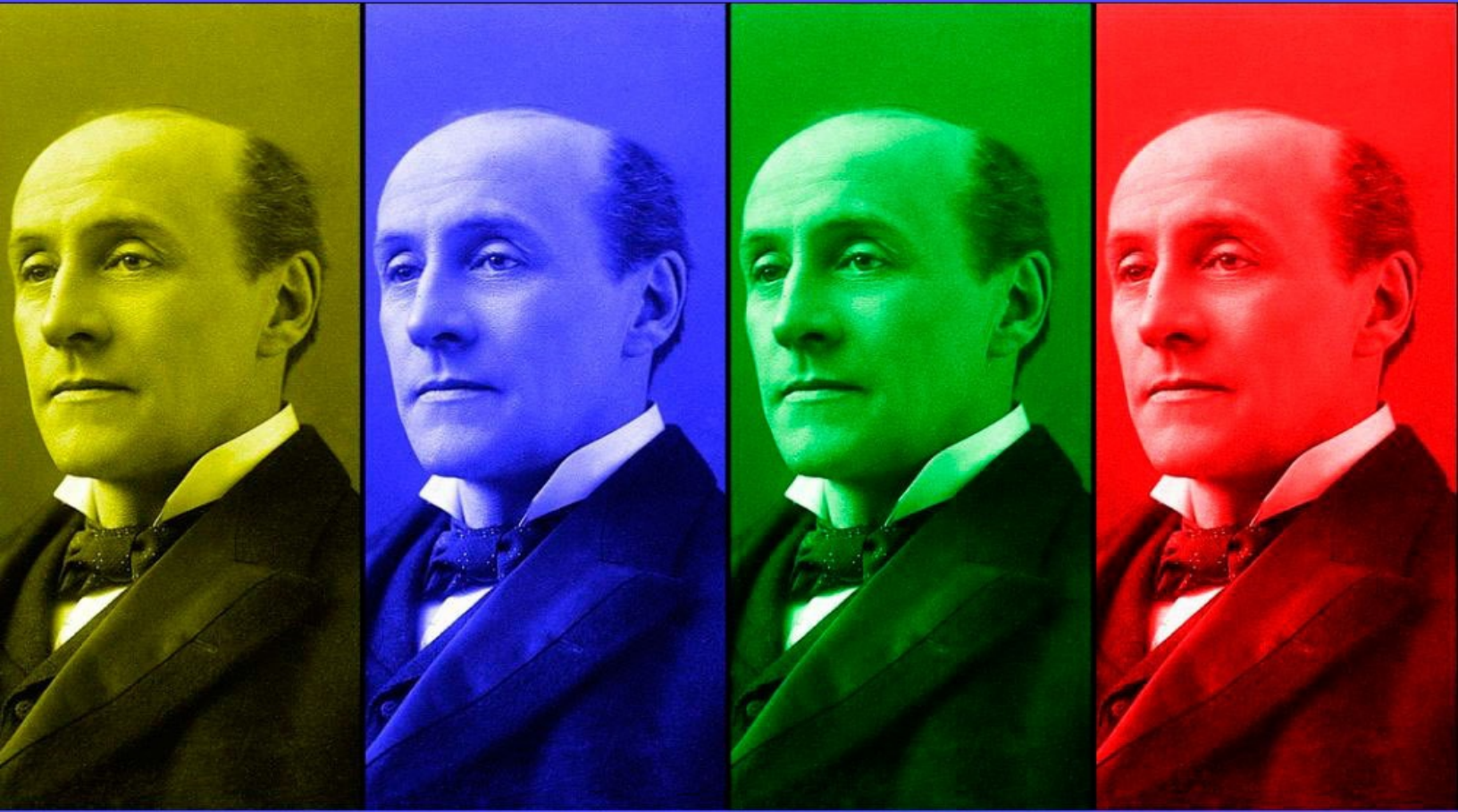


ANTHONY HOPE



SIMON
DALE

BIOGRAPHICALLY ANNOTATED

Simon Dale

Anthony Hope

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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 disillusionings, 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.

