ANTHONY HOPE

THE INTRUSIONS OF PEGGY

BIOGRAPHICALLY ANNOTATED

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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.

The Intrusions Of Peggy

Chapter I Life Is Recommended

The changeful April morning that she watched from the window of her flat looking over the river began a day of significance in the career of Trix Trevalla—of feminine significance, almost milliner's perhaps, but of significance all the same. She had put off her widow's weeds, and for the first time these three years back was dressed in a soft shade of blue; the harmony of her eyes and the gleams of her brown hair welcomed the colour with the cordiality of

an old friendship happily renewed. Mrs. Trevalla's maid had been all in a flutter over the momentous transformation; in her mistress it bred a quietly retrospective mood. As she lay in an armchair watching the water and the clouds, she turned back on the course of her life, remembering many things. The beginning of a new era brought the old before her eyes in a protesting flash of vividness. She abandoned herself to recollections—an insidious form of dissipating the mind, which goes well with a relaxed ease of the body.

Not that Mrs. Trevalla's recollections were calculated to promote a sense of luxury, unless indeed they were to act as a provocative contrast.

There was childhood, spent in a whirling succession of lodging-houses. They had little individuality and retained hardly any separate identity; each had consisted of two rooms with folding doors between, and somewhere, at the back or on the floor above, a cupboard for her to sleep in. There was the first baby, her brother, who died when she was six; he had been a helpless, clinging child, incapable of living without far more sympathy and encouragement than he had ever got. Luckily she had been of hardier stuff. There was her mother, a bridling, blushing, weak-kneed woman (Trix's memory was candid); kind save when her nerves were bad, and when they were, unkind in a weak and desultory fashion that did not deserve the name of cruelty. Trix had always felt less anger than contempt for her half-hysterical outbursts, and bore no malice on their account. This pale visitor soon faded—as indeed Mrs. Trevalla herself had—into non-existence, and a different picture took its place. Here was the Reverend Algernon, her father, explaining that he found himself unsuited to pastoral work and indisposed to adopt any other active calling, that inadequate means were a misfortune, not a

fault, that a man must follow his temperament, and that he asked only to be allowed to go his own way—he did not add to pay it—in peace and quiet. His utterances came back with the old distinction of manner and the distant politeness with which Mr. Trevalla bore himself towards all disagreeable incidents of life—under which head there was much reason to surmise that he ranked his daughter.

Was he unjust in that? Trix was puzzled. She recalled a sturdy, stubborn, rather self-assertive child. The freshness of delicacy is rubbed off, the appeal of shyness silenced, by a hand-to-mouth existence, by a habit of regarding the leavings of the first-floor lodger in the light of windfalls, by constant flittings unmarked by the discharge of obligations incurred in the abandoned locality, by a practical outlawry from the class to which we should in the ordinary course belong. Trix decided that she must have been an unattractive girl, rather hard, too much awake to the ways of the world, readily retorting its chilliness towards her. All this was natural enough, since neither death nor poverty nor lack of love was strange to her. Natural, yes; pleasant, no, Trix concluded, and with that she extended a degree of pardon to Mr. Trevalla. He had something to say for himself. With a smile she recalled what he always did say for himself, if anyone seemed to challenge the spotlessness of his character. On such painful occasions he would mention that he was, and had been for twenty years, a teetotaler. There were reasons in the Trevalla family history which made the fact remarkable; in its owner's eyes the virtue was so striking and enormous that it had exhausted the moral possibilities of his being, condemned other excellencies to atrophy, and left him, in the flower-show of graces, the self-complacent exhibitor of a single bloom.

Yet he had become a party to the great conspiracy; it was no less, however much motives of love, and hopes ever

