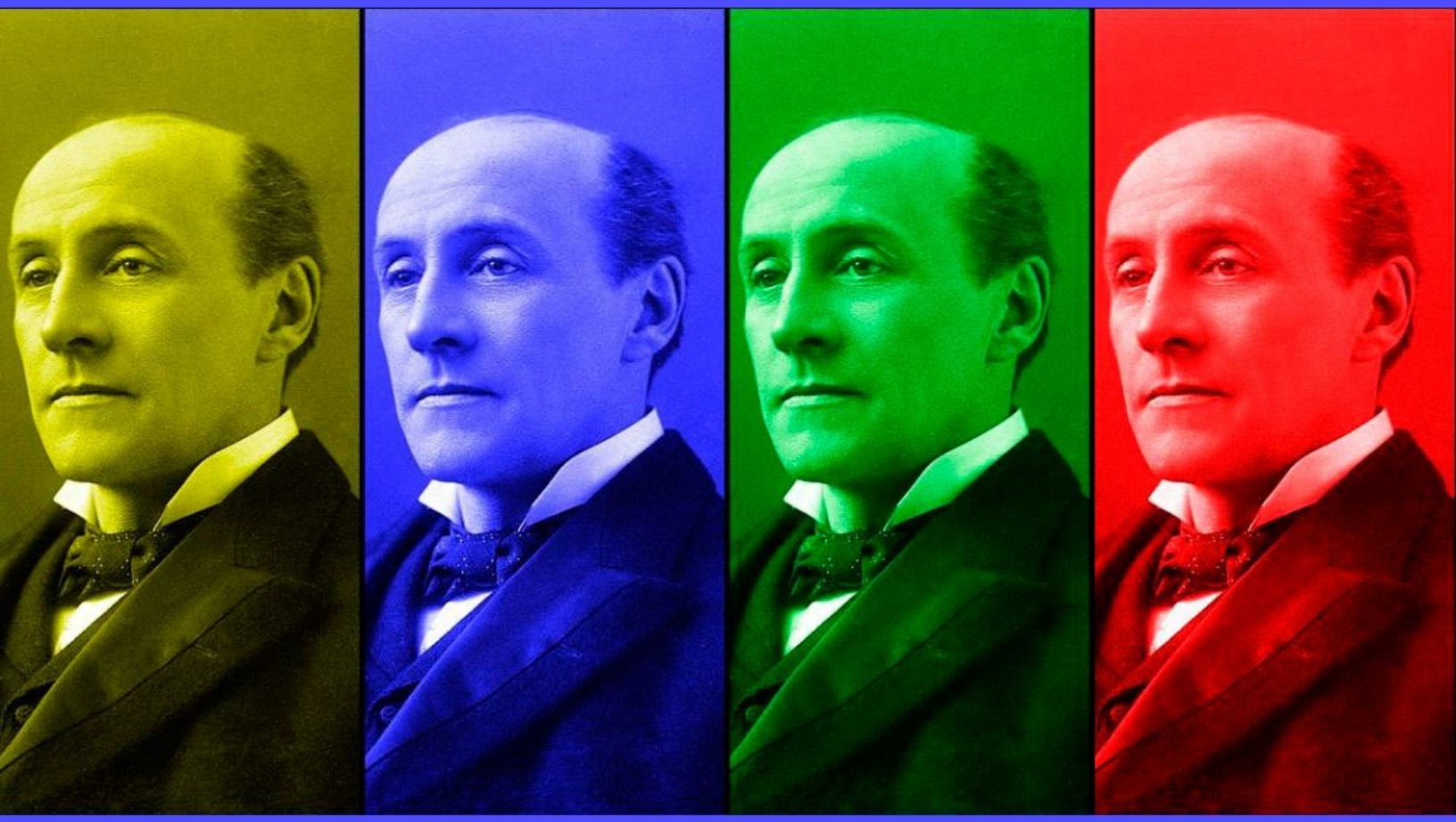
ANTHONY HOPE



DOUBLE HARNESS

BIOGRAPHICALLY ANNOTATED

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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 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.

