

GRAPENUTS

BY EDEN PHILPOTTS AND
ARNOLD BENNETT

CHAPTER I. The Watchman.

That monster, London, was just lying down to rest. The clocks of the Strand churches and the Strand hotels, keeping nocturnal vigil, showed a quarter to one under the autumn moon. Through the closed windows of closed public-houses could be seen barmen, who, with sleep in their eyes and dusters in their hands, were endeavoring to wipe away the last stain from their counters. The Strand was inhabited chiefly by policemen engaged in the examination of shop doors, and omnibuses that had the air of hurrying home for fear of being late. A Carter Paterson van, obviously out for the night, rumbled along at leisure. In the courtyard of the two great hotels a few cabs, with their glaring yellow orbs, waited for august patrons, while haughty commissioners and contemptuous cabmen, on the pavements, were perhaps, not more than twenty pedestrians, instead of the twenty thousand that jostled one another at noon. The monster seemed to expel a fatigued sigh, and said: "I'll try to get a little sleep, but I'm not at all sure that I shall."

Among the score of pedestrians was Philip Masters, a young, large-boned man of 30 years, who had already had some trifling experience of life and was destined soon to have considerably more. He loitered from the direction of Charing Cross, having stopped a moment in front of a jeweler's which was illuminated to tantalize burglars, he crossed from the south to the north side of Wellington street, and then turned up the splendid curve of Aldwych. The vast and ornate arch in its pearly whiteness that the breath of the monster had not time to soil; and Philip wondered, as people in Philip's condition are apt to wonder, where the money had come from to rear with the rapidity of a steam train the blanching places devoted solely to luxury and pleasure.

For Philip was at his final sixpence; he carried all that he possessed on earth in a little black bag; and no one was more surprised than Philip to find himself in the midst of a city that spends tens of millions of pounds a day on cab fares, with no home and no prospect of adding to the sixpence. Philip once had quite the habit of flinging half-crowns to cab drivers in a grand, careless manner. He had lost his mother at an early age, and his father, some months earlier, and his effective parents had been a couple of trustees who, on his twenty-first birthday, had furnished him with 5,000 pounds, and some sound advice.

They had brought him up with much common sense, had been careful to keep him out of public schools and historic universities and other pleasure resorts; had procured him a place in the office of a flourishing publisher, and, in general, had done their best for him. But they had not taught him how to take advice, nor how to acquire a real liking for publishing, nor how to lose money on the Stock Exchange. So that within six years, besides having shown his heels to publishing and acted contemptuously to the vice in almost every particular, Philip had contrived to part with nearly the whole of his six thousand pounds. He was a man of many remarkable qualities; he was even a philosopher of singular enlightenment, but he happened to have been born with a hole in his pocket which nothing could mend.

At 27 he had made away with everything except his peace of mind and his faith in human nature.

He had essayed various vocations, from insurance to the secretaryship of a club, and had not found the right one. He might have succeeded in the colonies, but circumstances had not sent him hither. Not everyone goes to the colonies who might; he happened to be full of colonists who ought to be in Canada. He had stayed longest in his last situation as half-assistant manager, half-professor in a Jiu-Jitsu school, for he had the frame and the proclivities of an athlete. Among the pupils at the school (Jermyn street) had been a duke. In an encounter Philip had locked the duke's arm, and it was the duke's part to yield at peril of a broken limb.

The duke, however, possibly on account of his arm, had not seen fit to yield, and somehow the arm had gone off crack. Now, when an assistant manager of a Jiu-Jitsu school fractures the arm of a duke, who is making the fortune of the school, the fault is clearly that of the assistant manager. Philip saw the propriety of a resignation, and he resigned, so as to avoid further risk to the arms of the British aristocracy.

That was a fortnight ago. Thenceforward he had sought in vain another profitable outlet for his talents; and though he had as yet neither opened a cab at the theater doors, nor sold evening papers, nor enlisted, or done any of the approved things for a person in his predicament, he was rapidly acquiring a sort of philosophic detachment. The idea of not having enough to eat; which had at first appeared to him as a sense of humor, now struck him as a merely unpleasant idea.

He thought ran: "It can't be me who am 'going under' in London. It surely can't be me who will starve or beg." So he ran the thoughts of all men who have come to the end of the tether.

He passed into Kingsway, the immense artery which the arguments of the police and the arguments of the law have not yet learned to flow. Its double line of lamps stretched impotently to the metropolis, and on the other by the raw remains of habitations which the surgeon's knife had sheared like a guillotine. In the huge and solemn emptiness of the street he hesitated for a moment.

