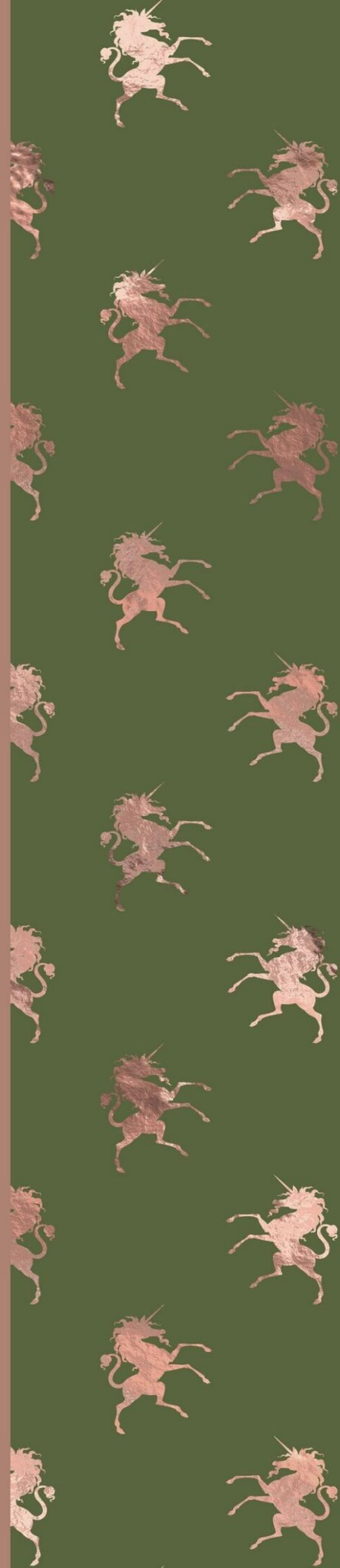


Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

MAN

A
OF MARK

Anthony Hope

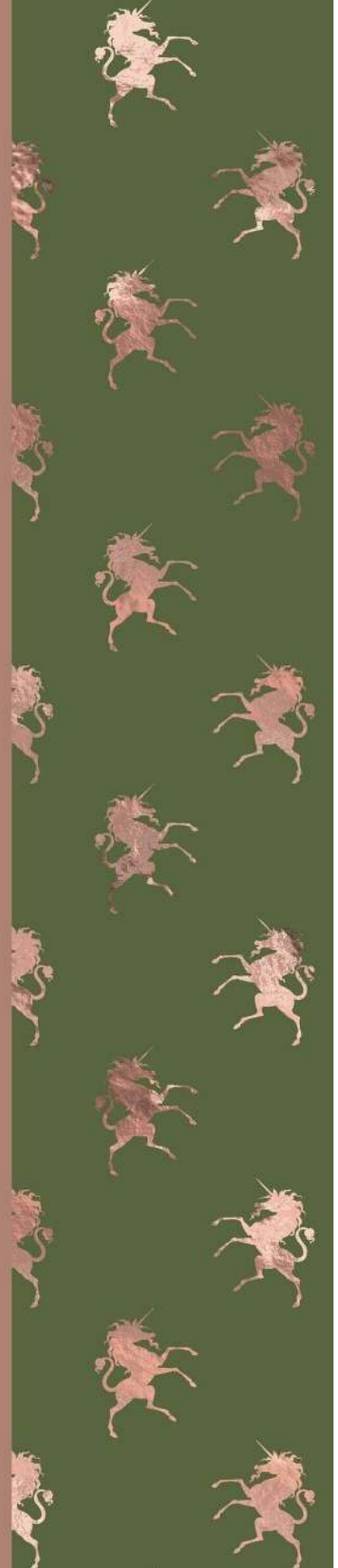


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ANTHONY HOPE

A Man of Mark

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Anthony Hope asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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One

