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A Prince of Sinners

By E. Phillips Oppenheim
Author of "The Truants," "The Sarcotist," "A Millionaire of Yesterday," Etc.

CHAPTER V.
Brooks Enlists a Recruit.

Brooks had found a small restaurant in the heart of fashionable London, where the appointments and decorations were French, and the waiters were not disposed to patronize. Of the cooking neither he nor Mary Scott in those days was a critic. Nevertheless she protested against the length of the dinner which he ordered.

"I want an excuse," he declared, laying down the carte, "for a good long chat. We shall be too late for the theatre, so we may as well resign ourselves to an hour or so of one another's society."

"A very apt excuse for unwarrantable greediness," she declared. "Surely we can talk without eating?"

"You do not smoke, and you do not drink liquors," he remarked. "Now I have noticed it is simply impossible for one to sit before an empty table after dinner and not feel that one ought to go. Let the waiter take your cape. You will find the room warm."

"Do you remember," she asked him, "the first night we dined together?"

"Rather! It was my introduction to your uncle's household. Selina sat on my left, and Louise on my right. You sat opposite, tired and disagreeable. I was tired—and I am always disagreeable."

"I have noticed it," he agreed, equably. "I hope you like oysters." "If Selina were to see you now," she remarked, with a sudden humorous smile, "how shocked she would be."

"What a little far-away world it seems down there," he said thoughtfully. "After all, I am glad that I have not to live in Medchester all my life."

"You have been there this afternoon, haven't you?"

"Yes. Henslow is giving us a lot of trouble. I am afraid we shall lose the seat next election."

"Do you mind?"

"Not much. I am no party politician. I want to see Medchester represented by a man who will go there with a sense of political proportion, and I don't care whether he calls himself Liberal, or Radical, or Conservative, or Unionist."

"Please explain what you mean by that," she begged.

"Why, yes. I mean a man who will understand how enormously more important is the welfare of our own people, the people of whom we are making slaves, than this feverish imperialism and war cant. Mind, I think our patriotism should be a thing wholly understood. It needn't be talked about. It makes show fireworks for the platform, but it's all unnecessary and to my mind very undignified. If only people would take that for granted and go on to something worth while."

"Are things any better in Medchester just now?" she asked.

"On the surface, yes, but on the surface only. More factories are running half-time, but after all what does that mean? It's a slow starvation. A man can't live and keep a family on fifteen shillings a week, even if his wife earns a little. He can't do it in a dignified manner, and with cleanliness and health. That is what he has a right to. That is what the next generation will demand. He should have room to expand. Cleanliness, air, fresh food. Every man and woman who is born into the world has a God-given right to these, and there are millions in Medchester, Manchester, and all the great cities who are denied all three."

"So all Henslow's great schemes, his Royal Commissions, his Protection Duties, his great Housing Bill, have come to nothing then?" she remarked.

"To less than nothing," he answered, gloomily. "The man was a fraud. He is not worth attempting to bully. He is a puppet politician of a type that ought to have been dead and buried generations ago. Enoch Strome is our only hope in the House now. He is a strong man, and he has hold of the truth."

"Have you decided upon Henslow's successor?" she asked.

for a year or two first. That is why I am glad to get to London."

"With the people?" she asked, "in Jermyn Street?"

He laughed good-humoredly. "I have also lodgings in the Bethnal Green Road," he said. "I took possession of them last week."

"Anywhere near Merry's Corner?" she asked.

"What do you know about Merry's Corner?" he exclaimed, with uplifted eyebrows. "Yes, my rooms are nearly opposite, at the corner of the next street."

"I've been down there once or twice lately," she said. "There's a mission hall just there, and a girl named Kate Stuart gave me a letter to go three times a week."

"I know the place. Week-night services and hymn-singing and preaching. A cold, desolate affair altogether. I'm thankful I went in there, though for it's given me an idea."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to start a mission myself."

"Go on."

"On a new principle. The first thing will be that there will be no religious services whatever. I won't have a clergyman connected with it. It will be intended solely for the benefit of the people from a temporal point of view."

"You are going a long way," she said. "What about Sundays?"

"There will be a very short service for the mission helpers only. No one will be asked from outside at all. I they come it will be as a favor. Directly it is over the usual week-day procedure will go on."

"And what is that to be?"