Double Harness

Chapter I - Some Views Of The Institution

The house—a large, plain white building with no architectural pretensions—stood on a high swell of the downs and looked across the valley in which Milldean village lay, and thence over rolling stretches of close turf, till the prospect ended in the gleam of waves and the silver-grey mist that lay over the sea. It was a fine, open, free view. The air was fresh, with a touch of salt in it, and made the heat of the sun more than endurable—even welcome and nourishing. Tom Courtland, raising himself from the grass and sitting up straight, gave utterance to what his surroundings declared to be a very natural exclamation:

"What a bore to leave this and go back to town!"

"Stay a bit longer, old chap," urged his host, Grantley Imason, who lay full length on his back on the turf, with a straw hat over his eyes and nose, and a pipe, long gone out, between his teeth.

"Back to my wife!" Courtland went on, without noticing the invitation.

With a faint sigh Grantley Imason sat up, put his hat on his head, and knocked out his pipe. He glanced at his friend with a look of satirical amusement.

"You're encouraging company for a man who's just got engaged," he remarked.

"It's the devil of a business—sort of thing some of those fellows would write a book about. But it's not worth a book. A page of strong and indiscriminate swearing—that's what it's worth, Grantley."

Grantley sighed again as he searched for his tobacco-pouch. The sigh seemed to hover doubtfully between a faint sympathy and a resigned boredom.

"And no end to it—none in sight! I don't know whether it's legal cruelty to throw library books and so on at your husband's head——"

"Depends on whether you ever hit him, I should think; and they'd probably conclude a woman never would."

"But what an ass I should look if I went into court with that sort of story!"

"Yes, you would look an ass," Grantley agreed. "Doesn't she give you—well, any other chance, you know?"

"Not she! My dear fellow, she's most aggressively the other way."

"Then why don't you give her a chance?"

"What, you mean——?"

"Am I so very cryptic?" murmured Grantley as he lit his pipe.

"I'm a Member of Parliament."

"Yes, I forgot. That's a bit awkward."

"Besides, there are the children. I don't want my children to think their father a scoundrel." He paused, and added grimly: "And I don't want them to be left to their mother's bringing-up either."

"Then we seem to have exhausted the resources of the law."

"The children complicate it so. Wait till you have some of your own, Grantley."

"Look here—steady!" Grantley expostulated. "Don't be in such a hurry to give me domestic encumbrances. The bloom's still on my romance, old chap. Talking of children to a man who's only been engaged a week!" His manner resumed its air of languid sympathy as he went on: "You needn't see much of her, Tom, need you?"

"Oh, needn't I?" grumbled Courtland. He was a rather short, sturdily built man, with a high colour and stiff black hair which stood up on his head. His face was not wanting in character, but a look of plaintive worry beset it. "You try living in the same house with a woman—with a woman like that, I mean!"

"Thanks for the explanation," laughed Grantley.

"I must go and wire when I shall be back, or Harriet'll blow the roof off over that. You come too; a stroll'll do you good."

Grantley Imason agreed; and the two, leaving the garden by a little side gate, took their way along the steep road which led down to the village, and rose again on the other side of it, to join the main highway across the downs a mile and a half away. The lane was narrow, steep, and full of turns; the notice "Dangerous to Cyclists" gave warning of its character. At the foot of it stood the Old Mill House, backing on to a little stream. Farther on lay the church and the parsonage; opposite to them was the post-office, which was also a general shop and also had rooms to let to visitors. The village inn, next to the post-office, and a dozen or so of labourers' cottages exhausted the shelter of the

little valley, though the parish embraced several homesteads scattered about in dips of the downs, and a row of small new red villas at the junction with the main road. Happily these last, owing to the lie of the ground, were out of sight from Grantley Imason's windows, no less than from the village itself.

