

‘When I was concerned with great men and great events’

Sir Henry Rider Haggard in Natal

A short distance north of the small town of Bungay in the English county of Norfolk lies the village of Ditchingham. The novelist and public servant Sir Henry Rider Haggard lived at nearby Ditchingham House for most of his adult life. After his death on 14 May 1925 he was cremated and his ashes interred under a black marble slab in the chancel of St Mary’s church. In the north aisle there is a memorial window dedicated to Haggard. A framed piece of calligraphy explains various features of the window: the centrepiece of the Risen Christ is flanked by the angels Michael and Raphael while ‘below in the centre is a view of Bungay . . . On the left the Pyramids . . . On the right *Hilldrop*, Sir Rider’s farm in South Africa. These views he loved . . .’

Sir Rider’s South African farm was just outside Newcastle in Natal. In his autobiography, *The Days of My Life*, written in 1912 when he was 55, Haggard said of Natal that ‘the country impressed me enormously. Indeed on the whole I think it the most beautiful of any that I have seen in the world, parts of Mexico alone excepted. The great plains rising by steps to the Quathlamba or Drakensberg Mountains, the sparkling torrential rivers, the sweeping thunderstorms, the grass-fires creeping over the veld at night like snakes of living flame, the glorious aspect of the heavens, now of a spotless blue, now charged with the splendid and many-coloured lights of sunset, and now sparkling with myriad stars; the wine-like taste of the air upon the plains, the beautiful flowers in the bush-clad kloofs or on the black veld in spring – all these things impressed me, so much that were I to live a thousand years I should never forget them.

‘Then there were the Zulu Kaffirs living in their kraals filled with round bee-hive like huts, bronze-coloured, noble looking men and women clad only in “moochas”, whose herds of cattle wandered hither and thither in charge of a little lad. From the beginning I was attracted to these Zulus and began to study their character and their history.’¹

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Haggard was born on 22 June 1856 and christened Henry Rider – the eighth of ten children. From the beginning Rider, as he was always called, seems to have been the odd one out. ‘Only fit to be a damned greengrocer’ was the verdict of his father William, a mercurial Norfolk squire who, according to his grand-daughter, ‘was a man of violent temper, impatient and autocratic . . . but he loved his children and worked hard in their interests.’²

At the age of thirteen, after being educated by a series of governesses, the time came for the young Rider to undergo more formal education. Unlike his brothers, and other members of his class, Haggard's father decided against sending him to a public school. 'Not only was he apparently without any particular ability, but he completely lacked concentration, and had failed to absorb enough general knowledge to come up to even the modest requirements of the lesser public schools.'³ Furthermore, William Haggard was feeling the financial strain of supporting a large family.

Accordingly Haggard, together with two or three other boys, was sent for coaching by the Reverend H.J. Graham of Garsington Rectory, near Oxford. From there he went to Ipswich Grammar School. Haggard's academic career was undistinguished. Though he won a school essay competition he failed the army entrance examination in 1872 – 'duly floored by my old enemy, Euclid'.⁴

His father was probably beginning to wonder what to do with this problem son when, in a move of 'characteristic suddenness',⁵ he decided Rider should be educated with a career in mind – the Foreign Office. He was packed off to London where he spent almost a year at the home of a private tutor. 'Then my father announced that I was to go to Scoones, the great crammer, and there make ready to face the Foreign Office examination.'⁶

'I was about a year and a half at Scoones, making many friends, collecting many experiences and some knowledge of the world. How much book knowledge I collected I do not know, nor whether I should have passed for the Foreign Office if I had gone up. But it was not fated that I should do so.'⁷

Once again a sudden change of mind on the part of his father sent young Haggard off in a different direction. Rider was with his family enjoying a summer holiday at Tours in France when his father William 'read in *The Times*, or heard otherwise'⁸ that Sir Henry Bulwer had been appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Natal. The Bulwers of Heydon in Norfolk were old friends of the Haggard family and Rider's father wrote from France asking Sir Henry if he would take his son to Africa as a member of his staff. Bulwer agreed, 'which was extremely kind of him, as I do not remember that he had ever set eyes on me.'⁹

Bulwer was to replace Sir Garnet Wolseley who had been appointed acting governor by Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, for an interim term after the recall of Sir Benjamin Pine following the Langelibalele fiasco. Wolseley had been given the task of reforming the colony's administration with a view to promoting Carnarvon's vision of a confederation of states in South Africa, a policy in which Haggard was destined to be a minor player.

Haggard's holiday in France came to an abrupt end and he reported to his 'future chief in London, where he set me to work at once ordering wine and other stores to be consumed at Government House in Natal.'¹⁰ Haggard was put in charge of the catering arrangements. It was an unpaid post and for several years the young Haggard was dogged by his financial dependence on his father.

Bulwer was a fastidious man who 'with his pot belly, square head of spiky red hair, bushy moustache and incongruous imperial beard growing on his self-important chin, struck a faintly ludicrous figure. He was undoubtedly a fussy self-righteous official, but a thorough gentleman withal and an experienced imperial administrator who had served in distant outposts ranging from the Ionian Isles through Trinidad to Borneo.'¹¹

Though Haggard later acknowledged Bulwer's kindness to him, he was not blind to his faults. 'He was most painstaking and careful in all his methods, but to me his weak point seemed to be that he always saw so much of both sides of the case that he found it difficult to make up his mind which of them he ought to follow.'¹²

Haggard dedicated *Marie* (1912), the first of his Zulu trilogy, to Bulwer.

In London, while Haggard's brother Bazett organised the purchase of guns, Rider kitted himself out and said his goodbyes. In his farewell letter to his mother, dated 23 July 1875, he told her he had spent fifty pounds on his kit.

Ella Haggard, his mother, was still holidaying in Tours, from where she wrote a farewell letter to her nineteen-year-old son complete with well-meant advice: 'I hope you have managed the wine well. Your father begs me to tell you, for your consolation, that you will get into nice trouble if you have not! Be careful always to get a very clear understanding of Sir Henry's directions so as to make no mistakes which might reflect on you. Make him repeat anything you are in doubt about – if you can! This I give you as a general hint only, which may be useful, and do not forget what I said about order and punctuality, etc.'¹³

Though written by Ella it was a family letter signed by the other members of the family at Tours and included messages from his father and his brother Jack. Rider's mother added a poem:¹⁴

To My Son Rider
(On Leaving Home. July 1875)
Rise to thy destiny! Awake thy powers!
Mid throng of men enact the man's full part!
No more with mists of doubt dim golden hours,
But with strong Being fill thine eager heart!
Nineteen short summers o'er thy youthful head
Have shone and ripened as they flitted by:
May their rich fruit o'er coming years be shed,
And make God's gift of life a treasury.

.....

So, go thy way, my Child! I love thee well:
How well, no heart but mother's heart may know –
Yet One loves better, – more than words can tell, –
Then trust Him, now and evermore; – and go!

Looking back at his own youthful self about to embark for Africa Haggard described him as 'a tall young fellow, quite six feet, and slight; blue-eyed, brown-haired, fresh complexioned, and not at all bad looking . . . Mentally I was impressionable, quick to observe and learn whatever interested me, and could already hold my own in conversation. Also, if necessary, could make a public speech.'¹⁵

But the bluntness of youth masked a darker side: 'I was . . . subject to fits of depression and liable to take views of things too serious and gloomy for my age – failings I may add, that I have never been able to shake off.'¹⁶

Bulwer and his staff arrived in Cape Town on 17 August 1875 where they stayed with the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, for a week. During the trip young Haggard was kept busy bringing himself up to date with affairs in Natal – 'getting up all the Langalibalele case and extracting the pith from a mass of blue-books. It is not easy to get at the truth,' he wrote to his father on 18 August, 'when it is hedged round by such a mass of contradictory evidence. However the whole affair is rather interesting, inasmuch as it gives an idea of the tremendous state of ferment and excitement the Colony was and still is in.'¹⁷

His still somewhat ill-defined (and unpaid) role on Bulwer's staff was also a cause for concern. 'I am getting on all right, though my position is not an easy one. I find myself responsible for everything, and everybody comes and bothers me. However it all comes in the day's work. I don't know yet if I am private secretary, but I suppose

I am as nobody else has appeared. I make a good many blunders, but still I think I get on very well on the whole. I expect I shall have a tremendous lot of work at Natal as the Chief told me that he was going to entertain a good deal, and that will fall on my shoulders in addition to business.'¹⁸

During the week Bulwer's party spent in Cape Town with the governor, Haggard got a taste of the sort of entertainment he might be expected to arrange in future, attending various dinners as well as a ball given by the 'merchants of Cape Town . . . a good opportunity to study the Cape Town aristocracy.' He also visited the Bishop of Cape Town, William West Jones – 'a thorough specimen of muscular Christianity.'¹⁹

For all his apparent assurance Haggard was feeling homesick – 'all these new faces that you don't know make you think of the old ones that you do know' – and a little out of his depth – 'My mother will pity me when I tell her that I've got to get servants. Where on earth am I to find servants, and who am I to ask about them?'²⁰

The week in Cape Town over, 'four or five days' steaming along the green and beautiful coasts of south-eastern Africa, on which the great rollers break continually, brought us to Port Natal.'²¹

The Natal Witness reported that 'Sir H.E. Bulwer arrived by the *Florence* on the 26th inst., and is at present in Durban conferring with Sir Garnet Wolseley. He is however expected in the city shortly as the Legislative Council is to meet for business on September 15.'²²

Wolseley recorded the meeting in his diary, together with his unflattering impressions of the young Haggard: 'a leggy-looking youth not long I should say from school who seems the picture of weakness and dullness.'²³

The new governor and his staff departed from Durban at 10 am on the morning of Wednesday 1 September 'and came up the fifty-four miles over most tremendous hills in five and a half hours, going at full gallop all the way in a four-horse wagonette', reported Haggard in a letter to his mother. 'There were five of us, the Chief, Mr Shepstone (Secretary for Native Affairs), Napier Broome (Colonial Secretary), Beaumont²⁴ and myself. Some of the scenery was very fine, but we were so choked by the dust, which was so thick that you could not see the road beneath you, that we did not much enjoy it.'²⁵

Pietermaritzburg was busy anticipating their arrival. 'At an early hour on Wednesday morning, it became evident from the immense amount of bunting displayed in all parts of the city, that an event of unusual importance was expected to take place during the day,' reported *The Natal Witness*.

'Shortly after noon placards were posted on the walls of the town announcing the fact that His Excellency Sir Henry Ernest Bulwer, K.C.M.G., the new Lieutenant-Governor of this colony, might be expected to arrive in the city about 4.30 o'clock. In the course of the afternoon a number of citizens wended their way towards the Bridge to welcome His Excellency, while others proceeded on horseback or in carriages some miles out of town, in the direction of Thornville. At half past four a cloud of dust on the hill told those on the Bridge of His Excellency's approach, and five minutes afterwards Sir Henry was driven over the Bridge, in Murray and Collins's four-wheel trap, escorted by a strong body of the Natal Carbineers, the whole being enveloped in a cloud of dust, and looking very much begrimed after their journey. In the trap was Sir Henry with His Excellency's private secretary, the Hon. F. Napier Broome, and W.H. Beaumont, Esq., the latter of whom returns to the colony after an absence of six months, to take up his position in the Colonial Office.'²⁶

'When we got near Maritzburg crowds of people rode out to meet us,' Haggard told his mother, 'and we entered in grand style amidst loud hurrahs. We galloped up

to Government House, where the regiment was drawn up on the lawn, and as soon as the carriage stopped the band struck up "God Save the Queen" and salutes were fired from the fort [Napier]. Then all the grandees of Maritzburg came forward and paid their respects to the Governor, and at last we were left alone to clean ourselves as best we could.'

Haggard found Government House (now the Natal College of Education) a 'very pretty building'. While not as big as the Cape's Government House he declared it 'far from small. I, who have to look after it, find it too large. I have a large bedroom upstairs and my office in the Executive Council chamber.'²⁷

Haggard thought Pietermaritzburg 'a charming town of the ordinary Dutch character, with wide streets bordered by sluits of running water and planted with gum trees.'²⁸

On 2 September 1875, Bulwer was sworn into office 'in a room where the Legislative Council sit in the Public Offices building'²⁹ and 'the day being brilliantly fine, there was a very large attendance at the Court House, particularly of the fair sex.'³⁰

When Bulwer arrived at noon 'the guard presented arms and the band played the National Anthem.'³¹

Once Bulwer's commission and proclamation had been read out the city's mayor, John Fleming, began his address: 'To his Excellency Sir Henry Ernest Bulwer, Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, Lieutenant Governor of the colony of Natal, Vice Admiral of the same, and Supreme Chief over the Native Population . . .'³²

As the honorifics indicate it was a 'very swell ceremony indeed' and Haggard 'had to go through an extraordinary amount of scraping and bowing, presenting and pocketing, or trying to pocket, enormous addresses, commissions, etc., etc.'³³

After the ceremony followed a *levee* which, said Haggard, 'tried my patience considerably, for these people came so thick and fast that I had no time to decipher their, for the most part, infamously written cards, so I had to shout out their names at haphazard. However this came to an end too at last, and we drove off amidst loud hurrahs.'³⁴

The Natal Witness, in a slightly more laconic tone, recorded that 'during the ceremony which lasted about $\frac{3}{4}$ hour business was almost entirely suspended; however by one o'clock all was over, the crowd cleared away, and matters were allowed to resume their usual course. One or two flags were allowed to remain waving in the breeze for the remainder of the day, in honour of the auspicious event.'³⁵

By the time of the inauguration Haggard's position on Bulwer's staff had been clarified: 'I am not private secretary,' he wrote to his mother. 'The Chief was talking the other night to Beaumont about me and told him he had a very good opinion of me and thought I should do very well, but that he "always intended" to have an older man help him at "first", though who it is going to be does not seem clear. He wants somebody who can go and talk to all these people as a man of their own standing, which I cannot do. He also wants someone who has some experience in this sort of work. I am not in the least disappointed; indeed now that I see something of the place, and of the turbulent character of its inhabitants, I should have much wondered if he had made a fellow young as I am private secretary.'³⁶

Though sporting a brave face at this disappointment Haggard nevertheless felt keenly the lost opportunity to support himself financially. 'I am sorry, very sorry, still to be dependent on my father, but you may be sure, my dear Mother, that I will be as moderate as I can. At any rate I will cost less than if I had been at home.'