Simon Dale

Chapter I

The Child Of Prophecy

One who was in his day a person of great place and consideration, and has left a name which future generations shall surely repeat so long as the world may

last, found no better rule for a man's life than that he should incline his mind to move in Charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of Truth. This condition, says he, is Heaven upon Earth; and although what touches truth may better befit the philosopher who uttered it than the vulgar and unlearned, for whom perhaps it is a counsel too high and therefore dangerous, what comes before should surely be graven by each of us on the walls of our hearts. For any man who lived in the days that I have seen must have found much need of trust in Providence, and by no whit the less of charity for men. In such trust and charity I have striven to write: in the like I pray you to read.

I, Simon Dale, was born on the seventh day of the seventh month in the year of Our Lord sixteen-hundred-and-forty-seven. The date was good in that the Divine Number was thrice found in it, but evil in that it fell on a time of sore trouble both for the nation and for our own house; when men had begun to go about saying that if the King would not keep his promises it was likely that he would keep his head as little; when they who had fought for freedom were suspecting that victory had brought new tyrants; when the Vicar was put out of his cure; and my father, having trusted the King first, the Parliament afterwards, and at last neither the one nor the other, had lost the greater part of his substance, and fallen from wealth to straitened means: such is the common reward of an honest patriotism wedded to an open mind. However, the date, good or bad, was none of my doing, nor indeed, folks whispered, much of my parents' either, seeing that destiny overruled the affair, and Betty Nasroth, the wise woman, announced its imminence more than a year beforehand. For she predicted the birth, on the very day whereon I came into the world, within a mile of the parish church, of a male child who—and the utterance certainly had a lofty sound about it—should love

where the King loved, know what the King hid, and drink of the King's cup. Now, inasmuch as none lived within the limits named by Betty Nasroth, save on the one side sundry humble labourers, whose progeny could expect no such fate, and on the other my Lord and Lady Quinton, who were wedded but a month before my birthday, the prophecy was fully as pointed as it had any need to be, and caused to my parents no small questionings. It was the third clause or term of the prediction that gave most concern alike to my mother and to my father; to my mother, because, although of discreet mind and a sound Churchwoman, she was from her earliest years a Rechabite, and had never heard of a King who drank water; and to my father by reason of his decayed estate, which made it impossible for him to contrive how properly to fit me for my predestined company. "A man should not drink the King's wine without giving the King as good," my father reflected ruefully. Meanwhile I, troubling not at all about the matter, was content to prove Betty right in point of the date, and, leaving the rest to the future, achieved this triumph for her most punctually. Whatsoever may await a man on his way through the world, he can hardly begin life better than by keeping his faith with a lady.

She was a strange old woman, this Betty Nasroth, and would likely enough have fared badly in the time of the King's father. Now there was bigger game than witches afoot, and nothing worse befell her than the scowls of her neighbours and the frightened mockery of children. She made free reply with curses and dark mutterings, but me she loved as being the child of her vision, and all the more because, encountering her as I rode in my mother's arms, I did not cry, but held out my hands, crowing and struggling to get to her; whereat suddenly, and to my mother's great terror, she exclaimed: "Thou see'st, Satan!" and fell to weeping, a thing which, as every woman in the parish

knew, a person absolutely possessed by the Evil One can by no means accomplish (unless, indeed, a bare three drops squeezed from the left eye may usurp the name of tears). But my mother shrank away from her and would not allow her to touch me; nor was it until I had grown older and ran about the village alone that the old woman, having tracked me to a lonely spot, took me in her arms, mumbled over my head some words I did not understand, and kissed me. That a mole grows on the spot she kissed is but a fable (for how do the women know where her kiss fell save by where the mole grows?—and that is to reason poorly), or at the most the purest chance. Nay, if it were more, I am content; for the mole does me no harm, and the kiss, as I hope, did Betty some good; off she went straight to the Vicar (who was living then in the cottage of my Lord Quinton's gardener and exercising his sacred functions in a secrecy to which the whole parish was privy) and prayed him to let her partake of the Lord's Supper: a request that caused great scandal to the neighbours and sore embarrassment to the Vicar himself, who, being a learned man and deeply read in demonology, grieved from his heart that the witch did not play her part better.