"And that's the home of the fairy princess?" asked Courtland as they passed Old Mill House, a rambling, rather broken-down old place, covered with creepers.

"Yes; she and her brother moved there when the old rector died. You may have heard of him—the Chiddingfold who was an authority on Milton. No? Well, he was, anyhow. Rather learned all round, I fancy—Fellow of John's. But he took this living and settled down for life; and when he died the children were turned out of the rectory and took Old Mill House. They've got an old woman—well, she's not very old—with the uneuphonious name of Mumple living with them. She's been a sort of nurse-housekeeper-companion: a mixed kind of position—breakfast and midday dinner with the family, but didn't join his reverence's evening meal. You know the sort of thing. She's monstrously fat; but Sibylla loves her. And the new rector moved in a fortnight ago, and everybody hates him. And the temporary curate, who was here because the new rector was at Bournemouth for his health, and who lodged over the post-office, has just gone, and everybody's dashed glad to see the last of him. And that's all the news of the town. And, behold, Tom, I'm the squire of it, and every man, woman, or child in it is, by unbroken tradition and custom, entitled to have as much port wine out of my cellar as his, her, or its state of health may happen to require."

He threw off this chatter in a gay self-contented fashion, and Tom Courtland looked at him with affectionate envy.

The world had been very good to him, and he, in return, was always amiable to it. He had been born heir and only child of his father; had inherited the largest share in a solid old-fashioned banking-house; was now a director of the great joint-stock undertaking in which the family business had consented to merge itself on handsome terms; had just as much work to do as he liked, and possessed, and always had enjoyed, more money than he needed. He was thirty-three now, and had been a social favourite even before he left school. If it was difficult to say what positive gain his existence had been to society, there was no doubt that his extinction would at any time have been considered a distinct loss.

"A country squire with a rosy-cheeked country girl for wife! That's a funny ending for you, Grantley."

"She's not rosy-cheeked—and it's not an ending—and there's the post-office. Go in, and be as civil as you can to Lady Harriet."

A smile of pity, unmistakably mingled with contempt, followed Courtland into the shop. The tantrums of other men's wives are generally received with much the same mixture of scepticism and disdain as the witticisms of other parents' children. Both are seen large, very large indeed, by sufferers and admirers respectively.

The obligation of being as civil as he could to his wife caused Courtland to take three or four minutes in framing his telegram, and when he came out he found Grantley seated on the bench that stood by the inn and conversing with a young man who wore a very old coat and rough tweed knickerbockers. Grantley introduced him as Mr. Jeremy Chiddingfold, and Courtland knew that he was Sibylla's brother. Sibylla herself he had not yet seen.

Jeremy had a shock of sandy hair, a wide brow, and a wide mouth; his eyes were rather protuberant, and his nose turned up, giving prominence to the nostrils.

"No family likeness, I hope?" Courtland found himself thinking; for though Jeremy was a vigorous, if not a handsome, masculine type, the lines were far from being those of feminine beauty.

"And he's enormously surprised and evidently rather shocked to hear I'm going to marry his sister—oh, we can talk away, Jeremy; Tom Courtland doesn't matter. He knows all the bad there is about me, and wants to know all the good there is about Sibylla."

One additional auditor by no means embarrassed Jeremy; perhaps not a hundred would have.

"Though, of course, somebody must have married her, you know," Grantley went on, smiling and stretching himself luxuriously like a sleek indolent cat.

"I hate marriage altogether!" declared Jeremy.

Courtland turned to him with a quick jerk of his head.

"The deuce you do!" he said, laughing. "It's early in life to have come to that conclusion, Mr. Chiddingfold."

"Yes, yes, Jeremy, quite so; but——" Grantley began.

"It's an invention of priests," Jeremy insisted heatedly.