He then boosted his prospects: 'I am pretty well convinced that I shall be his private secretary sooner or later . . . I continue to get on very well with him, indeed we are the best of friends, and I have many friendly jaws with him.'³⁷

Such friendly chats aside, the young Haggard was clearly under strain: 'my chief trouble is my housekeeping. I have all this large house entirely under me, and being new to it find it difficult work. I have often seen with amusement the look of anxiety on a hostess's face at a dinner-party, but, by Jove, I find it far from amusing now. Dinner days are black Mondays to me. Imagine my dismay the other day when the fish did not appear and when, on whispering a furious inquiry, I was told the cook had forgotten it! Servants are very difficult to get here, and one has to pay five pounds at the lowest.'³⁸

Haggard was kept busy supervising the entertainments at Government House and because 'Sir Henry was unmarried, I had much to do.'³⁹

By December he was making arrangements for a ball to be held at Government House on December 8. 'It was understood that about 250 had been invited,' reported *The Natal Witness* of the occasion, 'but the weather had been such as to account for a large defalcation. Government House balls are such common events that a detailed description is unnecessary. Our readers will be aware that the weather was hot and the host and his aide de camp were courteous. It only remains to add that the music, played by the band of 1-13th was good, the company was mixed, the dresses very good for a place where materials are hard to get, and the dancing somewhat provincial.'⁴⁰

Early in the new year of 1876 Haggard would have been busy behind the scenes at the banquet celebrating the turning of the first sod of the Natal Government Railways link between Durban and Pietermaritzburg on 4 January. By February he had clearly settled down and was enjoying the colonial life: 'I am getting on all right and have quite got over all signs of liver since I got a horse. This place, if only you take exercise, is as healthy as England.'⁴¹

For the most part exercise meant riding and, as likely as not, hunting. 'I got out for a day's buck-hunting the other day to a place about twelve miles off, a farm of fertile plain (about 12,000 acres). The owner of it, a very good fellow, is one of the few people who preserve their buck.'

The letter enthusiastically describes the method of hunting: 'three or four guns on good horses ride over the plain about fifty yards apart. If an oribe (*sic*) gets up you have to pull up and shoot off your horse's back, which is not very easy till you get used to it.'

Haggard was evidently still getting used to it: 'I had dropped a little behind the others, when in galloping up to join them my horse put its foot into a hole and came to the ground, sending me and my loaded gun on to my head some five or six yards further on. I had hardly come to my senses and caught my horse when I saw an oribe pass like a flash of light, taking great bounds. I turned and went away after him, and I must say I never had a more exciting ride in my life.'

After a breakneck ride of two miles the buck 'popped into a bush . . . instead of getting off and walking him up, I sent one barrel into the bush after him and the other as he rose.' However he didn't kill the buck and when he spurred his horse to 'catch him . . . he only gave a jump, and I found myself in a bog whilst my wounded buck slowly vanished over a rise.'⁴²

Colonial Natal also attempted to recreate the English country scene by hunting with packs of hounds. Haggard wrote that they 'got very good runs sometimes. I very nearly lost my watch and chain in one the other day.'⁴³

On 9 March 1876 Bulwer presided over the opening of the new corporation bridge, the Alexandra Bridge. Once again Haggard was busy with the catering – though this time he also had a speaking role. The baptism of the bridge was to be followed by tiffin and ‘after a pleasant walk of a few minutes, the party found themselves at a marquee in the Park, where a sumptuous repast was provided,’ observed an approving *Natal Witness*.

‘The party sat down, to the number of over 80, to a table well laid out in a tent decorated throughout with evergreens and flowers.’

Various dignitaries made speeches and proposed toasts, among them Theophilus Shepstone and John Bird, then ‘Mr Scoones proposed, in a few fitting terms, “The Ladies”, on behalf of whom Mr Haggart (*sic*) replied, and kept the company in constant laughter.’ *The Natal Witness* consistently misspelt Haggard’s surname as Haggart. An improvement on the Cape Town newspapers which had referred to him as Waggart.

By now Haggard had become known to many of the prominent figures of the day, among them John Colenso, Bishop of Natal. Colenso had been rector at Fornsett St Mary in Norfolk from 1846 to 1853 and ‘recognised my name the first time I saw him.’⁴⁴

On Easter Sunday 16 April 1876 Haggard attended a church service where Colenso preached a funeral sermon on his friend Thomas Warwick Brooks, a superintendent of education and a churchwarden who had committed suicide a few days previously. ‘The Bishop quite broke down. I was sitting under him; all the last part of his sermon he was literally sobbing. It was touching to see the stern-faced Colenso, whom nothing can move, so broken. He is a very strange man, but one you cannot but admire, with his intellect written on his face . . .’⁴⁵

In later life Haggard recalled Colenso as ‘a tall, able and agreeable man with a most interesting face, but one who was desperately at loggerheads with everybody.’⁴⁶ Differences over doctrine had led to schism in the Anglican church and while Colenso remained the legal bishop of Natal the opposition orthodox party had appointed W.K. Macrorie as Bishop of Maritzburg.

‘It always seemed to me somewhat illogical that Colenso should wish to remain in a Church of which he criticised the tenets, on the principle that one should scarcely eat the bread and butter of those whom one attacks,’ reflected Haggard. ‘On the other hand the views that Colenso held forty years ago – which by the way were suggested to him by the extraordinarily acute questions put by Zulus whom he tried to convert to Christianity – are widespread today, even among clergymen. He was in advance of his generation, and like others suffered for it, that is all.’⁴⁷

In Haggard’s view Colenso was unpopular among Natal colonists not for his religious views but ‘because he was such a strong advocate of the rights of natives’ and Haggard was ‘more or less in sympathy with him. White settlers, especially if they be not of the highest order, are to apt to hate, despise, and revile the aboriginal inhabitants among whom they find themselves. Often this is because they fear them, even more frequently because the coloured people, not needing to do so, will not work for them at a low rate of wage. For example, they cannot understand why these blacks should object to spend weeks and months hundreds of feet underground, employed in the digging of ore, and, in their hearts, often enough would like to compel them by force to do their will. Yet surely the Kaffir whose land we have taken has a right to follow his own opinions and convenience on the subject.’⁴⁸

Bishops and matters of church protocol placed Haggard in something of a predicament at one dinner at Government House. As invited guests sat down to dinner among them were ‘the Roman Catholic Archbishop [Charles Constant Jolivet], a dean

of the Church of England, and a very shining non-Conformist light. Generally it was Sir Henry's custom if a clergyman was present to ask him to say grace, but on this occasion, realising the difficulty of the situation, he passed that duty on to me.'

"Haggard," he said in a reproachful voice, which suggested that I was neglecting my business, "will you be so good as to ask someone to say Grace?"

'I worked out the position rapidly in my mind and, coming to the conclusion that one should stick to one's own people, ignored the Roman Catholic bishop and went for the dean.'⁴⁹

In the same letter that spoke of the sobbing Colenso, Haggard also wrote of seeing 'a curious dance the other day, a witch dance. I cannot attempt to describe it, it is a weird sort of thing.'

However his powers of description were soon to spring to graphic life. During May Haggard accompanied Bulwer 'on a tour he made up country and there saw a great war dance which was organised in his honour.' He wrote of it in a letter home and later worked it up for publication – 'it was the first thing I ever wrote for publication.'⁵⁰ It was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of July 1877 under the title 'A Zulu War Dance'. Though the first to be written, this was not the first of Haggard's articles to be published. His first published article, concerning the annexation of the Transvaal Republic and entitled 'The Transvaal', appeared in the May 1877 issue of *Macmillan's Magazine*.

Bulwer's tour was to Weenen County and the purpose of the trip to this district, 'the largest in Natal, is understood to be a desire to acquire a more intimate knowledge of the county, and to examine the condition of the Natives of the district.'⁵¹

On the trip was the Secretary for Native Affairs, 'the most interesting man of all whom I came into contact in Natal . . . who afterwards became my beloved chief and friend . . . not withstanding the wide difference in our years . . . I refer to Sir Theophilus Shepstone, or Sompseu (*sic*) as he was called by all the natives throughout South Africa.'⁵²

In his memoirs Haggard recalled how he had once heard Shepstone 'say "I love that boy" to one of my elder colleagues as I passed by him, he thought out of earshot, and I have never forgotten the words or the tone in which they were uttered. Well, the affection was reciprocated, and will be while I have memory.'

Haggard described Shepstone as a 'curious, silent man, who had acquired many of the characteristics of the natives amongst whom he lived. Often it was impossible to guess from his somewhat impassive face what was passing in his brain. He had the power of silence, but he observed everything and forgot little. To me, however, when the mood was on him, he would talk a great deal – the stories I have heard from him would fill half a volume – and sometimes even unfold to me the secret springs of his actions.'⁵³

The war dance that Haggard witnessed took place at the homestead of Pagate 'a powerful chief ruling over some fifteen thousand souls, who had fled from the rule of the Zulus many years before to this wild, remote spot, and dwelt there in peace under the protection of the Crown.'

The journey to this destination was not without incident as Haggard made clear in a letter written on 13 May 1876, headed 'Camp, Pagate's Location'. Bulwer's party trekked 'steadily on through the country in much the same way, except that we have left the plains and entered the mountainous bush-land which, though the roads are terrible, is much pleasanter to travel through as it is more varied. Also you can make little dives into the bush in search of a little shooting, though it is very necessary to take your bearings first.'

As Haggard found to his cost one day having neglected to do so. Hopelessly lost he eventually spied some houses on a distant hill and 'thither I and my tired horse and dogs clambered as best we could, now over masses of boulders, now through deep water-courses, till at last we came to the neighbourhood of the first house, just as night was setting in.'

Approaching the houses he was struck by the 'stillness of the place and drawing nearer yet I saw that brambles and thorns were mingled with the peaches and pomegranates of the garden, and the fruit had not been plucked, but eaten away by birds; then I observed that the front door had fallen from its hinges. I rode in and found the place a picture of melancholy desertion.'

The other houses were in the same condition and Haggard decided to make 'one more shot for the road'. It began to rain heavily and so he turned back, making for the deserted houses 'as best I could through the dark, feeling uncommonly cold, when I suddenly stumbled on a Kaffir coming through the bush. An angel could not have been more welcome.'

Then a new problem presented itself. 'I knew no Kaffir, he knew no English. Luckily I did know the Kaffir name of Mr. Shepstone – "Sompseu" – which is known by every black in South Africa, and managed to make my friend understand that I was travelling with the "Mighty Hunter", also that there were four wagons.'

The man knew the party was travelling in the area and 'following his unerring instinct he at once struck out for the high road from which I had wandered five miles. Arrived there, he managed by the glimmer of the stars to find the track of the wagons, and having satisfied himself that they had passed, struck away again into the most awful places where anything but the Basuto pony I was riding must have come to grief.'

'On we went for about eight miles till I began to think my friend was knocking under to the cold (a very little cold kills them) and making for his own kraal. However, to my astonishment he hit the track again and at length came safely to the wagons. I was not sorry to see them.'⁵⁴

Pagate's homestead was situated on a 'high promontory that juts out and divides two enormous valleys at the bottom of which runs the Mooi River. The view is superb; two thousand feet below lies the plain encircled by tremendous hills bush-clad to the very top, while at the bottom flashes a streak of silver which is the river. There is little of what we admire in views in England, but Nature in her wild and rugged grandeur.'

On arrival at the homestead 'we went into the principal hut and partook of refreshments in the shape of Kaffir Beer.'

The following day Pagate arranged a war dance 'which is one of the most strange and savage sights I ever saw. It was not very large as they only had a day's notice to collect the warriors; however some five hundred turned up.'

As well as writing a letter about the dance Haggard evidently kept a notebook or diary, since lost. He used the notes to work up the article that was subsequently published in *Gentleman's Magazine*. In this youthful piece Haggard's sense of the romantic and the dramatic, that he would later employ to telling effect, is already evident.

'During the morning we could hear snatches of distant chants and caught glimpses of wild figures threading the thorns – Pagate's warriors hastening to the War Dance in our honour. Higher and higher rose the distant chant, but no one could be seen. Suddenly there stood before us a creature, a woman – tiny, withered, and bent nearly double by age, but in her activity passing comprehension. Clad in a strange jumble of snake skins, feathers, furs and

bones; a forked wand in her outstretched hand she rushed to and fro before the little group of white men crying:

‘“Ou, Ou, Ai, Ai, Ai,
Oh! Ye warriors that shall dance before the great ones of the earth, come!
Oh! Ye dyers of spears, ye plumed suckers of blood, come!
I, the witch finder;
I the wise woman;
I, the seer of strange sights;
I the reader of dark thoughts; call ye!
Come and do honour to the white lords.
Ah! I hear ye!
Ah! I see ye!
Ye come! Ye Come!”

‘As her invocation trailed off there rushed over the hill a finely built warrior arrayed in the full panoply of savage war. In his right hand he grasped his spears, and on his left hung his large, black, oxhide shield, lined on its inner side with spare assegais. From the ‘man’s’ ring round his head rose a single, tall, grey plume, robbed from the Kaffir crane. His broad shoulders were bare, and beneath the armpits was fastened a short garment of strips of skin, intermixed with oxtails of different colours. From his waist hung a rude kilt, made chiefly of goat’s hair, whilst round his calf of the right leg was fixed a short fringe of black ox-tails. Striking his shield with his assegai he poured forth his salutation:

‘“Bayete, Bayete, O chief from the olden times, O lord and chief of chiefs!

Pagadi, the son of Masingorano, the great chief, the leader of brave ones, the son of Ulabako greets you.

Pagadi is humble before you; he comes with warrior and with shield, but he comes to lay them at your feet.

O father of chiefs, son of the Great Queen over the Water, is it permitted that Pagadi approach you?

Ou! I see it is, your face is pleasant: Bayete, Bayete.”

‘As the last words died on his lips, the air was filled with a deep murmuring sound like distant thunder; it swelled and rolled and finally passed away, to give place to the noise of the rushing of many feet. Over the brow of the hill dashed a compact body of warriors, running swiftly in lines of four, their captain at their head. Each bore a snow-white shield carried on the slant, and above each warrior’s head rose a grey heron’s plume. These were the advanced guard formed of the “Greys” or veteran troops.

‘As they came into full view, the shields heaved and fell, and then from every throat out burst the war-song of the Zulus. Passing us swiftly they took up their position in a double line on our right, and stood there solemnly chanting all the while. Another rush of feet and another company flitted over the hill towards us, but they bore coal-black shields, and the drooping plumes were as black as night. Then they came, faster and faster, but all through the same gap in the bush, The red shields, the dun shields, the mottled shields, the yellow shields, followed each other in quick succession, till at length there stood before us some five hundred men.

‘A moment later, from each of those five hundred throats, there swelled a chant never to be forgotten. From company to company it passed, that wild song, so touching in its simple grandeur, so expressive in its deep, pathetic volume. Never had the white men who listened heard music so weird, so soft, and yet so savage, so simple and yet so expressive of the fiercest passions known to

the human heart. Slowly it died; lower and lower it sank, growing faint, despairing –

‘“Why does he not come, our chief, our lord?
Why does he not welcome his singers?
Ah! see they come, the heralds of our lord!
Our chief is coming to lead his warriors.”’

‘Again it rose and swelled louder and louder, a song of victory and triumph. It rolled against the mountains, it beat upon the ground.

‘“He is coming – he is here – attended by his chosen.
Now we shall go forth to slay;
Now shall we taste of the battle.”’

