THE HOLY TERROR!

Story of a World Dictator

By H. G. WELLS

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CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PUTSCH

Rud couldn't sit at the table. He walked about the room, white-faced, gesticulating with clenched fists. "I see it all," he said, "I see it all. They think they've used us and they think they're done with us. And the hand that is drawing all the threads together is that hairy fist of the future. First World President, the Conqueror of the Last War of All, the ultimate Julius Caesar, Judas Caesar—Reedly. . . . . "Who I thought was just on his own. . . ."

And then in an inentse voice, and as if he soilloquized, he said something that lifted Chiffan's eyebrows. "I will not have my Resolution assassinated," he said. "No. I will not be tricked now. Now that I have got thus far, I have struggled for this day—for five and twenty centuries. Yes. I and my sort. Five and twenty centuries of it against the bullies and the bouncers and the quiet, sly, plausible people, one down, another up. My sort of men have struggled long enough. My sort of men. The pre-Ruds and the sub-Ruds, the vulgar, ugly, slighted, cheated, resentful, free-spirited Common Men. The Crowd. The Rebels. The Great Unwashed. Me! Do you think I haven't been here before? In the same corner. They can kill us and bury us and burn us up or let us rot away. Back we come again and again. Now, this time, we're nearer winning than ever we were. I feel it in my bones . . . .

"Do you think the Son of Man is going to be downed by a chap who neighs like a horse? . . . ."

He stopped short and stared at Chiffan. "Sometimes you think I'm crazy, Chiffan."

"Sometimes I think you're inspired."

"Well anyhow," said Rud, and stood for a moment like a drugged man. He pulled himself together. "Well, now we have it plain. Come "Frankly, I expect a Reedly Putsch now within six weeks. Bellacourt ought to be coming over Greenland now and his fighting planes ought to be accumulating during the next fortnight It has to be done quietly. We don't want to frighten the birds too soon. I want this Putsch to happen. I want Reedly to show his hand. That will bring word affairs to one plain issue.

"I didn t perhaps consult you as I ought to have done," he said. He turned to Bodisham with his notes. He was as near to being apologetic as he could be.

"How do you figure this out?" he began.

Steenhold looked at him. He liked this. This was his Rud at his best. It came into his head to say: "Do you remember, Rud, how you came into my flat that Sunday morning—not so many years ago? Just as you are now. 'This is the moment', you said. And then it occurred to him that this remark might be unnecessary and inopportune, so that he did not make it.

Thirp appeared suddenly. "You're quick," said Rud.

"I have to be," said Thirp.

"Olders had hardly gone out of the room five minutes ago to call you."

"He didn't call me. I came of my own accord. I have something very urgent to tell you."

Rud took him aside.

"If it could be just ourselves," said Thirp. "For a moment anyhow I want to tell you something. It's something so queer—I don't want to argue. Do you mind?"

Chiffan and Steenhold intimated that they did not mind. Bodisham was expressionless. There was something feminine in the way that Thirp would always scheme to get Rud to himself if he could and have little special understandings with him, but it was a pity Rud fell in with this. Bodisham was a philosopher. He had to take Rud as he found him. Rud was essential to the Revolution and that was that. Rud expected to have everything told and explained to him and yet he was always going behind his organizer's back, with Norvel, with Bellacourt, with Thirp—with anyone. It was his way. Bodisham drummed with the fingers of one hand on the table and Steenhold understood how he felt and thought.

Rud led Thirp to an inner room.

TWELVE MILLION POSTCARDS

"It is a very extraordinary thing," began Thirp in his highpitched voice after he had watched the door close. "But you have such understanding—"

He twisted his long, thin hands together. "It may seem preposterously trivial to you, but what I have to tell you about is the despatch of twelve million colored postcards from London, to various destinations I have checked. They are all pictures of the same person—"

Reedly?"

"Exactly. I have known about these postcards for weeks — joining them up to other little things of a similar nature. There are some pamphlets too — in various languages. Well, I will confess I'm startled. I did not expect these cards to move so soon. No, I counted on three or four weeks yet. I was timing things for that as I explained to you Then suddenly they have been hustled off . . . ."

