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BEST BY TEST

W. N. U., Salt Lake City, No. 18-1928

King Tommy

By George A. Birmingham
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"I'M ENGAGED"

SYNOPSIS.—In London the teller of the story of the adventures of "King Tommy," and known hereafter as "Uncle Bill," is informed by Lord Norheys, son of an old friend, that Lord Troyte, head of the British foreign office, Norheys' uncle, has a scheme to make him (Norheys) king of Lystria, in central Europe, through marriage to Calypso, daughter of King Wladislaws, deposed monarch of that country. A financier, Procopius Cable, knows there is oil in profusion in Lystria, and with an English king on the throne the output could be secured for England. Norheys, in love with a stage dancer, Viola Temple, is not enthusiastic over the proposition. The patriarch, Menelaus, highest ecclesiastical dignitary in Lystria, is heartily in favor of the restoration of the monarchy, and Cable has generously financed the sentiment. Calypso is making a living dancing in the "Maacotte," Berlin cabaret. Norheys refuses to entertain the idea of giving up Viola Temple, to whom he is secretly engaged.

CHAPTER II—Continued

Having got all that settled, Cable approached Lord Edmund Troyte with a proposal that the marquis of Norheys, his godson, should be king of Lystria. He would have to marry the princess, of course. The Lystrians, being strong legitimists, insisted on that. But the princess, so Cable said, was a beautiful girl, with charming manners and far more respectable than her father had ever been.

"As a matter of fact," said Troyte, "she's a dancer in Berlin. Wladislaws did not succeed in carrying off a penny from Lystria, so both he and the girl have to work for their living. But that is not an insuperable objection to her."

"Have you," I said, "laid that part of the scheme before Norheys, asked him whether he was willing to marry the princess?"

"Not yet," I said. "If I were you I'd mention that to Norheys before going any further. Indeed, it might be as well to find out what the princess thinks about it, too."

"She'll be all right," said Troyte. "Her name is Calypso."

"Girls are dreadfully independent nowadays," I said. "You can't be sure."

"She's dancing in a cabaret in Berlin. So Cable says."

"She ought to prefer being married, to that," I said. "Still if I were you I'd consult her. I should certainly consult Norheys."

Troyte took my advice about consulting Norheys; but he did not give me the satisfaction of telling me he meant to. He went on to discuss another side of the affair.

"The main thing," he said, "is that England should obtain control of the Lystrian oil. The civilization of the Twentieth century rests on oil precisely as that of the Nineteenth century rested on coal."

"Is that fellow Cable an Englishman?"

"He's a British subject," said Troyte, "naturalized before the war."

After that I had to listen to an account of the uses of oil in peace and war which bored me; to a description of the distribution of the present oil supply of the world and the small quantity of it controlled by England.

There, I think, lay the real motive of Troyte's action, the explanation of his consent to the plan of setting Norheys on the throne of Lystria. No doubt it pleased him—Troyte has a great deal of family pride—to think of his nephew being a king. And the Troytes had some slight connection with the Lystrian royal family. No doubt he thought that marriage to the Princess Calypso would save Norheys from an undesirable entanglement with Viola Temple. Troyte hated the idea of having to welcome that young lady as the next marchioness of Norheys. No doubt also Cable's remarkable personality had some influence with him. Procopius Cable is accustomed to getting his own way with all sorts of people, and has persuaded several clever men to do foolish things. Troyte likes and admires men of the Cable kind. He has a theory that the British empire has been built up by buccaners; in the Elizabethan days by buccaners who went forth in ships and looted, flying the British flag for their own protection, leaving it still fluttering in the places which they sacked after they sailed away. In the Eighteenth century the empire-building buccaners called themselves merchants, or merchant adventurers, but they acted exactly as their predecessors did, looting, and then leaving the care of the conquered provinces to embarrassed statesmen at home. At the end of the Nineteenth century the buccaners became financiers. But their methods and the results of them were the same as before. Procopius Cable was the latest and ablest of these filibustering empire-builders. That was Troyte's theory about him. And it influenced him in favor of any scheme suggested by Cable.

But the main thing was England's need of oil, and the possibility of obtaining an enormous supply of it in

Lystria. For the sake of England's greatness he was ready to sacrifice Norheys, if sacrifice had been necessary.

There was also another consideration which weighed with Troyte. He came to it when he had finished with the oil.

"The Germans," he said, "are scheming to put up a king of their own in Lystria. The man they have in mind is the Prinz von Steinfeldt."

"I used to know him," I said. "He was in the foreign office in Berlin. He must be a bit too old for the princess. Do you think she'd marry him?"

"The princess," said Troyte, "will marry the man she's told to."

"I was not so sure about that. The spirit of revolt against that doctrine of a girl's duty laid firm hold upon the middle classes years ago. Since then it has been spreading upward, and I dare say, downward. It would not surprise me to hear that rebellion is now openly advocated in the schoolrooms of palaces. Besides, Calypso appeared to be an emancipated woman. If she dances in a cabaret in Berlin she must have shed most of the garments of conventionality in which most princesses are wrapped."

"By the way," I said, "where's King Wladislaws now? As the girl's father he may want to have a say about her marriage."

"Wladislaws has gone under utterly," said Troyte. "I don't know where he is or what he's doing. We need not consider him."

CHAPTER III

Two or three days later Norheys came to me in the club where I was lunching.

"Look here, Uncle Bill," he said, "you remember my telling you the other day about my going in for being a king and that sort of thing."

"Yes," I said. "Well, Uncle Ned's been at me again and he's rather surprised me. Now, I'm a fellow who isn't at all easy to surprise; for what I always say is: Whatever happens—even if the jolly old sun doesn't turn up in the morning at the proper hour—take it calmly. And that's what I do, make a regular rule of it; but I'm bound to say Uncle Ned made me jump this time."