He wanted to discover a certain new lodging house of which he had heard, but of whose address he knew nothing save that it was in a street branching westward out of Kingsway. Less than a quarter of a mile off the Strand

of a watchman burned a bright red under the yellow glare of the gas lights, and a little system of red lanterns, resembling toy railway signals, showed that Kingsway itself, despite its tender age, was already "up." He could see two gesticulating figures vaguely silhouetted against the radiance of the brazier. As he walked slowly on he demanded of himself whether he would have the courage to ask the watchman as to the lodging matter was such that when he approached the brazier, he crossed over the road, away from it, while trying to make up his mind to accost the watchman.

The watchman, however, had a surprise for Philip Masters.

"Matey," called out the watchman, who appeared to be alone now, and somewhat excited.

"Hello!" Philip replied.

"Here! Half a mo'!" cried the watchman.

"Do look like a tramp," was Philip's mental question, "that this fellow orders me to come over to him?" But he went over. The watchman was middle-aged and rather thin; he wore an overcoat and a black top of the overcoat, and two muffers.

"Want a job?" he inquired of Philip, abruptly, after having scrutinized him. He had been a night watchman in main thoroughfares for many years, and the comparative richness of what remained of Philip's clothes did not deceive him for a moment; he judged a wanderer by his gait and eyes.

Philip could not tell a lie, so he told the truth.

"Well," said the watchman, "sit in my cabin for three hours and keep your eye on a fellow, and a bob's yours, matey."

"Right oh," Philip agreed, determined to be jovial with the watchman in the watchman's own dialect. "And what are you going to do, matey?"

"They're just come for to tell me that my poor old woman's took ill at Bronesbury, and I'm going to foot it up there. I should have gone, anyhow, substitute or no substitute, but seeing as you'll take it on... No hankey-pankey, now, matey."

"Leave me the sack," said Philip. "What have I got to do?"

"Watch," said the watchman, crossly, and trotted off.

Philip, his shoulders enveloped in a black, found himself in charge of Kingsway. He had his little house and his heart; and he chanced on a ladder in the shape of a tea can and a red handkerchief certainly containing sustenance. But the ladder was not there, and he was conscious of a badgering of the property of an honest and ingenious mortal in two muffers, a husband in the midst of domestic calamity; to take it would be to rob a poor man of his bread. Still, in two minutes Philip was eating a good digestive apparatus and no conscience! So true it is that a hungry man, though he won't lie, will steal.

A cab glided swiftly down the street while Philip was warming the tea. "Don't burn your fingers, Charlie," shouted the cabman, imitating a woman's voice, as he flashed by.

"Go and bury yourself," retorted Philip, feeling that he must be a watchman to the life or perish in the attempt. As the cabman made no response, he was conscious of a badgering of the property of an honest and ingenious mortal in two muffers, a husband in the midst of domestic calamity; to take it would be to rob a poor man of his bread. Still, in two minutes Philip was eating a good digestive apparatus and no conscience! So true it is that a hungry man, though he won't lie, will steal.

He straightened his hat, adjusted the sack, and crept out of his residence to reconnoiter. His residence was at the corner of Strand and Kingsway, and had been dug along the south side of Strand street and nearly a third of the way across Kingsway. The trench was guarded by a rope-iron fence, and dully illuminated by lamps, in the establishment of which there was nothing but uncoupled ground; to the north was a row of tall, eighteenth century houses that had survived many improvements and schemes, and would probably survive many more.

Now, as Philip gazed along the trench, he saw a dim form clamber out of it at the far end, at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards, and shuffle across Strand street and disappear, but whether it disappeared into a house or into a possible alley Philip could not decide. Nor could he decide whether the form was that of a big dog, a lion escaped from the Hippodrome, or a human being on all fours.

He gave forth an exclamation.

"What's up?" muttered a deep voice.

He jumped violently. It was a policeman who had been standing behind the cabin.

"I thought I saw someone climb out of the trench there," Philip stammered.

"Oh, you did, did you?" said the policeman, approaching the fire.

The tone of the policeman seemed to indicate to Philip that he must control his thoughts better than that.

"Yes, I did," he insisted.

"It's funny, as I saw nothing," the policeman remarked with cold irony. "You the watchman?"

young man, also rising, but with more difficulty.

Philip nodded.

"I thought so. I must learn it. I am excessively obliged to you."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Philip. "Have you a bed to let? I take it you are the manager."

"You don't know me?" exclaimed the young man, with gentle surprise.

