

whispered, might easily be identified by those familiar with the inner circles of Mayfair. It would seem as though he was now content to have that enjoyable flash of early

spontaneity forgotten, for his later volumes make no mention of it among his published works. And this is a pity, because it was a volume that we mentally shelved somewhere near its contemporary, Anthony Hope's *Dolly Dialogues*. His annual volumes, nowadays, are quite decorous, quite serious, and just a little bit dull. *Mrs. Ames* is typical of this later manner. It is full of the social small talk of a small English town; the gossip, the rivalries, the dinners and card parties, and rarer diversion of a masquerade; an abortive attempt at a suffragette demonstration, and a still more abortive attempt at an elopement. The Mrs. Ames of the title has for years held undisputed sway as social leader; her brilliancy in conversation, her faultless table with its memorable menus, her whole impeccable code of social usage make her the pride and envy of the neighbourhood. To be sure, what we are allowed to see and hear of Mrs. Ames's sayings and doings does not quite live up to the author's assurances of her rare gifts,—but that is so common a failing of would-be clever books that it ceases to be a distinction. Well, the time comes when Mrs. Ames's prestige is threatened by the advent of a slightly younger and prettier woman, a Mrs. Evans, whose husband, a physician, has bought the local practice. Mrs. Evans is a vain, shallow little woman, who chooses to think that her husband does not understand her, and that his only interest in life is wrapped up in his drugs and lotions. So she amuses herself by flirting with middle-aged but still inflammable Major Ames, and actually leading him to the brink of an open and scandalous elopement,—when Mrs. Ames, learning in the nick of time what they are proposing to do, treats the pair like a couple of naughty children, brings them to their senses and once more resumes her sway as local *arbiter elegantiarum*. An eminently tranquil book, full of shrewd observance and mild satire.

It is nearly two decades since Mr. Benson sprang into popularity with a "best seller" bearing the flippant title of *Dodo*, the heroine of which, so it was