"If there's anything more surprising than being asked suddenly to be a

king," I said, "it must be something which would make an ancient Roman stoic jump."

"You'd never think," said Norheys, "that Uncle Ned would turn out to be a giddy matchmaker."

I knew what he was at then. Troyte must have taken my advice and mentioned the proposed marriage.

"He wants me to marry a black princess," said Norheys. "Now I'm not a prejudiced sort of fellow at all. Any girl may be a lady, don't you know? and a fellow ought to marry her, supposing he wants to, like the king that the poem's about who went round pretending to be a landscape painter and then married a beggar. I always say he was quite right there. If he really fancied the girl. But—well, hang it all, Uncle Bill, however unprejudiced a fellow is, he must draw the line somewhere, and I do think it's a bit thick asking me to marry a black princess."

"But," I said, "the Princess Calypso isn't black. What makes you think she is?"

"Sure to be. All those desert islandy places are governed by black princesses. I dare say she's good looking enough in her way. Uncle Ned seemed to think so. But I don't like them black. And—well, hang it all, no fellow can possibly be expected to be pleased when he finds his wife is tattooed all over; and they all are. Quite right of her, of course, if it's the thing to do in her own country. I'm not blaming her in the least. Only just I don't like it."

"My dear boy," I said, "I'm not advising you to be a king, or to marry the lady. But I think I ought to tell you that Lystria isn't an island. It's miles, perhaps hundreds of miles, from the sea, and I don't think that the Princess Calypso can possibly be black. I met her father once. He's

certainly white. The daughter wasn't born at that time, but her mother was an Englishwoman and a cousin of your own. It's most unlikely that the girl is black."

"Even so," said Norheys, "she'll be more or less savage, and I don't care for savages. It's not that I'm particularly keen on civilization. What I always say about that is that a lot of it is rather rot. Still, that's a different thing from marrying a savage. A girl ought to wear corsets, you know, and go to a decent dress-maker."

"You're wrong about that," I said. "The Central European aristocracy—and that's the class she belongs to—are quite civilized. She probably speaks half a dozen languages and gets her frocks from Paris—or used to. She can't now, poor thing, for her father is stony broke. That's the reason she's had to take to dancing. And I'm told that she's quite a good looking girl."

"She may be," said Norheys, "but my point is—that is to say, what I really feel is—"

There he stopped.

"If she isn't black," I said, "and isn't tattooed, and has ordinary manners, and wears corsets, which I'm perfectly certain she does, I don't see what your objection is."

"The fact is," said Norheys, "that I'm engaged to be married to Miss Temple."

"Did you tell your uncle that?" I asked.

"No, I didn't. I didn't want to ruffle the old boy, and that would have ruffled him. My idea is that you might break it to him, gently, don't you know, so as not to give him a shock. What I always say is this—if there's a jarring kind of thing which has to be said, it's better for a fellow to get some one else to say it."

"You realize of course," I said, "that if you refuse to marry Princess Calypso you can't be king of Lystria."

"I'd be sorry for that. I don't mind saying that I'd rather like to be king of that country. If Viola and I could go there together—"

"Viola?"

"That's Miss Temple. If she and I could set up there as king and queen, we could have a high old time and really make things hum. Viola would make a splendid queen, absolutely top hole."

"You may put that idea out of your head at once," I said.

"Uncle Ned and that stockbroker friend of his could have all the oil. We shouldn't want a drop for ourselves, and I'd make the good old Lystrians dig like the devil. You might try to get Uncle Ned to look at it from that point of view."

"It won't do," I said. "It really won't."

"I don't see why not. I mean to say I think it might be worked if we went the right way about it. I'm not much of a whale on court etiquette and ecclesiastical law but I've always had a notion that there's some sort of recognized dodge by which you can be married on the double if you're a king, both marriages being perfectly O. K."

"There are morganatic marriages," I said. "It's a left-handed and unsatisfactory arrangement. I don't think you ought to ask Miss Temple to agree to it."

"I wasn't thinking of asking her. The very last thing I want to do is to put Viola into an awkward position. In fact, I wouldn't do it, not even to please Uncle Ned. My idea is to marry her in St. George's, Hanover square, with a bishop and bridesmaids and all complete. The other one, this Calypso girl, that Uncle Ned is so keen on, could be the morganatic—what-do-you-call-it? I don't suppose she'd mind."

"My dear Norheys," I said, "she's a princess, the daughter of a man who was a European sovereign until a few years ago."

"I don't believe a black princess would be as particular as all that. Look here, Uncle Bill, you've always been jolly good to me and all that. Just you put the morganatic scheme up to Uncle Ned. Be as persuasive as you can. I expect he'll see his way to work it somehow. But you must make it quite clear that there's to be no hanky-panky about Viola's position. She may or may not be queen of Lystria, but she's jolly well going to be marchioness of Norheys."

"I'll speak to your uncle about it," I said, "but it won't be the slightest use. The thing's impossible."

"I don't see why. Lots of these sultans and pashas and people have whole harems full of wives. I don't want to go as far as that. At the same time, if they can do it, why can't I?"

"Nobody's proposing to set you up on the throne of a Moslem state," I said. "Lystria is a Christian country."

"Oh, come now, Christian. You can't call those countries Christian. Hang it all, Uncle Bill, it was only last week I gave a fellow a subscription to a missionary society especially to convert the heathen. He wouldn't want to convert them if they were Christians already, would he?"

"There's an archbishop there," I said. "A patriarch, which is a superior kind of archbishop. His name is Menelaus."

"Sounds to me like Greek grammar," said Norheys, "for the matter of that, so does Calypso, and I've always barred learning Greek grammar."

"Norheys evidently is not strong on geography but his heart seems to be all right. What's the next development?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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