"No," Philip answered. "How should I? But as you appeared to be trying to chuck someone out I naturally assumed—"

"You don't mean to say you don't recognize me from my portraits?" The young man's surprise was becoming almost a hurt surprise.

"What portraits?"

"Why, in the press! I've been interviewed by nearly every paper in London. I'm Hilguy. You've heard of Hilguy, the bookmaker?"

"Never," said Philip, smiling. "You see, I'm—"

"Not heard of Hilguy, the bookmaker, my dear sir! But he was a very great bookmaker, indeed. I regret to have to say it, since he was my father. However, he was strictly honorable. He used to say he had lost a hundred thousand pounds in bad debts to the House of Lords alone. He died and left me extremely wealthy, and as I had the misfortune, what is to do something to satisfy my conscience. Hence my scheme, sir."

"What scheme?"

Mr. Hilguy controlled his astonishment at Philip's surpassing ignorance, and then said: "I've been thinking of coming into my office and I'll tell you all about it."

And he drew Philip into a tiny office to the left of the hall. It was electrically lighted, furnished with fruit, green furniture and adorned with regalia of pictures by G. F. Watts. They sat down.

"Take some out Cavendish," suggested Hilguy, offering a pouch. "My scheme, sir, is philanthropic. It aims at doing well for the distressed, and the lower classes, and others for the lower classes. I have no prejudices against the lower classes, but their habits are not ours. And it has always struck me that one of the worst of our social evils is the fact that the lower classes are forced to adopt the habits and endure the society of their social inferiors. Imagine the feelings of a well-refined individual, sir, whom I have known, who has been reduced to a lower class, the accent—odors of those with whom he must associate. I provide a boarding-house (I will not call it a lodging-house) for the distressed, and the lower classes, and others for the lower classes."

"That is my case," Philip put in.

Hilguy bowed and continued with eagerness. "It is called 'The Corner House,' because there is a corner for each of decent appearance and demeanor."

"And who settles what is decent appearance and demeanor?" Philip asked.

"I do sir, alone. When I am not satisfied with the way things fall up, I say, 'You are always here, then?'"

"This house is my hobby, I am always here. I sleep from 5 a.m. to noon; and from noon to 2 p.m. I take exercise. Between these hours new guests are not admitted. My difficulty with the person who you so kindly just put me to bed, was his refusal to believe my formal statement that we were full up. Such a person would have been impossible in the Corner House, where the standard of manners is high. If a man of low manners is here, it is because he is a low man. We eat off white-clothed tables, and we do not eat peas with a knife, and we allow ourselves Japanese serviettes, and we do not make noises, and we do not swear. The ladies leave the dining-room first."

"There are ladies?"

"Most decidedly, why not? A distressed gentleman, sir, is one of the—"

"And you make it pay at sixpence a night?" asked Philip, filling the room with fumes of Cavendish.

"I just put me to bed, sir. Space is rigidly economized, but not ventilation. The old rooms are each divided into two, or even three cubicles—but by sound-proof partitions. They are very cheaply furnished, but each differently and with art furniture, and I do not derive myself of the pleasure of putting inexpensive copies of masterpieces on every wall in the house."

He waved his hand. "In days of yore, when Raphael's 'Analgesic Madonna' can be bought for three pounds."

"Exactly," said Philip. "Now, car, I have one of your sixpenny rooms?"

"It grieves me to say that we are full up," replied Hilguy.

"Ah!" said Philip. "I am not regretful enough. I guessed I do not give you my word of honor I do not eat peas with a knife."

"I beg you to believe," returned Hilguy, "that we are really full up. The Corner House is a colossal success. However, one of our guests, Mr. Hilguy, has a large book, open on the night that she would leave this morning. I will reserve her room for you. And in the meantime you will do me the favor of resting in the armchair. I consider myself deeply in your debt."

He jumped up, deprecating Philip's expressions of gratitude. A clock struck 5 at the same moment and a step was heard in the hall.

"My sub-manager," said Hilguy, opening the door. "I will give instructions about you. Make yourself at home here. Good morning, and thanks again."

The bookmaker's son passed swiftly, with his rather melancholy smile, out of the door. Philip took the little artistic green armchair and slept under the electric light.

He was awakened later by a prodigious din outside in the street. The British workman was commencing his deliberate labor in the trench, and making the world aware of the fact: Hilguy stretched himself, looked out

and found that the window was open and also that the pale huster of a London dave was competing with night electricity in the room. He rose, turned off the light and went into the hall.

