ANTHONY HOPE

A SERVANT TO THE PUBLIC

BIOGRAPHICALLY ANNOTATED

A Servant Of The Public

Anthony Hope

Contents:

Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849648053

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
www.facebook.com/jazzybeeverlag
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

Anthony Hope – His Life And Work

By Frederick Taber Cooper

It is a sufficiently pleasant task to undertake to write a brief appreciation of Mr. Anthony Hope. The prevailing urbanity of his manner, the sustained sparkle of his wit, the agreeable expectation that he arouses of something stimulating about to happen, largely disarm criticism. Besides, he does not seem to demand to be taken too seriously; he is not a preacher or reformer, he is not trying to revolutionize the world; he is too well pleased with men

and women as they actually are, to desire to make them something different. In short, he is a suave and charming public entertainer, and like all wise entertainers he alters the character of his program in accordance with the fluctuations of public taste. And being both versatile and farsighted he is usually in the van of each new movement. The God in the Car, his story of gigantic land speculations in South Africa, with the Herculean figure whom he chooses to disguise under the name of " Juggernaut," appeared in 1894, thus antedating by five years The Colossus, by Morley Roberts. Phroso, with its romantic setting among the islands of modern Greece, anticipated by a year Mr. E. F. Benson's analogous attempts, The Vintage and The Capsina. When the revival of the English historical novel was at its height, he succeeded once more in coming in ahead of his competitors, and Simon Dale, which appeared in 1898 and is a study of Restoration manners, with Nell Gwynn for its central interest, led the way for The Orange Girl by Sir Walter Besant, issued in 1899, and F. Frankfort Moore's Nell Gwynn, Comedian, which was not published until 1900.

But although he so cleverly adapts himself to the trend of public taste, Mr. Anthony Hope is not an innovator; he adapts but does not originate. Yet it is no uncommon thing to hear him erroneously praised for having created two new and widely popular types of fiction, the Zenda type and that of The Dolly Dialogues. Now, The Prisoner of Zenda, as we remember at once when we stop to think, is not the first up-to-date sword and buckler story of an imaginary principality; it was preceded, by nearly a decade, by Stevenson's Prince Otto; and the only reason that it so often gets the credit of being the forerunner of its class is simply because it was done with a defter, lighter touch, a more spontaneous inspiration. Similarly, The Dolly Dialogues are not the first attempt to imitate in English the

sparkle and the piquancy of the Gallic dialogue in the form that " Gyp " and Henri Lavedan have made familiar. Although it is quite likely that at that time Anthony Hope had never even heard of it, The Story of the Gadsbys had at least three years the start of The Dolly Dialogues, and even though it was done with a heavier hand, it succeeded in getting a greater effectiveness out of the type.

But, after all, statistics of this sort, while interesting to a person of precise and inquiring mind, have little or no bearing upon the sources of enjoyment which a surprisingly large number of people undoubtedly find in Mr. Hope's writings. And there is variety enough among them to suit all tastes. He began in a spirit of blithe and irresponsible romanticism; he has gradually come, in his later years, to look upon life in a rather matter-of-fact way and to picture, by choice, the more serious problems of life in the social world to which he belongs. Yet his novels, even the most ambitious of them, never suggest the ponderousness of a novel-with-a-purpose; he never forgets what is expected from a conscientious entertainer. And one reason why he so uniformly succeeds is that he is an exceedingly good craftsman; he has mastered the sheer mechanics of his art. It is never wise for a novelist, whatever his literary creed may be, to be wantonly scornful of technique. There are just a few erratic geniuses who, because they have in them certain big thoughts that are struggling for utterance and apparently cannot be uttered in the simple usual way, boldly break the established rules and make new ones to suit their needs. To draw an offhand parallel, they are somewhat in the position of a man who, although untrained in public speaking, is listened to indulgently because of the importance of what he has to say. But your public entertainer enjoys no such license; and the lighter and more irresponsible his theme the more perfect must be his execution. And it is because Mr. Hope possesses that magic

touch of the born story teller, that such delightful triflings as The Dolly Dialogues and The Indiscretion of the Duchess seem to linger in the memory with perennial youth, while many another weightier volume has faded out with the passage of years.