"Brooks smiled a little doubtfully. "Well," he said, "I've got the main idea in my head, but all the details want thinking out. I want the place to be a sort of help bureau, to give the people living in a certain street or couple of streets somewhere to go for advice and help in cases of emergency. There will be no money given away, under any consideration—only food, clothing, and, if they are asked for, books. I shall have half-a-dozen bathrooms, and the people who come regularly for advice and help will have to use them and to keep their houses clean. There will be no distinction as to character. We shall help the drunkards and the very worst of them just the same as the others if they apply. If we get enough helpers there will be plenty of branches we can open. I should like to have a children's branch, for instance—some of two women will take the children of the neighborhood in hand and bathe them every day. As we get to know the people better and appreciate their special needs other things will suggest themselves. But I want them to feel that they have some place to fall back upon. We shall be frightfully humbugged, robbed, cheated, and deceived—at first. I fancy that after a time that will wear itself out."

"It is a fascinating idea," she said, thoughtfully, "but to carry it out in any way thoroughly you want a great many helpers and a great deal of money."

"I have enough to start it," he said, "and when it is really going and improving itself I shall go out and ask for subscriptions—big ones, you know, from the right sort of people. You can always get money if you can show that it is to be well spent."

"And what about the helpers?"

"Well, I know of a few," he said, "who I think would come in, and there is one to whom I would have to pay a small salary."

"I could come in the afternoons," she said.

"Capital! But are you sure," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "that it is quite fair to yourself?"

"Oh, I can manage with my morning's salary," she answered, laughing. "I shan't starve. Besides I can always burn a little midnight oil."

A waiter stood at their table for a moment, deftly carving some new dish, and Brooks, leaning back in his chair, glanced critically at his companion. In his judgment she represented something in womankind essentially of the durable type. He appreciated her good looks, the air with which she wore her simple clothes, her large full eyes, her wide, gently-humorous mouth, and the hair parted in the middle, and rippling away towards her ears. A frank companionable woman, whose eyes had never failed to look into his, in whom he had never at any time seen a single shadow of embarrassment. It occurred to him just at that moment that never since he had known her

had he seen her interested to the slightest degree in any man. He looked back at her thoughtfully. She was young, good-looking, too catholic in her views of life and its possibilities to refuse in any way in recognizing its inevitable tendencies. Yet he told himself complacently as he stepped his wife and watched her gazing with amused interest at the little groups of people about the place, that there must be in her composition a lack of sentiment. Never for a second in their intercourse had she varied from her usual good-natured cheerfulness. If there had been a shadow she had brushed it away ruthlessly. Even on that terrible afternoon at Eton she had sat in the cab white and silent—she had appealed to him in no way for sympathy.

The waiter retreated with a bow. She shot a swift glance across at him. "I object to being scrutinized," she declared. "Is it the plainness of my hat or the depth of my wrinkles to which you object?"

"Object!" he repeated.

"Yes. You were looking for some thing which you did not find. You were distinctly disappointed. Don't deny it. It isn't worth while."

"I won't plead guilty to the disappointment," he answered, "but I'll tell you the truth. I was thinking what a delightfully companionable girl you were, and yet how different from any other girl I have ever met in my life."

"That sounds hackneyed—the latter part of it," she remarked, "but in my case I see that it is not intended to be a compliment. What do I lack that other girls have?"

"You are putting me in a tight corner," he declared. "It isn't that you lack anything, but nearly all the girls one meets some time or other seem to expect from one nice little speech or compliments, just a little sentiment now and then. Now you seem so entirely superior to that sort of thing altogether. It is a ridiculously lame explanation. The thing's in my head all right, but I can't get it out. I can only express it when I say that you are the only girl I have ever known, or know of, in my life with whom sex would never interfere with companionship."

"She stirred her coffee absently. At first he thought that she might be offended, for she did not look up for several moments.

"I'm afraid I failed altogether to make you understand what I meant," he said, humbly. "It is the result of an attempt at too great candour."

Then she looked up and smiled at him graciously enough, thought it seemed to him that she was a little pale.

"I am sure you were delightfully lucid," she said. "I quite understood and on the whole I think I agree with you. I don't think that the sentiment at side of me has been properly developed. By the bye you were going to tell me about that pretty girl I saw at Eton—Lady Caroom's daughter wasn't she?"

His face lit up—he saw his thoughts go flitting away, and the corner of his lips curled in a retrospective smile of pleasure.

"Sybil Caroom," he said, softly. "She is a very charming girl. You would like her, I am sure. Of course she's been brought up in rather a frivolous world, but she's quite unspoilt, very sympathetic, and very intelligent. Isn't that a good character?"

"Very," she answered, with a suspicion of dryness in her tone. "Is this paragon engaged to be married yet?"

He looked at her, keenly surprised by the intimation of something foreign in her tone.

"I think not," he answered. "I should like you to meet her very much. She will be coming to London soon, and I know that she will be interested in our new scheme if it comes to anything. We will take her down and give her a few practical lessons in philanthropy."

