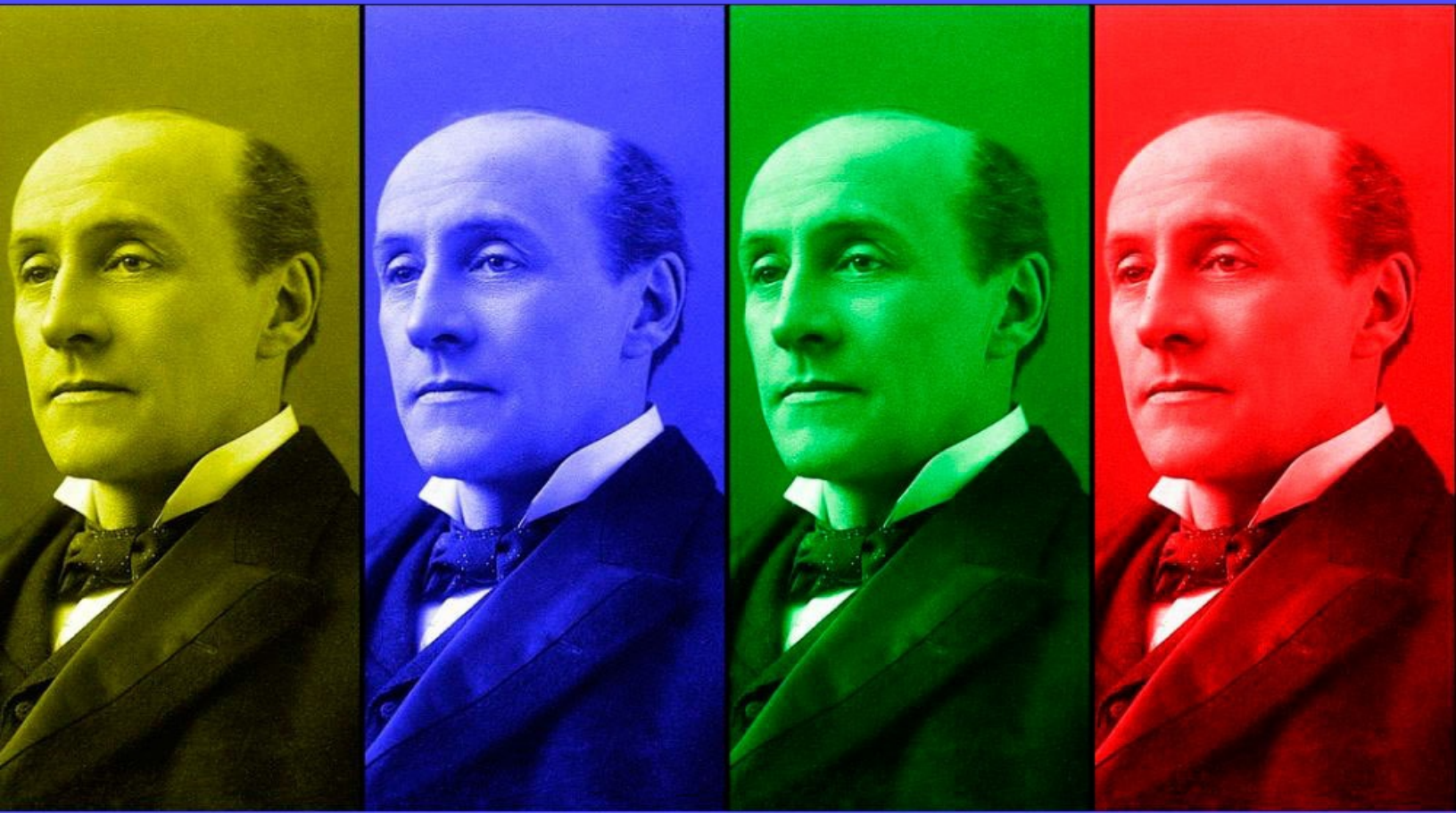


ANTHONY HOPE



THE HEART OF
PRINCESS OSRA

BIOGRAPHICALLY ANNOTATED

The Heart Of Princess Osra

Anthony Hope

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Anthony Hope – His Life And Work

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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 Vintager* 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 disillusion, 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.

The Heart of Princess Osra

Chapter I.

The Happiness of Stephen the Smith.

"STEPHEN! Stephen! Stephen!"