Accordingly, Mr. Hope belongs to that order of novelists about whom it is not only more enjoyable but more profitable to gossip genially than to weigh strictly in the balance. It is so easy to become garrulous over volumes that have worn well and afford many a pleasant hour of relaxation. It would be purposeless to take up serially each one of his many volumes, analyze and pigeonhole it according to its relative value. The better and the franker thing to do is to admit that there are certain volumes by Mr. Hope which gave the present writer genuine pleasure, and certain others that gave him no pleasure at all, and that those falling under the first division are the only ones which it seems worth while to discuss. In his earlier period the mere mention of Anthony Hope conjured up scenes of spirited adventure, reckless daring, gallant heroes combining the good breeding, the patrician ease, the assured manner of the better class of young Englishmen possessing the double advantage of birth and education, who, nevertheless, despite their studied reserve and immaculateness of dress, are plunged by a whim of fate into adventures of extraordinary daring and sublime audacity, adventures that would have taxed the prowess of Dumas's Immortal Three. It is a clever formula, this trick of taking certain types of familiar everyday people straight out of prosaic actuality and compelling them, whether they will or no, to perform romantic deeds against a romantic background. This peculiar combination was certainly a happy thought. It appealed to that latent thirst for adventure which we almost all possess; it unconsciously flattered the reader with a new sense of daring, a feeling

that he too, if thus suddenly and surprisingly transported into Zendaland, might similarly rise to the occasion and achieve great deeds. There is no purpose served by analyzing once again the story of The Prisoner of Zenda. It is one of those stories the artificiality of which stands out glaringly the moment one starts to lay its bones bare.

Any story which depends upon the chance resemblance of two human beings, a resemblance so close, so misleading, that even the wife of one of the two is at a loss to distinguish them, takes on, when stated briefly, apart from the glamour of the tale itself, an air of palpable falsity to life. And yet the fact remains that tens of thousands of readers have lost themselves, forgotten time and space, in their utter absorption in the dilemma of the Princess Flavia, who finds in Rudolph Rassendyl all the qualities which might have made it possible for her to love her husband, if only he had been as close a replica of Rassendyl morally as he was physically.

I do not mind admitting that personally I revert more frequently to The Dolly Dialogues than to any other volume by Mr. Hope. This is not merely because of the delicate touch and epigrammatic neatness for which they have been so universally praised. Superficially considered they are a series of encounters between a sparkling and fascinating little lady and a sedate and nimble-witted gentleman, whom it is insinuated that the Lady Dolly has jilted. Now, the real fascination about these brilliant exchanges of repartee lies chiefly in the subtle and yet elusive implications that we are always on the point of reading between the lines, and yet never quite get in their entirety. That Mr. Carter has long been a worshiper at the shrine of Lady Dolly, that he has many a time felt a pang of regret that his fortune in life has made him ineligible, that he considers her husband not half grateful enough to Providence and that his own

assumed air of sentimental resignation has in it a little touch of genuine regret, all this we get pretty clearly. And yet, we are well aware, all the time, that Mr. Carter, in spite of an occasional twinge of envy, would not change his condition if he could; that, although he may not be precisely aware of it, he is already confirmed in his bachelor habits; that he likes his freedom from responsibility, his harmless, unprofitable daily routine, his favorite corner in his favorite club, his innocent philandering with various young women, married and unmarried. He may, at times, deceive the Lady Dolly into commiserating him and blaming herself as a thoughtless coquette, but never for very long at a time. The whole thing is a sort of grown-up game of make-believe in which the players get a curious transitory, almost illogical enjoyment in feigning broken hearts and blighted lives. And yet there is just enough truth underlying it all to suggest that Mr. Hope was capable of more serious work than he had yet done. There was, for instance, everywhere a pervading suggestion of the infinite number of contradictory motives and impulses that determine every human action, and the impossibility which every man and woman must admit to themselves of deciding just how much gladness and how much regret is entailed in every least little thing that they do.

Almost without warning Mr. Hope proved that the vague promise of more serious work was well founded, by producing what, I think, the sober judgment of posterity will recognize as his most ambitious and most enduring work, Quisante. Alexander Quisante, from whom the volume takes its name, is not an Englishman either by birth or ancestry. He comes of antecedents almost unknown beyond the fact that they are a mixture of French and Spanish. With scanty means he comes, an absolute outsider, preparing to lay siege to the political and social

world of London. In every way he finds himself handicapped. The foreordained course of education through which the English ruling classes pass as a matter of course and by which their prejudices and points of view are determined, has not been his privilege. In addition to this he lacks that inborn refinement which sometimes makes up for good breeding and social experience. His taste is often exceedingly bad; his manner is alternately too subservient and too arrogant. Of the higher standards of morality he has no perception; he is the typical adventurer, unscrupulous, insincere, monumentally selfish. But, to offset all this, his intellect is quite extraordinary; his brain is an instrument marvelously under control, and he uses it at his pleasure, to bring the lesser intellects about him under his dominion. Above all, he has the gift of eloquence; and when he chooses to give full rein to his rhetorical powers, he can sway his audience at will, and thrill and sweep them with him through the whole gamut of human emotions. Of the men and women whom he meets, fully one-half are antagonized and repelled; the others give him an unquestioning, almost slavish devotion. But he has a personality which cannot leave negative results; it must breed love or hate.