The Movement and the Man



In the year 1884 the Republic of Aureataland was certainly not in a flourishing condition. Although most happily situated (it lies on the coast of South America, rather to the north—I mustn't be more definite), and gifted with an extensive territory, nearly as big as Yorkshire, it had yet failed to make that material progress which had been hoped by its founders. It is true that the state was still in its infancy, being an offshoot from another and larger realm, and having obtained the boon of freedom and self-government only as recently as 1871, after a series of political convulsions of a violent character, which may be studied with advantage in the well-known history of "The Making of Aureataland," by a learned professor of the Jeremiah P. Jecks University in the United States of America. This profound historian is, beyond all question, accurate in attributing the chief share in the national movement to the energy and ability of the first President of Aureataland, his Excellency, President Marcus W. Whittingham, a native of Virginia. Having enjoyed a personal friendship (not, unhappily, extended to public affairs) with that talented man, as will subsequently appear, I have great pleasure in publicly indorsing the professor's eulogium. Not only did the President bring

Aureataland into being, but he molded her whole constitution. "It was his genius" (as the professor observes with propriety) "which was fired with the idea of creating a truly modern state, instinct with the progressive spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was his genius which cast aside the worn-out traditions of European dominion, and taught his fellow-citizens that they were, if not all by birth, yet one and all by adoption, the sons of freedom." Any mistakes in the execution of this fine conception must be set down to the fact that the President's great powers were rather the happy gift of nature than the result of culture. To this truth he was himself in no way blind, and he was accustomed to attribute his want of a liberal education to the social ruin brought upon his family by the American Civil War, and to the dislocation thereby produced in his studies. As the President was, when I had the honor of making his acquaintance in the year 1880, fifty years old if he was a day, this explanation hardly agrees with dates, unless it is to be supposed that the President was still pursuing his education when the war began, being then of the age of thirty-five, or thereabouts.

Starting under the auspices of such a gifted leader, and imbued with so noble a zeal for progress, Aureataland was, at the beginning of her history as a nation, the object of many fond and proud hopes. But in spite of the blaze of glory in which her sun had risen (to be seen duly reflected in the professor's work), her prosperity, as I have said, was not maintained. The country was well suited for agriculture and grazing, but the population—a very queer mixture of races—was indolent, and more given to keeping holidays and festivals than to honest labor. Most of them were unintelligent; those who were intelligent made their living out of those who weren't, a method of subsistence satisfactory to the individual, but adding little to the aggregate of national wealth. Only two classes made fortunes of any size, Government officials and

bar-keepers, and even in their case the wealth was not great, looked at by an English or American standard. Production was slack, invention at a standstill, and taxation heavy. I suppose the President's talents were more adapted to founding a state in the shock and turmoil of war, than to the dull details of administration; and although he was nominally assisted by a cabinet of three ministers and an assembly comprising twenty-five members, it was on his shoulders that the real work of government fell. On him, therefore, the moral responsibility must also rest—a burden the President bore with a cheerfulness and equanimity almost amounting to unconsciousness.

I first set foot in Aureataland in March, 1880, when I was landed on the beach by a boat from the steamer, at the capital town of Whittingham. I was a young man, entering on my twenty-sixth year, and full of pride at finding myself at so early an age sent out to fill the responsible position of manager at our Aureataland branch. The directors of the bank were then pursuing what may without unfairness be called an adventurous policy, and, in response to the urgent entreaties and glowing exhortations of the President, they had decided on establishing a branch at Whittingham. I commanded a certain amount of interest on the board, inasmuch as the chairman owed my father a sum of money, too small to mention but too large to pay, and when, led by the youthful itch for novelty, I applied for the post I succeeded in obtaining my wish, at a salary of a hundred dollars a month. I am sorry to say that in the course of a later business dealing the balance of obligation shifted from the chairman to my father, an unhappy event which deprived me of my hold on the company and seriously influenced my conduct in later days. When I arrived in Aureataland the bank had been open some six months, under the guidance of Mr. Thomas Jones, a steady going old clerk, who was in future to act as chief (and indeed only) cashier under my orders.