‘Higher and higher yet until at length the chief Pagate, swathed in war garments of splendid furs, preceded by runners and accompanied by picked warriors, crept slowly up. He was old and tottering, and of an unwieldy bulk. One moment the old man stood and surveyed his warriors, and listened to the familiar war cry. As he stood his face lit up with the light of battle. The tottering figure straightened itself, the feeble had become strong once more. With a shout the old man shook off his supporters and grasped his shield, and then, forgetting his weakness and his years, he rushed to his chieftain’s place in the centre of his men. Pagate stopped and raised his hand, and the place was filled with utter silence. But not for long. The next moment five hundred shields were tossed aloft, five hundred spears flashed in the sunshine, and with a sudden roar sprang forth the royal salute – Bayete! Bayete! (accent on first ‘e’)

‘The chief drew back and gave directions to his “Indunas”, his wise ones, distinguished from their fellows by the absence of plume or shield. The Indunas passed the orders to the captains and at once the dance began. First they manoeuvred a little in silence, changing their position with wonderful precision and agility; but as their blood warmed there came a sound like the hissing of ten thousand snakes, and they charged again and again. A pause and then the company of the “Greys” on the right, threw itself into open order, flitted past like so many vultures, to precipitate themselves with a wild whistling cry on an opposing body, which rushed to meet it. They joined issue; they grappled; on them swooped another company, then another and another, until nothing was to be distinguished except a mass of wild faces, of heaving, changing forms, rolling and writhing, and to all appearances, killing and being killed; whilst the whole air was pervaded with a shrill, savage, sibilation – S’gee! S’gee! S’gee!

‘Another pause, and forth from the ranks sprang a chosen warrior and hurled himself on an imaginary foe. Warrior after warrior came forth, and last of all to spring forward with a wild yell was the future chief, Pagate’s son and successor. He stood with his shield in one hand, and lifted his battleaxe – borne by him alone – in the other. Looking proudly around, he rattled his lion-claw necklace, whilst from every side burst forth a storm of sibilating applause, that strange whistling sound, which, without the slightest apparent movement of face or lip, issued from every mouth, not from the soldiers only, but from the old men, women and children.

‘Then followed a mimic battle, which is beyond words to describe in its abandoned fury. Wild as seemed the confusion, through it all, even in the moments of highest excitement, some sort of rough order was maintained.

‘At last the warriors grew weary, and the companies were drawn up in order to receive the praise and thanks of the white men whom they had honoured, and to which the Zulus replied in imposing fashion. At a given signal each man

began to tap his ox-hide shield softly with the handle of his spear, producing a sound like the murmur of the distant sea. By slow degrees it grew louder and louder, until at length it rolled and re-echoed from the hills like thunder, and came to its conclusion with a fierce, quick rattle. This is the royal salute of the Zulus, and is but rarely heard by a white man. One more sonorous salute with voice and hand and then the warriors disappeared as they had come, dropping swiftly over the brow of the hill in companies. In a few moments no sign or vestige of dance or dancers remained.

'When the last dusky figure had topped the rising ground and had stood out for an instant against the flaming background of the western sun, then vanished as it were back into its native darkness beyond those gates of fire, the old Chief drew near and sat amongst Shepstone and his companions.'

' "Ah!", said he, taking the hand of Sir Theophilus Shepstone and addressing him by his native name, "ah! t'Sompseu, t'Sompseu, the seasons are many since I first held this your hand. Then we were young, and life lay bright before us, and now you have grown great and are growing grey; and I have grown very old. I have eaten the corn of my time till only the cob is left for me to suck, and ow! it is bitter. But it is well that I should clasp your hand once more O holder of the spirit of Chaka, before I sit down and sleep with my forefathers. Ow! I am glad."⁵⁵

In Lilius Rider Haggard's biography of her father, *The Cloak That I Left*, she describes how Haggard sat in the shadows listening to the two men talking 'until a full moon topped the edges of the further side of the valley and flooded all that wild and lovely place with a silver radiance . . . At last the old chief rose to take his leave, and his parting words came clearly to Rider's ears and were written down in the little notebook he carried.'

' "Your counsel is good, t'Sompseu, and perhaps while your arm is still strong, and you hold it out to shield the white peoples that they may dwell in safety beneath it. But I tell you t'Sompseu, that Cetywayo's regiments grow thirsty for blood, and his captains cry that they weary of idleness, and will the King have them milk cows and hoe gardens like women? Go to the King's kraal on the Feast of the First Fruits, and count the warriors who dance before Cetywayo – for every one that I have shown you he will summon a thousand, and there will be much killing. Cetywayo's heart is soft towards you, he does not want war with the English, but he is but one mind against who would tread the red road of the assegai – the road that was trodden by the great Elephants Chaka and Dingaan."

' "Is it so, Pagate?" Shepstone replied quietly. "Then I tell you as I told the King, that the Queen of England is the most mighty one in the whole earth, and though her foot, of which you see but the little toe here in Africa, seems small to you, yet if she is angered it will stamp the Zulu flat, so that they cease to be."

' "Ow! t'Sompseu, truth and wisdom dwells in your heart, and it may be so, but first there will be a very great killing." And with a sigh the unwieldy old man turned and bidding them a dignified farewell, departed to his kraal.'

For Haggard the visit to Pagate's homestead was clearly the high point of Bulwer's tour, which included visits to Greytown, Estcourt and Colenso.

On the return to Pietermaritzburg of Bulwer and his retinue *The Natal Witness* observed that 'His Excellency, who has the reputation of working too hard, came back . . . all the better for his trip.' The same report refers to 'Mr Haggart, private secretary'. Certainly Haggard seems to have taken on secretarial duties by this time but he still remained an unpaid member of Bulwer's staff.⁵⁶

Bulwer and 'Haggart' were back in time to attend a race meeting on 22 May – '5000 persons were on the ground, a larger number than even assembled at the turning of the first sod of the railway at Durban.'⁵⁷

Two days later on the 24 May Haggard would also have been in attendance with the Governor and Sir Arthur Cunynghame, commander-in-chief of the army in South Africa, at manoeuvres by the 13th Regiment, the Maritzburg Rifles, Natal Carbineers, Cadet Corps and Mounted Corps from Hilton College.

That evening there was a ball at Government House where 'an excellent innovation was introduced by the laying out of a capital supper in a capacious marquee which enabled everyone to enjoy the most important event of the day without crowding,' noted *The Natal Witness*,⁵⁸ later recording a 'very pleasant garden party . . . held at Government House on (June) the 1st.'⁵⁹

Organising and attending such events were the main occupation of Haggard during 1876. 'The remainder of my life in Natal . . . as secretary to the Governor can be summed up in a few words. I copied despatches, received guests, and did my other duties, probably not as well as I might have done.'⁶⁰

Among his acquaintances of this period was Sir George Pomeroy Colley, then a colonel. 'He stayed with us at Government House'. Haggard recalled that when Colley was leaving Natal he 'wished to sell a shotgun which I wished to purchase . . . We had a difference of opinion as to the price of the article. Finally I interviewed him one morning when he was taking his bath, and he suggested we should settle the matter by tossing. This I did with a half-sovereign, he giving the call but who won I forget.'⁶¹

Another military acquaintance was Captain Cox, Bulwer's aide-de-camp, who severed an artery in his head while playing polo. 'A serious operation was performed on him by doctors which necessitated his being kept under chloroform for five hours, but great difficulty was experienced in tying this artery. He seemed to get better, and at last was allowed to eat a snipe which I went out and shot for him. That evening some circumstance or other made me uneasy about him, and of my own motion I passed the night sitting up in the office, going in to look at him from time to time. He slept well, and when the dawn came I thought that I would retire to bed. By an afterthought I returned to give him another look, and found him still lying asleep, but with blood spurting from his head in a little fountain. I pressed my thumb on the artery and held it there until assistance came. Another operation was performed, and ultimately he recovered, though one of his eyes was affected.'⁶²

In his autobiography Haggard also recalled Chief Justice Henry Connor who 'has always remained in my mind because of his curious power of self-control. I remember that when the mail came in, which at that time I believe was only once a month, he used to undo the many *Times* newspapers that it brought to him and arrange them in a pile. Then, beginning with the oldest in date, on each day he would read his *Times*, nor, however exciting might be the news, would he suffer himself to anticipate its daily development. He never looked at the end of the story. Thus did he delude himself into the belief that he was still in England and receiving his morning paper wet from the press. The drawback to the system was that he was always a month behind the Natal world and two behind that of Europe.'⁶³

Haggard thought John Bird, the treasurer of the colony, a 'dear old gentleman' who had 'the most marvellous memory of any man I have ever known. He told me that if he read once anything he liked he remembered it; if he read it twice he remembered it without error; if he read it thrice he never forgot it. In his youth he had been a surveyor, and in the course of his long waggon journeys in the Cape he taught himself Greek. I have heard him offer to bet anyone five pounds that he would repeat

any book in Homer that might be selected without making five mistakes. Also I heard him give a lecture on "The Pleasures of Memory" which was nearly two hours long. In the course of this lecture he made dozens of quotations from all sorts of authors and never used a single note.'⁶⁴

Caught up in the social whirl of Pietermaritzburg the young Haggard was not unaware of the underlying tensions of the time – of which the conversation between Shepstone and Pagate was an indication. In a letter dated 6 July written from Durban where Haggard was enjoying a three-day holiday ('the first holiday I have had with the exception of a week when I was sick.') he wrote of 'stirring news from the Transvaal'. There had been a skirmish between the 'Boers and Secoceni, a native chief of very considerable power.'

A battle with the Boers was one thing, but Sekhukhune of the Pedi was an ally of the Zulus in dispute with the Transvaal over their north-western borders. There was a danger the Zulus could 'take an opportunity to have a shot at them too'. Another piece of the jigsaw were the Amaswazi. With their friendship towards the Boers wavering there was a possibility that if they patched up their differences with the Zulus the three tribal groups could make a concerted attack on the Boers. 'War here between white and black is a terrible thing.'⁶⁵



Theophilus Shepstone and his staff en route to annex the Transvaal Republic to the British Crown. From left to right (standing) Lieutenant Phillips, Melmoth Osborn, Colonel Brooke, Captain James; (seated) Joseph Henderson, Theophilus Shepstone, Dr Vacy Lyle, Fred Fynney. Haggard is seated on the ground.

(Photograph by courtesy of *The Natal Witness*)

The one occasion Haggard could recall Shepstone getting angry with him, 'for he was very tender to my faults', was when he suggested the Transvaal be better left unannexed. ' "Then," I said, "the Zulus and the Boers will destroy each other, and the Transvaal will fall like a ripe apple into the lap of Great Britain." ' Shepstone was furious and angrily asked Haggard if he understood what he was saying, 'that such a policy would mean the destruction of thousands of white men, women and children by the Zulu assegais, to be followed probably by a great war between white and black.'⁶⁶

While Haggard was holidaying in Durban, Shepstone was attending the Confederation conference in London. He returned with a commission from Lord Carnarvon empowering him to annex the Transvaal. Shepstone asked Bulwer to let Haggard go with him 'partly because he had taken a great liking to him, and partly because he . . . saw in Rider, boy as he was, the ability to understand the native mind – one to whom he might teach much.'⁶⁷

At first it appears Bulwer was reluctant to let Haggard go but finally he agreed. '[Shepstone] wants me to come with him for two reasons. First, we are very good friends and he was kind enough to say he wished to have me as a companion. Second, I imagine there will be a good deal of what is called the champagne and sherry policy up at Pretoria and he wants somebody to look after the entertaining. It will be a most interesting business . . .'⁶⁸

Haggard went as a member of Shepstone's staff, which included Melmoth Osborn, Major Marshall Clarke, Colonel Brooke, Captain James, Joseph Henderson, W.B. Morcom, Fred Fynney, Dr Vacy Lyle and Lieutenant Phillips, in charge of the escort of mounted police.

It was an expedition undertaken, if not under a veil of secrecy, at least without any clear statement of intent. 'All we can say,' wrote the frustrated editor of *The Natal Witness* on 1 December, 1876, 'is that (Shepstone's) present plans are understood to be to start for the Transvaal before these lines appear in print . . . Whether it is true that 40 mounted police are going as guard of honour we cannot say. All we can say is that if they do go and cross into the territory of the Transvaal, or if a single man of them does, it will be an invasion of that country. If the British emissary wants a guard of honour beyond the frontier, he must ask it from Mr Burgers; if he wants to invade the Transvaal, he must go with more than 40 men.'⁶⁹

But the trip was delayed and Haggard only managed to get away on 15 December. During the afternoon 'four of our party, two on horseback, and two on the box of an ox-waggonette, proceeded down the streets of Maritzburg in the rain,' Haggard recorded in his diary of the trip, 'looking, in our flannel shirts and mackintoshes "like gentlemen about to extend British influence" as a local newspaper sarcastically remarked.'⁷⁰

It was their intention to catch up with the rest of the wagons and camp that night at Howick. 'On arrival we found the eight wagons, each with its span of sixteen oxen, drawn up and tents pitched for our reception.'

The next day dawned fine but an early departure was delayed due to some of the wagons having to be repacked and the shooting of two oxen who had come down 'with that terrible disease "redwater".'

When they finally got going it proved a 'fearful day. What is known as a hot wind had set in, a violent north wind which comes straight from the burning plains of the interior, withering and scorching everything in its course. We only made a short trek of about two hours and a half, and then outspanned, just before a thunderstorm struck us, travelling as always in Natal against the wind. It set in wet for the night, and a wet night in camp is very wretched.'

'The next night we pitched our camp in one of the coldest spots in the colony, a high plateau at the foot of the Karkloof heights.'

Another day's trek brought them to Mooi River and the day after that they arrived in Estcourt, 'a pretty little place with about a hundred inhabitants, on the Bushman's River, and we all got our papers and letters, which were more than welcome.'

Colenso was the next stage on the journey. Crossing the Thukela a wagon got stuck on a rock in the middle of the river. 'It was a wild scene. The wide river, with its roaring rapids and wooded banks over which the evening light was fast darkening into night, made a strange frame for the picture of the wagon, stuck fast in its centre, the confused and bellowing oxen, the naked drivers up to their middles in water, shouting and clapping their tremendous "voorslay" (*sic*) whips cut from the hide of a seacow. At length, the eight drivers with their attendant voorloopers managed to get the oxens' heads straight, and seizing the moment to let into all the unfortunate beasts with their great whips, accompanied with a volley of wild cries, got them to pull the wagon out.'

Two days later it was Christmas Day 'and very hot. It seemed queer, riding along in the heat over these desolate African plains, gun in hand, to think of the people at home, and the holly-decked rooms, the warm fires and the church bells. We never realise what it means until we become wanderers upon the face of the earth – the old home, the old faces, and the Christmas Days of our childhood.'

That afternoon after crossing the Klip River they arrived in Ladysmith. 'Then on, day after day, until we were ascending the high and healthy slopes of the Biggarsberg, where the weather, which has been terrifically hot, broke with a great storm. As we drew near the Ingagane River the country grew less desolate and more fertile than among the rock-strewn hills we had been passing through. From there we made a night trek to Newcastle, where we were to meet other members of the expedition. It was one of those glorious moonlit nights one sometimes sees in Africa; so lovely that we went on before the waggons and waited for their coming on a little stony kopje at the top of a hill. I shall never forget that night. Behind us the moon, all the brighter for its background of inky clouds, was flooding the mountain plain and valley with wonderful light. It struck upon Leo's Kop (*sic*), and made that solitary hill look more mysteriously beautiful and more lonesome. It fell upon the great distances of rolling plain and made them more limitless still. It lit the hill behind us, and turned the upright slabs of rock into enormous and fantastic gravestones. Its rays even reached the base of the Drakensberg towering on a dim horizon, their heads now and again crowned with fire by the flickering summer lightning. At length the long line of white-capped wagons came creeping up, breaking the silence and the spell, and we set out on our march again.'

