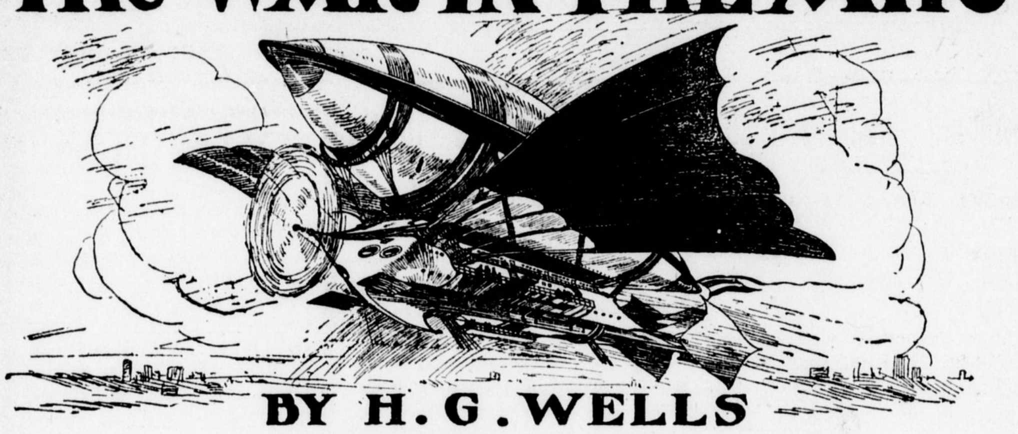
The WAR IN THE AIR



BY H. G. WELLS

PROLOGUE OF THE STORY.

Germany, hating the Monroe doctrine and ambitious for world's supremacy, secretly builds a vast fleet of airships and plans to surprise the United States by means of a sudden attack. Her airship fleet consists of great dirigibles of the Von Zeppelin type and small aeroplanes called Drachenflieger.

Prince Karl Albert commands the German airships. Germany and England have both been endeavoring to buy an extraordinary flying machine invented by Alfred Butteridge, who arrives at a British seaside resort in a runaway balloon, accompanied by a lady in whom he is interested.

Bert Smallways, a motorcycle dealer in hard luck, who is in love with Miss Edna Bunthorne, and his partner, Grubb, are impersonating a pair of "desert dervishes" at the seashore. Bert catches hold of the basket of the balloon and falls into it just as Butteridge and the lady fall out.

The balloon carries Bert across the North sea. He finds drawings of Butteridge's airship in some of Butteridge's clothing and hides the plans in his chest protector. His balloon drifts over Germany's immense aeronautic park. German soldiers shoot holes in it and capture Bert. They think he is Butteridge. Soldiers carry him to the cabin of the Vaterland, flagship of the air fleet. Lieutenant Kurt guards him. The vast fleet starts across the ocean to attack New York. Graf von Winterfield denounces Bert as an impostor, but offers him £500 for Butteridge's secret. The prince agrees to take Bert along "as ballast."

The Battle of the North Atlantic.

THE Prince Karl Albert had made a profound impression upon Bert. He was quite the most terrifying person Bert had ever encountered. He filled the Smallways soul with passionate dread and antipathy. For a long time Bert sat alone in Kurt's cabin, doing nothing and not venturing even to open the door lest he should be by that much nearer that appalling presence.

So it came about that he was probably the last person on board to hear the news that wireless telegraphy was bringing to the airship in throbs and fragments of a great naval battle in progress in mid-Atlantic.

He learned it at last from Kurt.

Kurt came in with a general air of ignoring Bert, but muttering to himself in English nevertheless. "Stupendous!" Bert heard him say. "Here," he said, "get off this locker." And he proceeded to rout out two books and a case of maps. He spread them on the folding table and stood regarding them. For a time his Germanic discipline struggled with his English informality and his natural kindliness and talkativeness and at last lost.

"They're at it, Smallways," he said.

"At what, sir?" said Bert, broken and respectful.

"Fighting! The American north Atlantic squadron and pretty nearly the whole of our fleet. Our Eiserne Kreuz has had a grueling and is sinking, and their Miles Standish—she's one of their biggest—has sunk with all hands. Torpedoes, I suppose. She was a bigger ship than the Karl der Grosse, but five or six years older. Gods! I wish we could see it, Smallways; a square fight in blue water, guns or nothing, and all of 'em steaming ahead!"

He spread his maps, he had to talk, and so he delivered a lecture on the naval situation to Bert.