Courtland, scarred with fifteen years' experience of the institution thus roundly attacked, was immensely diverted, though his own feelings gave a rather bitter twist to his

mirth. Grantley argued, or rather pleaded, with a deceptive gravity:

"But if you fall in love with a girl?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Well, but the world must be peopled, Jeremy."

"Marriage isn't necessary to that, is it?"

"Oho!" whistled Courtland.

"We may concede the point—in theory," said Grantley; "in practice it's more difficult."

"Because people won't think clearly and bravely!" cried Jeremy, with a thump on the bench. "Because they're hidebound, and, as I say, the priests heaven-and-hell them till they don't know where they are."

"Heaven-and-hell them! Good phrase, Jeremy! You speak feelingly. Your father, perhaps——? Oh, excuse me, I'm one of the family now."

"My father? Not a bit. Old Mumples now, if you like. However that's got nothing to do with it. I'm going on the lines of pure reason. And what is pure reason?"

The elder men looked at one another, smiled, and shook their heads.

"We don't know; it's no use pretending we do. You tell us, Jeremy," said Grantley.

"It's just nature—nature—nature! Get back to that, and you're on solid ground. Why, apart from anything else, how can you expect marriage, as we have it, to succeed when women are what they are? And haven't they always been the same? Of course they have. Read history, read fiction (though it isn't worth reading), read science; and look at the world round about you."

He waved his arm extensively, taking in much more than the valley in which most of his short life had been spent.

"If I'd thought as you do at your age," said Courtland, "I should have kept out of a lot of trouble."

"And I should have kept out of a lot of scrapes," added Grantley.

"Of course you would!" snapped Jeremy.

That point needed no elaboration.

"But surely there are exceptions among women, Jeremy?" Grantley pursued appealingly. "Consider my position!"

"What is man?" demanded Jeremy. "Well, let me recommend you to read Haeckel!"

"Never mind man. Tell us more about woman," urged Grantley.

"Oh, lord, I suppose you're thinking of Sibylla?"

"I own it," murmured Grantley. "You know her so well, you see."

Descending from the heights of scientific generalisation and from the search after that definition of man for which he had been in the end obliged to refer his listeners to another authority, Jeremy lost at the same time his gravity and vehemence. He surprised Courtland by showing himself owner of a humorous and attractive smile.

"You'd rather define man, perhaps, than Sibylla?" suggested Grantley.

"Sibylla's all right, if you know how to manage her."

"Just what old Lady Trederwyn used to say to me about Harriet," Courtland whispered to Grantley.

"But it needs a bit of knowing. She's got the deuce of a temper—old Mumples knows that. Well, Mumples has got a temper too. They used to have awful rows—do still now and then. Sibylla used to fly out at Mumples, then Mumples sat on Sibylla, and then, when it was all over, they'd generally have a new and independent row about which had been right and which wrong in the old row."

"Not content with a quiet consciousness of rectitude, as a man would be?"

"Consciousness of rectitude? Lord, it wasn't that! That would have been all right. It was just the other way round. They both knew they had tempers, and Mumples is infernally religious and Sibylla's generous to the point of idiocy in my opinion. So after a row, when Sibylla had cheeked Mumples and told her to go to the devil (so to speak), and Mumples had sent her to bed, or thumped her, or something, you know——"

"Let us not go too deep into family tragedies, Jeremy."

"Why, when it had all settled down, and the governor and I could hear ourselves talking quietly again——"

"About marriage and that sort of question?"

"They began to have conscience. Each would have it borne in on her that she was wrong. Sibylla generally started it. She'd go weeping to Mumples, taking all her own things and any of mine that were lying about handy, and laying them at Mumples' feet, and saying she was the wickedest girl alive, and why hadn't Mumples pitched into her a lot more, and that she really loved Mumples better than anything on earth. Then Mumples would weigh in, and call Sibylla the sweetest and meekest lamb on earth, and say that she loved Sibylla more than anything on earth, and that she—Mumples—was the worst-tempered and cruellest and unjustest woman alive, not fit to be near such an angel as Sibylla. Then Sibylla used to say that was rot, and Mumples said it wasn't. And Sibylla declared Mumples only said it to wound her, and Mumples got hurt because Sibylla wouldn't forgive her, when Sibylla, of course, wanted Mumples to forgive her. And after half an hour of that sort of thing, it was as likely as not that they'd have quarrelled worse than ever, and the whole row would begin over again."