In Newcastle Haggard bought, for eight pounds, 'a three-legged sporting pony – I say three legged because his fourth prop could hardly be called a leg'. However Haggard was confident he would soon build up his fourth leg 'after about forty miles a day for three or four consecutive days, and nothing but grass to eat.'

His other pony Metal ('so called because of the metallic nature of his mouth') was 'a handsome pony, just like a little wooden horse, possessing great speed and endurance. His weak point is he abominates the report of a gun. If you are shooting birds he will jerk your arm just as you fire, so that he is altogether useless as a shooting pony, except to ride into the game on – and then you can't hold him.'

On the afternoon of 2 January 1877, 'we trekked out of Newcastle into the wilds of the Transvaal'. It was pouring with rain again and 'when we got to Sliding Hill all the wagons had to come up with double spans – a very good bit of driving. Next day we crossed the border line, a little spruit, and entered the Transvaal.'

They reached Pretoria on 27 January. 'We had done the 370 miles in thirty-eight days – not bad travelling.'

An older Haggard later recalled with nostalgia the camaraderie experienced during those days of travel. 'Those camps were very pleasant, and in them, as we smoked and drank our "square-face" after the day's trek, I heard many a story from Sir Theophilus himself, from Osborn and from Fynney, who next to him, perhaps, knew as much of the Zulus and their history as any living in Natal.'⁷¹

Osborn had witnessed the battle of Ndondakusuka fought between rival claimants to the Zulu throne, Cetshwayo and Mbuyazi, in 1856. According to Haggard he had swum his horse across the Thukela river and 'hid himself in a wooded kopje in the middle of the battlefield'⁷². Haggard made use of Osborn's account of the battle in *Child of Storm* (1913), the second volume of his Zulu trilogy.

Haggard also recalled Shepstone telling him of his visit to the banks of the Thukela 'a day or two afterwards, and (he) told me that he never saw another sight so fearful as they presented, because of the multitude of dead men, women and children with which they were strewn.'⁷³

He also heard stories from another individual attached to the Commission 'a kind of head native attendant to Sir Theophilus'. His name was M'hlopekazi. A Swazi of high birth, he was 'a tall, thin, fierce-faced fellow with a great hole above the left temple over which the skin pulsated, that he had come by in some battle. He said that he had killed ten men in single combat . . . always making use of a battleaxe. However this may be, he was an interesting old fellow from whom I heard many stories that Fynney used to interpret.'⁷⁴

Under the name Umslopogaas, together with his axe the Woodpecker, M'hlopekazi featured in three books by Haggard: *Allan Quatermain* (1887), *Nada the Lily* (1892) and *She and Allan* (1921).⁷⁵

Haggard's own servant, a Zulu called Mazooku [Haggard's spelling. Correctly rendered as Masuku], whose name meant 'day' was 'a member of the Buthelezi tribe, a very famous one, to which many notables in Zulu history belonged'. He was born in 1854 two years before the battle of Ndondakusuka. 'His father fought on the side of Cetshwayo on that occasion, but owing to the induna under whom he served being suspected of disloyalty, the said induna, with Mazooku's father and others, was obliged to take refuge in Natal.'⁷⁶ Mazooku appears under his own name in *The Witch's Head* (1885).

The Zulus had conferred on Haggard the name Lundanda u Ndandokalweni which, according to his daughter Lilius, 'freely translated, means "One who walks upon the hills" or "the tall one who travels on the heights"'.⁷⁷

Haggard himself wrote that 'the Zulus gave me the name of Indanda which meant, I believe, one who is tall and pleasant natured.'⁷⁸

* * *

A number of stories have become attached to this first period of Haggard's life spent in Natal, as described above. For example, Otto's Bluff, just outside Pietermaritzburg, has been cited as the inspiration for the novel *She* (1887). According to Otto family tradition Haggard wrote the book sitting under a particular rock. Another family tradition relates how Haggard came to the area as a learner-farmer under Petrus Albertus Ryno Otto, the man who trekked from the Cape in 1840 and gave Otto's Bluff its name. While Haggard certainly would have met the Ottos while on Bulwer's staff – their names appear on the guest list for the 8 December ball – and could well have gone hunting on their farm, claims regarding his writings

and agricultural apprenticeship have no basis in fact. Interestingly, P.A.R. Otto junior's wife, Helena, had a horse named Haggard.⁷⁹

In the corner of a display at the Fort Durnford museum at Estcourt there is a picture of Haggard and a photograph of a cottage in Albert Street he is said to have rented and which enjoyed a view of two hills. 'Haggard is said to have been inspired by the town's twin hillocks, Queen Sheba's Breasts, and included them in the novel *King Solomon's Mines*,' reads the legend beneath the photograph. Were the hills named Queen Sheba's Breasts before or after the novel was published in 1885?

As we have seen, Haggard visited Estcourt with Bulwer in 1876 and was to pass through on at least two more occasions. Local historian Fred Woods, whose family has lived in the area since 1863, says there is no documentation concerning Haggard's sojourn in Estcourt. 'It's all hearsay, but it has always been accepted that he stayed here.'

A more intriguing story may lie in Haggard's links with the Ghost Mountain or Tshaneni in northern KwaZulu-Natal. This mountain near Mkuze is the setting for much of *Nada the Lily*. According to a framed notice in the Ghost Mountain Inn, Haggard did a spell 'of duty at the Ubombo Court House as a member of the staff of Sir Theophilus Shepstone.' Again there appears to be no basis in fact for this statement. In his preface to the book, which also contains a fulsome dedication to Shepstone, Haggard thanks 'Mr F.B. Fynney, late Zulu border agent, for much information given to him in bygone years by word of mouth.' Perhaps Fynney's tales were the source for *Nada the Lily* which Haggard's imaginative skills invested with the sense of a more immediate experience.

Perhaps such stories may be explained by the desire of people and places to claim some link with Haggard once he had become famous, with the consequence that such tenuous connections as existed were embroidered into something more substantial.

* * * *

The focus of this article is on Haggard's life in Natal, and consequently his stay in the Transvaal is dealt with in brief.

The proclamation of annexation was read out in Pretoria on 12 April 1877. To avoid inflaming local feeling the raising of the British flag was postponed. It was raised on 24 May, Queen Victoria's birthday. Haggard pulled it up the flagstaff.

Haggard had hardly settled into a new post as English clerk to Melmoth Osborn, Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal, when the Master and Registrar of the High Court died and he was appointed to act in his place – barely turned 21, and with no legal experience. His superior, John Kotze, the high court judge, was only 28.

In Pretoria Haggard found a friend of similar age in Arthur Cochrane, who came to the Transvaal with William Sergeant, a crown agent sent out by the home government to investigate the Transvaal's finances.⁸⁰

Haggard and Cochrane built a small cottage in Pretoria, ironically calling it 'The Palatial'. Rider Haggard Street in modern Pretoria is close to the spot where it once stood. They were living there when the Anglo-Zulu War began in January 1879 and it was at The Palatial that Haggard first heard of the Zulu defeat of the British forces at Isandlwana, told to him by an old Hottentot washerwoman – a full day before an exhausted rider galloped into Pretoria with the official news.

With constant alarums from Zulus and Boers, Haggard took the Queen's shilling as a cavalry volunteer, eventually commanding a troop of the Pretoria Horse.

In Pretoria he acquired the favourite horse of his life, Moresco, 'a long, low chestnut, with high hip bones and a rather plain head'.⁸¹ It was while riding Moresco

that Haggard managed to get lost in the bush again – this time being rescued by the faithful Mazooku.

In 1879 Haggard and his friend Cochrane resigned from government service to start a farming venture centred on ostriches. They bought a small estate just outside Newcastle from Melmoth Osborn who had been resident magistrate there and built the farmhouse known as *Hilldrop* on the 3000 acre property of *Rooipoint* farm.

While Cochrane headed for Natal with a herd of ostriches, Haggard returned to England in August 1879.

A year later, and after a protracted courtship, Haggard married Louisa Margitson on 11 August, 1880. He was also having second thoughts about farming in South Africa and considered pursuing either a legal career or a return to the colonial service. But lack of opportunity, plus his commitment to Cochrane, decided him to return to South Africa.

While Haggard procrastinated Cochrane was on the farm struggling with recalcitrant ostriches, a brick kiln, and waiting for a grinding mill stuck in Durban – there was no money to pay for its transport up-country.

Some of these financial problems were sorted out by the arrival of George Blomefield whom Haggard sent out in June 1880. He was a ward of William Haggard who with £1000 from the boy's own inheritance had purchased for him a partnership in the farm with Rider and Cochrane, taking as security a part-mortgage on the estate. 'Considering the difficulties of the times, this was a most generous payment for a one-third partnership and, if nothing else, allowed all outstanding debts to be repaid.'⁸²

Back in London Haggard and his wife Louie, as she was known, purchased an entire household of furniture for *Hilldrop* before setting sail for South Africa in November together with Lucy Gibbs, an elderly maid of Louie's, Stephen Lanham, a groom from Bradenham, 'three dogs, two parrots, and a "spider" carriage, which was built to my order in Norwich.'⁸³

They arrived in Pietermaritzburg in time to spend Christmas with the Shepstones but 'the news that greeted them was anything but cheerful. The long-expected Boer Rebellion in the Transvaal had broken out in full force, the country was in an uproar, and Sir George Colley, now Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Natal, was about to move up-country with the few troops available.'⁸⁴

The situation put Haggard in a quandary. 'Newcastle, whither we desired to proceed, lies very near the Transvaal border, and the question was, Did I dare take my wife thither? . . . Literally I was at my wits' end to know what to do. To advance seemed too risky; to remain where we were was both wearisome and, with our servants, ruinously expensive.'⁸⁵

On 27 December Shepstone recorded in his diary that the Haggards 'terminated their visit with us and went back to Moseley's'. The hotel was expensive, and to make matters worse, all their belongings had already been sent on to Newcastle, at a cost of £155. On 2 January Louie wrote to her London solicitor: 'We've got this far OK, but we're detained by the Boer outbreak which began as we were about to start up country. We hope it will be safe to venture forth next week.' She went on to say that the war had caused inflation and they needed money by the next post. 'We hope to be able to live very cheaply when once we get settled . . . I fancy I shall like the life out here very much, though of course now we are in a very unsettled and uncomfortable state as we sent everything . . . up country before this row began so we have hardly more than the clothes we are wearing.'⁸⁶

While Haggard dithered, Louie decided for them both. Boers or no Boers she wanted to go to her new home. Also, Pietermaritzburg was 'fearfully hot'⁸⁷ and she

was pregnant with their first child. Accordingly Haggard bought two horses for the spider, to add to the two horses sent down from Newcastle by Cochrane.

On the evening of 9 January, shortly before they left, the couple dined at Government House. 'It was the night before Colley left Maritzburg to take personal command of the troops at Newcastle.'⁸⁸

'I believe there were thirteen of us at table . . . of whom three were ladies – Lady Colley, another lady whose name I forget, and my wife. The other guests were officers and members of Colley's staff. The only name I can remember is that of young Elwes, who within a week or two was to die charging the Boer schanzes and shouting "Floreat Etona!". I sat next to him at table.'

Elwes was recently out from England and told Haggard that just before his departure he had seen Haggard's father at King's Lynn station. Haggard also recalled Elwes as the embarrassed focus of conversation at one point in the evening. Elwes had been responsible for writing the menus in French and he had recorded one of the items as '*pâtés de mince*'. Lady Colley enquired what this dish was "I never heard of a dish called *pâtés de mince*!" whereon everyone turned and looked at Elwes.'

'"*Pâtés de mince*, Lady Colley," he stammered presently, his youthful face covered with blushes, "is the French for mince pies."

'Poor Elwes. He did not hear the last of his *pâtés de mince* during that meal. Thus do farce and tragedy often walk hand in hand.'⁸⁹

Next day Colley left for Newcastle, Shepstone recording in his diary: 'Sir George Colley started early this morning for Newcastle. I hope he will not act rashly.'⁹⁰

Rashly or not, Haggard recalled grimly that 'in a few months' time Lady Colley, the other lady, my wife and I were the sole survivors of that dinner-party.'⁹¹

The Haggards set out for Newcastle on 14 January, 1881. The journey followed the same route Haggard had taken three years earlier with Shepstone to the Transvaal. 'We got to our first stage, Howick, last Friday, which luckily for us was a very pretty place with a comfortable hotel,' Louie wrote to Haggard's father from Estcourt on January 19. 'I say luckily, because we were detained there by the rain till Monday.'

'The unhappy Gibbs came to sad grief' on this section of the journey 'and all on account of her devotion to Bob. She was nursing the said spoilt animal on her knee when suddenly the carriage went into a hole, gave a lurch and nearly sent Bob flying. In her efforts to save him out fell Gibbs right between the wheels.'⁹²

'Never shall I forget the splash she caused,' Haggard remembered. 'The spectacle of an elderly British lady's maid in that hole still clasping Bob to her bosom was almost weird. The hind wheels of the "spider" went over her, grinding her deeper into the mire.

"Good God!," I said to Stephen, "she is done for."

'My further remarks were interrupted by a series of piercing yells.

'"Lord bless you, sir," answered Stephen, "if she can screech like that there ain't much the matter."

'Nor was there, except mud and Gibbs's voluble views upon South African roads.'⁹³

The roads got worse. 'We then started at 9.30 a.m. for Mooi River . . . which we did not reach until about 8 o'clock in the evening. The roads were in a positively fearful state: we could only go at a foot's pace the whole way, and even then we got into some very nasty places. I walked a good part of the way, in fact we all did, as it was quite as hard work hanging on driving as walking.'⁹⁴

Haggard remembered galloping 'in front of a fearful thunderstorm, of which the flashes kept striking behind us, and at last we reached shelter just in time.' The thunderstorm 'reduced Gibbs to a perfect jelly of terror.'

'"Don't be so foolish Gibbs," said my wife, "and make an exhibition of yourself. Look at me, I'm not frightened."

'"No, ma'am, I see you ain't," answered the gasping Gibbs, "and I tell you straight I don't call it ladylike!"'⁹⁵

On another day they 'ploughed through sodden peat flats, in which our wheels sank to the axles, to the edge of a river – I forget which river. On the farther bank was an inn. The night was coming and the river was in full flood. What could we do? To get back across those flats was impossible; to attempt to cross the flooded river was very dangerous. My wife as usual, made up her mind at once. "Let's try it," she said.'

'I felt bound to give Gibbs her choice.

'"Don't you go a-asking of her, sir," said Stephen, "or we shan't never do naughting. If we've got to drown, she may as well drown too." Stephen, I may observe, lacked affection for Gibbs.

'So we "tried it," two brave and brawny Zulus wading into the water with us, and hanging on to the sides of the "spider" in order to prevent it from over-turning. A transport rider on the bank, who had warned us against the attempt, shouted valedictory messages: "When you are all drowned, don't blame me. Remember that I told you so!"

'I answered something appropriate to the occasion and my feelings, and in we went.