The impatient cry was heard through all the narrow gloomy street, where the old richly-carved house-fronts bowed to meet one another and left for the eye's comfort only a bare glimpse of blue. It was, men said, the oldest street in Strelsau, even as the sign of the "Silver Ship" was the oldest sign known to exist in the city. For when Aaron Lazarus the Jew came there, seventy years before, he had been the tenth man in unbroken line that took up the business; and now Stephen Nados, his apprentice and successor, was the eleventh. Old Lazarus had made a great business of it, and had spent his savings in buying up the better part of the street; but since Jews then might hold no property in Strelsau, he had taken all the deeds in the name of Stephen Nados; and when he came to die, being unable to carry his houses or his money with him, having

no kindred, and caring not a straw for any man or woman alive save Stephen, he bade Stephen let the deeds be, and, with a last curse against the Christians (of whom Stephen was one, and a devout one), he kissed the young man, and turned his face to the wall and died. Therefore Stephen was a rich man, and had no need to carry on the business, though it never entered his mind to do anything else; for half the people who raised their heads at the sound of the cry were Stephen's tenants, and paid him rent when he asked for it; a thing he did when he chanced to remember, and could tear himself away from chasing a goblet or fashioning a little silver saint; for Stephen loved his craft more than his rents; therefore, again, he was well liked in the quarter.

"Stephen! Stephen!" cried Prince Henry, impatiently hammering on the closed door with his whip. "Plague take the man! Is he dead?"

The men in the quarter went on with their work; the women moved idly to the doors; the girls came out into the street and clustered here and there, looking at the Prince. For although he was not so handsome as that scamp Rudolf, his brother, who had just come back from his travels with half a dozen wild stories spurring after him, yet Henry was a comely youth, as he sat on his chestnut mare, with his blue eyes full of impatience, and his chestnut curls fringing his shoulders. So the girls clustered and looked. Moreover Stephen the smith must come soon, and the sight of him was worth a moment's waiting; for he buried himself all day in his workshop, and no laughing challenge could lure him out.

"Though, in truth," said one of the girls, tossing her head, "it's thankless work to spend a glance on either, for they do not return it. Now when Rudolf comes——"

She broke off with a laugh, and her comrades joined in it. Rudolf left no debts of that sort unpaid, however deep he might be in the books of Stephen Nados and of the others who furnished his daily needs.

Presently Stephen came, unbolting his door with much deliberation, and greeting Prince Henry with a restrained courtesy. He was not very well pleased to see his guest, for it was a ticklish moment with the nose of Saint Peter, and Stephen would have liked to finish the job uninterrupted. Still, the Prince was a prince, a gentleman, and a friend, and Stephen would not be uncivil to him.

"You ride early to-day, sir," he observed, patting the chestnut mare.

"I have a good reason," answered Henry. "The Lion rages to-day."

Stephen put up his hand to shelter his eyes from a ray of sunshine that had evaded the nodding walls and crept in; it lit up his flaxen hair, which he wore long and in thick waves, and played in his yellow beard; and he looked very grave. For when the Lion raged, strange and alarming things might happen in the city of Strelsau. The stories of his last fit of passion were yet hardly old.

"What has vexed the King?" he asked; for he knew that Prince Henry spoke of his father, Henry surnamed the Lion, now an old man, yet as fierce as when he had been young. "Is it your brother again?"

"For a marvel, no. It is myself, Stephen. And he is more furious with me than he has ever been with Rudolf; aye,

even more than he was at all the stories that followed my brother home."

"And what is the cause of it all, sir, and how is it in my power to help?"

"That you will find out very soon," said the Prince with a bitter laugh. "You will be sent for to the palace in an hour, Stephen."

"If it is about the King's ring, the ring is not finished," said Stephen.

"It is not about the ring. Yet indeed it is, in a way, about a ring. For you are to be married, Stephen. This very day you are to be married."

"I think not, sir," said Stephen mildly. "For it is a thing that a man himself hears about if it be true."

"But the King thinks so; Stephen, have you remarked, among my sister Osra's ladies, a certain dark lady, with black hair and eyes? I cannot describe her eyes."

"But you can tell me her name, sir," suggested Stephen, who was a practical man.

"Her name? Oh, her name is Hilda—Hilda von Lauengram."

"Aye, I know the Countess Hilda. I have made a bracelet for her."

"She is the most beautiful creature alive!" cried Prince Henry, in a sudden rapture and so loudly (being carried away by his passion) that the girls heard him and wondered of whom he spoke with so great an enthusiasm.

"To those to whom she seems such," observed Stephen.
"But, pray, how am I concerned in all this, sir?"

The Prince's smile grew more bitter as he answered:

"Why, you are to marry her. It was an idle suggestion of Osra's, made in jest; my father is pleased to approve of it in earnest."

Then he bent in his saddle and went on in a hurried urgent whisper: "I love her better than my life, Stephen—better than heaven; and my faith and word are pledged to her; and last night I was to have fled with her—for I knew better than to face the old Lion—but Osra found her making preparations and we were discovered. Then Osra was scornful, and the King mad, and Rudolf laughed; and when they talked of what was to be done to her, Osra came in with her laughing suggestion. It caught the King's angry fancy, and he swore that it should be so. And, since the Archbishop is away, he has bidden the Bishop of Modenstein be at the palace at twelve to-day, and you will be brought there also, and you will be married to her. But, by heavens, I'll have your blood if you are!" With this sudden outbreak of fury the Prince ended. Yet a moment later, he put out his hand to the smith, saying: "It's not your fault, man."