"Here it is," he said, "latitude 30 degrees 50 minutes north; longitude 30 degrees 50 minutes west. It's a good day off us anyhow, and they're all going southwest by south at full pelt as hard as they can go. We shan't see a bit of it, worse luck! Not a sniff we shan't get!"

The naval situation in the north Atlantic at that time was a peculiar one. The United States was by far the stronger of the two powers upon the sea, but the bulk of the American fleet was still in the Pacific. It was in the direction of Asia that war had been most feared, for the situation between Asiatic and white had become unusually violent and dangerous, and the Japanese government had shown itself quite unprecedentedly difficult. The German attack, therefore, found half the American strength at Manila and what was called the second fleet strung across the Pacific in wireless contact between the Asiatic station and San Francisco. The north Atlantic squadron was the sole American force on her eastern shore. It was returning from a friendly visit to France and Spain and was pumping oil fuel from tenders in mid-Atlantic—for most of its ships were steamships—when the international situation became acute. It was made up of four battleships and five armored cruisers ranking almost with battleships, not one of which was of a later date than 1913. The Americans had indeed grown so accustomed to the idea that Great Britain could be trusted to keep the peace of the Atlantic that a naval attack on the eastern seaboard found them unprepared even in their imaginations. But long before the declaration of war—indeed, on Whitmonday—the whole German fleet of eighteen battleships, with a flotilla of fuel tenders and converted liners containing stores to be used in support of the air fleet, had passed through the [illegible] for New York. Not only did these German battleships outnumber the Americans two to one, but they were more heavily armed and more modern in construction, seven of them having high explosive engines built of Charlottenburg steel and all carrying Charlottenburg steel guns.

The fleets came into contact on Wednesday before any actual declaration of war. The Americans had strung out in the modern fashion at distances of thirty miles or so and were steaming to keep themselves between the Germans and either the eastern states or Panama, because, vital as it was to defend the seaboard cities, and particularly New York, it was still more vital to save the canal from any attack that might prevent the return of the main fleet from the Pacific. No doubt, said Kurt, this was now making records across that ocean, "unless the Japanese have had the same idea as the Germans." It was obviously beyond human possibility that the American north Atlantic fleet could hope to meet and defeat the German; but, on the other hand, with luck it might fight a delaying action and inflict such damage as to greatly weaken the attack upon the coast defenses. Its duty, indeed, was not victory, but devotion, the severest task in the world. Meanwhile the submarine defenses of New York, Panama and the other more vital points could be put in some sort of order.

This was the naval situation, and until Wednesday in Whit week it was the only situation the American people had realized. It was then they heard for the first time of the real scale of the Dornhof Aeronautic park and the possibility of an attack coming upon them not only by sea, but by the air. But it is curious that so discredited were the newspapers of that period that a large majority of New Yorkers, for example, did not believe the most copious and circumstantial accounts of the German air fleet until it was actually in sight of New York.

Kurt's talk was half soliloquy. He stood with a map on Mercator's projection before him, swaying to the swinging of the ship and talking of guns and tonnage, of ships and their build and powers and speed, of strategic points and bases of operation. A certain shyness that reduced him to the status of a listener at the officers' table no longer silenced him.

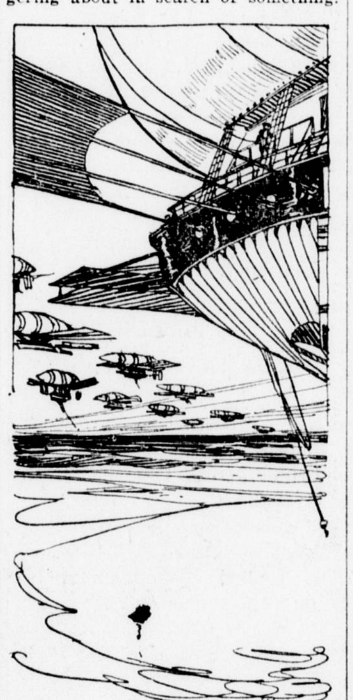
Bert stood by, saying very little, but watching Kurt's finger on the map. "They've been saying things like this in the papers for a long time," he remarked. "Fancy it coming real!"