'The stream was coming down like a mill-race and rising every minute. Soon the horses were off their legs, but they were plucky beasts and struck out for the further shore of the drift. The water ran through the bottom of the carriage, which began to float, but the brave Kaffirs hung on, although they were up to their arm-pits and could scarcely stand. Gibbs wailed softly in the background and clasped Bob to her breast. There were a few fearful moments of doubt, then, thank God! the horses got their feet again, and we dragged through, damp but safe, and slept that night in comfort in the inn.'⁹⁶

Gibbs, called by the Zulus anglice "a worn-out old cow who would have no more calves," survived her African adventures and when the Haggards returned to England 'she remained in our service for a year or two, then left and vanished away as modern domestics do.'⁹⁷

The weather improved for the remainder of their journey but the clouds of war were fast approaching. 'At almost every stage we meet fugitives from the Transvaal, but they all seem to look upon Newcastle as safe.'⁹⁸

At last they reached Newcastle and the farm *Rooipoint* 'about a mile and half from the town'. The farmhouse, *Hilldrop*, appears renamed as *Mooifontein* in *Jess* (1887):

'It was a delightful spot. At the back of the stead was the steep boulder-strewn face of the flat-topped hill that curved round on each side, embosoming a great slope of green, in the lap of which the house was placed. It was very solidly built of brown stone, and . . . was covered with rich brown thatch. All along its front ran a wide verandah, up the trellis-work of which green vines and blooming creepers trailed pleasantly, and beyond was the broad carriage-drive of red soil, bordered with bushy orange trees laden with odorous flowers and green and golden fruit.'

At *Hilldrop* Haggard was reunited with his friend Cochrane, his Zulu servant Mazooku and his favourite horse, Moresco. While Haggard was in England Moresco had been having adventures of his own. One night he had escaped to chase after some mares and been stolen by horse thieves. Cochrane, knowing of Haggard's devotion to the horse, advertised large rewards for Moresco's return and eventually traced him down to the Cape. But there the trail vanished.

Some months later Cochrane was riding down to Newcastle when he saw a horse in the pound that looked oddly familiar. 'There was Moresco, worn to a shadow of his former self, his bones sticking through his skin and his shoulders galled and running with sores. No one ever discovered where he had been or how he had come back.'⁹⁹

Cochrane nursed Moresco back to health and by the time Haggard and Louie arrived he was more or less recovered. However he never regained his full strength and despite being a salted horse he caught horse-sickness in May 1881. He was thought to be recovering 'when one night they heard a strange, heavy thumping at the back of the house. Rider got up to see what it was, and found Moresco dying outside the door. Some instinct to find help in his extremity had made him struggle painfully over the low wall which divided the horse kraal from the house premises, and dragging himself to the door he had been banging on it with his head.'¹⁰⁰

The arrival of the Haggards at *Hilldrop* coincided with the opening moves of the First Anglo-Boer War. On 24 January, the day of their arrival, Colley advanced on the Transvaal border. Two days later they heard gunfire. It was the sound of the British forces being defeated at the battle of Laing's Nek. On 28 January Haggard received a note from his old friend W.H. Beaumont, now Resident Magistrate of Newcastle, informing him that the 'troops failed this morning in their attack on the "Nek" and had to retreat to the waggon laager.' Beaumont told Haggard he didn't think Newcastle was in any danger. 'The signal for alarm in town is a bell; but if I think there is any occasion for it I will send out a runner to warn you.'¹⁰¹

On 30 January Haggard wrote to his father: 'Nobody dreamed that Sir George Colley could be mad enough to try and force the passes with such a handful of men, and I believe he was again and again warned of its impossibility . . . We have all got our things up here safely and have made the place quite pretty but can take no pleasure in anything just now with blood being shed like water all round.'¹⁰²

At around noon on 8 February they once again heard the 'guns at work in the neighbourhood of the hill Scheins Hoogte, about eleven miles from our farm. The firing was heavy, that of the field pieces being almost unceasing, as was the crash and roll of the rifles. At dusk it died away. Some Kaffirs came to *Hilldrop* and told us that a force of British soldiers were surrounded on a hill on the Ingogo River: that they were fighting well but that "their arms were tired".'

After the battle of Ingogo on 8 February the victorious Boers invaded Natal. 'One night in the stillness, I heard the galloping of a vast number of horses,' wrote Haggard. 'Some five hundred of the enemy had taken possession of the farm next to our own, which they looted.'

The British colonists decided to form a volunteer corps with the idea of fighting the Boers. Haggard was undecided whether to join or not because of family responsibilities. 'I remember my young wife coming out of the house into the garden, where some of us were talking over the matter, and saying, "Don't consider me. Do what you think your duty."'¹⁰³

However the colonists were denied the chance to do their duty as the authorities, anxious to prevent the war spreading to the civilian population, forbade the formation of such a unit.

The atmosphere at *Hilldrop* was becoming increasingly tense. 'We were surrounded by the enemy, and from hour to hour never knew on whom or where the blow might fall. Every night at *Hilldrop* we placed Kaffirs on the surrounding hills that they might warn us of the approach of the enemy. Well and faithfully did these men fulfil their duty; indeed, we were kept advised of all that happened through the Zulu natives dwelling on our farm. Also my old body-servant Mazooku . . . with his

friends night and day guarded us as a mother might her child. Night by night, sometimes in our clothes, we slept with about six horses saddled in the stable, loaded rifles leaning against our beds, and revolvers beneath our pillows.'¹⁰⁴

Then came a rumour, and a credible one, that a battle between the Boers and British reinforcements marching up to Newcastle was to be fought at a drift of the Ingagane river on Haggard's property; further that the Boers intended occupying *Hilldrop* and the hill behind. 'This was too much, so abandoning everything except our plate, we retreated into laager in Newcastle, and there spent a few very uncomfortable days.'

However the expected battle failed to materialise and the Haggards returned home. In Haggard's view it was the 'one military mistake that they (the Boers) made, for had they done so I believe they would have cut up the line of reinforcements, and subsequently have taken the town of Newcastle without much difficulty. On the contrary, they withdrew to the Nek as silently and swiftly as they had come.'¹⁰⁵

On their return to *Hilldrop* on 25 February Louie recorded in her diary that 'we discovered that someone had been stealing the feathers off two of the ostriches . . . Mr Cochrane luckily discovered the offenders, who were taken into Newcastle to receive the just rewards of their deeds, namely 20 lashes and two months hard labour.'¹⁰⁶

When another warning came of an imminent Boer attack on the farm they decided to ignore it.

On Sunday 27 February Louie wrote: 'Drove into church but found we were too late as service was 10.15 instead of 11.30 as usual. Weather oppressively hot. In the afternoon Rider thought he heard guns but we all said it was thunder. Presently he and Mr Cochrane rode into town and came back with the startling news that an engagement had taken place near the "Nek", our loss was great and Sir G. Colley missing.'

'We were all very anxious (she wrote the next day) for further particulars of the fight today so, as it was too wet for hay-making, Mr Cochrane went into Newcastle and brought back the following news. Sir George, having gone with 500 men to take possession of a hill commanding the "Nek", was attacked by 7000 Boers. Our men . . . ran short of ammunition . . . Sir George was shot through the head.'¹⁰⁷

The Boers had won another decisive victory on the mountain of Majuba.

'We are not altogether in an enviable position' wrote Louie to Haggard's mother on 7 March 1881,¹⁰⁸ describing the British troops as 'panic-stricken' by their continual defeats. Despite their predicament Louie was still capable of expressing admiration for the tenacity of the Boers. 'Their coolness and pluck are wonderful, and they have not made *one* false move yet. Add to this the fact that they are all splendid shots, and you will agree that it is no mean foe with whom we have to deal, though this is what our officers and men would not first believe.'

Louie also had news of life on the farm. 'The farm is pretty flourishing. We are now in the middle of haymaking, and the lazy Rider is routed out about 6 a.m. every fine morning to go and cut. He looks in better health for it, in fact I think we are both in better health since we left England. We have lost another ostrich, luckily not a very good one, but the other birds seem to be doing nicely and some of them have splendid feathers.'

Haymaking was considered 'rather a new departure in that district in our time,' Haggard recalled with pride, 'where the cattle were left to get through the winter as best they could'. Thanks to the strong military presence it showed a good profit as 'the product was in eager demand at high price. I remember selling the result of about a month of my own work for 250 pounds, and never in all my life have I been prouder

of anything than I was of earning that money, literally with my hands and by the sweat of my brow.¹⁰⁹

To help in the haymaking Haggard had imported a hay-cutting machine – 'one of the first seen in these parts' – pulled by three horses and boasting a 'dreadful apparatus' of 'levers and knives'. Once the hay was mown a 'gigantic rake' which they had invented was used to gather it up into 'enormous cocks'. These were covered 'and when they had settled and sweetened by the generated heat, we sold them to the purchasers, generally commissariat officers.'

They also grew mealies 'but here the trouble was that stray cattle and horses would break in at night and eat them.'¹¹⁰

At the foot of the 'boulder-strewn hill' Haggard and Cochrane 'erected the steam-driven grinding mill which I had bought in England, our idea being that we should make our fortunes or at any rate do very well as millers.' But they didn't keep the farm long enough to find out if it would turn into a paying proposition. In hindsight Haggard expressed his doubts: 'It was a risky business to import expensive machinery into a place that was not accustomed to machinery, since it involved the employment of an engineer and long and costly delays if anything went wrong.'¹¹¹

On 4 May, in a letter to Haggard's mother, Louie declared the mill 'finished and ready to start'. However an earlier trial run had 'rather disastrous results to poor George Bromefield. He went up the ladder and meddled with one of the safety-valves (the mill not going quite right), whereupon a tremendous noise was heard and rush of steam and water came out. All the lookers-on fled for their lives thinking something fearful had happened, and Mr. B. in his hurry slipped his foot and came down with a crash upon his head, happily without hurting himself at all.'¹¹²

Another more successful venture was that of brick-making – 'for which there was a good market in Newcastle,' wrote Haggard.¹¹³ It was hard work and 'our energy . . . astonished the neighbourhood so much that Natal Boers used to ride from quite a distance to see two white farmers actually working with their own hands. One of the curses of South Africa, is, or used to be, the universal habit of relegating all manual toil, or as much of it as possible, to Kaffirs, with the result that it came to be looked upon as a more or less degrading occupation only fit for black men.'

Another first for Haggard and Cochrane was the farming of ostriches in that part of Natal. Haggard found the ostrich 'an extremely troublesome bird'. One gave Cochrane a 'frightful drubbing, and through a pair of opera glasses I saw an unfortunate Kaffir barely escape with his life from its attentions by going to earth in an ant-bear hole.'¹¹⁴

They also had a tendency to 'pick up pocket knives or anything that attracts them.' One swallowed a bone that got caught in its gullet. Haggard and Cochrane decided to operate with a 'razor and without anaesthetic'. Not surprisingly the bird 'resented our surgical aid'. However they got the bone out and the bird recovered, only to turn up a few weeks later 'with another bone immovably planted in exactly the same place!' This time the ostrich was left to its fate.

Besides ostriches they kept draught oxen and some wagons. These were hired out to Government for transport 'though from these trips they returned dreadfully footsore and poor.'¹¹⁵ They also invested 'hundreds of pounds in a bunch of trek oxen which we sent down to the bushveld to recover.' Later they received a message informing them they had died from eating a poisonous herb called tulip. 'We often wondered whether "tulip" really accounted for their disappearance from our ken.'

The defeat at Majuba in February effectively ended the First Anglo-Boer War. On 6 March a truce was arranged with the Transvaal and on 21 March an armistice

was signed and it was agreed a Royal Commission be appointed to negotiate the terms of the peace – the retrocession of the Transvaal was certain.

Haggard was in Newcastle when the news of the armistice arrived. 'Never shall I forget the scene on the market square . . . Some thousands of people were gathered there, many of them refugees, among whom were a number of loyal Boers, and with them soldiers, townsfolk and natives. I saw strong men weeping like children, and heard English-born people crying aloud that they were "b——y Englishmen" no more. Soldiers were raging and cursing, and no one tried to stop them; natives stood stupefied, staring before them, their arms folded on their breasts; women wrung their hands.'

'Then an idea struck the crowd; they made a rude effigy of Mr. Gladstone and, as was done in most other loyal parts of South Africa, burnt it with contempt and curses.'¹¹⁶

On 6 April 1881 Haggard let *Hilldrop* 'for a residence for H.E. Sir Hercules Robinson and staff and for the use and service of the Royal Commission about to assemble under H.E.'s presidency' in order to thrash out the peace terms.

The £50 a week rent was a welcome addition to the Haggard finances. Haggard's lease arrangement allowed for the option of a renewal 'for a further period to complete the term of one month' and reserved 'our own bedroom for my wife's use.' In the event the commission occupied the house for about five weeks 'during which time we all got on very well together, and of course I heard much of what was going on.'

Haggard was not unaware of the irony of the commission sitting in his home. 'It was a strange fate which decreed that the Retrocession of the Transvaal, over which I had myself hoisted the British flag, should be practically accomplished beneath my roof.'¹¹⁷

Rider, Cochrane and Blomefield camped in tents or slept down at the mill. Another tent was used for cooking. 'We shall have to live in a kind of picnic fashion,' wrote Louie, 'I expect for about a fortnight, as our house-room will consist of bedroom and two tents! – one of which we shall convert into a kitchen and the other a room for Jack. Mr. Cochrane and George Blomefield are going over to the mill . . . we are now having bright sunny weather, just the right sort for camping out.'¹¹⁸

Jack, one of Haggard's brothers, had arrived for a visit early in May complete with his terrier Spice 'who signalled her arrival by fighting the household cat at the top of a tree.'¹¹⁹

Jack with 'his red hair and roving glances, his mercurial love affairs and endless store of startling yarns – was cheerful company in anxious times.'¹²⁰ Jack wasn't only out on holiday, he was also looking for a post, 'but I fear there is no chance of his getting employment in Natal owing to the flood of Transvaal officials who have to be provided for somehow.'¹²¹

Events in the Transvaal and the subsequent war had undermined the Haggards' desire to stay in South Africa. 'Every day that passes has only strengthened my conviction that we can look for no peace and security in South Africa,' Haggard wrote to his mother.

'Gladstone's policy has effectually ruined the country . . . We have more or less fixed on Vancouver Island for our next Colonial venture. I dare say you will wonder at this, but there are several reasons, first we both like Colonial life, next it is a satisfaction to earn one's own living, thirdly, and chiefly, I am very anxious to form connections with some country in which it is possible for a man of moderate means to start his children in some respectable career in which they can learn their livelihood, and have a fair chance of getting on in the world. This I had hoped to do in Natal – but events have been against us.'¹²²

Finding they enjoyed the colonial life the Haggards had set their sights on moving to Canada but Jack's 'account of Vancouver Island is such as to make us abandon our idea of forming a company and going there, so I suppose we must stay on here and then come home.'¹²³

While the Commission was occupying *Hilldrop*, Louie gave birth to their first child. The baby was not expected until June but on the night of Sunday 22 May 'Louie had a great deal of pain, and towards five o'clock the following morning it became clear it was the real thing. I then sent off at once for the Doctor and the lady who had kindly consented to come and look after Louie, but within half an hour of that the child was born, at a quarter to six on the 23rd.'¹²⁴

According to Haggard's daughter Lilius, the baby 'was brought into the world by a native woman, hastily fetched by one of the dismayed houseful of men.'¹²⁵

Gibbs was also at hand but 'spent most of the time crouching in the corner of the room rocking herself backwards and forwards and moaning.'¹²⁶

'Until the arrival of assistance we underwent considerable anxiety. At last Mrs. S. came, bringing the cheerful news that the Doctor had gone away for a holiday! Luckily she is the mother of a large family and has had considerable experience, and was able to do what was needed. On the whole I think Louie had a good time of it. The child is a very perfect and fine boy, he weighed nine pounds just after birth, and is a very well-nourished child. He has dark blue eyes and is a fair child with a good forehead.'¹²⁷ The baby was named Arthur John Rider Haggard – after Cochrane and Jack, his godfathers – but he was always called Jock.