"It is," said he to my father, "a monstrous lapse."

"Nay, it is a sign of grace," urged my mother.

"It is," said my father (and I do not know whether he spoke perversely or in earnest), "a matter of no moment."

Now, being steadfastly determined that my boyhood shall be less tedious in the telling than it was in the living—for I always longed to be a man, and hated my green and petticoat-governed days—I will pass forthwith to the hour when I reached the age of eighteen years. My dear father was then in Heaven, and old Betty had found, as was

believed, another billet. But my mother lived, and the Vicar, like the King, had come to his own again: and I was five feet eleven in my stockings, and there was urgent need that I should set about pushing my way and putting money in my purse; for our lands had not returned with the King, and there was no more incoming than would serve to keep my mother and sisters in the style of gentlewomen.

"And on that matter," observed the Vicar, stroking his nose with his forefinger, as his habit was in moments of perplexity, "Betty Nasroth's prophecy is of small service. For the doings on which she touches are likely to be occasions of expense rather than sources of gain."

"They would be money wasted," said my mother gently, "one and all of them."

The Vicar looked a little doubtful.

"I will write a sermon on that theme," said he; for this was with him a favourite way out of an argument. In truth the Vicar loved the prophecy, as a quiet student often loves a thing that echoes of the world which he has shunned.

"You must write down for me what the King says to you, Simon," he told me once.

"Suppose, sir," I suggested mischievously, "that it should not be fit for your eye?"

"Then write it, Simon," he answered, pinching my ear, "for my understanding."

It was well enough for the Vicar's whimsical fancy to busy itself with Betty Nasroth's prophecy, half-believing, half-mocking, never forgetting nor disregarding; but I, who am,

after all, the most concerned, doubt whether such a dark utterance be a wholesome thing to hang round a young man's neck. The dreams of youth grow rank enough without such watering. The prediction was always in my mind, alluring and tantalising as a teasing girl who puts her pretty face near yours, safe that you dare not kiss it. What it said I mused on, what it said not I neglected. I dedicated my idle hours to it, and, not appeased, it invaded my seasons of business. Rather than seek my own path, I left myself to its will and hearkened for its whispered orders.

"It was the same," observed my mother sadly, "with a certain cook-maid of my sister's. It was foretold that she should marry her master."

"And did she not?" cried the Vicar, with ears all pricked-up.

"She changed her service every year," said my mother, "seeking the likeliest man, until at last none would hire her."

"She should have stayed in her first service," said the Vicar, shaking his head.

"But her first master had a wife," retorted my mother triumphantly.

"I had one once myself," said the Vicar.

The argument, with which his widowhood supplied the Vicar, was sound and unanswerable, and it suited well with my humour to learn from my aunt's cook-maid, and wait patiently on fate. But what avails an argument, be it ever so sound, against an empty purse? It was declared that I must seek my fortune; yet on the method of my search some difference arose.

"You must work, Simon," said my sister Lucy, who was betrothed to Justice Barnard, a young squire of good family and high repute, but mighty hard on idle vagrants, and free with the stocks for revellers.

"You must pray for guidance," said my sister Mary, who was to wed a saintly clergyman, a Prebend, too, of the Cathedral.

"There is," said I stoutly, "nothing of such matters in Betty Nasroth's prophecy."

"They are taken for granted, dear boy," said my mother gently.

The Vicar rubbed his nose.

Yet not these excellent and zealous counsellors proved right, but the Vicar and I. For had I gone to London, as they urged, instead of abiding where I was, agreeably to the Vicar's argument and my own inclination, it is a great question whether the plague would not have proved too strong for Betty Nasroth, and her prediction gone to lie with me in a death-pit. As things befell, I lived, hearing only dimly and, as it were, from afar-off of that great calamity, and of the horrors that beset the city. For the disease did not come our way, and we moralised on the sins of the townsfolk with sound bodies and contented minds. We were happy in our health and in our virtue, and not disinclined to applaud God's judgment that smote our erring brethren; for too often the chastisement of one sinner feeds another's pride. Yet the plague had a hand, and no small one, in that destiny of mine, although it came not near me; for it brought fresh tenants to those same rooms in the gardener's cottage where the Vicar had dwelt till the loyal

Parliament's Act proved too hard for the conscience of our Independent minister, and the Vicar, nothing loth, moved back to his parsonage.

