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NOBODY'S MAN :-: By E. Phillips Oppenheim

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

ANDREW TALLENTE—brilliant statesman, approaching middle age, but still young in spirit. Defeated for Parliament, he becomes interested in a new political party, aiming at co-operation of capital and labor for the public welfare, and is its choice for Premier.

MRS. TALLENTE—who has married Andrew to forward social ambitions, trading her great wealth for his political prestige. Furious at his declining a peerage, she plots with his secretary, Anthony Palliser, in whom she has a sentimental interest.

ANTHONY PALLISER—who has stolen valuable political papers from Andrew, and who, after a quarrel, has mysteriously disappeared.

LADY JANE PARTINGTON—Andrew's nearest neighbor, who stirs his interest greatly after his separation from his calculating wife. Though the daughter of a Duke, she is somewhat socialistic, conducting her estate on such principles. She is in love with Andrew.

STEPHEN DARTREY—the great Labor-Liberal chief, a statesman, but without ability as a party leader, for which he picks Tallente.

NORA MIALL—a fascinating young feminist and radical, in love with Dartrey.

MILLER—a coarse-grained radical.

HE SMILED and in the lightening of his face she appreciated for the first time a certain strained look about his eyes and the drawn look about the mouth.

"You are worrying about all this!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, in a way I am worrying," he confessed simply. "Not about the storm itself. I am ready to face that and I think I shall be a stronger and a saner man when the battle has started. In the meantime, I think that what has happened to me is this: I have arrived just at that time of life when a man takes stock of himself and his doings, criticizes his own past and wonders whether the things he has proposed doing in the future are worth while."

"You of all men in the world need never ask yourself that," she declared warmly. "Think of your life-long devotion to your work. Think of the idlers by whom you are surrounded."

"I work," he admitted, "but I sometimes ask myself whether I work with the same motives as I did when I was young. I started life as an altruist. I am not sure now whether I am not working in self-defense, from habit, because I am afraid of falling behind."

"You mean that you have lost your ideals?"

"I wonder," he speculated, "whether any man can carry them through to my age and not be afflicted with doubts as to whether, after all, he has been on the right path, whether he may not have been worshiping false gods."

"Tell me exactly how you started life," she begged.

"Like any other third or fourth son of a bankrupt baronet," he replied. "I went to Eton and Oxford with the knowledge that I had to carve out my own career, and my ambitions when I left the university were entirely personal. I chose diplomacy. I did moderately well, I believe. I remember my first really confidential mission," he went on, with a faint smile, "brought me to Paris, where we met. Then came Parliament—afterward the war and a revolution in all my ideas. I suddenly saw the strength and power of England and realized whence it came. I realized that it was our democracy which was the backbone of the country. I realized the injustice of those centuries of class government. I plunged into my old socialistic studies, which I had taken up at Oxford more out of caprice than anything, and I began to have a vision of what I have always since looked upon as the truth. I began to realize that there was some superdivine truth in the equality of all humans, notwithstanding the cheap arguments against it; that by steady and broad-minded government for a generation or so human beings would be born into the world under more level conditions; and with the fading away of class would be born or rather generated the real and wonderful spirit of freedom. My parliamentary career progressed by leaps and bounds, but when in '15 the war began to go against us, I turned soldier."

"You don't need to tell me anything about that part of your career," she interrupted, with a little smile almost of proprietary pride. "I never forget it."

"When I came back," he continued, "I was almost a fanatic. I worked not from the ranks of the Labor Party itself, because I flatter myself that I was clear-sighted enough to see that the Labor Party as it existed after the war, split up by factions, devoted to the selfish interests of the great trades unions and with the taint of Miller retarding all progress, had nothing in it of the real spirit of freedom. It was every man for his own betterment and the world in which he lived might go hang. I stayed with the Coalitionists, though I was often a thorn in their side, but because I was also useful to them I bent them often toward the light. Then they began to fear me, or rather my principles. It was out of my principles, although I was not nominally one of them, that Dartrey admits freely today he built up the Democratic Party. He had been working on the same lines for years, a little too much from the idealistic point of view. He needed the formula. I gave it to him. Horlock came into office again and I worked with him for a time. Gradually, however, my position became more and more difficult. In the end he offered me a peer in the Cabinet, indeed me to resign my own seat, which I admit was a doubtful one, and sent me to fight Helmsfield, which it was never intended that I should win. Then Miller dug his own grave. He opposed me there and I lost the seat. Horlock was politely regretful, scarcely saw what could be done for me at the moment, was disposed to join in a paltry little domestic plot to send me to the Lords. This was at the time I came down to Martinhoe, the time, except for those brief moments in Paris, when I first met you."