The other character in the book who shares the central interest is Lady May Gaston, a woman who, by birth and training, participates in all those special privileges of rank and caste, all the traditions of her order from which Quisante is shut out. There is another man, one in her own class, who would be glad to make her his wife. He is in all respects the sort of man whom she is expected to marry; and she is not wholly indifferent to him. But she meets Quisante, and, from the first, comes under the spell of his dominant personality. There is much in him from which she shrinks. His social ineptitude, his faculty for doing the wrong thing, or the right thing at the wrong time, makes

her shudder. Although fascinated, she is not blinded. She sees his vulgarities, she questions his sincerity, she even doubts whether he is deserving of her respect. Nevertheless, the spectacular, flamboyant brilliancy of the man dominates her better judgment, and in spite of her relatives' remonstrances, in spite of warnings from a member of Quisante's own family, she marries him, unable to resist the almost hypnotic spell cast over her by this man, who is something of a charlatan and something of a cad. The greater part of the book concerns itself with the story of the married life of this curiously ill-assorted couple; of his success in the public eye; of her gradual disillusionment, which, bitter though it is in its completeness, finds her somewhat apathetic, unable to feel the resentment that she knows she ought, unable to acknowledge that she regrets her choice. This, indeed, is the most interesting aspect of the book, the domination, mentally and morally, of a woman of rare sensitiveness and infinite possibilities by a man with whom companionship inevitably means deterioration.

The next of Mr. Anthony Hope's volumes, which personally appealed to the present writer, is entitled A Servant of the Public, and is enjoyable chiefly because of the tantalizing witchery of its heroine. Ora Pinsent is a young actress, who has taken London by storm. She has a husband somewhere, it is said, " whose name does not matter "; indeed, it matters so little that it does not prevent her from letting Ashley Mead make ardent love to her, one Sunday afternoon, though all the while she " preserves wonderfully the air of not being responsible for the thing, of neither accepting nor rejecting, of being quite passive, of having it just happen to her." Thus with a single pen stroke Mr. Hope has set the woman unmistakably before us. Throughout the book she practices the art of having things just happen to her, the art of dodging responsibility. With Ashley she

drifts, dangerously one thinks, at first, until one sees how easily she checks his ardor when she chooses, with a nervous laugh, and a low whispered " Don't, don't make love to me any more now." She talks much solemn nonsense about her duty to the husband whose name does not matter, and about her intention to renounce Ashley, although one realizes that there is really nothing to renounce, nor ever will be. And when the time comes for her company to leave London and start on their American tour, here also she plays the passive role, neither accepting nor rejecting. It is only when the weary months of her absence are over and she comes back as the wife of her leading man, that Ashley begins to see her as she really is; only then that he feels her power over him has ceased; only then that he can say, " I no longer love her, but I wish to God I did! " It is not easy to convey an impression of a woman's charm, when it lies not in what she says, but in the way she says it; not in what she does, but in the way she does it. But this is precisely what Anthony Hope has done triumphantly in his portraiture of Ora Pinsent, Ora, with her upturned face, with its habitual expression of expecting to be kissed, is one of the heroines in contemporary fiction that will not easily be forgotten.

Helena's Path deserves something more than a passing word of commendation, for it is an excellent example of Mr. Hope's deftness in doing a very slight thing extremely well. It has an outward framework of actuality, the atmosphere of present day English country life; yet into this he has infused a certain spirit of old-time chivalry and homage that gives to his whole picture something of the grace and charm of a Watteau landscape. The whole theme of the volume, which is scarcely more than a novelette, concerns itself with a right of way. The hero's estates lie somewhere on the east coast of England; but between his land and the strip of beach where he and his fathers before him have for

generations been in the habit of bathing lies the property which the heroine has recently purchased; and, unaware of any right of way, she closes up the gate through which it is his habit to pass for his daily swim. He writes courteously but firmly, insisting on his right. She answers in the same spirit, emphatically denying it. He refuses to be robbed of his legal rights, even by a pretty woman; she refuses to yield, at a command, what she would have graciously granted to a prayer. As neither side chooses to adopt legal measures, a state of mimic war ensues, in which he continues to invade the enemy's territory, while she continues to barricade and entrench. And all the while, although they have not once met face to face, each is quietly falling in love with the other, so that when finally honorable terms of peace are concluded, it is already a foregone conclusion that the whole dainty little comedy will end with oaths of fealty and bestowal of favors worthy of a knight and a lady of the olden times.

With the passage of years, however, the author of The Dotty Dialogues has tended to give us fewer and fewer of these dainty trifles and more and more of his serious and careful social studies. In this class belongs The Great Miss Driver, and there is no exaggeration in saying that since the publication of Quisante it is easily the biggest, best-rounded, and altogether worthiest book he has written. And yet, the first thing you are apt to think of is that the germ idea of the story goes straight back to The Dolly Dialogues; that in a superficial way, yes, and perhaps in a deeper way, too, there is a certain rather absurd similarity between them; just as though the author, having once made a pleasant little comedy out of a certain situation, had ever since been turning over in his mind the possibility of using it in a bigger and more serious way, until eventually he evolved the present volume. Not that Jennie Driver, heiress to Breysgate Priory, bears any close resemblance to Lady

Mickleham beyond the very feminine desire for conquest, any more than the Mr. Austin of the one story is a close relative of Mr. Carter in the other. The resemblance lies in this, that both stories are told in the first person by the man who in his secret heart loves the woman of whom he writes, but knows that because he is poor, because he has the natural instinct of an old bachelor, because, also, she has given her heart elsewhere, he must remain content to look upon her joys and sorrows in the capacity of a friend, and not that of a lover. To this extent The Great Miss Driver may be defined as The Dolly Dialogues rendered in a different tempo.

