

Cottages.

Doubloons

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS 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 February moon. Through the windows of closed public houses could be seen barmen who, with sleep in their eyes and dusts 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 Cater Paterson van, obviously out for the night, rumbled along at leisure, in the courtyard of the two great hotels, a few hansom cabs with their glowing yellow orbs, waited, waited for august patrons, while haughty commissionaires ignored contemptuous cabmen. On the pavements, between Aldwych and Charing Cross, there were perhaps not more than twenty pedestrians, instead of the twenty thousand of the morning. One another, however, the monster seemed to expel a fatigued sigh, as one saying: "I'll try to get a little sleep, but I'm not at all sure that I shall succeed."

Among the score of pedestrians was Philip Masters, a young, large-boned man of thirty years, who had already suffered some trifling experience of life, and was destined soon to endure considerably more. He loitered from the direction of Charing Cross, and, having stopped a moment in front of a jeweler's which was illuminated in order 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 architecture of that region rose above him to a peak of whiteness that the breath of the monster had not yet soiled; and Philip wondered, as people in Philip's condition are apt to wonder, whether the money came from to rear, with the rapidity of a dream, these blanching palaces 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 his wanderings, spends twelve thousand pounds a day on cab fares, with no home and no prospect of adding to the expence. Philip once had quite the habit of flinging half-crowns to cab drivers in the grand manner. He had lost his mother at birth and his father some thirty years earlier, and he and his mother had been a couple of trustees who, on their twenty-first birthday, had furnished him with six thousand pounds and some sound advice. They had brought him up with much commonsense; had been careful to keep him out of public schools, historic universities and other places where he 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 not to lose money on the Stock Exchange. So that, at twenty-seven 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 thither. Not everyone goes to the colonies who might succeed there; Piccadilly is 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, besides having shown his heels to publishing and acted contrary to their advice in almost every particular. Philip had contrived to get a small, tidy, and comfortable house, worth 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.

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He had at first appealed to his sense of wonder and his sense of humor, now struck him as a merely unpleasant idea.

His 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 reach the end of the tether.

He passed into Kingsway, the immense artery which London's surgeons have created, but through which the blood has not yet learned to flow. His double line of lamps stretched imposingly to Holborn, flanked on one side by the posters of every theatre and medicine in the metropolis, and on the other by the raw remains of habitations which the surgeon's knife had sheared off like a guillotine. In the huge and solemn emptiness of the street he hesitated 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 westwards out of Kingsway. Less than a quarter of a mile off the brazen of a watchman burned a bright red under the yellow glare of the gas lights, and a little system of red lanterns, resembling railway signals, showed that Kingsway itself, despite its tender age, was already "up." He could see two gesticulating figures vaguely shouted against the radiance of the brasier. As he walked slowly on, he demanded of himself whether he would have the courage to ask the watchman as to the lodging house. His diffidence about this simple matter was such that, when he approached the brasier, he crossed the road away from it, while trying to make up his mind to accost the watchman.

Here, however, a great surprise awaited Philip Masters.

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

"Hello," Philip replied.

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

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

"Well," said the watchman: "sit in a cab for three hours, and keep the fire a-going, and the boss'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've just come for to tell me as my old Dutch is took ill at Brondesbury, and I'm going to foot it up there. I should have gone, anyhow, substitute or no substitute, but I can't take it on—No hankey-pankey, now, matey."

"Leave me the sack," said Philip, with a voice, as he finished, that was mortal in two muffs, a husband in the midst of domestic calamity. To take it would mean the loss of his bread. Still, in three minutes Philip was eating—half digestive apparatus and no conscience! So true it is that a man can make man, though he won't lie, steel.

"Don't burn your fingers, Charlie," shouted the cabman, imitating a wailing voice, as he finished.

"Take that loss to the knacker's yard!" retorted Philip, feeling that he must be a watchman to the life or a Jiu-Jitsu school, besides having shown his heels to publishing and acted contrary to their advice in almost every particular. Philip had contrived to get a small, tidy, and comfortable house, worth 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.

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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—I thought I saw some one climb out of the track 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.

But Philip was not to be bounced. "Yes, I did," he insisted.

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

"Oh, you are, are you?" sneered that agnostic of a policeman. "I'll have a look yonder myself."

And he marched along Strange street with a lantern, and the watchman followed him, shaking the Albert suspension bridge.