"That means something has been precipitated?"

"Exactly You see — I think. It's very significant."

"The first catspaw of a storm?"

"Exactly. These postcards are trivial in themselves, but they are part of an elaborate scheme. If they go off, then the whole scheme must be in motion. Nobody would give a particular orders especially about them. Somebody or something has pressed a button. A postcard can show how the wind blows."

"Things are still at a standstill on the front?"

"N—oo. I shouldn't say that. That's exactly it. They can't be. The unexpected must have been busy there. The front has always been difficult to watch. Conditions vary from sector to sector. From their left wing and all up through the Little Carpathians the disposition to fraternize has been very strong for some time. Bellacourt's leaflets, the ones you drafted, have done more there than bombs. Reedly has flatly forbidden them and he has five planes under arrest—."

"Blank mutiny."

"At Constance. I've just got the report of that. You know he has always been opposed to our air propaganda. But he has never dared touch it before. Probably he has some excuse. Thingsare different on the right there, where the lilies bend back above the Juna. What we call the Italian flank. These sectors are more complicated. Old hatreds. There is a considerable artillery activity. The men can't get near each other, and there's Italians against our Spanish That ugly old feud is as biting as ever. There's black blood there, and also near the middle where the Czechs are up against the Germans. Now the English and Germans have even stopped sniping. . . . But all that's quite secondary. . . ."

"Let's look at a map."

The map was spread on the table. "These are details. The right and its little raids and killings is, I say, secondary What matters is the state of affairs on the center and their left. There their discipline is in such a state that their Higher Command may come trotting over to Reedly with a white flag at any time. For all I know that may be happening now. I told you that was possible yesterday, but I didn't realize it was imminent. Since then something definite may have happened. Something very definite. Reedly certainly didn't expect a snap to come so soon. Nobody expected it so soon I didn't. He's a great commanding figure is Marshal Reedly, and when he says a thing has to happen, that is the appointed time. Maybe it's got something to do with the food breakdown. Maybe some quite small regimental affair has started an avalanche. Maybe they're shooting their officers like the Russians did in '17. . . . Maybe they're fighting among themselves. But you see, whatever he's been getting ready in the way of a mine under our feet, is going to be let off—sooner than was expected—in a day or so . . . Or earlier. These postcards . . ."

"You're listening in everywhere?"

"I could a tale unfold. But I spare you. I've got it pretty clear; trust me I join my slats. The idea always has been to stage an Armistice at the front without consulting you, and to proclaim World Federation and the end of the war straight away. Andthat's whatthey seem to be doing now. In a rush."

"Reedly as Jove?"

"Descending upon an exhausted Europa in a cloud of postcards. Sorry! I'm afraid I'm mixing the ladies."

"And he means to do—what?"

"He will seize the airdromes and tackle Bellacourt. And that reminds me of another thing about this sudden precipitance. Bellacourt, I find, has been in Canada. Has anything been going on in Canada?"

"You don't know that?"

"No, I don't know that. How could I know it — if you didn't tell me?"

"Well — there has been——"

"Preparation?"

"Bellacourt will fight Reedly — yes."

"I wish I had known," said Thirp, and wished silently that sometimes Rud would let his left hand know what his right was doing. "I wish I had known," he repeated.

"Reedly must have heard of that," he went on. "Before I did. That may have touched everything off. But anyhow he is against Bellacourt. He hates Bellacourt if possible more than he hates you. He's a vain man. These last months without any real air fighting and the command of the air in our hands, have made him feel ridiculous. I think I can give a rough guess of what he will do. In one little communication that I happened to hear he said — what was it?—prigridden air. He'd go straight for the airdromes and try and recover them from the Allied Air Control, that is to say, Bellacourt. He will sieze some of the big power-stations. I've been trying to get all that unobtrusively policed — by trustworthy people. He will naturally denounce you for wanting to prolong the war by holding back the air arm

Hey Presto! Civilization has been saved in the nick of time. We shall figure—as Reds, as World Communists, enemies of religion, enemies of patriotism. All our hard-won respectability gone! Most of us will be arrested."

"He's got all this ready?"