sanguine, might excuse it in one of the parties to it—not the Reverend Algernon. They had all been involved in it—her father, old Lady Trevalla (her husband had been a soldier and K.C.B.), Vesey Trevalla himself. Vesey loved Trix, Lady Trevalla loved Vesey in a mother's conscienceless way; the mother persuaded herself that the experiment would work, the son would not stop to ask the question. The Reverend Algernon presumably persuaded himself too—and money was very scarce. So Trix was bidden to notice—when those days at Bournemouth came back to mind, her brows contracted into a frown as though from a quick spasm of pain—how Vesey loved her, what a good steady fellow he was, how safely she might trust herself to him. Why, he was a teetotaler too! 'Yes, though his gay friends do laugh at him!' exclaimed Lady Trevalla admiringly. They were actually staying at a Temperance Hotel! The stress laid on these facts did not seem strange to an ignorant girl of seventeen, accustomed to Mr. Trevalla's solitary but eloquent virtue. Rather weary of the trait, she pouted a little over it, and then forgot it as a matter of small moment one way or the other. So the conspiracy throve, and ended in the good marriage with the well-to-do cousin, in being Mrs. Trevalla of Trevalla Haven, married to a big, handsome, ruddy fellow who loved her. The wedding-day stood out in memory; clearest of all now was what had been no more than a faint and elusive but ever-present sense that for some reason the guests, Vesey's neighbours, looked on her with pity—the men who pressed her hand and the women who kissed her cheek. And at the last old Lady Trevalla had burst suddenly into unrestrained sobbing. Why? Vesey looked very uncomfortable, and even the Reverend Algernon was rather upset. However, consciences do no harm if they do not get the upper hand till the work is done; Trix was already Vesey's wife.

He was something of a man, this Vesey Trevalla; he was large-built in mind, equitable, kind, shrewd, of a clear vision. To the end he was a good friend and a worthy companion in his hours of reason. Trix's thoughts of him were free from bitterness. Her early life had given her a tolerance that stood her in stead, a touch of callousness which enabled her to endure. As a child she had shrugged thin shoulders under her shabby frock; she shrugged her shoulders at the tragedy now; her heart did not break, but hardened a little more. She made some ineffectual efforts to reclaim him; their hopelessness was absurdly plain; after a few months Vesey laughed at them, she almost laughed herself. She settled down into the impossible life, reproaching nobody. When her husband was sober, she never referred to what had happened when he was drunk; if he threw a plate at her then, she dodged the plate: she seemed in a sense to have been dodging plates and suchlike missiles all her life. Sometimes he had suspicions of himself, and conjured up recollections of what he had done. 'Oh, what does last night matter?' she would ask in a friendly if rather contemptuous tone. Once she lifted the veil for a moment. He found her standing by the body of her baby; it had died while he was unfit to be told, or at any rate unable to understand.

'So the poor little chap's gone,' he said softly, laying his hand on her shoulder.

'Yes, Vesey, he's gone, thank God!' she said, looking him full in the eyes.

He turned away without a word, and went out with a heavy tread. Trix felt that she had been cruel, but she did not apologise, and Vesey showed no grudge.

The odd thing about the four years her married life lasted was that they now seemed so short. Even before old Lady Trevalla's death (which happened a year after the wedding) Trix had accommodated herself to her position. From that time all was monotony—the kind of monotony which might well kill, but, failing that, left little to mark out one day from another. She did not remember even that she had been acutely miserable either for her husband or for herself; rather she had come to disbelieve in acute feelings. She had grown deadened to sorrow as to joy, and to love, the great parent of both; the hardening process of her youth had been carried further. When Vesey caught a chill and crumpled up under it as sodden men do, and died with a thankfulness he did not conceal, she was unmoved. She was not grateful for the deliverance, nor yet grieved for the loss of a friend. She shrugged her shoulders again, asking what the world was going to do with her next.

Mr. Trevalla took a view more hopeful than his daughter's, concluding that there was cause for feeling considerable satisfaction both on moral and on worldly grounds. From the higher standpoint Trix (under his guidance) had made a noble although unsuccessful effort, and had shown the fortitude to be expected from his daughter; while Vesey, poor fellow, had been well looked after to the end, and was now beyond the reach of temptation. From the lower—Mr. Trevalla glanced for a moment round the cosy apartment he now occupied at Brighton, where he was beginning to get a nice little library round him—yes, from the lower, while it was regrettable that the estate had passed to a distant cousin, Trix was left with twenty thousand pounds (in free cash, for Vesey had refused to make a settlement, since he did not know what money he would want—that is, how long he would last) and an ascertained social position. She was only twenty-two when left a widow, and better-looking than she had ever been in her life. On the whole,

were the four years misspent? Had anybody very much to grumble at? Certainly nobody had any reason to reproach himself. And he wondered why Trix had not sent for him to console her in her affliction. He was glad she had not, but he thought that the invitation would have been natural and becoming.

'But I never pretended to understand women,' he murmured, with his gentle smile.