Grantley lay back and laughed.

"A bit rough on you to give your things to—er—Mumples?" suggested Courtland.

"Just like Sibylla—just like any woman, I expect," opined Jeremy, but with a more resigned and better-tempered air. His reminiscences had evidently amused himself as well as his listeners.

"Wouldn't it have been better to have a preceptress of more equable temper?" asked Grantley.

"Oh, there's nothing really wrong with Mumples; we're both awfully fond of her. Besides she's had such beastly hard luck. Hasn't Sibylla told you about that, Imason?"

"No, nothing."

"Her husband was sent to quod, you know—got twenty years."

"Twenty years! By Jingo!"

"Yes. He tried to murder a man—a man who had swindled him. Mumples says he did it all in a passion; but it seems to have been a cold sort of passion, because he waited twelve hours for him before he knifed him. And at the trial he couldn't even prove the swindling, so he got it pretty hot."

"Is he dead?"

"No, he's alive. He's to get out in about three years. Mumples is waiting for him."

"Poor old woman! Does she go and see him?"

"She used to. She hasn't for years now. I believe he won't have her—I don't know why. The governor was high sheriff's chaplain at the time, so he got to know Mumples, and took her on. She's been with us ever since, and she can stay as long as she likes."

"What things one comes across!" sighed Tom Courtland.

Grantley had looked grave for a moment, but he smiled again as he said:

"After all, though, you've not told me how to manage Sibylla. I'm not Mumples—I can't thump her. I should be better than Mumples in one way, though. If I did, I should be dead sure to stick to it that I was right."

"You'd stick to it even if you didn't think so," observed Courtland.

For a moment the remark seemed to vex Grantley, and to sober him. He spent a few seconds evidently reflecting on it.

"Well, I hope not," he said at last. "But at any rate I should think so generally."

"Then you could mostly make her think so. But if it wasn't true, you might feel a brute."

"So I might, Jeremy."

"And it mightn't be permanently safe. She sees things uncommonly sharp sometimes. Well, I must be off."

"Going back to Haeckel?"

Jeremy nodded gravely. He was not susceptible to ridicule on the subject of his theories. The two watched him stride away towards Old Mill House with decisive vigorous steps.

"Rum product for a country parsonage, Grantley."

"Oh, he's not a product; he's only an embryo. But I think he's a promising one, and he's richly amusing."

"Yes, and I wonder how you're going to manage Miss Sibylla!"

Grantley laughed easily. "My poor old chap, you can't be expected to take a cheerful view. Poor old Tom! God bless you, old chap! Let's go home to tea."

As they walked by the parsonage a bicycle came whizzing through the open garden-gate. It was propelled by a girl of fifteen or thereabouts—a slim long-legged child, almost gaunt in her immaturity, and lamentably grown out of her frock. She cried shrill greeting to Grantley, and went off down the street, displaying her skill to whosoever would look by riding with her arms akimbo.

"Another local celebrity," said Grantley. "Dora Hutting, the new parson's daughter. That she should have come to live in the village is a gross personal affront to Jeremy Chiddingfold. He's especially incensed by her lengthy stretch of black stockings, always, as he maintains, with a hole in them."

Courtland laughed inattentively.

"I hope Harriet'll get that wire in good time," he said.

No remark came into Grantley's mind, unless it were to tell his friend that he was a fool to stand what he did from the woman. But what was the use of that? Tom Courtland knew his own business best. Grantley shrugged his shoulders, but held his peace.

Chapter II - The Fairy Ride