Yet, such a definition gives no hint of the strength, the variety, the vital interest of this story. In the character of Jennie Driver Mr. Hope has given us a woman whose ruling passion is to hold sway, to fascinate and bend to her will every one who comes within her sphere. And because of this desire she can never bear to lose the allegiance of any man, no matter how mean and unworthy he has proved himself; and herein lies the source of her life's tragedy. She is not content to be merely the richest woman in the county, to play the part of Lady Bountiful, and build memorials and endow institutions with fabulous sums; she wants also to be a social leader with undisputed right to take precedence over all the other ladies of the community, and this she could do if she married Lord Fillingford, whom she respects, and who badly needs her fortune; but not if she should marry Leonard Octon, big, brusque, rather brutal, who is cut by the whole county, and whom she happens to love. It is a rather unique situation in fiction for a woman to be forced into publicly slighting the one man on earth that she cares for; still more unique for a woman who is pledged to marry one man to be secretly meeting the other man, and thus atoning for deliberately cutting him whenever they meet in public. And, surely, it was a

rather audacious thing for Mr. Hope to attempt to make us feel that in spite of her double-dealing Jennie Driver is a rather big and fine and splendid sort of woman; that she would have kept faith with Fillingford had he been big enough to trust her when appearances were heavily against her; and that in defying convention and scandalizing the little world she lives in by fleeing with Octon to Paris, she is doing the one big, brave, inevitable act. Yet, that is precisely what the author does succeed in making us feel; and when because Fate intervenes and wrecks the last chance of Jennie's happiness through the death of Octon, we not only sympathize with her bitterness toward the narrow-minded social circle that had forced her lover into exile, but we also glory with her in the big, carefully planned and altogether adequate revenge by which she forces the county to pay tardy homage to the name of Octon.

Notwithstanding the statement made at the beginning of this chapter, to the effect that Mr. Anthony Hope does not write problem novels, the volume entitled Mrs. Maxon Protests comes critically near the border-line. Mrs. Maxon is simply one more young woman who has discovered marriage to be something vastly different from what she had imagined; and her difficulty is of the variety which she regards as almost humiliatingly commonplace namely, incompatibility. Her husband happens to be one of those narrow, self-satisfied, dictatorial men, with old-fashioned ideas about women in general and a rooted conviction that a man has a high moral responsibility for his wife's conduct and must mould her in all fashions to his own way of thinking. Mrs. Maxon bears the strain for five years; then she consults a lawyer. She learns that while she cannot get a divorce in England, she can leave her husband and he cannot force her to come back. At the time of their separation, or to be more accurate, her desertion of him for

Maxon refuses to take the matter seriously there is no other man in her life; but in the weeks that follow during which she stays at the country home of some friends with lax ideas of life and a houseful of curious and often irregular people, she suddenly surprises herself by falling in love with a certain Godfrey Ledstone and promptly scandalizes society by eloping with him openly and unashamed. The rest of the book traces, with a clear-sightedness that Mr. Hope has not always shown in his books, the subsequent career of a woman who thinks that by the force of her own example she can bring the whole world over to her way of thinking. He does not spare us any of her disillusions, her humiliations, her heartache and loneliness. But through it all she is learning, strangely and cruelly learning, much that is exceedingly good for her. She is learning, for instance, that charity and sympathy and understanding are often found where least expected. She is learning, too, that there are many other standards in this world as well as her own and that they are just as reasonable and perhaps nobler. She learns that one of the best men she has ever had the good fortune to meet, loving her, pitying her, utterly disapproving of her, would nevertheless have made her his wife in spite of the scandal that had preceded and followed her divorce but for one reason: he is an army officer, and a woman with a taint upon her name would lower the social tone of his regiment and be in some degree a menace to the moral tone of the younger set. It is a temptation to analyze at some length the separate episodes of this rather unusual book throughout the years while Mrs. Maxon is slowly finding her way out of the quagmire of her own making into a belated peace and happiness. Yet, after all, what the book stands for is so admirably summed up in the concluding paragraph that one cannot do it a greater service than to close with one brief quotation. It is a satisfaction to find a book written upon this theme which, while recognizing that

there is much to be said on both sides, shows neither vindictiveness toward the woman nor a misplaced championship that would exalt her into a martyr.