Women would have declared that they did not understand him either, using the phrase with a bitter intention foreign to the Reverend Algernon's lips and temper. His good points were so purely intellectual—lucidity of thought, temperance of opinion, tolerance, humour, appreciation of things which deserved it. These gifts would, with women, have pleaded their rarity in vain against the more ordinary endowments of willingness to work and a capacity for thinking, even occasionally, about other people. Men liked him—so long as they had no business relations with him. But women are moralists, from the best to the worst of them. If he had lived, Trix would probably have scorned to avail herself of his counsels. Yet they might well have been useful to her in after days; he was a good taster of men. As it was, he died soon after Vesey, having caught a chill and refused to drink hot grog. That was his doctor's explanation. Mr. Trevalla's dying smile accused the man of cloaking his own ignorance by such an excuse; he prized his virtue too much to charge it with his death. He was sorry to leave his rooms at Brighton; other very strong feeling about his departure he had none. Certainly his daughter did not come between him and his preparations for hereafter, nor the thought of her solitude distract his fleeting soul.

In the general result life seemed ended for Trix Trevalla at twenty-two, and, pending release from it in the ordinary course, she contemplated an impatient and provisional existence in Continental *pensions*—establishments where a young and pretty woman could not be suspected of wishing to reap any advantage from prettiness or youth. Hundreds of estimable ladies guarantee this security, and thereby obtain a genteel and sufficient company round their modest and inexpensive tables. It was what Trix asked for, and for two years she got it. During this period she sometimes regretted Vesey Trevalla, and sometimes asked whether vacancy were not worse than misery, or on what grounds limbo was to be preferred to hell. She could not make up her mind on this question—nor is it proposed to settle it here. Probably most people have tried both on their own account.

One evening she arrived at Paris rather late, and the isolation ward (metaphors will not be denied sometimes) to which she had been recommended was found to be full. Somewhat apprehensive, she was driven to an hotel of respectability, and, rushing to catch the flying coat-tails of *table d'hôte*, found herself seated beside a man who was apparently not much above thirty. This unwonted propinquity set her doing what she had not done for years in public, though she had never altogether abandoned the practice as a private solace: as she drank her cold soup, she laughed. Her neighbour, a shabby man with a rather shaggy beard, turned benevolently inquiring eyes on her. A moment's glance made him start a little and say, 'Surely it's Mrs. Trevalla?'

'That's my name,' answered Trix, wondering greatly, but thanking heaven for a soul who knew her. In the *pensions* they never knew who you were, but were always trying to

find out, and generally succeeded the day after you went away.

'That's very curious,' he went on. 'I daresay you'll be surprised, but your photograph stands on my bedroom mantel-piece. I knew you directly from it. It was sent to me.'

'When was it sent you?' she asked.

'At the time of your marriage.' He grew grave as he spoke.

'You were his friend?'

'I called myself so.' Conversation was busy round them, yet he lowered his voice to add, 'I don't know now whether I had any right.'

'Why not?'

'I gave up very soon.'

Trix's eyes shot a quick glance at him and she frowned a little.

'Well, I ought to have been more than a friend, and so did I,' she said.

'It would have been utterly useless, of course. Reason recognises that, but then conscience isn't always reasonable.'

She agreed with a nod as she galloped through her fish, eager to overtake the *menu*.

'Besides, I have——' He hesitated a moment, smiling apologetically and playing nervously with a knife. 'I have a propensity myself, and that makes me judge him more easily—and myself not so lightly.'

She looked at his pint of *ordinaire* with eyebrows raised.

'Oh, no, quite another,' he assured her, smiling. 'But it's enough to teach me what propensities are.'

'What is it? Tell me.' She caught eagerly at the strange luxury of intimate talk.

'Never! But, as I say, I've learnt from it. Are you alone here, Mrs. Trevalla?'

'Here and everywhere,' said Trix, with a sigh and a smile.

'Come for a stroll after dinner. I'm an old friend of Vesey's, you know.' The last remark was evidently thrown in as a concession to rules not held in much honour by the speaker. Trix said that she would come; the outing seemed a treat to her after the *pensions*.

They drank beer together on the boulevards; he heard her story, and he said many things to her, waving (as the evening wore on) a pipe to and fro from his mouth to the length of his arm. It was entirely owing to the things which he said that evening on the boulevards that she sat now in the flat over the river, her mourning doffed, her guaranteed *pensions* forsaken, London before her, an unknown alluring sea.

'What you want,' he told her, with smiling vehemence, 'is a revenge. Hitherto you've done nothing; you've only had things done to you. You've made nothing; you've only been

made into things yourself. Life has played with you; go and play with it.'

Trix listened, sitting very still, with eager eyes. There was a life, then—a life still open to her; the door was not shut, nor her story of necessity ended.

'I daresay you'll scorch your fingers; for the fire burns. But it's better to die of heat than of cold. And if trouble comes, call at 6A Danes Inn.'