Two boys were cleaning the floor. They had apparently received their orders, for one of them touched a forelock and directed him to a lavatory which was microscopic, very complete in detail. From the lavatory he sauntered to the street, where a chill and tonic wind was blowing eastward. The simplicity of the early morning, tranquillizing the feverish pulses of the night hours and dispelling their wild thoughts, made him feel that, despite his misfortunes and his unenviable situation, it was an excellent and a goodly thing to be alive, with sound health and a cheerful mind.

And then he approached the trench and looked over the ropes. The earth above the laid portion of the pipes had a peculiar appearance on the side nearest to him. It seemed not to lie quietly; seemed, he thought, to be somewhat uneasy to have been disturbed and to have been replaced. The group of workmen were moving pipes at the other end of the trench, near Kingsway, their figures vaguely mingled in the uncertain and feeble light. A milkman passed by, one arm weighted by a heavy can and the other stretched horizontally. As Philip stared into the trench a regiment of suspicions, created out of innumerable half-remembered circumstances of the night, took possession of his brain. A foreman approached him along the trench. Philip addressed him.

"You notice nothing remarkable about the life of the earth there?" he suggested, diffidently, pointing.

"I notice as it's been badly filled," replied the foreman, who was munching a piece of bread. "I told them about it yesterday afternoon. But I don't know as that's any concern of yours. You ain't his majesty the chairman of the county council, I presume?"

Philip broke into his imperturbable smile.

"I was only thinking it had been disturbed in the night," he said.

"Five," said Philip. There was a pause, such as frequently occurs between friends after a long separation.

"I notice your talent for small talk is as striking as ever," said Tony.

"Why talk, when others will talk for you? And why does your man address you as 'Sir Anthony'?"

"I'm almost ashamed to tell you, Phil," replied Tony. "But really these accidents will occur even in quiet respectable families. I'm a baronet—a twelfth baronet. My cousin died two days before his marriage."

"Never knew you had a cousin."

"That's because you never ask enough questions. So I got the title."

"A pretty toy! Anything useful with it?"

"Fifteen thousand five hundred a year."

Philip paused; the philosopher in him had enough to do to maintain his sang froid. Five years ago, when Philip was helping to mismanage a proprietary club in St. James' Square, Tony Didding, then aged twenty-two, was beginning a career of cheerful and irresponsible failure as a barrister. The contrast between their characters had helped to draw them together at the club, which Didding was a member, and for a year or so a club friendship had mightily flourished. And now Tony had a stake in the country and an income of fifty pounds a day. Sundays excepted, he was a man of letters, spending it, I suppose?

Philip murmured.

"Oh, quite easily. What are you doing?"

"I'm a man of leisure."

"The duce you are! You don't look it."

"Yes, I do," said Philip. "That's just where you're mistaken."

In no time the car drew up at the Devonshire Mansion on the confines of Hyde Park. The vast pile, which comprised its eleven floors, a hotel, a restaurant, a cafe, several clubs, Charleypoulos's cigarette shop, a barber's, a billiard academy, a circulating library, a post and telegraph office, and some scores of flats unsurpassed for elegance, had not yet commenced its business. The remnant of commissionaires on duty in the great hall where three tape machines are, were in the muff of sleeved waistcoats, and the lift-boy, who lifted Sir Anthony and the gentleman of leisure to the fifth floor, had not yet brushed his hair.

An oldish, clean-shaven, iron-gray man received them gravely at Sir Anthony's door.

"Good morning, Sir Anthony."

"Morning, Oxwich. Breakfast for two, Cavalry kidneys."

"I have ventured to order grape-nuts, Sir Anthony."

"Ridiculous, man! Mr. Masters has not come all the way from Bloomsbury to eat grape-nuts."

"You're digestion after these nights, sir—or, rather, I should say, your indigestion!"

"You're quite right, Oxwich. But this gentleman—"

"I insist upon grape-nuts," said Philip.

The portly Oxwich took charge of hats and furs, and presently it was no secret that Sir Anthony was wearing evening dress.

"You see," he explained apologetically, "we had a bit of a flutter here last night—must enjoy life—and two of my friends, jolly chaps, missed the last train for Manchester. Didn't miss it; forgot it. So I promised them they should catch the first. Why Manchester, of all places? I don't know! But it seems they had an important appointment. I shan't change before breakfast, Oxwich. I'm too hungry. Besides, I'm more comfortable as I am."

"I have ventured to prepare your shirt, Sir Anthony, and your new gray lounge suit, with the sapphire necktie. I've had the lower carrying bottom of the waistcoat altered."

"Oh, very well, very well. Take Mr. Masters to the other bathroom." Tony fled.

"Certainly, sir. One moment, sir,"

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