In the small circle of those with whom she had shared the issues of destiny she had unsettled much; of a certainty she had settled nothing. Things were just as much in solution as ever; the welter was not abated. Man being imperfect, laws must be made. Man being imperfect, laws must be broken or ever new laws will be made. Winnie Maxon had broken a law and asked a question. When thousands do the like, the Giant, after giving the first comers a box on the ear, may at last put his hand to his own and ponderously consider.

Such are the volumes chosen as a matter of personal preference, out of the generous series that Mr. Hope has so industriously turned out, during a score of years. Another reader's choice might be different, and who shall say whether it would not be as well justified? Because, the first duty of a public entertainer is to entertain; and, taking this for a criterion, the most that any one can say of his own knowledge is, such-and-such volumes have entertained me. It is obvious that Mr. Hope's own preference is for his more serious work, that with the passage of years he has grown more willing to allow the books of his romantic period to fade from sight. Yet, by doing this, he challenges a harder competition, a stricter measurement against a host of rivals. There has been no one to give us a second Prisoner of Zenda, excepting Mr. Hope himself, notwithstanding that many another writer has tried his best. But it would be easy to name a dozen contemporary novelists who could give us the annals of another Servant of the People, or chronicle some further Intrusions of Peggy, and one or two who, perhaps, could do it better. Mr. Hope is not one of the great novelists of his generation; but he is never mediocre, and

even in his uninspired moments never dull. His Prisoner of Zenda and his Dolly Dialogues were both gems of the first water; his Quisante certainly suffers nothing by comparison with George Gissing's Charlatan, separated from it by barely a year. As a chronicler of English manners he is certainly of rather more importance than Mr. E. F. Benson or Mr. Maarten Maartens, although not in the same class with Galsworthy, Bennett, or W. H. Maxwell. He will be remembered, I think, somewhat as William Black and Marion Crawford are remembered, as having preserved a wholesome optimism, an unshaken belief in human nature, and as having done his part to keep the tone of the modern novel clean and wholesome.

A Servant of the Public

Chapter I - Muddock And Mead

THE social birth of a family, united by a chain of parallel events with the commercial development of a business, is a spectacle strange to no country but most common among the nation of shopkeepers; it presents, however, interesting points and is likely to produce a group of persons rather diverse in character. Some of the family breathe the new air readily enough; with some the straw of the omnibus (there was straw in omnibuses during the formative period)

follows on silken skirts into the landau. It takes, they say, three generations to make a gentleman; the schools ticket them — National or Board, Commercial or Grammar, Eton or Harrow. Three generations, not perhaps of human flesh, but of mercantile growth, it takes to make a great Concern. The humble parent-tree in the Commercial Road puts forth branches in Brixton, Camberwell, Stoke Newington, wherever buyers are many and "turnover " quick: here is the second period, when the business is already large and lucrative, but not yet imposing. Then a new ambition stirs and works in the creator's mind; there is still a world to conquer. Appearance is added to reality, show to substance. A splendid block rises somewhere within the ken of fashion; it is red, with white facings, a tower or two, perhaps a clock. First and last, a good deal is said about it in talk and in print. Possibly a luncheon is given. Now there are points of policy to be practiced, not directly productive of hard money, but powerful in the long run. For example, the young ladies and gentlemen who serve the counters should be well treated, and carefully looked after in regard to their morals. And if this be done, there is no reason against having the fact stated with the utmost available publicity. For this service, sections of an all-embracing Press are ready and willing. In the eye of the polite world this big block is now the business: the branches are still profitable, but the ledgers alone sing their virtues; men cease to judge the position or the purse of the family by their humble fronts. For the family too has been on the move; it has passed, in orderly progression, in an ascent of gentility, from Putney to Maida Vale, from Maida Vale to Paddington, from Paddington to Kensington Palace Gardens. At each stopping-place it may acquire members, at some it will lose them; the graves where those lie who have dropped from the ranks are themselves milestones on the march. The survivors have each some scent, some trace, of their place of origin. To the architect of fortune the Commercial Road

is native and familiar; he lost his first love there and buried her down East. His second wife dates from the latter end of the Maida Vale time and is in all essentials of the Middle, or Paddington, Period. The children recollect Paddington as childhood's home, have extorted information about Maida Vale, talk of Putney with a laugh, and seem almost of true Kensington Palace Gardens' blood. Yet even in them there is an element which they are hardly conscious of, an element not to be refined away till the third generation of human flesh has run. Then comes the perfect product; a baronetcy is often supposed to mark, but sometimes maybe considered to precede, its appearance. Indeed — for it is time to descend to the particular — Sir James Muddock was hardly the perfect product; nay, he still strove valiantly to plume himself on not being such. But with a wife and children it is hard to go on exulting in a lowly origin. It is also rather selfish, and was certainly so in Sir James' case, since Lady Muddock was very sensitive on the subject. It would seem that being of the Middle Period is apt to produce a sensitiveness of this sort; the pride of achievement is not there, the pride of position is still new and uneasy.