'Where in the world is Danes Inn?' she asked, laughing.

'Between New and Clement's, of course.' He looked at her in momentary surprise, and then laughed. 'Oh, well, not above a mile from civilisation—and a shilling cab from aristocracy. I happen to lodge there.'

She looked at him curiously. He was shabby yet rather distinguished, shaggy but clean. He advised life, and he lived in Danes Inn, where an instinct told her that life would not be a very maddening or riotous thing.

'Come, you must live again, Mrs. Trevalla,' he urged.

'Do you live, as you call it?' she asked, half in mockery, half in a genuine curiosity.

A shade of doubt, perhaps of distress, spread over his face. He knocked out his pipe deliberately before answering.

'Well, hardly, perhaps.' Then he added eagerly, 'I work, though.'

'Does that do instead?' To Trix's new-born mood the substitute seemed a poor one.

'Yes—if you have a propensity.'

What was his tone? Sad or humorous, serious or mocking? It sounded all.

'Oh, work's your propensity, is it?' she cried gaily and scornfully, as she rose to her feet. 'I don't think it's mine, you know.'

He made no reply, but turned away to pay for the beer. It was a trifling circumstance, but she noticed that at first he put down three *sous* for the waiter, and then returned to the table in order to make the tip six. He looked as if he had done his duty when he had made it six.

They walked back to the hotel together and shook hands in the hall.

'6A Danes Inn?' she asked merrily.

'6A Danes Inn, Mrs. Trevalla. Is it possible that my advice is working?'

'It's working very hard indeed—as hard as you work. But Danes Inn is only a refuge, isn't it?'

'It's not fit for much more, I fear.'

'I shall remember it. And now, as a formality—and perhaps as a concession to the postman—who are you?'

'My name is Airey Newton.'

'I never heard Vesey mention you.'

'No, I expect not. But I knew him very well. I'm not an impostor, Mrs. Trevalla.'

'Why didn't he mention you?' asked Trix. Vesey had been, on the whole, a communicative man.

He hesitated a moment before he answered.

'Well, I wrote to him on the subject of his marriage,' he confessed at last.

She needed no more.

'I see,' she said, with an understanding nod. 'Well, that was —honest of you. Good night, Mr. Newton.'

This meeting—all their conversation—was fresh and speaking in her brain as she sat looking over the river in her recovered gown of blue. But for the meeting, but for the shabby man and what he had said, there would have been no blue gown, she would not have been in London nor in the flat. He had brought her there, to do something, to make something, to play with life as life had played with her, to have a revenge, to die, if die she must, of heat rather than of cold.

Well, she would follow his advice—would accept and fulfil it amply. 'At the worst there are the *pensions* again—and there's Danes Inn!'

She laughed at that idea, but her laugh was rather hard, her mouth a little grim, her eyes mischievous. These were the marks youth and the four years had left. Besides, she cared for not a soul on earth.

Chapter II Coming Near The Fire

At the age of forty (a point now passed by some half-dozen years) Mrs. Bonfill had become motherly. The change was sudden, complete, and eminently wise. It was accomplished during a summer's retirement; she disappeared a queen regnant, she reappeared a dowager—all by her own act, for none had yet ventured to call her *passée*. But she was a big woman, and she recognised facts. She had her reward. She gained power instead of losing it; she had always loved power, and had the shrewdness to discern that there was more than one form of it. The obvious form she had never, as a young and handsome woman, misused or over-used; she had no temptations that way, or, as her friend Lady Blixworth preferred to put it, 'In that respect dearest Sarah was always *bourgeoise* to the core.' The new form she now attained—influence—was more to her taste. She liked to shape people's lives; if they were submissive and obedient she would make their fortunes. She needed some natural capacities in her *protégés*, of course; but, since she chose cleverly, these were seldom lacking. Mrs. Bonfill did the rest. She could open doors that obeyed no common key; she could smooth difficulties; she had in two or three cases blotted out a past, and once had reformed a gambler. But she liked best to make marriages and Ministers. Her own daughter, of course, she married immediately—that was nothing. She had married Nellie Towler to Sir James Quinby-Lee—the betting had been ten to one against it—and Lady Mildred Haughton to Frank Cleveland—flat in the face of both the families. As for Ministers, she stood well with Lord Farringham, was an old friend of Lord Glentorly, and, to put it unkindly, had Constantine Blair fairly in her pocket. It does not do to exaggerate drawing-room influence, but when Beaufort Chance became a Whip, and young Lord Mervyn was appointed Glentorly's Under-