'Mrs S.' was the widow of the former Baron Bernhard Ludwig Schwikkard who had renounced his German title and became a British subject in 1837 at the accession of Queen Victoria. He fought on the British side at the battle of Congella in 1842 and thereafter pursued a career prospecting and trading, finally settling at Standerton in the Transvaal. She did indeed have 'considerable experience' – they had nine children.

Haggard had met the family during his time in the Transvaal. The former baron died in February 1877 and Haggard invited the family to come and stay at *Hilldrop* during the troubles in the Transvaal. Mrs Schwikkard and several of the younger children came to *Hilldrop*. 'On their arrival (Haggard) made them most welcome with all their goods and cattle. Mrs Schwikkard remained at the farm for some months and then moved into Newcastle.'¹²⁸

Haggard's mentor, Shepstone, heard of the birth from 'one of the little Schwikkard girls' and sent his congratulations. 'Fortunately everything that is born in a stable is not a horse, or your boy would be a Boer or a Royal Commissioner; the latter he may become, the former never.'¹²⁹

The Commission left *Hilldrop* on 2 June 1881 to continue negotiations in the Transvaal. Before their departure Haggard and his brother Jack were invited to dinner with the Commissioners. Among the other guests were negotiators Sir Henry de Villiers and President Jan Hendrik Brand of the Free State. In a letter to Shepstone Haggard expressed his liking for Sir Hercules Robinson ('a straightforward man') but considered De Villiers a 'Boer at heart or I am much mistaken'.

'About this Transvaal business' Haggard continues, 'I don't know what to say. It is perfectly crushing – it seems to be the result of a most wonderful combination of political dishonesty, cowardice and personal ambition. One can only suppose that Providence is working out some unforeseen end by ways we cannot understand. How would it do for you Sir, if you were to write and publish some vindication of the Transvaal policy. It would carry great weight . . . since it must be remembered that after all the respectable part of the nation at home is deeply disgusted with this

business. I don't see why these asses should go on braying eternally without some contradiction. However I suppose it is no use fretting over it. In great matters as in small, in the affairs of nations as in those of individuals it seems to me that we odd it till it comes even. – and I suppose this business will come even some time or other.^{'130}

On 30 July Haggard wrote to his father: 'I must now tell you that after thoroughly thinking the matter over I have made up my mind to return to England next month. This will probably seem a somewhat eccentric announcement, but my reasons are briefly as follows. First I have given due weight to what you and Mr. Blake [Haggard's solicitor] write to me, and admit there is a great deal in what you say. What brings me back in such a hurry is however the state of the country.'

Haggard outlined the 'state of the country' in what appears to a fuller and slightly different version of the same letter quoted by his daughter, Liliias: 'I am as certain as far as it is possible for any man to be the Boers will never cede an inch of territory or pay a sixpence, indeed they openly boast they prefer to thrash us again to doing so. There will be another war – and this time it will spread to the Cape and Natal – perhaps I am wrong, but I consider the state of the country so unsatisfactory and so dangerous I dare not risk the safety of others – the sooner we go the better.'¹³¹

In a letter to Shepstone, Haggard voiced similar sentiments: 'The fact of the matter is I do not like at all the aspect of affairs here. These seem to me the early prospect of a renewal of war. If the home Govt. insist on *anything* I am sure the Boers will fight again. At any rate I should hardly feel justified in risking it . . . Therefore taking everything into consideration we have come to the conclusion that we had better go . . . I don't see how respectable people can be expected to stop up here in this land of murder and sudden death.'¹³²

Cochrane was to return with them. Suffering from a prolonged bout of dysentery it was thought a 'rest and change of air is the only thing that will pull him together again.'¹³³

The farm was to be left in the charge of 'George and Mr. North (our engineer), a very respectable man who has the advantage of experience of the country.'¹³⁴ North had been employed to work the mill. Two years later, on April 29, 1883, a settlement of farm ownership was signed at Ditchingham by Haggard, Cochrane and Blomefield, dissolving the partnership. Assets after liabilities, amounted to £250.14.6. which was divided among the three signatories.¹³⁵

Haggard's farming experiences formed his 'pleasantest recollections' of *Hilldrop*, 'though were I to start again, I would not have had so many irons in the fire. On the whole we made a good deal of money, though our outgoings and losses were also heavy. To farm successfully in Natal requires, or required much capital and, owing to the poor quality of the Kaffir labour, incessant personal supervision. These Kaffirs, however, who were most of them our tenants, were in many ways our best friends; moreover they afforded us constant amusement when they were not engaged in driving us mad by their carelessness.'¹³⁶

On one such occasion they broke the best dinner dish, bringing the fragments to Louie. "I have collected and carried these fragments to the Inkosikaas," explained the man responsible "that the Inkosikaas, being clever like all white people, may cause them to join themselves together again."

Louie, called by the Zulus 'the pretty white bead with a pink eye', was rendered speechless. Less so when the best family silver was discovered being used by Mazooku and some friends to dissect a 'decaying ox that had died of lung sickness'.

Before leaving *Hilldrop* the Haggards sold their imported furniture. 'It was a highly successful sale, since such articles were then rare at Newcastle. A grand piano



Henry Rider Haggard on the steps of Ditchingham House soon after his return from Africa in 1881.

(Photograph by courtesy of the Norfolk Records Office)

which I had bought second-hand for £40 in England, fetched £200, and the other things went at proportionately good prices.'

During the auction held at *Hilldrop* on 23 August the bidders 'got hold of a stock of wine which was exposed upon the verandah and therein drank our healths, whereon the watchful auctioneer knocked it down to the drinkers at a high price per dozen.'¹³⁷

The auction over they were ready to leave. 'So at last we bade farewell to *Hilldrop*, which neither of us ever has, or I suppose ever will, see again except in dreams. I remember feeling quite sad as we drove down the dusty track to Newcastle, and the familiar house, surrounded by its orange trees, grew dim and vanished from our sight.'

'There my son had been born; there I had undergone many emotions of a kind that help to make a man; there I had suffered the highest sort of shame, shame for my country; there, as I felt, one chapter in my eventful life had opened and had closed.'¹³⁸

The saddest goodbye was to Haggard's servant Mazooku. 'The poor fellow was moved at this parting, and gave me what probably he valued more than anything he possessed, the kerry that he carried ever since he was a man – that same heavy, redwood instrument with which more than once I have seen him battering the head of some foe. It hangs in the hall of this house, but where I wonder, is Mazooku, who saved my life when I was lost upon the veld? Living, perhaps, in some kraal, and thinking from time to time of his old master Indanda, of whose subsequent doings some vague rumours may have reached him. If so, were I to revisit Africa today, I have not the faintest doubt but that he would reappear. I should go out of my hotel and see a grey-headed man squatted on the roadside, who would arise, lift up his arm, salute me and say "Inkoos Indanda, you are here; I am here, come back to serve you."'

'I do not know that I felt anything more in leaving Africa than the saying good-bye to this loving, half-wild man.'¹³⁹

The Haggards left *Hilldrop* during the last week of August 1881, and 'on Wednesday, the 31st August, from the deck of the *Dunkeld*, we saw the shores of Natal recede from our sight forever.'¹⁴⁰

Or so Haggard believed when writing his autobiography in 1912.

* * * *

Back in England Haggard studied for the Bar. After passing the required examination and finding himself with time on his hands he turned to his pen. His first book *Cetewayo and His White Neighbours* (1882) was largely an apologia for Shepstone and his policies. After producing two potboilers *Dawn* (1884) and *The Witch's Head* (1884) (where Shepstone also made a disguised appearance), Haggard decided to concentrate on his legal career.

Lilias records how one day while travelling to London with one of his brothers they started discussing the recently published and highly successful *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. 'Rider said he didn't think it was so very remarkable, whereupon his brother replied, rather indignantly: "Well, I'd like to see you write anything half as good, bet you a bob you can't." "Done," said Rider.' The result of the bet was *King Solomon's Mines*, published in 1885.

Further books followed, many with an African setting, among them *She* (1887), *Jess* (1887), *Allan Quatermain* (1887), *Cleopatra* (1889), *Nada the Lily* (1892) and the Zulu trilogy *Marie* (1912), *Child of Storm* (1913) and *Finished* (1916). Eventually they became repetitive, formulaic moneyspinners as Haggard increasingly devoted his energies to public service, for which he was knighted in 1912.

The Haggard family increased with the birth of Agnes in 1883, Dorothy in 1884 and Lilias in 1892. Jock died in 1891 at the age of ten while Rider and Louie were visiting Mexico, an event that cast a shadow over the rest of Haggard's life.

In 1901 his nephew Gerald Haggard died in South Africa during the Second Anglo-Boer War. A cyclist in the Scottish Horse, he was killed in action at Naauwpoort in the Magaliesberg on 4 April 1901.¹⁴¹ Haggard's brother Arthur served during the war with the Royal Army Service Corps.

In 1914 Haggard himself returned to South Africa for the first time since his departure in 1881. He came as one of six Royal Commissioners charged with visiting and reporting on the Dominions. The job of the Royal Commission was 'to report on the health of the British Empire and recommend any measures thought necessary to improve it.'¹⁴²

The Commission toured Australia and New Zealand in 1913. In 1914 it headed for South Africa.

Haggard was to come to South Africa once more in 1916. He came on a mission to discuss the possible settlement of servicemen in the Dominions once the war against Germany should end. This 1916 visit did not include Natal. Haggard stayed in Cape Town for just over two weeks before going on to visit Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

* * * *

In 1914 Haggard, travelling with Louie and his daughter Lilias, arrived in Cape Town at the end of February. There, at an agricultural show, he met a Mr Struben who had bought Haggard's wagon and span of oxen when he left Newcastle. This chance meeting induced the 'strange mood which lasted all the months he was in Africa' wrote Lilias, 'a feeling as if he had come back from another life. Everything was so changed, towns unrecognisable, transport revolutionised by trains and motors where there had been only post carts and ox wagons; families that were household

words forgotten, or but a tradition, for time moves fast in Africa, and memory is short. Then on a sudden, he would find some place unaltered, untouched by the years, smiling in the sunshine as it smiled in those high-hearted days of his youth. Some man or woman, who by those magic words "do you remember", recalled happy comradeship, dangers faced and shared, days of great adventure and endless promise, so that grey hairs and wrinkles were forgotten "and to me it feels as though those three and thirty intervening years had vanished and once more I was back in Africa as she was in my youth."¹⁴³

From Cape Town the Commission travelled up-country 'and then followed weeks of travelling, the inspection of farms and vineyards, factories and mines, and long days of taking evidence.'¹⁴⁴

The young Liliias noted 'how rapidly her generally fastidious parent had reverted to the ways of his youth. He rode the small veld ponies with real enjoyment' and 'smoked Boer tobacco'.¹⁴⁵

Eventually they made their way to Newcastle and one sunny morning Haggard and Louie drove up the familiar road to *Hilldrop*, 'the last place I ever expected to see again.'¹⁴⁶

According to Liliias, Haggard 'wandered through all the rooms, so little changed that in the sitting room he turned round to look at the spot where his pipe rack used to hang upon the wall, almost expecting to see it there still. He glanced into the room where Jock was born more than thirty years ago, then turned away quickly and went out across the stoep into the garden.'¹⁴⁷

In the garden Haggard picked an orange from the trees that still grew there, he visited the wagon house, the stone kraal that he and Cochrane had built for the ostriches and the smaller kraal over whose stone wall the horse Moresco had climbed the night he died. He passed by the spring where they used to draw water and came to the place where they had once made bricks. There were still some bricks lying in the grass. 'Rider picked them up and turned them over in his hands, filled strangely enough with more emotion than he had felt all that day. "Well they are not bad bricks," he said quietly. So back to the house – presently to step off the well-remembered stoep – this time forever.'¹⁴⁸

After a civic reception was held for them in Newcastle they stayed the night at an inn and the next morning left for Pietermaritzburg, arriving on the afternoon of Wednesday 25 March. They were met by James Stuart, the Natal official and collector of Zulu oral tradition, and booked into the Imperial Hotel in Loop Street.

One of the first things Haggard did was to walk to Government House which had become the Training College of the Natal Education Department. 'I saw where I used to sit at the end of the table – the room is unaltered except that folding doors have been built into the wall. My office in the Executive Council Chamber has been pulled down, and with it the little bedroom where I tossed Sir George Colley in his bath as to the price of a gun, and where I saved Cox's life when an artery broke out on his wounded leg. Every corner is full of memories, even the porch where the big yellow spider always spun her web.'¹⁴⁹

On Thursday morning Haggard and Stuart visited Richard Henry Addison, Chief Native Commissioner, to organise a trip to Zululand to be made during April. After the meeting the two men passed a 'crowd of native chiefs, headmen, Zulu messengers and policemen, who were waiting to see various officials. 'Stuart stopped and introduced Rider, explaining that he was Sompseu's child, whom he had loved in the days that their fathers told them of. The effect was astounding, in a moment the whole motley crowd broke out into smiles and a volley of enthusiastic salutes. "Such" wrote Haggard in his diary, "is the magic of that name!"'¹⁵⁰

Pietermaritzburg was eagerly awaiting Haggard's visit and he was the invited guest and speaker at the African Club's monthly luncheon to be held on Friday 27 March in the Town Hall Supper Room. A record attendance was expected, especially as 'the Committee desires it be known that on this occasion ladies may be brought as the guests of members.'¹⁵¹

Haggard proved a major drawcard and 'the innovation of lady guests is evidently extremely popular, and a large number of members are booking seats for their wives and lady friends.'¹⁵²

'Sir Rider, who is 58 years of age, is a charming and delightful personality, with whom the stranger feels instantly at home,' reported *The Natal Witness* in a front page article. 'He looks more the "man of affairs" than the novelist, and more the farmer than the man of affairs. He is tall, spare of build, rugged yet homely, and with keen penetrating eyes and a mobile expressive mouth.'

Described as 'thoughtfully reminiscent' he was 'interested to absorption in the revisiting of old scenes. Asked if he had met any old friends Haggard replied that he had seen "familiar sights but no familiar faces . . . with the exception of two or three old ladies, whom I hardly expected to see, I found none whom I knew."

' "And how have the old haunts changed?"

' "Really they have hardly changed. In intrinsic they are just as they were. I spent a little time in Newcastle, and it was completely familiar. Today I walked down from Government House, and Church Street, too was just the same. I really believe," Sir Rider added, "that they are just the same shops and fronts. They look just the same to me."

