

H. RIDER
HAGGARD

THE MAHATMA
AND THE HARE

It's time to read
o r i  i n a L

Москва, 2018

УДК 82
ББК 84(0)

H. Rider Haggard

The Mahatma and the Hare / H.R. Haggard. – М.: Т8RUGRAM / Original, 2018. – 102 с. – (Top 100 Classic Books)

ISBN 978-5-521-07599-7

Sir Henry Rider Haggard was an English writer of adventure novels set largely in Africa, and a founder of the Lost World literary genre. His stories, situated at the lighter end of Victorian literature, continue to be popular and influential. The Mahatma and the Hare is the story of the self-called mahatma – a spiritual man who is able, when asleep, to view “The Great White Road” on which the souls of those recently departed enter heaven – encounters the hare of the title after that animal’s death.

УДК 82
ББК 84(0)
ВІС FC
ВІSAC FIC004000

ISBN 978-5-521-07599-7

© Т8RUGRAM, оформление, 2018
© Original, 2018

CONTENTS

THE MAHATMA AND THE HARE: A DREAM STORY

THE MAHATMA.....	5
THE GREAT WHITE ROAD.....	17
THE HARE	25
THE SHOOTING.....	41
THE COURSING.....	59
THE HUNTING.....	69
THE COMING OF THE RED-FACED MAN.....	83

THE MAHATMA

THE MAHATMA¹

Everyone has seen a hare, either crouched or running in the fields, or hanging dead in a poulterer's shop, or lastly pathetic, even dreadful-looking and in this form almost indistinguishable from a skinned cat, on the domestic table. But not many people have met a Mahatma, at least to their knowledge. Not many people know even who or what a Mahatma is. The majority of those who chance to have heard the title are apt to confuse it with another, that of Mad Hatter.

This is even done of malice prepense (especially, for obvious reasons, if a hare is in any way concerned) in scorn, not in ignorance, by persons who are well acquainted with the real meaning of the word and even with its Sanscrit origin. The truth is that an incredulous Western world puts no faith in Mahatmas. To it a Mahatma is a kind of spiritual Mrs. Harris, giving an address in Thibet at which no letters are delivered. Either, it says, there is no such person, or he is a fraudulent scamp with no greater occult powers – well, than a hare.

¹ Mahatma, “great-souled.” “One of a class of persons with preter-natural powers, imagined to exist in India and Thibet.” – *New English Dictionary*.

I confess that this view of Mahatmas is one that does not surprise me in the least. I never met, and I scarcely expect to meet, an individual entitled to set "Mahatma" after his name. Certainly *I* have no right to do so, who only took that title on the spur of the moment when the Hare asked me how I was called, and now make use of it as a *nom-de-plume*. It is true there is Jorsen, by whose order, for it amounts to that, I publish this history. For aught I know Jorsen may be a Mahatma, but he does not in the least look the part.

Imagine a bluff person with a strong, hard face, piercing grey eyes, and very prominent, bushy eyebrows, of about fifty or sixty years of age. Add a Scotch accent and a meerschaum pipe, which he smokes even when he is wearing a frock coat and a tall hat, and you have Jorsen. I believe that he lives somewhere in the country, is well off, and practises gardening. If so he has never asked me to his place, and I only meet him when he comes to Town, as I understand, to visit flower-shows.

Then I always meet him because he orders me to do so, not by letter or by word of mouth but in quite a different way. Suddenly I receive an impression in my mind that I am to go to a certain place at a certain hour, and that there I shall find Jorsen. I do go, sometimes to an hotel, sometimes to a lodging, sometimes to a railway station or to the corner of a particular street and there I do find Jorsen smoking his big meerschaum pipe. We shake hands and he explains why he has sent for me, after which we talk of various things. Never mind what they are, for that would be telling Jorsen's secrets as well as my own, which I must not do.

It may be asked how I came to know Jorsen. Well, in a strange way. Nearly thirty years ago a dreadful thing happened to me. I was married and, although still young, a person of some mark in literature. Indeed even now one or two of the books which I wrote are read and remembered, although it is supposed that their author has long left the world.

The thing which happened was that my wife and our daughter were coming over from the Channel Islands, where they had been on a visit (she was a Jersey woman), and, and – well, the ship was lost, that’s all. The shock broke my heart, in such a way that it has never been mended again, but unfortunately did not kill me.

Afterwards I took to drink and sank, as drunkards do. Then the river began to draw me. I had a lodging in a poor street at Chelsea, and I could hear the river calling me at night, and – I wished to die as the others had died. At last I yielded, for the drink had rotted out all my moral sense. About one o’clock of a wild, winter morning I went to a bridge I knew where in those days policemen rarely came, and listened to that call of the water.

“Come!” it seemed to say. “This world is the real hell, ending in the eternal naught. The dreams of a life beyond and of re-union there are but a demon’s mocking breathed into the mortal heart, lest by its universal suicide mankind should rob him of his torture-pit. There is no truth in all your father taught you” (he was a clergyman and rather eminent in his profession), “there is no hope for man, there is nothing he can win except the deep happiness of sleep. Come and sleep.”

Such were the arguments of that Voice of the river, the old, familiar arguments of desolation and despair. I leant over the parapet; in another moment I should have been gone, when I became aware that some one was standing near to me. I did not see the person because it was too dark. I did not hear him because of the raving of the wind. But I knew that he was there. So I waited until the moon shone out for a while between the edges of two ragged clouds, the shapes of which I can see to this hour. It showed me Jorsen, looking just as he does to-day, for he never seems to change – Jorsen, on whom, to my knowledge, I had not set eyes before.

“Even a year ago,” he said, in his strong, rough voice, “you would not have allowed your mind to be convinced by such arguments as those which you have just heard in the Voice of the river. That is one of the worst sides of drink; it decays the reason as it does the body. You must have noticed it yourself.”

I replied that I had, for I was surprised into acquiescence. Then I grew defiant and asked him what he knew of the arguments which were or were not influencing me. To my surprise – no, that is not the word – to my bewilderment, he repeated them to me one by one just as they had arisen a few minutes before in my heart. Moreover, he told me what I had been about to do, and why I was about to do it.

“You know me and my story,” I muttered at last.

“No,” he answered, “at least not more than I know that of many men with whom I chance to be in touch. That is, I have not met you for nearly eleven hundred years. A thousand and eighty-six, to be correct. I was a blind priest then and you were the captain of Irene’s guard.”