Somewhat in this vein, but with a more malicious and humorous turn of speech, Ashley Mead ran through the history of the firm of Muddock and Mead for Lady Kilnorton's pleasure and information. She was interested in them as phenomena and as neighbours; they were hardly more than across the road from her house in Queen's Gate. Ashley spoke with full knowledge; both business and family were familiar to him; he himself represented an episode in the career of the concern which survived only in its name. He used to say that he had just missed being a fit figure for romance; his father had not been a scatter-brained genius bought out of a splendid certainty of wealth for fifty pounds, but a lazy man who very contentedly and with open

eyes accepted fifteen thousand pounds and leisure in preference to hard work and an off-chance of riches. This elder Mead had come into the business with three thousand pounds when capital was wanted for the Stoke Newington branch, and had gone out when ambition began to whisper the name of Buckingham Palace Road. He had not felt aggrieved at losing opulence, but had lived on his spoil — after all, a good return for his investment — and died with it in cheerfulness. But then he had not been born a trader. He came of the professions; money-making was not in his blood nor bone of his bone, as it must be in the frame of one who is to grow gradually by his own labour to the status of a millionaire. The instinct of gain was not in his son either; Ashley laughed with unreserved good-nature as he said:

" If my father hadn't gone out, I should have had half the business, I suppose, instead of starving along on four hundred a year."

"You've your profession," observed Lady Kilnorton, hardly seriously. " The Bar, you know."

" My profession?" he laughed, as he leant against the mantel-piece and looked down at her. " I'm one of five thousand names on five hundred doors, if that's a profession! "

" You might make it one," she suggested, but not as though the subject interested her or were likely to interest him. The little rebuke had all the perfunctoriness of duty and convention.

"The funny thing is," he went on, "that old Sir James would like to get me back now; he's always hinting about it. Shall I go and sell the ribbons?"

"Why can't Mr. Robert sell the ribbons?"

" Well, in the family we don't think Bob very bright, you see."

" Oh! Alice is bright, though; at least she's very clear-headed."

" More brains than any of them. And what did you think of My lady?"

"Of My lady?" Irene Kilnorton laughed a little, raised her brows a little, and paused before she said:

"Well, her hair's too fluffy, isn't it? They don't beat her, do they? She looks rather like it."

" No, they don't beat her; but she's not quite sure that she's got the grand manner."

" Isn't she?" said Lady Kilnorton, laughing again.

" And then Sir James insists on referring to Putney, especially by way of acknowledging the goodness of God in family prayers. The servants are there, of course, and — you understand?"

" Perfectly, Mr. Mead. In such a case I shouldn't like it myself."

" Lady Muddock has no objection to being thankful privately, but she doesn't like it talked about."

"You go there a great deal?" she asked, with a glance at him.

"Yes, a good deal."

" And the girl — Alice — is very fond of you? "

" Not the least, I believe."

" Oh, you're bound to say that! Would she go with — with selling the ribbons?" But she went on without waiting for an answer, perhaps because she had risked a snub. " I was received with immense empress entente

" You're a bit of a swell, aren't you? "

" A poverty-stricken Irish widow! No, but I took some swells with me."

" Lord Bowdon, for instance?"

" Yes, Lord Bowdon. And a greater swell still — Miss Ora Pinsent."

A pause followed. Ashley looked over his hostess' head out of the window. Then Lady Kilnorton added, " Lord Bowdon drove Miss Pinsent to her house afterwards."

Another pause followed; each was wondering what the other's point of view might be.

" Fancy Ora Pinsent at the Muddocks'! " reflected Ashley presently. " She went to please you? "

"How do I know why she went? I don't suppose she knew herself."

" You're great friends, though? "

" I admire and despise, love and most bitterly hate, Ora Pinsent," said Lady Kilnorton.

" All at once? " asked Ashley with a smile, and brows raised in protest.

" Yes, all at once, and successively, and alternately, and in all sorts of various combinations."

"And Lord Bowdon drove her home?" His tone begged for a comment from his companion.

" I told you so," she answered with a touch of irritation, which was as significant as any comment.

The servant came in, bringing tea; they were silent while the preparations were made. Ashley, however, covertly regarded his friend's trim figure and pretty, small features. He often felt rather surprised that he had no inclination to fall in love with, or even to make love to, Irene Kilnorton. Many men had such an inclination, he knew; among them he ranked this same Lord Bowdon who had driven Miss Pinsent to her house. Lady Kilnorton was young, she was pretty, she had, if not wit, at least the readiness of reply which is the common substitute provided by the habit of conversing with wide-awake people. It was, though, very pleasant to have so charming a friend and to be in no danger of transforming her into the doubtful and dangerous character of a woman he loved; so he told himself, having no disposition to love her.