"He's got it half ready. In one way or another I've wetted a lot of his powder. Some sort of attack was actually brewing here, there's some army die-hards professedly on leave in Amsterdam. Maybe they meant to raid us here. But I've scotched that for the moment. I think by bringing in about a thousand—nearly a thousand—of my own youngsters. From London . . . Well anyhow they'll be here this afternoon He's had about three divisions in reserve in Flanders ready to be clapped into trains and rushed here by the end of next week. That I know. Munitions not arrived for them. He's a bad organizer. Roots has held that up. We've got all that taped. They're stirring now, but they can't get moving — at least only a few companies might be rushed . . . with no guns. . . . I'll have the trains held up. I think I can do that. My men will be here in three hours at latest Nothing much can happen until then."

His confidence had a slightly forced quality.

"Of course," said Thirp, "in a place like Amsterdam . . One can't answer for everything —. There's always been a strong reactionary movement. . . ."

Rud stood brooding over the map.

"This place might be quite a lively spot in no time," he said.

Olders burst in with a paper in his hand and handed it to Rud. Rud read it silently and then aloud: "Enemy army in open mutiny. Discipline gone. Higher Command and officers ask to surrender to us. They are in great danger Have ordered Cease Fire and am arranging surrender and armistice. Propose to proclaim World Peace forthwith based on self-determination."

"D'you hear that?" said Rud. "Based on self-determination."

"Only conditions generally acceptable. Trust you and Bellacourt will cooperate. . . ."

"We were prophetic," said Rud. "And now?"

"Either I shoot Reedly or he shoots me within the next twenty-four hours"

"My lads from London will be here," said Thirp; "it can't take them three hours. I don't see how I can possibly accelerate them. . . . Frankly I would if I could. Tell me about Bellacourt. How does he stand? Can these planes from America be brought here? In time? . . ."

Rud answered none of Thirp's questions. Instead he went on extracting particulars of the situation in Amsterdam.

(To be Continued)

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LONDON, Jan. 13—A play in three acts, called "The Promotion Examination" was shown to young officers of the London School of Military Instruction as part of their training in infantry attacks. It dealt with organization of the modern mechanization infantry battalion in attack, and was so successful that this form of teaching will be adopted on a wider scale.

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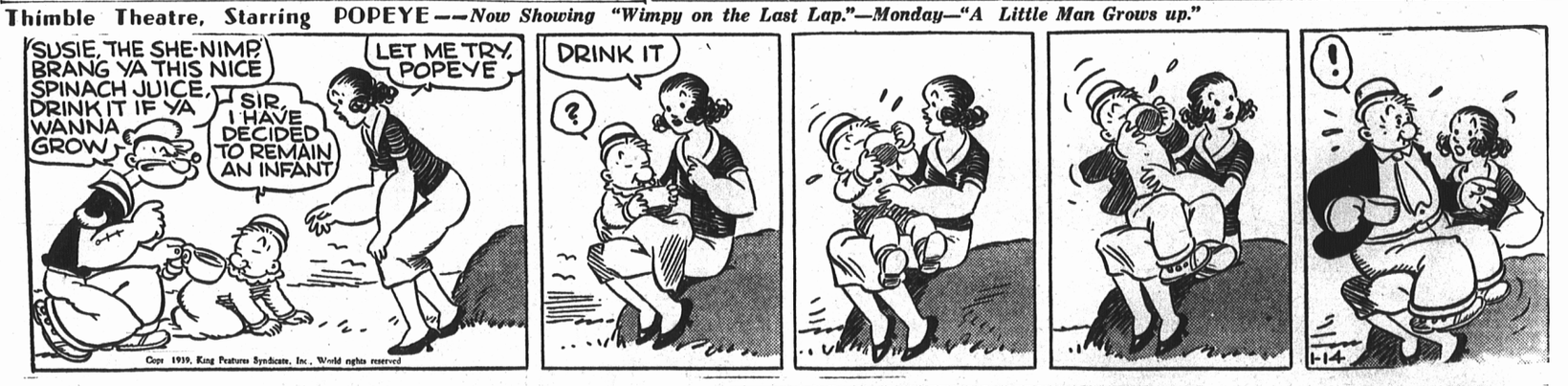