"Will she be interested?" Mary asked.

"Immensely," he answered, with confidence. "Lady Caroom is an awfully good sort, too."

Mary remembered the well-bred insolence of Lady Caroom's stare, the contemptive incredulity which found militant expression in her beautiful eyes and shapely curving lips, and for a moment half closed her eyes.

"Ah, well," she said, "that afternoon was a rather terrible one to me. Let us talk of something else."

He was profuse at once in apologies for his own thoughtlessness. But she checked him almost at the outset.

"It is I who am to blame for an unusual weakness," she said. "Let us both forget it. And don't you find this place hot? Let us get outside and walk."

They found a soft misty rain falling. The commissionaire called a hansom. She moved her skirts to make room for him.

"I am going down to Stepany to see a man who I think will be interested in my scheme," he said. "When may I come down again and have tea with you?"

"Any afternoon, if you will drop me a line the night before," she said, "but I am not very likely to be out in any case. Thank you so much for my dinner. My aunt seemed to think that I was coming to London to starve. I think I feel fairly safe this evening, at any rate."

The cab drove off, skirting the gaily-lit crescent of Regent Street. The smile almost at once died away from her lips. She leaned forward and looked at herself in one of the oblong mirrors. Her face was almost colorless, the skin seemed drawn closely round her eyes, giving her a strained

look. For the rest, her hair, smoothly brushed away from her face, was in perfect order, her prim little hat was at exactly the right angle, her white tie about her neck, the sombre-ness of her black jacket. She sighed and suddenly felt a moistening of her hot eyes. She leaned far back into the corner of the cab.

CHAPTER VI.
Kingston Brooks, Philanthropist.

"It is my deliberate intention," Lord Arranmore said, leaning over towards her from his low chair, "to make myself a nuisance to you."

Lady Caroom smiled at him thoughtfully.

"Thank you for the warning," she said, "but I can take care of myself. I do not feel even obliged to deny myself the pleasure of your society."

"No, you won't do that," he remarked. "You see, so many people bore you, and I don't."

"It is true," she admitted. "You pay me nothing but unspoken compliments and you devote a considerable amount of ingenuity to conceal the real meaning of everything you say. Now some people might not like that. I adore it."

"Catharine, will you marry me?" "Certainly not! I'm much too busy looking after Sybil, and in any case you've had your answer, my friend."

"You will marry me," he said, deliberately, "in less than two years—perhaps in less than one. Why can't you make your mind up to it?"

"You know why, Arranmore," she said, quietly. "If you were the man I remembered many years ago, the man I have wasted many hours of my life thinking about, I would not hesitate for a moment. I loved that man, and I have always loved him. But, Arranmore, I cannot recognize him in you. If these terrible things which you have suffered, those follies which you have committed, have withered you up so that there remains no trace of the man I once cared for, do you blame me for refusing you? I will not marry a stranger, Arranmore, and I not only don't know you, but I am a little afraid of you."

"Perhaps you are right," he said, softly. "I believe that the only thing I have carried with me from the beginning, and shall have with me to the end is my love for you. Nothing else has survived."

Her eyes filled with tears. She leaned over to him.

"Dear friend," she said, "listen! At least I will promise this. If ever I should see the least little impulse or action which seems to me to come from the Philip I once knew, and not Lord Arranmore, anything which will convince me that some part, however slight, of the old has survived, I will come to you."

He sighed.

"You alone," he said, "might work such a miracle."

"Then come and see me often," she said with a brilliant smile, "and I will try."

He moved his chair a little nearer to her.

"You encourage me to hope," he said. "I remember that one night in the conservatory I was presumptuous enough—to take your hand. History repeats itself, you see, and I claim the prize, for I have fulfilled the condition."

She drew her hand away firmly, but without undue haste.

"If you are going to be frivolous," she said, "I will have all the callers shown in. You know very well that that is not what I mean. There must be some unpremeditated action, some impulse which comes from your own heart. Frankly, Arranmore, there are times now when I am afraid of you. You seem to have no heart—to be absolutely devoid of feeling, to be cold and calculating even in your slightest actions. There, now, I have told you just what I feel sometimes, and it doesn't sound nice, does it?"

"It sounds very true," he said, wearily. "Will you tell me where I can buy a new heart and a fresh set of impulses, even a disposition, perhaps? I'd be a customer. I'm willing enough."

"Never mind that," she said, softly. "After all, I have a certain amount of faith. A miracle may happen at any moment."

Sybil came in, dressed in a fascinating short skirt and a toque. Her hair on the threshold was carrying a small green balm.