" She's got a husband, hasn't she? " he asked, as the door closed behind the footman.

" Ora? Oh, yes, somewhere. He's a scamp, I think.

He's called — oh, I forget! But his name doesn't matter."

" They've always got a husband, he's always a scamp, and his name never matters," remarked Ashley between mouthfuls of toast.

" Fenning! That's it! Fenning."

"Just as you like, Lady Kilnorton. It's the fact, not what you call it, that's the thing, you know."

As he spoke the door was opened again and Lord Bowdon was announced. He came in almost eagerly, like a man who has something to say, shook hands hastily, and, the instant that he dropped into a chair, exclaimed, " What a glorious creature! "

" I knew exactly what you were going to say before you opened your lips," remarked Lady Kilnorton. " You haven't been long, though." There was a touch of malice in her tone.

" It wasn't left to me to fix the length of the interview. And she said she liked driving fast. Well, Ashley, my boy, how are you?"

" I'm all right, Lord Bowdon."

" I've got a job for you. I'll write to you about it presently. It's a Commission they've put me on, and I thought you might like to be secretary."

" Anything with a stipend," agreed Ashley cheerfully.

" What a lot men think of money! " said Lady Kilnorton.

" I don't think I ever met a more fascinating creature," Lord Bowdon mused.

" It's awfully good of you," continued Ashley. " I'm uncommonly hard-up just now."

" Do you know her? " asked Bowdon.

" Met her once or twice," Ashley answered very carelessly. Bowdon seemed to fall into a reverie, as he gently stirred his tea round and round. Lady Kilnorton leant back and looked at the mantel-piece. But presently he glanced at her, smiled pleasantly, and began to discuss the Muddocks. Ashley left them thus engaged when he took his leave ten minutes later.

Lord Bowdon had lived a full and active life which now stretched over forty-three years. In spite of much sport and amusement he had found time for some soldiering, for the duties of his station, and for proving himself an unexpectedly useful and sensible Member of Parliament. But he had not found time to be married; that event he used to think of in his earlier days as somehow connected with his father's death; when he became Earl of Daresbury, he would marry. However, about a year back, he had made Lady Kilnorton's acquaintance, had liked her, and had begun to draw lazy and leisurely plans about her. He had not fallen in love with her, any more than Ashley Mead had, but he had drifted into a considerable affection for her. His father had lived to be old; he himself had already grown more middle-aged than was desirable in a bridegroom. During the last few weeks he had considered the project seriously; and that he had assumed this attitude of mind could hardly have escaped the lady's notice. He had detected, with some pleasure, her hidden consciousness of

his purpose and commended her for a gracefully easy treatment of the position. She did not make at him, nor yet run away from him, she neither hurried nor repulsed him. Thus by degrees the thing had become very pleasant and satisfactory in imagination. It was not quite what in by-gone years he had meant by being in love — he thanked heaven for that, after reflection — but it was pleasant and satisfactory. " Let it go on to the end," he would have said, with a contentment hardly conscious of an element of resignation.

Today there was a check, a set-back in his thoughts, and he was uncomfortable lest it might show in his manner. He talked too long about the Muddocks, then too long about Ashley Mead, then about something quite uninteresting. There was an unexplained check; it vexed and puzzled him. Lady Kilnorton, with her usual directness, told him what it was before they parted.

"You've been thinking about Ora Pinsent all the time," she said. " It would have been better to have the courage of your ingratitude and go on talking about her." The gay, good-humored words were accompanied by a rather nervous little smile.

"Who is she?" asked Bowdon bluntly and with undisguised curiosity.

" She's Mrs. Jack Fenning. I don't know and I don't care who Jack Fenning is, only — "

"Only what?"

" Only he's not dead. I know you think that's the one thing he ought to be."

" I'm not sure about that," he answered, looking in her face. The face had suddenly become charming to him in its now apparent mixture of annoyance and merriment. " Well, I must be going," he added with a sigh. Then he laughed; Lady Kilnorton, after an instant's hesitation, joined in his laugh.

" She liked me to drive as fast as I could, and straight home! " said he. " Good-bye, Lady Kilnorton."

" Good-bye. I wonder you aren't a little more sensible at your age."

" She carries you off your feet, somehow," he murmured apologetically, as he made for the door. He was feeling both rude and foolish, confessing thereby the special relation towards his hostess which he had come to occupy.

