Perhaps Anthony Hope never wrote better than he did in *The Prisoner of Zenda*; his public in the 1890s thought so, and so did reviewers and fellow-novelists. Over a period of four decades the original publisher sold 300,000 copies; another 200,000 were sold in 'editions specially arranged', according to Hope's biographer, Sir Charles Mallet.¹ In the United States some 260,000 copies found satisfied buyers, and thousands more were used to educate Egyptian children, as well as to entertain readers in India and Japan. Cheap editions brought out by various publishers doubtless doubled the sales that Arrowsmith had enjoyed at 3s. 6d., and Hope was not displeased, since he had wanted the novel to sell for a shilling in the first place. Edward Rose's dramatization won large audiences in both London and New York, though its sombre tone moved the relatively light-hearted story toward tragic possibilities that Hope had not wanted to deal with.

*Rupert of Hentzau* underlined the permanent entertainment value of Ruritania; its appearance in 1898 (some three years after its completion) could not have evoked higher praise from Sir Walter Besant, Quiller-Couch, Andrew Lang, and Robert Louis Stevenson than that which they had lavished on *The Prisoner of Zenda*. As a sequel it found a very large audience, too, and rapidly was transferred to the stage.

Hope developed this world of badinage, manners both good and bad, and judiciously proportioned virtue and villainy as if it really existed. *The Heart of Princess Osra* (1896) dealt with the romance of King Rudolph's sister; and there were more Ruritanian universes, self-enclosed, convincingly consistent, in *Phroso* (1897) and *Sophy of Kravonia* (1906). Other novels, dealing with Victorian life, concentrated on character rather than social problems: the character of empire-builders, actresses, politicians.

Hope did not deny that he found his human material in the headlines of the day, though he thought it only prudent to change

---

¹ H. Orel, *The Historical Novel from Scott to Sabatini* © Harold Orel 1995
circumstances, provide a different personal appearance, sketch in 'a few unimportant mannerisms not possessed by the original'. In one of the few analyses of his own technique contained in his autobiography, *Memories and Notes*, Hope added, 'under this disguise you can generally use all that you want to use, and no one will be the wiser as to where you got it. In that way you will be safe from blame. But you will not create as much gossip and amusement ...'

Accused of having employed Cecil Rhodes as the inspiration for Ruston, the leading character of *The God in the Car* (1894), Hope conceded only that Ruston had ideas similar to those of Rhodes, and quoted, in his defence, Rhodes's comment, after reading the novel, 'I'm not such a brute as that.'

Fair enough, and Hope, in such novels as the five that preceded the publication of *The Prisoner of Zenda* and most of those that followed (including what he considered to be his best book, *The King's Mirror* [1899], which he filled with surprisingly sour aphorisms), wrote entertaining stories by a set schedule: from ten in the morning till one, and from two till five in the afternoon. Like Scott and Trollope, he refused to wait for 'a divine afflatus, a thing that can hardly be expected to synchronize with Big Ben every weekday morning'. His aim was not to propagate the merits of particular notions, but to produce 'a constant and stable output of readable fiction'.

Financial returns from a grateful reading public were such that in July 1894 he gave up the bar, and wrote to his clients announcing his decision. He found comforting the middle-class values inherent in a statement made by Dean Gaisford of Christ Church, who at the time was speaking of the study of Greek literature: 'it not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument'. Young writers who came to Hope for advice were bound to hear his favourite response, 'Invest at least half the money that you're making'. Perhaps they didn't believe him at the time; his warning had a sardonic flavour, and he knew it; but experience, that sage teacher, might well lead some of them to bless his name, at a later stage, even as they banked their dividends.

Hope wrote with considerable fluency. *The Prisoner of Zenda*, begun at the end of November 1893, was completed exactly one month later, and a similar speed was achieved in the writing of *Rupert of Hentzau*. Indeed, miracles of productivity can be accomplished if one can sustain the rate of two chapters a day. Hope mentioned, more than once, the danger of correlating the labours of literary creation with the value of most finished products, and the