"Nothing here," he shouted, gazing into the trench with noble condescension. "You don't mean to say you don't recognize me from my portraits?"

The young man's surprise was becoming almost unbearable. "What portraits?"

"Why, in the Press! I've been interviewed, with portrait, by nearly every paper in London. I'm Hilgag, you've heard of Hilgag, the bookmaker?"

"Never!" said Philip, smiling.

"Not heard of Hilgag, the bookmaker, my dear sir! But he was a very great person, 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 dog races, and the House of Lords alone. He died and left me extremely wealthy, and as I had the misfortune to disapprove of bookmaking, he was obliged to do something to satisfy my conscience. Hence my scheme, sir."

"What scheme?"

"Hilgag controlled his astonishment at Philip's surprising ignorance, and then said:

"Come into my office, and I'll tell you all about it. He drew Philip into an office to the left of the hall. It was electrically lighted, furnished with frail, good furniture, and adorned with reproductions of pictures by the name of 'The House of Lords alone.' He said some of the worst hardships of a gentleman (excuse the word) 'to do the duties of a watchman, to endure the society of his social inferiors. Imagine the feelings of a refined individual, sir, when his fortune of hundreds of thousands of pounds is suddenly reduced to a few shillings!'"

"And my breakfast, mister?"

He was thus greeted on his arrival at the office. The watchman, his employee, had come back breathless. "I've eaten it," said Philip. "I'm awfully sorry."

"But sorry won't do," replied the watchman. "That breakfast I cast you a bob, and no less. Here I foot it all the blooming way to Brondesbury expecting my old missus at Brondesbury, and she ain't even ill. Sleeping like a child, she was, and I startled her finely. 'What's up, Charlie?' she says. 'What's up, they told me you was dying, Sarah.' I says, 'I've got nothing of it,' she says, blinking out of her silly old eyes. And I thought as she'd get powness, I said, 'leat!'"

"Then it was a false alarm?"

"A plant! Someone trying to make a fool of me. And done it, too, seemingly. I says, 'I've got nothing of it,' she says, blinking out of her silly old eyes. And I thought as she'd get powness, I said, 'leat!'"

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between the two doors. If the navy had enjoyed even the slightest acquaintance with Jiu-Jitsu, he would have recoiled before this master-position in the greatest known art of self-defence. The navy, however, had never heard of Jiu-Jitsu, and as a consequence of his rash ignorance, after getting a wrist ingeniously sprained, he was propelled in a graceful curve, by the upraised flat of Philip's left foot, clean into the street.

His first thought, on recovering his wits, was that the age of miracles had returned. Then, not being a duke, he staggered away, beaten.

Philip nodded.

"I thought so, I must learn it. I'm excessively obliged to you."

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 quite level; it seemed to be somewhat uneven; to have been disturbed and to have been replaced. The group of workmen were moving pipes and the other end of the trench, near Kingsway, their figures vaguely mingled in the uncertain and feeble light. A milkman passed by, and the height of a heavy can and the other stretched horizontally. As Philip stared at the raw and broken earth a regiment of strange suspects created out of his mind. He 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 lie of that soil, there?" he suggested diffidently, pointing.

"No, nothing," replied the foreman, who was munching a piece of bread. "But I don't know as that's any concern of yours. You ain't his majesty's chairman of the County Council, I presume?"

Philip broke into his imperturbable smile.

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

"Stuffed!" said the foreman. "Going to make them do it again?"

Philip asked.

At that instant, his face being in the direction of the street so that he commanded both the trench and the Corner House, he saw in the tail of his eye a blind casually lifted and suddenly let fall in one of the windows of Mr. Hilgag's establishment for the respectable.

"Not much," said the foreman. "This is a contract job. What do you think?"

"I see," said Philip laconically. The regiment of suspicions fled before the foreman's matter-of-fact tone.

He left the gaping trench and strolled into Kingsway, and then up toward Holborn. He had his next meal to find.

But the foreman, visited in his turn by some disconcerting notion, continued to gaze at the accused earth.

"Bill," he shouted at length. "An old man in the gang at the other end of the trench glanced up, and the foreman summoned him with a jerk of the head."

"Look at that, Bill," said the foreman.

Bill scratched his head.

"Funny, ain't it?" murmured Bill, in a natural voice. That indicated brandy.