I found Whittingham a pleasant little city of about five thousand inhabitants, picturesquely situated on a fine bay, at the spot where the river Marcus debouched into the ocean. The town was largely composed of Government buildings and hotels, but there was a street of shops of no mean order, and a handsome square, called the "Piazza 1871," embellished with an equestrian statue of the President. Round about this national monument were a large number of seats, and, hard by, a *café* and band stand. Here, I soon found, was the center of life in the afternoons and evenings. Going along a fine avenue of trees for half a mile or so, you came to the "Golden House," the President's official residence, an imposing villa of white stone with a gilt statue of Aureataland, a female figure sitting on a plowshare, and holding a sword in the right hand, and a cornucopia in the left. By her feet lay what was apparently a badly planed cannon ball; this, I learned, was a nugget, and from its presence and the name of the palace, I gathered that the president had once hoped to base the prosperity of his young republic on the solid foundation of mineral wealth. This hope had been long abandoned.

I have always hated hotels, so I lost no time in looking round for lodgings suitable to my means, and was fortunate enough to obtain a couple of rooms in the house occupied by a Catholic priest, Father Jacques Bonchrétien. He was a very good fellow, and, though we did not become intimate, I could always rely on his courtesy and friendly services. Here I lived in great comfort at an expense of fifty dollars a month, and I soon found that my spare fifty made me a well-to-do man in Whittingham. Accordingly I had the *entrée* of all the best houses, including the Golden House, and a very pleasant little society we had; occasional dances, frequent dinners, and plenty of lawn tennis and billiards prevented me feeling the tedium I had somewhat feared, and the young ladies of Whittingham did their best to solace my exile. As for business, I found the

bank doing a small business, but a tolerably satisfactory one, and, if we made some bad debts, we got high interest on the good ones, so that, one way or another, I managed to send home pretty satisfactory reports, and time passed on quietly enough in spite of certain manifestations of discontent among the population. These disturbing phenomena were first brought prominently to my notice at the time when I became involved in the fortunes of the Aureataland national debt, and as all my story turns on this incident, it perhaps is a fit subject for a new chapter.

Two

A Financial Expedient



When our branch was established at Whittingham there had been an arrangement made between ourselves and the Government, by the terms of which we were to have the Government business, and to occupy, in fact, much that quasi-official position enjoyed by the Bank of England at home. As a *quid pro quo*, the bank was to lend to the Republic the sum of five hundred thousand dollars, at six per cent. The President was at the time floating a loan of one million dollars for the purpose of works at the harbor of Whittingham. This astute ruler had, it seemed, hit on the plan of instituting public works on a large scale as a corrective to popular discontent, hoping thereby not only to develop trade, but also to give employment to many persons who, if unoccupied, became centers of agitation. Such at least was the official account of his policy; whether it was the true one I saw reason to doubt later on. As regards this loan, my office was purely ministerial. The arrangements were duly made, the proper guarantees given, and in June, 1880, I had the pleasure of handing over to the President the five hundred thousand dollars. I learned from him on that occasion that, to his great gratification, the balance of the loan had been taken up.

“We shall make a start at once, sir,” said the President, in his usual confident but quiet way. “In two years Whittingham harbor will walk over the world. Don’t be afraid about your interest. Your directors never made a better investment.”

I thanked his Excellency, accepted a cigar, and withdrew with a peaceful mind. I had no responsibility in the matter, and cared nothing whether the directors got their interest or not. I was, however, somewhat curious to know who had taken up the rest of the loan, a curiosity which was not destined to be satisfied for some time.

The works were begun and the interest was paid, but I cannot say that the harbor progressed rapidly; in fact, I doubt if more than one hundred thousand dollars ever found their way into the pockets of contractors or workmen over the job. The President had some holes dug and some walls built; having reached that point, about two years after the interview above recorded he suddenly drew off the few laborers still employed, and matters came to a dead stop.

It was shortly after this occurrence that I was honored with an invitation to dine at the Golden House. It was in the month of July, 1882. Needless to say, I accepted the invitation, not only because it was in the nature of a command, but also because the President gave uncommonly good dinners, and, although a bachelor (in Aureataland, at all events), had as well ordered a household as I have ever known. My gratification was greatly increased when, on my arrival, I found myself the only guest, and realized that the President considered my society in itself enough for an evening’s entertainment. It did cross my mind that this might mean business, and I thought it none the worse for that.

We dined in the famous veranda, the scene of so many brilliant Whittingham functions. The dinner was beyond reproach, the wines