

**THE PRINCE OF THE  
HUNDRED  
SOUPS: A PUPPET-SHOW  
IN NARRATIVE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649679386

The Prince of the Hundred Soups: A Puppet-Show in Narrative by Vernon Lee & Sarah Birch

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

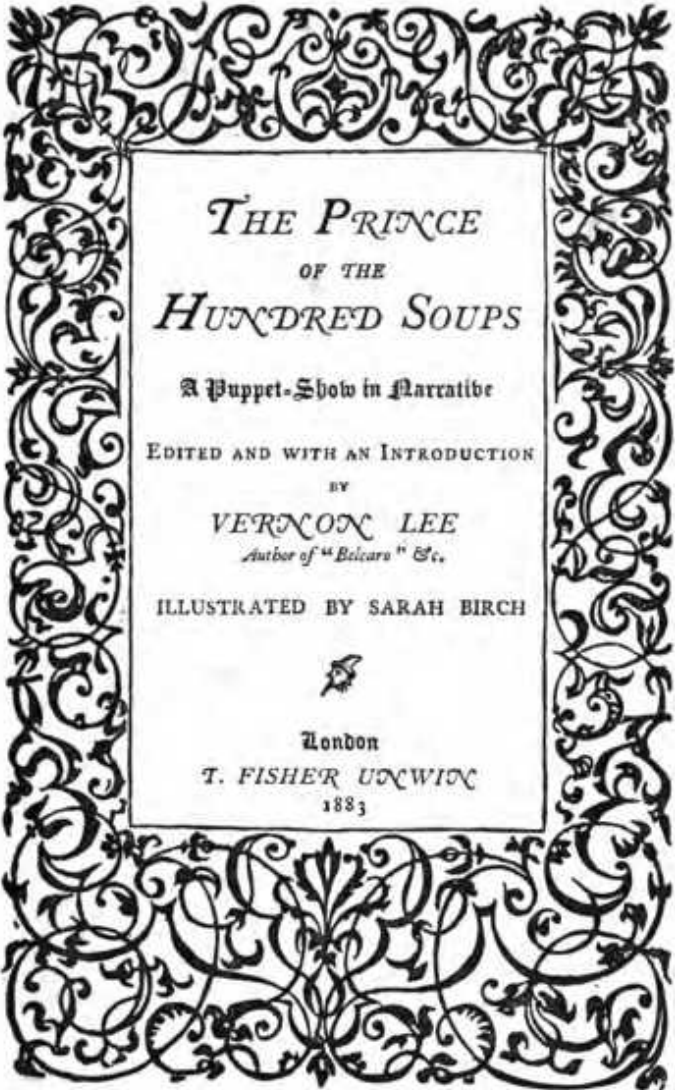
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**VERNON LEE & SARAH BIRCH**

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SOUPS: A PUPPET-SHOW  
IN NARRATIVE**





*THE PRINCE*  
OF THE  
*HUNDRED SOUPS*

A Puppet-Show in Narrative

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

*VERNON LEE*

*Author of "Belcaro" &c.*

ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH BIRCH



London

T. FISHER UNWIN

1883

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To

BELLA AND EFFIE STILLMAN,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF

MANY HAPPY EVENINGS

BY THEIR

MOTHER'S FIRESIDE.



## EDITOR'S PREFACE.

**W**E had pretty well decided to send the "Prince of the Hundred Soups" into the world just as if it were any other of the swarm of story-books prepared for Christmas, and not to bother about any kind of explanation, when, on second thoughts, my friend Mr. Unwin applied to me for a preface giving some account of the authorship of the book and of the school of art (if art may be connected with harlequinades) to which it belongs. And as it is always better to avoid any kind of mystification of the public and the reviewers, I am very willing to do so.