Left alone, Irene Kilnorton sat down and attempted a dispassionate appraisement of herself. She was twenty-nine, a widow of four years' standing. The world, which had seemed ended when her young husband died, had revived for her; such is the world's persistent way. She was pretty, not beautiful, bright, not brilliant, pleasant, but hardly fascinating. She was pleased with the impartiality which conducted her so far. But at this point the judgment of herself began to drift into a judgment of Ora Pinsent, who seemed to be all that she herself had just missed being; in assessing Ora the negatives fell out and the limitations had to be discarded. Yet her mood was not one of envy for Ora Pinsent. She would not be Ora Pinsent. Among those various feelings which she had for Ora, there was one which she had described by saying " I despise her." The mood, in truth, hung doubtful between pity and contempt; but it was enough to save her from wishing to be Ora Pinsent. She would sooner put up with the negatives and

the limitations. But she might wish, and did wish, that other people could take her own discerning view of her friend. She did not call herself a jealous woman; but after all Lord Bowdon had become in a rather special sense her property; now he was, as he put it graphically enough, carried off his feet. That condition would not last; he would find his feet and his feet would find the ground again soon. Meanwhile, however, she could hardly be expected exactly to like it. Men did such strange things — or so she had been told — just in those brief spaces of time when the feet were off the ground; perhaps women too did things rather strange in a similar case.

" And poor Ora's feet," she said to herself, " are never really on the ground."

She was vaguely conscious that her mingled admiration and contempt reflected in a rather commonplace fashion the habitual attitude of good-sense towards genius. Not being in love with commonplace good sense as an intellectual ideal, she grew impatient with her thoughts, flung the window open, and sought distraction in the sight of the people who passed up and down the hill through the cool kindliness of the June evening. The wayfarers caught her idle interest, and she had almost lost herself in wondering whether the boy and girl at the corner would kiss before they parted when she was recalled to her own sphere by seeing two people whom she knew breasting the slope on bicycles. A dark young man inclining to stoutness, very elaborately arrayed for the exercise on which he was engaged, rode side by side with a dark young woman inclining to leanness, plainly clad, with a face that a man might learn to think attractive by much looking, but would not give a second thought to in a London drawing-room. " The young Muddocks," said Irene, drawing back and

peering at them from behind her curtains. " Recovering themselves after the party, I suppose."

She watched them till they were out of sight; why, she did not ask herself. Of course there was the interest of wealth, perhaps a vulgar, but seemingly an unavoidable, sensation which pounds much multiplied enable their possessors to create. There was more; the Muddocks had come somehow into her orbit. They were in the orbit of her friend Ashley Mead; the girl might become the most important satellite there. Irene's own act had perhaps brought them into Ora Pinsent's orbit — where storms were apt to rage. Curiosity mingled with an absurd sense of responsibility in her. " It's such a risk introducing Ora to anybody," she murmured, and with this her thoughts flew back to Bowdon and the condition of men who are carried off their feet.

" It's simply that I'm jealous," she declared petulantly, as she shut the window. But she was not yet to escape from Ora Pinsent. There on the mantel-piece was a full length photograph, representing Ora in her latest part and signed with her autograph, a big O followed by a short sprawl of letters, and a big P followed by a longer sprawl. Though not a professed believer in the revelation of character by handwriting, Irene found something significant in this signature, in the impulse which seemed to die away to a fatigued perfunctory ending, in the bold beginning that lagged on to a conclusion already wearisome. Her eyes rose to the face of the portrait. It showed a woman in a mood of audacity, still merry and triumphant, but distantly apprehensive of some new and yet unrealized danger. Exultation, barely yet most surely touched with fear, filled the eyes and shaped the smile. It seemed to Irene Kilnorton that, if Ora knew herself and her own temper, such reasonably might be her disposition towards the world and her own life as well as her pose in the play to which she

now drew all the town; for her power of enjoying greatly in all likelihood carried with it its old companion, the power greatly to suffer. Yet to Irene a sort of triviality affected both capacities, as though neither could be exactly taken seriously, as though the enjoyment would always be childish, the suffering none too genuine. Good sense judged genius again; and again the possessor of good-sense turned impatiently away, not knowing whether her contempt should be for herself or for her friend.

Then she began to laugh, suddenly but heartily, at the recollection of Lady Muddock. When Ora had passed on after the introduction, and Irene was lingering in talk with her hostess, Lady Muddock had raised her timid pale-blue eyes, nervously fingered that growth of hair which was too fluffy for her years, and asked whether Miss Pinsent were " nice." This adjective, maid-of-all-work on women's lips, had come with such ludicrous inadequacy and pitiful inappropriateness that even at the moment Irene had smiled. Now she laughed. Yet she was aware that Lady Muddock had no more than this one epithet with which to achieve a classification of humanity. You were nice or you were not nice; it was simple dichotomy; there was the beginning, there the end of the matter. So viewed, the question lost its artlessness and became a singularly difficult and searching interrogation. For if the little adjective were given its rich fullness of meaning, its widely representative character (it had to sum up half a world!), if it were asked whether, on the whole, Ora Pinsent were likely to be a good element in the world, or (if it might be so put) a profitable speculation on the part of Nature, Irene Kilnorton would have been quite at a loss to answer. In fact — she asked, with a laugh still but now a puzzled laugh — was she nice or wasn't she? The mixture of feelings which she had described to Ashley Mead forbade any clear and definite response on her own behalf. On Lady Muddock's,