convincing. We do not quite expect him to be the Afro-American with whom we are in daily contact (perhaps); yet we cannot help noticing that he is eminently unchildlike; yet, only a childlike people, with an infinite capacity for living in the passing moment alone, could or would have borne the irresponsible, ruthlessly bloody and cruel rule of a Changa. In fact, when in one book which should, perhaps, form a class of its own, *Eric Brighteyes*, Mr. Haggard draws for us the Scandinavian viking, we seem to perceive much such a transformation as that effected by Sihamba upon "Swallow" and the maiden of the Umpondwana; his viking is simply a Zulu painted white.

With the publication of *Jess* Mr. Haggard began to enter upon his best work, though some of his later writings revert to the older manner; but his latest novel, *Swallow*,* is so immensely superior to everything else that he has ever done, that it seems to us to justify the title which we have given to this review. *Swallow*, indeed, is a veritable work of

**Swallow*. By H. Rider Haggard. New York: Longmans, Green and Company. \$1.50.

art, outranking *The Story of an African Farm*, in that it is more coherent and consecutive. Olive Schreiner is a true artist, but her characterisations are always more or less vaporous and cloud-like, whereas the personages of Mr. Haggard's latest creating are peculiarly realistic. The story is told by the mother of Suzanne, or "the Swallow"; and with remarkable skill this point of view is maintained throughout the story. Not once are we allowed to forget that these adventures befell the daughter of her who narrates them; never for a moment do we lose sight of the fact that this narrator is a Boer, the wife of a Boer farmer. Her faults, her loves, her prejudices, her mistakes, all are indicated as delicately, as subtly as the footnotes in *The Little Minister* draw for us the character of Dominie Ogilvy. Strange to say, the other persons of the story are much less sharply outlined, with the very remarkable exception of Sihamba, the Kaffir prophetess, who is decidedly her creator's masterpiece. The little woman, with the shock of hair standing upright and powdered blue, is a perfectly unique creation; her dreams, her second-sight, her mystic powers in general probably find precedents in plenty in African voodooism; in fact, one rather doubts whether they might not be paralleled from the records of the Society for Psychological Research. Swart Piet, the villain, is also very well done, and is a distinct advance even upon his prototype in *Jess*; though a very black villain, indeed, he is not without an occasional touch of humanity; and the power of the author is distinctly felt in making us experience a positive sympathy with his passion for the Swallow. The story itself is, it is almost needless to say, full of incident, yet without a single forced situation; finally it gives us a most valuable insight into the character of the African Boer, the history of the Transvaal and the causes of Boer hatred and distrust of the Uitlanders.

It would be to most masters in art an immense advantage if all their earlier writings could be summarily suppressed; Rudyard Kipling has, as we know, "hot-potted" some of his, and for many new aspirants the same office is daily performed by a syndicate composed of unsympathetic publishers and the kitchen stove. Rider Haggard has worked out

his apprenticeship before the eyes of all men; and perhaps will be more or less handicapped henceforward, because of this; but we hope that having now attained the serene heights of pure art, he will continue to give us, in his future writings, stories of the Africa he knows

so well; figures as sharply realistic as frontier life, but tinged with the magic and the mysticism, musical with the poetry and the melody, sad with the pathos and the tragedy of the Dark Continent. *Katharine Pearson Woods.*



EVANGELINE AND HER SISTER.



HERE is an interesting contradiction between Longfellow's *Evangeline* and Professor Roberts's recent novel, *A Sister to Evangeline*. The romance of Longfellow's heroine is re-

sponsible for most of the popular sentiment that attaches to the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755. While the poet did not specifically accuse the English of brutality, still the whole impression of his poem is most unfavourable to the English power.

The familiar poem pictures a community of beautiful simplicity and piety; the homes were abodes of contentment and virtue; the warmth of hospitality bordered on communism; Acadia, in the character of its people no less than in its bucolic glory, was an Arcadia. To force into far and scattered exile such a people as the Acadians are thus represented to be, seems to readers of the poem to have been an act of the most inexplicable and unpardonable cruelty.

It is well known that Longfellow took as much license as he pleased in his description of the Acadian country. Visitors to the land of Evangeline are annually disappointed in not finding the "forest primeval" and other physical characteristics of which the explicit verse seems like a guide-book. Although a day's sail would have carried the Cam-

bridge poet to the apple-blossom region, he never took the trouble to see it with his own eyes. And in giving his impressions of the people and of their calamity, he showed no greater care in the pursuit of accuracy. His guide in the view he took of the subject was Judge Haliburton, of Halifax, an eminent Provincial writer, whose sentimental portrayal of the episode is well known. Perhaps the original source was the contemporary Abbé Raynal, who wrote in France a pathetic description of a people whom he had never visited. Consequently, the popular idea has naturally been that the New England soldiers of King George who conducted the expulsion obeyed monstrous and wanton orders.

A Sister to Evangeline gives a decidedly different impression. Its scholarly author evidently has no desire to start a discussion or aggressively to upset popular views. Yet, as an historian himself, and thoroughly familiar with the documentary history and in close harmony, it may be said, with Parkman's account of the expulsion, he presents in this new novel a picture whose truthfulness cannot be questioned. He throws around the simple folk of Acadia the charm of romance, and even introduces bits of glitter carried thither from the Court of Louis. But he likewise tells the straight story of the protracted patience of the British Government toward a people who, after nearly half a century of English protection, peace and liberty, still