"I am going to Prince's, mother just for an hour, with Mrs. Huntingdon. How do you do, Lord Arranmore? You'll keep mother from being dull, won't you?"

"It is your mother," she said, "who is making me dull."

"Poor old mummy," Sybil declared cheerfully. "Never mind. Her bark is a good deal worse than her bite. Good-bye, both of you."

Lord Arranmore rose and closed the door after her.

"He's not to be blamed," Lord Arranmore said. "From his point of view I have been the most scandalous parent upon this earth."

Lady Caroom sighed.

"Don't you know," she said, "that he and Sybil were very friendly?"

"I noticed it," he answered. "She has asked about him once or twice since we got back to town, and when she reads about the starting of this new work of his at Stepany she will certainly write to him."

"You mean—"

"I mean that she has sent Sydney to the right-about this time in earnest. She is a queer girl, reticent in every way, although she seems such a chatterbox and I am sure she thinks about him."

Lord Arranmore laughed a little, hardly.

"Well," he said, "I am the last person to be consulted about anything of this sort. If he keeps up his present attitude and declines to receive any thing from me, his income until my death will be only two or three thousand a year. He might marry on that down in Stepany, but not in this part of the world."

"Sybil has nine hundred a year," Lady Caroom said, "but it would not be a matter of money at all. I should not allow Sybil to marry any one concerning whose position in the world there was the least mystery. She might marry Lord Kingston of Ross, but never Mr. Kingston Brooks."

"Has—Mr Brooks given any special sign of devotion?" Lord Arranmore asked.

"Not since they were at Eton. I dare say he has never even thought of her since. Still, it was a contending principle," Lord Arranmore said, dryly, "taking life as seriously as you please, and I should imagine it too well balanced to make anything but a very safe husband. If he comes to me, if he will accept it without coming to me, he can have another ten thousand a year and Eton."

"You are generous," she murmured. "Generous! My houses and my money are a weariness to me. I cannot live in the former, and I cannot spend the latter. I am a man really of simple tastes. Besides, there is no glory now in spending money. One can so easily be outdone by one's grocer, or one of those marvellous Americans."

"Yet I thought I read of you last week as giving nine hundred pounds for some unknown tapestry at Christie's."

"But that is not extravagance," he protested. "That is not even spending money. It is exchanging one investment for another. The purple coloring of that tapestry is marvellous. The next generation will esteem it priceless."

"You must go?" she asked, for he had risen.

"I have stayed long enough," he answered. "In another five minutes you will yawn, and mine would have been a wasted visit. I should like to time my visits always so that the five minutes which I might have stayed seem to you the most desirable five minutes of the whole time."

"You are an epicurean and a schemer," she declared. "I am afraid of you."

He bought an evening paper on his way to St. James' Square and leaning back in his brougham, glanced it carelessly through. Just as he was throwing it aside a small paragraph at the bottom of the page caught his attention.

A Novel Philanthropic Departure. The First Bureau Opened Today. Interview With Mr. Kingston Brooks.

You seem to have no heart—to be absolutely devoid of feeling, to be cold and calculating even in your slightest actions. There, now, I have told you just what I feel sometimes, and it doesn't sound nice, does it?"

He recognized it with a little start. It had once been a mission hall, then a furniture shop, and later on had been empty for years. It was brilliantly lit up, and he pressed forward and peered through the window. Inside the place was packed. Brooks and a dozen or so others were sitting on a sort of slightly-raised platform at the end of the room, with a desk in front of each of them. Lord Arranmore pulled his hat over his eyes and forced his way just inside. Almost as he entered Brooks rose to his feet.

"Look here," he said, "you all come up asking the same question and wasting my time answering you all severally. You want to know what this place means. Well, if you'll stay just where you are for a minute, I'll tell you all together, and save time."

"Hear, hear, gu'nor," said a jubilant old coter-monger, encouragingly.

"Let's hear all about it."

"So you shall," Brooks said. "Now listen. I dare say there are a good many of you who go up in the West End sometimes, and see those big houses and the way people spend their money there, who come back to your own houses here, and think that things aren't exactly dead out square. Isn't that so?"

"There was a hearty and unanimous assent."

"Well," Brooks continued, "it may surprise you to hear that a few of us who have a little money up there have come to the same conclusion. We'd like to do our little bit towards squaring things up. It may not be much, but lots more may come of it."

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ous way back to its owner in a somewhat dusty and mangled condition. (To be Continued.)
Early Grey to Return.
London, June 25.—Hon. Clifford Sifton in an interview before calling at Liverpool said that it was practically certain that Earl Grey will return to Canada to take up the Vice-regal duties for another year.

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