"Pruning roses in a shockingly bad suit of clothes," she murmured.

"And taken for my own gardener! Well, then came Dartrey's visit. He laid his program before me, offered me a seat and I agreed to lead the Democrats in the House. There I think I have been useful. I know the game, which Dartrey didn't. While he has achieved almost the impossible, has, except so far as regards Miller's influence among the trades unions, brought the great army of the people into line, I accomplished the smaller task of giving them their due weight in the House."

"Very well, then," Jane declared, looking at him with glowing eyes, "there is your stocktaking, taken from your own, the most modest point of view. With your own lips you confess to what you have achieved, to where you stand. What doubts should any sane man have? How can you say that the lamp of your life has burned dull?"

"Insight," he answered promptly. "Don't think that I fear the big fight. I don't. With Dartrey on my side we shall wipe Miller into oblivion. It isn't true today to say that he represents the trades unions, as solid bodies don't exist any longer. The men have learned to think for themselves. Many of them are earnest members of the Democratic Party. They have learned to look outside the interests of the little trade in which they earn their weekly wage. No, it isn't Miller that I am afraid of."

"Then what is it?" she demanded.

"How can I put it?" he went on thoughtfully. "Well, first of all, then, I feel that the Democrats, when they come into power, are going to develop as swiftly as may be all the fevers, the sore places, the jealousies and the pettiness of every other political party which has ever tried to rule the State. I see the symptoms already and that is what I think makes my heart grow faint. I have given the best years of my life to toiling for others. Who believes it? Who is grateful? Who would not say that because I lead a great party in the House of Commons I have all that I have worked for, that my reward is at hand? And it isn't. If I am Prime Minister in three months' time, there will still be something left of the feeling of weariness I carry with me today."

It was a new phase of the man who unconsciously had grown so dominant in her life. She felt the pull at her heartstrings. Her eyes were soft with unshed tears as her arm stole through his.

"Please go on," she whispered.

"There is the ego," he confessed, his voice shaking. "Why it has come to me just at this period of life—but there it is. I have neglected human society, human intercourse, sport, pleasures, the joys of a man who was born to be a man. I am a philosopher enough not to ask myself whether it has been worth while, but I do ask myself—what of the next ten years?"

"Who am I to give you counsel?" she asked, trembling.

"The only person who can."

"Then I advise you to go on. This is just a mood. There are muddy places through which one must pass, even in the paths that lead to the mountain tops, muddy and ugly and depressing places. As one climbs, one loses the memory of them."

"But I climb always alone," he answered, with a sudden fierceness. "I walk alone in life. I have been strong enough to do it and I am strong enough no longer. Jane," he went on, his voice a little unsteady, his hands almost clutching hers, "it is only since I have known you that I have realized from what source upon this earth a man may draw his inspiration, his courage, the strength to face the moving of mountains, day by day. My heart has been as dry as a seed plat. You have brought new things to me, the soft, humanizing stimulus of a new hope, a new joy. If I am to fight on to the end, I must have you and your love."

She was trembling and half afraid, but her hands yielded their pressure to his. Her lips and eyes, the little quivering of her body, all spoke of yielding.

"I have done foolish things in my life," he went on, drawing her nearer to him. "When I was young, I felt that I had the strength of a superman, and that all I needed in life was food for the brain. I placed woman in her wrong place. I sold myself and my chance of happiness that I might gain more power, a wider influence. It was a sin against life. It was a greater crime against myself. Now that the thunder is muttering and the time is coming for the last test, I see the truth as I have never seen it before. Nature has taken me by the hand—shows it me. Tell me it isn't too late, Jane? Tell me you care? Help me. I have never pleaded for help before. I plead to you."

Her eyes were wet and beautiful with the shine of tears. It seemed to him in that moment of intense emotion that he could read there everything he desired in life. Her lips met his almost eagerly, met his and gave of their own free will.

"Andrew," she murmured, "you see, you are the only man except those of my family whom I have ever kissed, and I kiss you now—again—and again—because I love you."

To be continued tomorrow

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New Crop Onions lb 4c
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Young's Soap Chips ..... pkg 9c
P. & G. Naphtha Powder ... pkg 6½c & 23c
Lifebuoy Soap ..... 3 cakes for 20c
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