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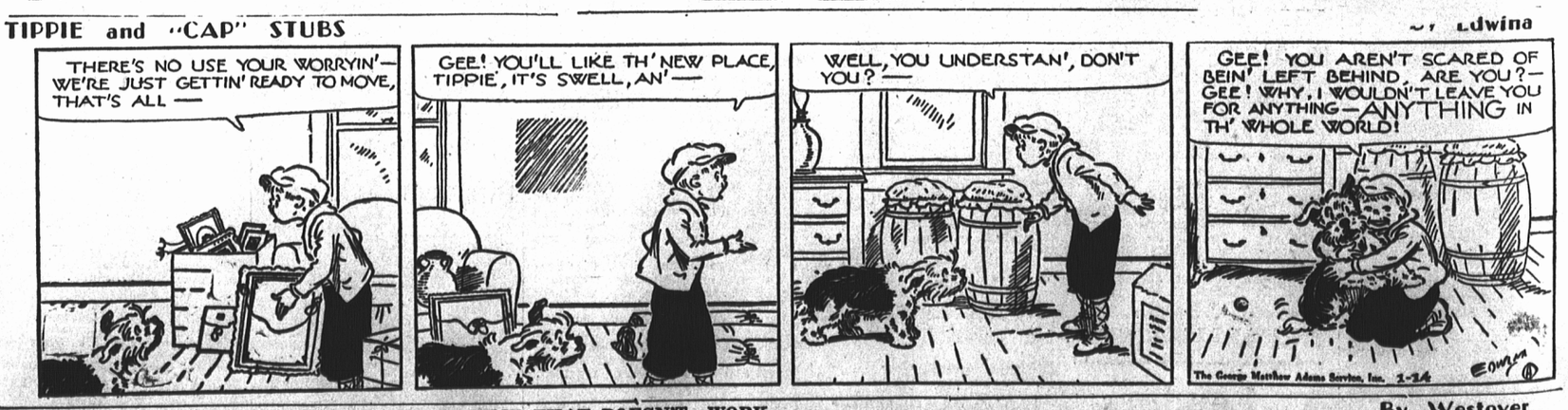
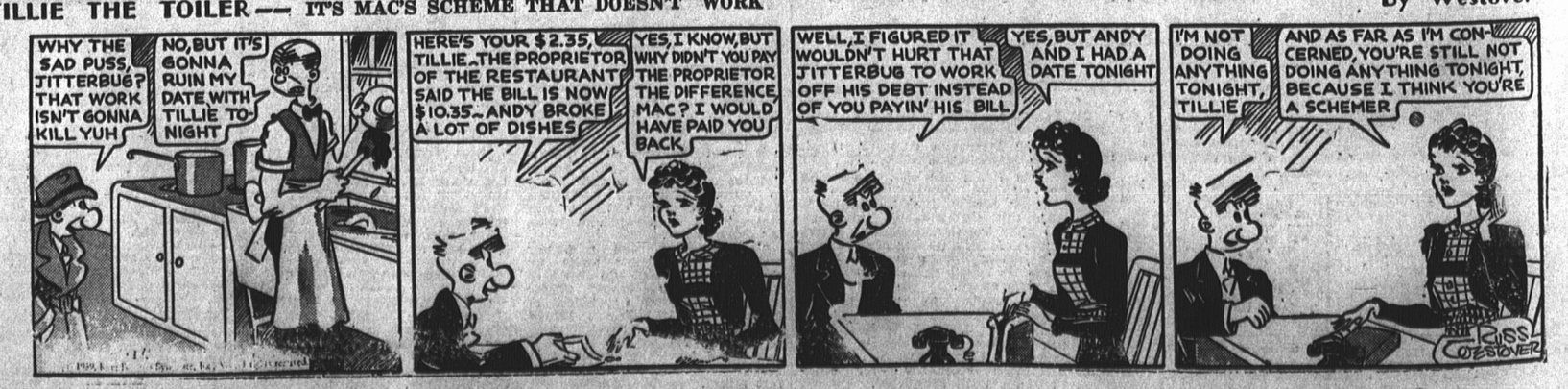
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