The curious circumstance about this "Prince of the Hundred Soups" (which, as I shall explain further

on, is a slightly modified translation of an unpublished German MS.) is that it was intended by its author not in the least as a Christmas book, but as the practical demonstration of a theory based upon an enormous amount of research. It was an experiment to show how much more interest could be got out of the Harlequins, Pantaloons, Columbines, and so forth, of pantomimes and puppet-shows than out of the distressed men and women—who know that they ought not to do it, but insist upon doing it nevertheless—of modern fiction; just on the same plan as Monsieur Littré's attempt to demonstrate, by translating Homer into medieval French, what a very great pity it was that Alfred de Musset or Théophile Gautier would write poems in the language of their own day. For learned folk are liable to have very peculiar crotchets; and the author of the "Prince of the Hundred Soups" happened to be learned almost to the height of monomania. He was the man who knew more than any other creature ever did about the Comedy of Masks. What the Comedy of Masks is or was you probably, on reflection, don't know. I have myself written half a volume on the subject, but I fear you have never read it, and perhaps never will read it (although I assure you it is by no means a bad book in its way);



so under the circumstances I had better tell you a little about this Comedy of Masks. But it would be simpler if I explained first who the author was, and how the MS. came into my hands.

When I was a child there lived in Rome a German old gentleman who was one of the sights of the place. Every town has several curious and grotesque, or melancholy and mysterious, figures, or figures in which all the four characters are curiously jumbled; whose odd outline looms, as it were, constantly on the horizon, familiar to every man, woman, and child; so that every now and then one exclaims, "Oh, there's So-and-so!" yet really known to no one — living monuments, well known as the church steeples, but whose origin and history are wrapped in mystery. Of this kind was my old German; one of my earliest recollections of Rome, and who, to my childish mind, seemed as inevitable a part of it as did the Coliseum or St. Peter's. The Roman people called him *Mangia-Zucchero*, "Eat-sugar," probably because he appeared to live off nothing but sweets. I say he appeared, because he took all his meals, or presumable meals, in public, and nothing more substantial than cream tarts was ever seen in process of being eaten by him. For he spent an enormous proportion of his day in

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cabs, and he was always eating something out of a paper: a wizen little old man, with the most singular face conceivable, in shape like that of an ape, and with an ape's hundred wrinkles and anxious, nervous, melancholy expression, but white, like a piece of book-binder's vellum. Whenever you least expected it, there he was in his cab before you—invariably alone, and invariably eating. You would see that cab of his (it was never the same one, although he might have bought a coach and six with the money he must have spent on cab fares those endless years, I should say) leisurely walking along the Corso, blocking up the way at the very hour of the fashionable drive; the magnificent carriage, poised like a boat on its springs, of some woman of fashion behind; the great blazoned and hammer-clothed coach of some cardinal in front; and there, between them, the little old man cocked up in his cab, looking round him with benign contempt, and munching something out of a paper bag. The cardinal's lacqueys, hanging on to the coach, would turn round and almost laugh in his face; the swell coachman behind would send his whip cracking almost into his ears, and the jostled crowd would laugh and say, "Look at Mangia-Zucchero!" or some street boy would cry out, "Well, Mangia-

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Zucchero, is it nice?" but he never took any notice. Sometimes you would see his cab drawn up before Nazzari's, the grand pastry-cook in Piazza di Spagna; sometimes before some little stall in Trastevere, where stale and highly varnished buns, and red and yellow painted biscuits, and dried jujube berries and pine pips were for sale: he did not mind what it was as long as it was sweet. I remember meeting a cab with Mangia-Zucchero in it on bitter winter days among the aqueducts and tombs near the city gates. He was always without a great coat or comforter; for that was another peculiarity of his, that he wore the same clothes all the year round; also in pelting rain eating his cakes under an umbrella, perfectly placid. The only thing was that no one had ever seen him on foot, or otherwise than eating. He must have been made of cast iron or of guttapercha, for climate had no effect upon him, and he drove about just the same in the sharp snow-wind and the burning August sun, braving heat, cold, malaria, fever, everything. And thus he had been known, apparently unchanged, ever since the memory of man. No one ever called him anything save Mangia-Zucchero; but on inquiry he was found to be called "Il Signor Todéro Vesedon" (I cannot make the Roman pronunciation tally with