"That's true enough," said the smith; "for I have no desire to marry her; and it is not fitting that a lady of her birth should mate with a smith; she is of a great house, and she would hate and despise me."

Prince Henry was about to assent when his eye chanced to fall on Stephen the smith. Now the smith was a very handsome man—handsomer, many said, than Prince Rudolf

himself, whom no lady could look on without admiration; he stood six feet and two inches in his flat working shoes; he was very broad, and could leap higher and hurl a stone farther than any man in Strelsau. Moreover he looked kind and gentle, yet was reputed to grow angry at times, and then to be very dangerous. Therefore Prince Henry, knowing (or thinking that he knew) the caprices of women, and how they are caught by this and that, was suddenly seized with a terrible fear that the Countess Hilda might not despise Stephen the smith. Yet he did not express his fear, but said that it was an impossible thing that a lady of the Countess's birth (for the House of Lauengram was very noble) should wed a silversmith, even though he were as fine a fellow as his good friend Stephen; to which gracious speech Stephen made no reply, but stood very thoughtful, with his hand on the neck of the chestnut mare. But at last he said: "In any case it cannot be, for I am bound already."

"A wife? Have you a wife?" cried the Prince eagerly.

"No; but my heart is bound," said Stephen the smith.

"The King will make little of that. Yet who is she? Is she any of these girls who stand looking at us?"

"No, she is none of these," answered Stephen, smiling as though such an idea were very ludicrous.

"And are you pledged to her?"

"I to her, but not she to me."

"But does she love you?"

"I think it most unlikely," said Stephen the smith.

"The Lion will care nothing for this," groaned the Prince despondently. "They will send for you in half an hour. For heaven's sake spare her, Stephen!"

"Spare her, sir?"

"Do not consent to marry her, however urgently the King may command you."

The smith shook his head, smiling still. Prince Henry rode sorrowfully away, spending not a glance on the bevy of girls who watched him go; and Stephen, turning into his house, shut the door, and with one great sigh set to work again on the nose of Saint Peter.

"For anyhow," said he, "a man can work." And after a long pause he added, "I never thought to tell any one; but if I must, I must."

Now, sure enough, when the clock on the Cathedral wanted a quarter of an hour of noon, two of the King's Guard came and bade Stephen follow them with all haste to the palace; and since they were very urgent and no time was to be lost, he followed them as he was, in his apron, without washing his hands or getting rid of the dust that hung about him from his work. However he had finished Saint Peter's nose and all had gone well with it, so that he went in a contented frame of mind, determined to tell the whole truth to King Henry the Lion sooner than be forced into a marriage with the Countess Hilda von Lauengram.

The Lion sat in his great chair; he was a very thin old man, with a face haggard and deeply lined; his eyes, set far back in his head, glowed and glowered, and his fingers pulled his sparse white beard. On his right Prince Rudolf lolled on a low seat, smiling at the play; on his left sat that

wonderfully fair lady, the Princess Osra, then in the first bloom of her young beauty; and she was smiling scornfully. Prince Henry stood before his father, and some yards from him was the Countess Hilda, trembling and tearful, supported by one of her companions; and finally, since the Archbishop was gone to Rome to get himself a Scarlet Hat, the Bishop of Modenstein, a young man of noble family, was there, most richly arrayed in choicest lace and handsomest vestments, ready to perform the ceremony. Prince Rudolf had beckoned the Bishop near him, and was jesting with him in an undertone. The Bishop laughed as a man laughs who knows he should not laugh but cannot well help himself; for Rudolf owned a pretty wit, although it was sadly unrestrained.

The King's fury, having had a night and a morning to grow cool in, had now settled into a cold ironical mood, which argued no less resolution than his first fierce wrath. There was a grim smile on his face as he addressed the smith, who, having bowed to the company, was standing between the Countess and Prince Henry.

"The House of Elphberg," said the King, with mocking graciousness, "well recognises your worth, Stephen, my friend. We are indebted to you——"

"It's a thousand crowns or more from Prince Rudolf alone, sire," interrupted Stephen, with a bow to the Prince he named.

"For much faithful service," pursued the King, while Rudolf laughed again. "I have therefore determined to reward you with the hand of a lady who is, it may be, above your station, but in no way above your worth. Behold her! Is she not handsome? On my word, I envy you, smith. She is beautiful, young, high-born. You are lucky, smith. Nay, no

thanks. It is but what you deserve—and no more than she deserves. Take her and be happy," and he ended with a snarling laugh, as he waved his lean veined hand towards the unhappy Countess, and fixed his sneering eyes on the face of his son Henry, who had turned pale as death, but neither spoke nor moved.



The Bishop of Modenstein—he was of the House of Hentzau, many of which have been famous in history—lifted up his hands in horror at Rudolf's last whispered jest, and then, advancing with a bow to the King, asked if he were now to perform his sacred duties.

"Aye, get on with it," growled the Lion, not heeding the Countess's sobs or the entreaty in his son's face. And the Princess Osra sat unmoved, the scornful smile still on her