' "There are big changes at Government House?"

' "There again I found the real essentials of the old house unchanged. A sliding door had changed into a wall, and my old office had vanished; but otherwise things were quite familiar. I found my old room without any trouble, but there had been a change there. The yellow wardrobe is gone. However after a consultation with a caretaker we found it in a passage."

' "So the thing that struck you most was the disappearance of old figures?"

' "Well, there is a striking exception to that. My old Zulu boy has been discovered. He is living only a few miles out of town, and owing to the efforts of an old friend he is coming tomorrow to see me. Mazooku they tell me, is doing fairly well, and is keeping young. As far as I am informed his hair is not yet grey."

' "But he must have been over 30 when you were last here?"

' "I really don't know. I should have thought so, but he is apparently wearing well. I shall know tomorrow."'¹⁵³

In the event Haggard wasn't to meet Mazooku until Saturday, the day after his speech to the African Club. When booking for the lunch closed 150 seats had been reserved. 'It is interesting to note that the luncheon is the largest ever held in Maritzburg.'¹⁵⁴

On the day of the luncheon *The Natal Witness* led with front page pictures of Haggard together with a long article on his career. An editorial sang his praises:

'The benefactors of the human race are many and their benefactions various. High up on the list must stand the name of one who for 30 years has been giving to the English-speaking world volume on volume of healthy, wholesome and thoroughly entertaining literature, in no page of which is there anything of a degrading or unmanly tendency. Today when our libraries and bookstalls are flooded with productions of a more or less questionable nature, this is a record of which a man might well be proud. That record is held, and held worthily, by Sir Rider Haggard . . .'

'The heart of Africa was . . . enshrined for the reading public only between the covers of costly books of travel; Haggard bared it in the pages of his stories and placed it within the reach of all . . .'

'Who shall say how many strong and sturdy pioneers have been attracted from the pleasant Homeland to help in winning the African wilds to civilisation as the result of romantic interest aroused in them when as boys they read and revelled in these romances? It has been said that Rider Haggard did more to advertise South Africa to the world when it was less known than it is now than any man of his time.'¹⁵⁵

The Saturday edition of *The Natal Witness* covered his speech at length.

'Sir Henry Rider Haggard, who was enthusiastically cheered, said that during the last month or so he had been compelled to wonder whether his name was Rider Haggard or Rip Van Winkle. (Laughter.) Consider what had happened to him. The other day he went to Newcastle, where he lived during the first Boer War, accompanying a committee of the Royal Dominions Commission. They were given a civic reception at the Town Hall . . . of all there to receive them there was not a single man who had been there in 1881. Could they wonder that he looked upon himself as Rip Van Winkle. So it was here in Maritzburg – few left who knew him.'

'Two days earlier they came to the city by train, and they trundled comfortably over a spruit or a small river not far from Colenso, and he very well remembered the time when he and his wife were left on the inhospitable plain after an attempt to cross the river with four natives hanging onto the corners of the cart and the horses swimming. That was one difference between then and today.'

After talking briefly about his novels Haggard returned to the theme of change.

'All the way down from Newcastle he never saw an oxwagon. Even the native dress had changed. He observed the natives in their kraals were clad in cast-off female fortifications of European origin – (Laughter.) – which bulged out here and there. That might be a mark of civilisation; it might uplift the moral tone of the natives – he did not doubt but that it did, but belonging as he did to a past generation he had to admit that he preferred the immemorial fashion set by Mother Eve. (Laughter.)'

He then spoke of the places he had visited in Pietermaritzburg such as the old Government House. 'He found that the old house which had been the home of Governors had now become a home of governesses. (Laughter.)'

This provided the cue for some reminiscences on important figures from his past in Natal. After speaking of the fateful dinner with Colley on the eve of his departure for Majuba he came to Shepstone. 'It is with some emotion that I mention his name because in truth, I looked on him very much as a father, and, in truth, he treated me very much as a son.' Haggard then went on to defend Shepstone's policies with regard to the Transvaal.

Referring to Bishop Colenso, Haggard observed that the 'folly of today was the wisdom of tomorrow . . . As time has vindicated Shepstone, so, (he would not speak of native policy) time had vindicated Colenso. (Cheers.)'

From talk of the past Haggard turned to the future. 'Whatever one may say, anybody who knows Africa will feel that it is most unwise to prophesy that there are no troubles ahead, because without troubles it would not be Africa. (Hear, Hear.) There is the question of the increase of the white population; which is not going on as might be hoped. (Hear, hear.) Then you have the increase in the native population, which is a serious and difficult question. (Hear, hear.) What is to be done with a nation just lifting itself up as it were from sleep and looking for the first time upon the dawn? How are you to lead these people? It is not enough just to rig them up in European clothes. I do not think that what I might call a policy of reach-me-downs will entirely satisfy the situation. You cannot build up a civilisation by importing ship-loads of



Mazooku, Haggard's servant during his days in South Africa as a young man, was reunited with him during Haggard's visit to Pietermaritzburg in March 1914.

(By courtesy of *The Natal Witness*)

broken-down European corsets. The stay is not strong enough. (Laughter.) It is a question of guidance, of the uplifting of these good people – for many of them are indeed very good people. (Hear, hear.) The races must learn to live together and to strive together to an end of the common good.'

'What remains? To wish well to South Africa? Well, I do that with all my heart, but perhaps, as an old Natalian, I may be allowed to wish the best of all things to this dear and lovely land of yours – to this fair Natal. She has beauty, great beauty, if ever country had it; she has fertility to a marvellous degree; she has history, much history for so short a career. May she also have peace, prosperity and progress from generation to generation and from age to age.'

'Advance, Natal! God bless Natal, white and black together, and bless her gates of mountains and sea!'

Sir Rider resumed his seat amid enthusiastic cheering.¹⁵⁶

On 28 March, the day after the African Club luncheon, Haggard met Mazooku, who came in to town from where he lived 'on land near Edendale purchased some years ago by a group of natives.'¹⁵⁷ Older now, but without a hint of grey in his hair, Mazooku greeted Haggard: ' "Inkoos pagate! Baba!" (Chief from of old! Father!), adding: "Here I am returned to serve you." "¹⁵⁸

Mazooku told Haggard of his adventures during the intervening years, including the recent loss of all his cattle to East Coast fever. Haggard promised he would see if something could be done about this 'and James Stuart said to Mazooku in Zulu: "In truth, O Mazooku, you should give great thanks to the spirits of your ancestors. See now of a sudden your own, your very father has descended from the heavens, has taken you by the hand and has dragged you from a deep pit." Whereupon Mazooku replied:

' "Chief of chiefs! The Elephant that is not turned! You who had charge of us from of old! Help of the fatherless when in trouble!" ' ¹⁵⁹

Haggard reminded Mazooku of his parting gift, the knobkerrie which now hung upon the wall at Ditchingham House. Mazooku said he remembered it 'but did not think it possible that so small a thing should have "lived through the years".'

During his stay in Pietermaritzburg Haggard also met Shepstone's brother John and son Henrique.

Together Haggard and Stuart looked up an old Zulu noted for his memory named Socwatsha and, together with Mazooku, he told Haggard 'much that he wanted to know and subsequently used in the book *Finished*.' ¹⁶⁰

'It was wonderful,' recorded Haggard in his diary, 'to watch old Socwatsha as he told his story of the battles, acting them as he spoke as only a Zulu can. Thus he gave Chaka's words when mourning for his mother in the same weeping voice, repeating his epithets, some of which were the strangest, referring as they did to her amorous propensities. Both he and Masooku declared that it is universally believed among the Zulus that Chaka did kill his mother.' ¹⁶¹

After two days in Pietermaritzburg they went with other members of the Commission to Pretoria by train. On the way the train stopped so that members of the Commission might see 'the ill-fated hill, Majuba'.

'There poor Colley rests with the all the others. It is a high hill, very easy to attack as its flanks are filled with hollows. I noted the little bush-clad kloof up which ninety Boers crept on that fatal morning. At its foot is a nice farmhouse – but I should not care to live within the shadow of Majuba, but then as I said in a speech in Maritzburg my name should be Rip Van Winkle, for few remember the defeats and the tragedies of my generation in Africa.' ¹⁶²

After visiting old haunts in Pretoria, and while Louie and Liliass travelled to Zululand, Haggard visited Rhodesia, later travelling down to Durban where he briefly met again with Louie and Liliass before bidding them farewell. They were to return home while he went on a trip around Zululand.

From Durban, Haggard, James Stuart and Mazooku went up to Eshowe where they stayed at the Residency built by Sir Melmoth Osborn.

The next day Stuart and Haggard visited the Gqikazi homestead where Cetshwayo had died. In his diary Haggard rendered it Jazi 'meaning Finished or Finished with Joy' ¹⁶³ using the English translation to provide the title for the third volume of his Zulu trilogy.

At Eshowe a special Zulu dance display was laid on for the visitors hosted by Gordon Tyrell, a Native Affairs Department official. His daughter, the ethnological artist Barbara Tyrell, was present at the occasion. She recalled the vivid impression it made on her in the opening pages of her autobiography published in 1996:

'Adults were seated in deck chairs facing the dancing area, VIP's in the front row; the shadowy figure of the Great Man [Haggard] . . . The scorching Zululand sun beat down and up again from hot earth, baking us in our unaccustomed, uncomfortable, starched white "best". . . A dance of brown people watched by white people, of almost unclad people and heavily overclad people. High stepping, stamping, chanting, girls of the front ranks in high-pitched song, shining bodies in beads only; deeper song from men at the back with shields and tall plumes. Old women scuttling along the line of girls, between them and the audience, mopping the girlish brows, cleansing the air with whirling switches . . . Ululating, that strange and exciting sound. Ropes of beadwork tossing wildly around brown bodies, and ostrich feathers against blue sky. A dance of praise for the honoured visitor.' ¹⁶⁴

From Eshowe, Haggard and his party embarked on a tour of Zululand accompanied by James Young Gibson, author of *The Story of the Zulus* (1911), recently appointed District Native Commissioner. At the meeting in Pietermaritzburg with Addison, Haggard had requested the tour be undertaken in a mule-drawn wagonette. Addison was unable to meet the request. 'I have tried every Government department as well as local contractors for such a conveyance. They either have no mules or won't risk them in certain parts of Zululand.' It was decided to hire a car instead. 'It is extraordinary how motor has superseded other traffic in Zululand during the last year or so.'¹⁶⁵

According to Gibson's official record of the trip the party left Eshowe on 23 April and travelled by car to Gingindhlovu and thence by rail to Somkhele. 'We were able to view from the train the development which has taken place in the sugar planting industry, but the mode of travelling did not admit of meeting any natives along the route.'¹⁶⁶

On 24 April they left Somkhele 'early by Motor Car provided by the Native Department, but found the gradients somewhat heavy and travelling was necessarily slower than we had anticipated.'¹⁶⁷

The car was driven by 'a young man called Edwards who was a grandson of the Miller Marsden of Bungay.'¹⁶⁸ Haggard was amused by the coincidence. Edwards less so. After Haggard's departure A. Edwards of Berea Livery and Bait Stable, 294 Essenwood Road, Durban entered into correspondence with the Native Affairs Department demanding compensation for damage done to the car. He claimed the number of passengers had been misrepresented at the time of hiring: there had been no mention of Haggard's 'native valet' nor had they been advised of the unsuitable terrain over which it would be expected to travel and which resulted in it having to be repainted – 'the estimated depreciation of the car is considerably over £50 so I am a big loser in the transaction.'¹⁶⁹

But for the car being a new model it would not have survived the journey according to Edwards. However despite steep gradients the party reached Hlabisa at noon and found an assembly of chiefs and headmen waiting to meet Gibson. Among them were Ntamenemidwa of the Mdhletshe tribe, accompanied by his uncle Ombe, Mtubatuba ka Somkhele of the Mpukunyoni tribe, Myombo and Mtekelezi of the Hlabisa tribe.

According to Gibson 'these chiefs had complaints to make, but the time for the discussion of them was inadequate.'

The complaints centred on land being demarcated for farms and game reserves and Mtubatuba claimed 'that the land left was quite inadequate for the people of the tribe . . . Myombo also complained about the reduction of his tribal lands through the setting apart of land for farms.' Myombo also complained of the increase of game in the area 'carrying *nagana* infection' which spread to cattle. Also 'riet buck . . . were becoming very destructive to crops.'

Haggard was impressed by the dignity of the chiefs as they laid their complaints before Stuart. 'No chief was rude or clamorous, each spoke in order of seniority, and none interrupted another, but the tale was a sad one.'¹⁷⁰

When his trip was over Haggard wrote a special report to Lewis Harcourt, Colonial Secretary, expressing his thoughts and hopes for the Zulus:

'The Zulu peoples are crushed and bewildered. Monarchical by instinct and practice they have no visible chief to whom to give their adherence. To their wonder and grief they found themselves handed over first to Natal and then to the Union. Commissions appear and disappear. Ministers come and go, there is no one permanent entity on whom they can fix their eyes as the shadow of their distant King, to whom

at heart they are intensely loyal. They were defeated in war, and like a nation of warriors accept the issue with resignation, hoping and believing they would be taken over and nursed by their victor the Queen, and her successors, and ruled as subjects like the Basutos. Instead of this they were made the bloody sport of a number of kinglets, while the Boers and others were allowed to rob them of their hereditary lands . . . It is not possible in this or any other human affair, continually and with intent to sow the wind and always escape the reaping of the whirlwind.

'I think that even now at the eleventh hour much might be done to give these people something to replace all that they have lost . . . My earnest hope . . . is that this opportunity may not continue to be neglected in years to come. If so it seems to me that we shall incur a heavy responsibility towards a bewildered people, that we have broken and never tried to mend, and suffer evils to arise of which the effects will not be endured by them alone.' This report was later printed for circulation in Whitehall.

At Hlabisa, Gibson introduced Haggard as 'Sompseu's child'. Asked by what name they should remember him 'they were told "Sir Rider Haggard," whereupon they shook their heads and smiled, saying: "Their tongues could not go round such words – was there no other name?" Mr. Gibson replied: "Yes, in this land years ago he had been called Lundanda u Ndandokalweni." "Ah!" they answered. "Now we hear, now we understand – now we shall never forget!"

'Then an old chief, his stiff woolly hair white about his head-ring said with grave courtesy:

' "We are rejoiced to see you, father – it is good and fitting that we should find friends among the people to whom we have given our loyalty, those who have been and remain our friends – for we need them. We are orphans left to wander alone in the land of our fathers." '

Haggard was asked to respond. He acknowledged 'they had gone through many troubles' and expressed his sympathy. A chief responded by further elaborating on their sorrows until 'Cetewayo's son Manzolwandle (Water of the Sea) so called because he was born after his father sailed for England . . . suddenly got up and proceeded to scourge the luckless man with his tongue.'