Kurt had a detailed knowledge of the Miles Standish. "She used to be a crack ship for gunnery—held the record. I wonder if we beat her shooting, or how? I wish I was in it. I wonder which of our ships beat her. Maybe she got a shell in her engines. It's a running fight! I wonder what the Barbarossa is doing," he went on. "She's my old ship. Not a first rater, but good stuff. I bet she's got a shot or two home by now if old Schneider's up to form. Just think of it! There they are whacking away at each other, great guns going, shells exploding, magazines bursting, ironwork flying about like straw in a gale, all we've been dreaming of for years! I suppose we shall fly right away to New York—just as though it wasn't anything at all. I suppose we shall reckon we aren't wanted down there. It's no more than a covering fight on our side. All those tenders and storeships of ours are going on southwest by west to New York to make a floating depot for us. See?" He dabbed his forefinger on the map. "Here we are. Our train of stores goes there, our battleships elbow the Americans out of our way there."

When Bert went down to the men's mess room to get his evening ration hardly an[illegible]ice of him ex[illegible] for an instant. Every one was talking of the battle, suggesting, contradicting; at times, until the petty officers hushed them, it rose to a great uproar. There was a new bulletin, but what it said he did not gather, except that it concerned the Barbarossa. Some of the men stared at him, and he heard the name of "Bootoraldge" several times. But no one molested him, and there was no difficulty about his soup and bread when his turn at the end of the cue came. He had feared there might be no ration for him, and if so he did not know what he would have done.

Afterward he ventured out upon the little hanging gallery with the solitary sentinel. The weather was still fine, but the wind was rising and the rolling swing of the airship increasing. He clutched the rail tightly and felt rather giddy. They were now out of sight of land and over blue water rising and falling in great masses. A dingy old brigantine under the British flag rose and plunged amid the broad blue waves, the only ship in sight.

In the evening it began to blow and the airship to roll like a porpoise as it swung through the air. Kurt said that several of the men were seasick, but the motion did not inconvenience Bert, whose luck it was to be of that mysterious gastric disposition which constitutes a good sailor. He slept well, but in the small hours the light awoke him, and he found Kurt staggering about in search of something.



They Were Now Out of Sight of Land.

He found it at last in the locker and held it in his hand unsteadily—a compass. Then he compared his map.

"We've changed our direction," he said, "and come into the wind. I can't make it out. We've turned away from New York to the south. Almost as if we were going to take a hand"—

He continued talking to himself for some time.

Day came, wet and windy. The window was bedewed externally, and they could see nothing through it. It was also very cold, and Bert decided to keep rolled up in his blankets on the locker until the bugle summoned him to his morning ration. That consumed, he went out on the little gallery, but he could see nothing but eddying clouds driving headlong by and the dim outlines of the nearer airships.

Later in the morning the Vaterland changed altitude and soared up suddenly in a high, clear sky, going, Kurt said, to a height of nearly 13,000 feet.

Bert was in his cabin and chanced to see the dew vanish from the window and caught the gleam of sunlight outside. He looked out and saw once more that sunlit cloud floor he had seen first from the balloon, and the ships of the German air fleet rising one by one from the white, as fish might rise and become visible from deep water. He stared for a moment and then ran out to the little gallery to see this wonder better. Below were cloudland and storm, a great drift of tumbled weather going hard away to the northeast, and the air about him was clear and cold and serene save for the faintest chill breeze and a rare drifting snowflake. Throb, throb, throb, throb, went the engines in the stillness. That huge herd of airships rising one after another had an effect of strange, portentous monsters breaking into an unfamiliar world.

[To be continued.]

A GLANCE AT WORLD AFFAIRS

THE din of ushering in the new year being all over and gone, the various reform resolutions having been made and some of them already broken, the natural query is, What of 1912? The only thing we know for sure is that a presidential election will be held this year, maneuvering for which is already going forward. One peculiar feature of the contest is that presidential primaries will be held in several states, thus giving the voters a chance to give their direct preferences for candidates on both sides. Some of these primaries come as early as March. Thus the battle may be expected to continue with ever increasing fierceness for the next ten months.

Committees Getting Busy.

Both of the national committees have opened headquarters and are in active preparation for the big fight. The Republican committee met in December, and the Democratic committee will soon convene. It is generally believed that the Democratic national convention will be called to meet soon after that of the Republican. These gatherings will, of course, start the public part of the campaign, but it must not be supposed that the real beginning is delayed to that time. A long preparation is necessary, including the gathering of names bringing of mailing lists up to date, selecting literature, preparing for conventions, choosing speakers and attending to a thousand and one other details. For this work Urey Woodson of the Democratic national committee opened headquarters in Chicago as early as last November.