Now I was walking one day, as I had full licence and leave to walk, in the avenue of Quinton Manor, when I saw, first, what I had (if I am to tell the truth) come to see, to wit, the figure of young Mistress Barbara, daintily arrayed in a white summer gown. Barbara was pleased to hold herself haughtily towards me, for she was an heiress, and of a house that had not fallen in the world as mine had. Yet we were friends; for we sparred and rallied, she giving offence and I taking it, she pardoning my rudeness and I accepting forgiveness; while my lord and my lady, perhaps thinking me too low for fear and yet high enough for favour, showed me much kindness; my lord, indeed, would often jest with me on the great fate foretold me in Betty Nasroth's prophecy.

"Yet," he would say, with a twinkle in his eye, "the King has strange secrets, and there is some strange wine in his cup, and to love where he loves——"; but at this point the Vicar, who chanced to be by, twinkled also, but shifted the conversation to some theme which did not touch the King, his secrets, his wine, or where he loved.

Thus then I saw, as I say, the slim tall figure, the dark hair, and the proud eyes of Barbara Quinton; and the eyes were flashing in anger as their owner turned away from—what I had not looked to see in Barbara's company. This was another damsel, of lower stature and plumper figure, dressed full as prettily as Barbara herself, and laughing with most merry lips and under eyes that half hid themselves in an eclipse of mirth. When Barbara saw me, she did not, as her custom was, feign not to see me till I thrust my presence on her, but ran to me at once, crying

very indignantly, "Simon, who is this girl? She has dared to tell me that my gown is of country make and hangs like an old smock on a beanpole."

"Mistress Barbara," I answered, "who heeds the make of the gown when the wearer is of divine make?" I was young then, and did not know that to compliment herself at the expense of her apparel is not the best way to please a woman.

"You are silly," said Barbara. "Who is she?"

"The girl," said I, crestfallen, "is, they tell me, from London, and she lodges with her mother in your gardener's cottage. But I didn't look to find her here in the avenue."

"You shall not again if I have my way," said Barbara. Then she added abruptly and sharply, "Why do you look at her?"

Now, it was true that I was looking at the stranger, and on Barbara's question I looked the harder.

"She is mighty pretty," said I. "Does she not seem so to you, Mistress Barbara?" And, simple though I was, I spoke not altogether in simplicity.

"Pretty?" echoed Barbara. "And pray what do you know of prettiness, Master Simon?"

"What I have learnt at Quinton Manor," I answered, with a bow.

"That doesn't prove her pretty," retorted the angry lady.

"There's more than one way of it," said I discreetly, and I took a step towards the visitor, who stood some ten yards

from us, laughing still and plucking a flower to pieces in her fingers.

"She isn't known to you?" asked Barbara, perceiving my movement.

"I can remedy that," said I, smiling.

Never since the world began had youth been a more faithful servant to maid than I to Barbara Quinton. Yet because, if a man lie down, the best of girls will set her pretty foot on his neck, and also from my love of a thing that is new, I was thoroughly resolved to accost the gardener's guest; and my purpose was not altered by Barbara's scornful toss of her little head as she turned away.

"It is no more than civility," I protested, "to ask after her health, for, coming from London, she can but just have escaped the plague."

Barbara tossed her head again, declaring plainly her opinion of my excuse.

"But if you desire me to walk with you——" I began.

"There is nothing I thought of less," she interrupted. "I came here to be alone."

"My pleasure lies in obeying you," said I, and I stood bareheaded while Barbara, without another glance at me, walked off towards the house. Half penitent, yet wholly obstinate, I watched her go; she did not once look over her shoulder. Had she—but a truce to that. What passed is enough; with what might have, my story would stretch to the world's end. I smothered my remorse, and went up to

the stranger, bidding her good-day in my most polite and courtly manner; she smiled, but at what I knew not. She seemed little more than a child, sixteen years old or seventeen at the most, yet there was no confusion in her greeting of me. Indeed, she was most marvellously at her ease, for, on my salute, she cried, lifting her hands in feigned amazement,

"A man, by my faith; a man in this place!"