In another minute four laborers had received orders to remove the earth. In another five minutes there was a huge mound of earth in the foot, then a leg, then the whole body of a man had been brought to view, laid flat against the sewer pipe. The group of laborers pressed round, awed by the pathetic dignity of death.

"Wonder if there's a policeman this side of the Thames?" said Bill.

"The was luck, that was," murmured the foreman, holding in his hand, the half-eaten bread. "If it had been any other man but me was bossing this job, he'd have lain there till goodness knows how long there would have lain there!"

CHAPTER III.
Sentence.

When Philip Masters got into Holborn he turned towards a horse will turn toward the stable, even when the manager is empty. In the West End he had always lived, and he scarcely felt at home east of Mudie's. He had thought of no device for getting a breakfast. It is true that he possessed still the sum of sixpence, but he considered that Mr. Hilgag had a lien upon that sixpence for the promised room, to say nothing of Raphael's Anadid Madonna. Doubtless, having regard to the singular way in which they became acquainted, Mr. Hilgag would offer him the room for nothing, with perhaps a breakfast; Mr. Hilgag had probably given instructions about a breakfast. But, simply because he really needed it, and for no other reason, Philip did not wish to accept Mr. Hilgag's hospitality. Had he been a man of ample means, with a regular income of twenty-five shillings or so tumbling in every week, he would have accepted a meal and a bed from Mr. Hilgag, and looked on it all as a great joke and picnic. Philip was a philosopher, but he was not an unnatural prodigy; and in social matters he was apt to be excessively human.

The curbstone of Holborn was decorated with dust-bins at irregular intervals, and all the shops, except Pearce and Plenty's were closed so thoroughly that they looked as if they would never reopen again. A stream of people passed from the east to the west, hurriedly, with a certain gloomy pre-occupation. They seemed chilly; the men had their collars turned up and their hands in their pockets, while the women, mostly young, used their feminine pride to keep themselves warm. The Tube rails threw up quantities of the same sort of people out of the earth. They were the vanguard of the black-coated workers. They all had to be at a particular place at a particular minute; they had the air of trying to catch trains, but they were only trying to avoid fines.

Philip alone had no rendezvous with capital. He was a loafer; he knew he was a loafer; and the workers knew it, too. They obviously scanned him with superciliousness as part of the submerged tenth, and he could not challenge their eyes with a denial. When one is submerged, one feels it and shows it. But Philip's revenge was high.

A magnificent automobile swept down Bloomsbury street into the main thoroughfare. It was driven by an august being in furs, and its freight was another august being in furs. Philip, who, like many improvident persons, loved and understood motor cars, at once perceived that it was a four-speed, eight cylinder Panhard, 60 h. p., with coachwork by Vedrine, and that the chauffeur was imprudently running on the fourth speed. He stopped behind it. There was nothing surprising in a man stopping to gaze at a motor car; but when a motor car stops to gaze at a man, there may be fair cause for astonishment, and Philip's mild astonishment, as the automobile jerked itself back on its haunches exactly in front of him, may therefore be excused as a matter of course.

The freight leaned its splendid furs over the side of the car; out of the furs smiled a youthful face, with blue eyes and a long fair mustache.

"Phil, isn't it?"

"Hullo, Tony!"

"They shook hands.

"I accept," said Tony to the chauffeur, as Philip embarked. "And shove her along."

"Yes, Sir Anthony."

The car swam arrogantly away. Philip no more formed part of the submerged; in an instant, by the magic of the car and the furs, he had been translated to the surface.

"It's three or four years since I lost touch with your stupendous calm," said Tony, after a short silence.

"I didn't. He got hold of him. He was my cousin's valet and he seemed to get on with him."

"I like him," said Philip.

"So do I. He resembles grape-nuts—he's good for me. And his taste in neckties—amazing!"

Tony gulped down the last of the stolen kidney as Oxwich senatorially returned.

"Done it!" said he, sinking back into his chair.

"Yes, sir!" Oxwich murmured. "It is arranged."

"I don't mean what you mean," said Tony. "Oxwich, the cigarettes?"

"A little more grape-nuts, sir?"

"No, thanks—excellent as they are! If you've finished, Phil, let's go into my study; Oxwich, the cigarettes?"

"Your study?" Philip repeated, surprised, knowing Sir Anthony's indifference to literature.

"Well, my den, my whatever you like of study; Oxwich, the cigarettes?"

(To be continued.)

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