Urey Woodson of Democratic National Committee.

End of the Circuit Courts.

In consequence of a law passed by congress on March 3, 1911, all the United States circuit courts went out of existence at midnight, Dec. 31. There were seventy-seven of these courts, doing business at 276 different places. None of the judges went out of office, however, but continued as district judges. The only men who lost their jobs were the circuit court clerks and some minor court officials.

American Historical Association.

One of the most important meetings of historians and teachers and students of history has just closed its sessions. This was the convention of the American Historical association, which started at Buffalo on Dec. 27 and continued till the 30th, the last session being held at Cornell university, a special train carrying the delegates from Buffalo to Ithaca. With the Historical association met the Political Science association and some other bodies. Because held so close to the Canadian border some attention was also given to Canadian history.

Notable Scientific Conventions.

At the same time the historians were gathered at Buffalo and Ithaca several scientific conventions were in session in Washington. Among these were the American Association For the Advancement of Science, the American Chemical society and the American Economic association. Each of the conventions extended from Dec. 27 to 30. The subject of pure foods and drugs was among those discussed by the chemical society.

Retiring Old Guard Officers.

Shifting to a more martial subject, the national guard of New York retired all officers over sixty-four years of age on Dec. 31. Some of these officers were past seventy. There has been a growing tendency in recent years to make the national guard of the various states conform more closely to the rules of the regular army, which in case of war it would be called upon to supplement.

Echo of Thackeray Centenary.

The centennial celebration of the birth of William Makepeace Thackeray was generally held last July, but one in New York was delayed until Dec. 27. The proceeds of this went to the benefit of Virginia mountaineers.

Athletic Events.

Despite the fact that midwinter is not a good season for sports, three athletic events of some importance occurred during the past week. The first of these in point of time were the indoor national athletic championship events held at Madison Square Garden, New York, starting Dec. 26. This is among the last of the affairs that will be pulled off in this historic building, as it is to be torn down shortly. On Dec. 27 the Canadian hockey season opened. The following day the National Collegiate Athletic association of the United States met in New York.

Another Peace Banquet.

Despite the fact that the earth is filled with wars and rumors of wars, the peace advocates are still busy. On Dec. 30 the citizens' peace banquet committee performed its allotted functions by holding a peace dinner in New York. Strange as it may seem, the event came dangerously near to war with the American Peace society, headed by Andrew Carnegie. When we cannot even keep the peace between peace societies, what hope is there for the unregenerate?

Harriman Headquarters.

With the beginning of the new year the headquarters of the Harriman railroads are in New York. The change was accompanied by the retirement of John C. Stubbs as traffic director of these lines. Another event in the railroad world of some importance to the traveling public is the beginning of work on the new union station in Chicago. It is to occupy the site of the old union station and is to be used by the same railroads—viz, the Pennsylvania, the Burlington and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. Travelers who pass through the Windy City have dared to hope that she would some day have a union station into which all the roads would run, but this would be too good to be true. Besides, the aforesaid travelers could not then see so much of Chicago.

For Federal Liability Law.

The employers' liability and workmen's compensation commission, headed by Senator Sutherland of Utah, has completed its labors and prepared its report. Senator Sutherland has announced that personally he favors assessing the damages for each individual case of injury to the employer of the man injured, but others support a plan for a liability fund made up by employers, which shall be drawn upon in case of accident. This is a sort of insurance, except that the workmen themselves do not have to make up the fund. It is believed that the report of this committee will lead to legislation on the subject during the present session of congress.

Navy Navigation Head.

Commander Philip Andrews, former aid to the secretary of the navy, becomes head of the all powerful bureau of navigation in the navy department on Jan. 1, succeeding Rear Admiral Reginald F. Nicholson, who will hoist his flag as commander in chief of the United States Asiatic fleet. Although Admiral Nicholson is relieved of his duty as head of the navigation bureau the first of the year, he will not assume his new command until some time in March, when he will relieve Rear Admiral Murdock.

Commander Andrews, born in New York, was appointed from New Jersey, entering the service in 1882.

Foreign Events.

War continues in many parts of the earth, although the speech of the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, seems to have dissipated the clouds hanging over England and Germany. There have been one or two issues of veracity between Sir Edward and the German foreign minister, Herr von Kiderlen-Waechter, but nations seldom go to war over a matter of veracity between their ministers.