Well pleased to be called a man, I bowed again.

"Or at least," she added, "what will be one, if it please Heaven."

"You may live to see it without growing wrinkled," said I, striving to conceal my annoyance.

"And one that has repartee in him! Oh, marvellous!"

"We do not all lack wit in the country, madame," said I, simpering as I supposed the Court gallants to simper, "nor, since the plague came to London, beauty."

"Indeed, it's wonderful," she cried in mock admiration. "Do they teach such sayings hereabouts, sir?"

"Even so, madame, and from such books as your eyes furnish." And for all her air of mockery, I was, as I remember, much pleased with this speech. It had come from some well-thumbed romance, I doubt not. I was always an eager reader of such silly things.

She curtsied low, laughing up at me with roguish eyes and mouth.

"Now, surely, sir," she said, "you must be Simon Dale, of whom my host the gardener speaks?"

"It is my name, madame, at your service. But the gardener has played me a trick; for now I have nothing to give in exchange for your name."

"Nay, you have a very pretty nosegay in your hand," said she. "I might be persuaded to barter my name for it."

The nosegay that was in my hand I had gathered and brought for Barbara Quinton, and I still meant to use it as a peace-offering. But Barbara had treated me harshly, and the stranger looked longingly at the nosegay.

"The gardener is a niggard with his flowers," she said with a coaxing smile.

"To confess the truth," said I, wavering in my purpose, "the nosegay was plucked for another."

"It will smell the sweeter," she cried, with a laugh. "Nothing gives flowers such a perfume." And she held out a wonderfully small hand towards my nosegay.

"Is that a London lesson?" I asked, holding the flowers away from her grasp.

"It holds good in the country also, sir; wherever, indeed, there is a man to gather flowers and more than one lady who loves smelling them."

"Well," said I, "the nosegay is yours at the price," and I held it out to her.

"The price? What, you desire to know my name?"

"Unless, indeed, I may call you one of my own choosing," said I, with a glance that should have been irresistible.

"Would you use it in speaking of me to Mistress Barbara there? No, I'll give you a name to call me by. You may call me Cydaria."

"Cydaria! A fine name!"

"It is," said she carelessly, "as good as any other."

"But is there no other to follow it?"

"When did a poet ask two names to head his sonnet? And surely you wanted mine for a sonnet?"

"So be it, Cydaria," said I.

"So be it, Simon. And is not Cydaria as pretty as Barbara?"

"It has a strange sound," said I, "but it's well enough."

"And now—the nosegay!"

"I must pay a reckoning for this," I sighed; but since a bargain is a bargain I gave her the nosegay.

She took it, her face all alight with smiles, and buried her nose in it. I stood looking at her, caught by her pretty ways and graceful boldness. Boy though I was, I had been right in telling her that there are many ways of beauty; here were two to start with, hers and Barbara's. She looked up and, finding my gaze on her, made a little grimace as though it were only what she had expected and gave her no more concern than pleasure. Yet at such a look Barbara

would have turned cold and distant for an hour or more. Cydaria, smiling in scornful indulgence, dropped me another mocking curtsy, and made as though she would go her way. Yet she did not go, but stood with her head half-averted, a glance straying towards me from the corner of her eye, while with her tiny foot she dug the gravel of the avenue.

"It is a lovely place, this park," said she. "But, indeed, it's often hard to find the way about it."

I was not backward to take her hint.

"If you had a guide now——" I began.

"Why, yes, if I had a guide, Simon," she whispered gleefully.

"You could find the way, Cydaria, and your guide would be most——"

"Most charitably engaged. But then——" She paused, drooping the corners of her mouth in sudden despondency.

"But what then?"

"Why then, Mistress Barbara would be alone."

I hesitated. I glanced towards the house. I looked at Cydaria.

"She told me that she wished to be alone," said I.

"No? How did she say it?"

"I will tell you all about that as we go along," said I, and Cydaria laughed again.