' "Who are you – that vomit all this froth? What kind of breeding have you, that you sing so loud a song about the words of the Inkosi Lundanda who has journeyed so far to visit us. Surely you must be a low fellow. Do you not know that when the Inkosi speaks it is your part to listen and be grateful, not to weep and whine and make comments upon the acceptable words which he has been pleased to say to us from his heart, where dwells the memory of Sompseu whom our fathers loved. Be silent!" And amid sounds of assent from all the assembled company, who seemed to think the reproof well deserved, the luckless grumbler collapsed.'¹⁷¹

The meeting over, the party travelled on to Nongoma where they spent the night. Another meeting with chiefs was held the following day. This time there were fewer complaints 'but failure of the crops was mentioned' plus 'a somewhat indefinite complaint, that dipping had caused mortality amongst goats.'¹⁷²

From Nongoma they travelled on to Mahlabatini and Melmoth but 'the difficulties of travelling owing to deep rivers and steep hills prevented (us) from reaching Mahlabatini and Melmoth in time for the appointed meetings.'¹⁷³

However they were able to visit the battlefield of Ulundi where 'Mazooku produced an old native who told them the tale of that impossible adventure, when the Zulus (with whom he had fought) advanced across the open plain into the muzzles of our entrenched guns – to die by thousands.'¹⁷⁴



The farmhouse (1997) at Hilldrop, outside Newcastle, where Haggard and his family lived in 1881. It was declared a national monument in 1981.

(Photograph by courtesy of The Natal Witness)



Sir Henry Rider Haggard from a drawing by William Strang (1915)

Haggard also visited Dingaan's Kraal and Kwa Matiwane where Piet Retief and his party were killed on Dingane's instructions in 1838. 'I know not why, but the place has an evil air and gives the impression of being horror haunted.'¹⁷⁵

Riding over the hill Haggard found a cairn which had been disturbed revealing the remains of several skeletons. 'So it came about after a lapse of seventy-six years we stood and actually looked upon the mortal remains of Retief and his murdered company. It was a strange scene upon this ill-omened Golgotha, now the home of silence and old memories.'¹⁷⁶

That night 'they slept at Empandhleni near the spot where the ancient Zulu Sigananda is buried; he fought with Chaka's impis and had been present at the murder of Retief. In later years, when he ruled over this district, he had told Stuart much of that history and declared that a great deal of what was written in *Nada the Lily* was true.'¹⁷⁷

Sunday 26 April they spent at Nkandhla where they called on Sir Charles Saunders, Chief Magistrate and Civil Commissioner for Zululand. The next day they visited the battlefield beneath the mount of Isandlwana. Stuart and Gibson argued over the meaning of the mountain's Zulu name. Gibson declaring for 'Like a Little House' while Stuart held that it meant 'The Second Stomach of the Ox'. 'When,' wrote Haggard in his diary, 'such learned doctors disagree as they did with vigour, I may perhaps be pardoned if I cling to the old rendering, "The Place of the Little Hand". Certainly it is not in the least like either a little house or an ox's stomach, whereas it has some similarity to an arm with a clenched fist at its end.'¹⁷⁸

Haggard walked over the battlefield finding the occasional relic of the battle: crushed cartridge cases and a broken cricket stump and bail.

'It was sad for me to stand by the piles of stone that cover all that is left of so many whom I once knew; Durnford and Pulleine and many other officers of the 24th, George Shepstone and the rest. Coghill I also knew very well, but he died with Melvill by the river bank. It makes me feel, too, how old I have become, for few others whom I meet today can remember them, not even Gibson.

'When I had gone some way I turned and looked back at this lonesome, formidable hill. The swift tropical night was falling, the stark mount had become very black and solemn, a trembling star had vanished and of the falling crescent of the young moon but one horn appeared above the hill. It looked like a plume of faint unearthly fire burning upon Isandlwana's rocky brow. A quiet place for man's eternal sleep – but the scene that went before that sleep!'¹⁷⁹

Haggard reminisced with Mazooku on how in Pretoria they had news of the battle via the old Hottentot washerwoman a full day before the official news. Mazooku was reluctant to tell Haggard how she might have come by the news so quickly, though he later allowed himself to be drawn on the induction of sangomas.

The party then visited Nqutu and Dundee before returning to Pietermaritzburg where Haggard said goodbye once again to Mazooku 'whom I suppose I shall never see again. Poor Mazooku! His last salute to me "Inkos Baba" was given in a quavering voice for the old man loved me. I felt very sad as I watched him disappear with his bundle in the crowded station. He served me faithfully for many years, he saved my life, and by good fortune I have been able at the expenditure of only a few pounds to set his affairs in order. Stuart is going to try and find a new home for him away from the white man, where I trust he will grow old and die in peace. Good fortune go with him! Whoever forgets me I am sure Mazooku never will, in whatever land memory remains to him.'¹⁸⁰

On 3 May 1914 Haggard left Durban aboard the *Armada Castle*. The melancholy note sounded by his parting from Mazooku lingered as the ship steamed

up the east coast of Africa. He confided to his diary: 'So ends my visit to South Africa – on the whole it has been successful, if sad in some ways. I am truly and deeply grateful for the extreme kindness with which I have been welcomed everywhere, in fact I have experienced quite a little triumph. Affectionate as was my greeting I think really it was more to do with the fact I am a sort of curiosity, a survival from a past generation, than to my own individuality. Also my subsequent career has interested those among whom I spent the first years of my manhood, when I was concerned with great men and great events.'

'So to South Africa, farewell, which is the dominant word in my life. It is a fair land of which the charm still holds my heart and whose problems interest me more than ever. How will they work out their fate I wonder? When I have gone to sleep or may be to dream on elsewhere. My name will perhaps always be connected with Africa if it remains a white man's "house" and even if it does not – perhaps. It is impossible for me to avoid contrasting the feelings with which I leave it now I have grown old, with those with which I bade goodbye to its shores in 1881 when I was young. Then life was before me, I had hopes and ambitions. Now life is practically behind me, with its many failures and few successes.'¹⁸¹

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 Laband, John, *Rope of Sand* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball 1995)
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 The KwaZulu-Natal Archives
 The Natal Witness
 The Killie Campbell Collection
 The Natal Society Library Special Collections

NOTES

Sources frequently referred to in these notes are abbreviated as follows:

Haggard, Sir Henry Rider, *The Days of My Life* – DOML
 Haggard, Lilius Rider, *The Cloak That I Left* – CTIL
 The Natal Witness – NW

1. DOML, pp.51–52.
2. CTIL, p.70.
3. CTIL, p.29.
4. DOML, Vol.1, p.28.
5. DOML, Vol.1, p.35.
6. DOML, Vol.1, p.36.
7. DOML, Vol.1, p.43.
8. DOML, Vol.1, p.44.

9. DOML, Vol.1, p.44.
10. DOML, Vol.1, p.44.
11. Laband, John. *Rope of Sand*, p.191.
12. DOML, Vol.1, p.45.
13. Ella Haggard quoted in CTIL, p.33.
14. His mother, Ella Haggard, was a published poet. In 1857 her narrative poem of the Afghan War, *Myra; or the Rose of the East* was published. In 1890 Rider Haggard arranged for the posthumous publication of her poem *Life and its Author*.
15. DOML, Vol.1, p.49.
16. DOML, Vol.1, p.49.
17. Quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.8.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. DOML, Vol.1, p.50.
22. NW, 31 August 1875.
23. The South African Diaries of Sir Garnet Wolseley edited with an introduction by Adrian Preston (Cape Town 1971), p.249.
24. W.H. Beaumont, formerly secretary to Sir Benjamin Pine.
25. Letter to mother dated Government House, Natal, September 15, 1875 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.52.
26. NW, 3 September 1875.
27. Letter 15 September 1875, DOML, Vol.1, p.53.
28. DOML, Vol.1, p.51.
29. Letter 15 September 1875 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.53.
30. NW, 3 September 1875.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Letter 15 September 1875 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.53.
34. Ibid.
35. NW, 3 September 1875.
36. Letter 15 September 1875 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.53.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. DOML, Vol.1, p.62. Pagate would now be rendered Phakade. Haggard also uses the form Pagadi when recording Zulu usage. In 1854 Bishop Colenso visited the chief (he calls him Pagade), also in the company of Shepstone. The Festival of the First Fruits was celebrated during this visit. See *Ten Weeks in Natal* by John William Colenso (Cambridge 1855).
40. NW, 10 December 1875.
41. Letter 14 February 1876 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.54.
42. In 1904 following a dream concerning the death of a beloved dog Haggard gave up bloodsports. 'From that day forward, except noxious insects and so forth, I have killed nothing, and, although I should not hesitate to shoot again for food or protection, I am by no means certain that the act would not make me feel unwell.' In 1911 his anti-blood sports novella *The Mahatma and the Hare* – a dialogue between a hunted hare and a holy man – was published.
43. Letter dated 14 February 1876 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.55.
44. Letter Easter Sunday 1876 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.56.
45. Ibid.
46. DOML, Vol.1, p.63.
47. DOML, Vol.1, p.63.
48. DOML, Vol.1, p.66.
49. DOML, Vol.1, p.63.
50. DOML, Vol.1, p.57.
51. NW, 2 May 1876.
52. DOML, Vol.1, p.68. Shepstone's Zulu name is more commonly rendered as Somtseu. However, Haggard consistently used the style Sompseu. Current usage is Somtsewu.
53. DOML, Vol.1, p.69.
54. Letter Dated 13 May 1876 quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.57.
55. CTIL p.40 et seq.
56. NW, 2 June 1876.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. NW, 30 June 1876.
60. DOML, Vol.1, p.71.
61. DOML, Vol.1, p.51.
62. DOML, Vol.1, p.72.
63. DOML, Vol.1, p.67.
64. DOML, Vol.1, p.68.
65. DOML, Vol.1, 61.
66. DOML, Vol.1, p.69.

67. CTIL, p.47
68. Letter dated 2 December 1876. Quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.62.
69. NW, 1 December 1876.
70. As quoted in CTIL, p.48 et seq. The diary appears to be no longer extant.
71. DOML, Vol.1, p.76.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. When Haggard met M'hlopekazi he was about sixty. He died in 1897 and was buried in Pietermaritzburg in the Native Cemetery on Town Hill. Clarendon Primary School now occupies the site and the cemetery is thought to have been the site of the school's playing fields.
76. NW, 30 March 1914.
77. CTIL, p.56.
78. DOML, Vol.1, p.49.
79. Information on Otto family from the late Theresa Otto. Personal interview 8 May 1996.
80. Haggard borrowed Cochrane's Zulu name, Macumazane (Watcher by Night), and gave it to his hero Allan Quatermain.
81. CTIL, p.83.
82. Higgins, D.S., *Rider Haggard The Great Storyteller*, p.50.
83. DOML, Vol.1, p.175.
84. CTIL, p.103.
85. DOML, Vol.1, p.175.
86. Letter in Clark Collection, quoted in Cohen, *Rider Haggard, His Life and Works* (1961), p.57.
87. Letter from Louisa Haggard quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.177.
88. DOML, Vol.1, p.176.
89. DOML, Vol.1, p.177.
90. Shepstone Papers, KwaZulu-Natal Archives. A96 Vol.7.
91. DOML, Vol.1, p.177.
92. Louisa Haggard Letter to William Haggard quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.178.
93. DOML, Vol.1, pp.178–179.
94. Louisa Haggard to William Haggard quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.178.
95. DOML, Vol.1, p.181.
96. DOML, Vol.1, pp.179–180.
97. DOML, Vol.1, p.200.
98. Louisa Haggard to William Haggard, DOML, Vol.1, p.178.
99. DTIL, p.111.
100. Ibid.
101. Quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.181.
102. Letter quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.182.
103. DOML, Vol.1, p.183.
104. DOML, Vol.1, pp.184–185.
105. DOML, Vol.1, p.185.
106. Diary quoted in Tom Pocock, *Rider Haggard and the Lost Empire*.
107. Ibid.
108. Quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.187.
109. DOML, Vol.1, p.198.
110. DOML, Vol.1, p.199.
111. DOML, Vol.1, p.196.
112. Quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.189.
113. DOML, Vol.1, p.196.
114. DOML, Vol.1, p.197.
115. DOML, Vol.1, p.198.
116. DOML, Vol.1, p.194.
117. DOML, Vol.1, p.190.
118. Louisa Haggard to Ella Haggard, 4 May 1881, quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.189.
119. Letter to William Haggard, 24 May 1881, quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.190.
120. CTIL, p.107.
121. Ibid.
122. Letter to mother, no date given, quoted in CTIL, p.109.
123. Ibid.
124. Letter from Haggard to his father quoted in CTIL, p.108.
125. CTIL, p.107.
126. Ibid.
127. Letter to William Haggard, 24 May 1881, quoted in CTIL, p.108. This section is omitted from DOML.
128. Cowley, Cecil, *Schwikkard of Natal and the Old Transvaal*, (Cape Town 1974), p.94.
129. Theophilus Shepstone to Rider Haggard, 16 June 1881, quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.192.
130. Letter from Haggard to Shepstone dated 3 June 1881. Shepstone Papers, KwaZulu-Natal Archives.
131. Letter quoted in CTIL, p.108.

132. Letter from Haggard to Shepstone dated 2 August 1881. Shepstone Papers, KwaZulu-Natal Archives.
133. Letter to William Haggard, 30 July 1881, quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.195.
134. To William Haggard, 30 July 1881, quoted in DOML, Vol.1, p.195.
135. Cohen, p.61.
136. DOML, Vol.1, p.199.
137. DOML, Vol.1, p.201.
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid.
140. DOML, Vol.1, p.202.
141. Gerald Haggard was buried on the farm Cyferfontein. His remains were later exhumed and reburied at the cemetery in Krugersdorp where his name appears on the monument. Information from Mr Steve Watt.
142. Pocock, Tom, *Rider Haggard and the Lost Empire*, p.163.
143. CTIL, p.220.
144. Ibid.
145. CTIL, p.223.
146. Haggard diary quoted in CTIL, p.222.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid. *Hilldrop* was declared a national monument in 1981.
149. Haggard's diary quoted in CTIL, p.223. As quoted earlier, in his autobiography Haggard refers to saving Cox's life by stemming the flow from an artery in his head, not his leg.
150. CTIL, p.223.
151. NW, 24 March 1914.
152. NW, 25 March 1914.
153. NW, 26 March 1914.
154. NW, 27 March 1914.
155. Ibid.
156. NW, 28 March 1914.
157. NW, 30 March 1914.
158. CTIL, p.223.
159. Ibid.
160. Ibid.
161. Quoted in CTIL, p.224.
162. Quoted in CTIL, p.225.
163. Ibid.
164. Tyrell, Barbara, *Her African Quest*, Cape Town, 1996, p.2.
165. Letter from Addison to Stuart in KwaZulu-Natal Archives CMC 1914/330.
166. Gibson J.Y., *Record of tour through Zululand*. KwaZulu-Natal Archives.
167. Ibid.
168. CTIL, p.234.
169. KwaZulu-Natal Archives CNC 1914/330.
170. CTIL, p.234.
171. Ibid.
172. Gibson.
173. Gibson.
174. CTIL, p.236.
175. Haggard quoted in CTIL, p.237.
176. Ibid.
177. p.239.
178. Ibid.
179. Ibid.
180. Haggard quoted in CTIL, p.240.
181. Haggard quoted in CTIL, p.243.

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