Italy is still plugging away at the Arabs and Turks in Tripoli, and there is hope that she may conquer her new province some day.

The Chinese revolutionists are yet revoluting, although Yuan Shih Kai seemingly has a firmer grip on the situation. It now appears probable that some sort of limited monarchy will result in China, with the Manchus singing rather small.

Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary.

Persia has given in to Russia, and it seems only a question of time until the country will be divided between Russia and Great Britain. [1B]

COMMON PHRASES

Here Are the Origins of Some Popular Forms of Expression.

REAL DUN WAS A COLLECTOR

"Mind Your P's and Q's" Attributed to Old English Alehouses' Queer Charge Account System—How the Name "Uncle Sam" Was Coined.

Here are the forgotten origins of a number of words and phrases that are used every day by all manner of men. Few of the people who use them know where the came from.

Joe Dun was a famous bailiff, who had a reputation as a collector of bad debts that was second to no one in England. Whenever one man complained to another that his debtors were slow he was always advised "to Dun them." Millions of people on or about the first of every month are reminded of the meaning of the short word of three letters, but few of them know anything about old Joe Dun of London town.

"Not worth a picayune" dates back to the days when the Frenchmen held Louisiana and New Orleans was the gay capital of what was left of New France. There was a coin of small value known as the "picayune." It was naturally used to show that a thing was well nigh valueless, not worth the snap of a finger.

An expression that is almost forgotten now was "a flash in the pan." Since percussion caps, fixed ammunition and breechloading guns have displaced the flintlock this expression has lost its meaning. It used to be said of any man who started out brilliantly and failed that he "was a flash in the pan." When men hunted and fought with flintlock rifles they were frequently annoyed by the powder in the pan under the flint flaring up and in the rifle barrel. This mishap was going out without igniting the charge called a "flash in the pan."

The word "news" is a new word when compared with many others and had a peculiar origin, states the St. Louis Republic. It is not derived from the adjective "new." Three or four hundred years ago it was unknown. When newspapers were first started they had a custom of placing at the top of their first page a sort of a cross. The four ends of the cross lines were marked "N.," "E.," "W.," "S." This signified that the paper contained intelligence from north, south, east and west—in fact, from all over the world.

"Humbug" is a word that seems to express exactly a certain shade of rascality. Its origin goes back to James II., who ordered coined at the Dublin mint a certain coin made of base metal. Anything that was handiest was used in the making of this money—lead, copper, pewter and brass were all poured into the melting pots at different times. So low was its intrinsic value that 20 shillings of it was hardly worth twopence. The Irishmen knew this soft base metal as uim bog, meaning soft copper or worthless money.

Thus the word "humbug" originated through men saying "That is a piece of uim bog. Don't try to pass any uim bog on me." In the course of time the Englishman added an "h" to the front of the word.

The expression "Mind your P's and Q's" is said to have originated in the old English alehouses, where customers' accounts were marked up on the wall behind the door of the taproom. In marking down these accounts it was customary to put the initials "P" and "Q" at the head of every man's account to show the number of pints and quarts he owed for.

Two mythical figures are often used as being symbolical of the United States of America. One is known as "Brother Jonathan" and the other is the better known "Uncle Sam." Both originated from actual people. When Washington went to Massachusetts to reorganize the continental army he found a great lack of ammunition and supplies. Jonathan Trumbull, then governor of Connecticut, had proved himself the strong man of New England, and his advice was much sought. Placing great reliance on Trumbull, Washington is said to have remarked: "We must ask Brother Jonathan about this."

This was done, and Trumbull was able to suggest a way out of the difficulty. Thenceforth, when difficulties arose it became the byword, "We must consult Brother Jonathan," and the name became a sort of designation for the plain, common sense of the whole country.

During the war with England in 1812 a contractor visited Troy, N. Y., and bought many supplies for the American army. The inspector left there by the army was known as "Uncle Sam" Wilson. The casks of foodstuff were all marked "U. S." Another inspector was asked what the "U. S." meant. He answered that he had no idea unless it referred to "Uncle Sam" Wilson. The joke took among the workmen and gradually spread over the United States.

The expression "to have a feather in one's cap" takes on a certain gruesome meaning when its origin is found. There is an old manuscript in the British museum which relates of Hungary in 1599, that "it hath been an ancient custom among them that none should wear a feather in his cap unless he had killed a Turk. It was lawful to show the number of these slain enemies by the number of feathers worn in the headgear."