

THE O.P.Q. RAYS.

BY HENRY A. HERING.



ONCE upon a time," began the old man, "I was a Britisher."
"Gosh!" said a smart young hardware drummer, "that's a poor beginnin'."

Mr. John Daniels looked at the speaker with marked disapprobation. "If you can't cotton to my beginnin'," he said, "I don't think my middle'll soot your constitootion, an' I'm certain my end won't. P'raps someone else'll oblige."

"Go on, daddy," was the general chorus. "Don't mind Sandy. We'll smother him nex' time."

Mr. Daniels was mollified. He rolled a cigarette with the dexterity that comes of much practice, lit it with calm deliberation, and then resumed—

"As I war a-sayin' when that darned hayseed interrupted, one time I war a Britisher. Seems sorter unnatural now, but at the time I rather fancied it. The only people I knew were British, barrin' Uncle Mick, an' he were Irish; the only songs I knew were British—'Rule, Britannia!' an' 'We won't go Home till Mornin'!'—an' the only langwidge I spoke was British. I couldn't speak Amurrican before I made the acquaintance of the O.P.Q. Rays."

"What's the O.P.Q. Rays, Mr. Daniels?" asked an intelligent inquirer.

"This hyer yarn's full of 'em," said the narrator. "I'm gettin' to 'em as quick as I can, but there's such a blamed lot of interruptin'."

The intelligent inquirer subsided bashfully, and after a dignified pause Mr. Daniels resumed—

"I lived in Leeds, in Yorkshire, England, when I was a Britisher. I used to write poems for the newspapers for a livin'; but I only had a very thin time of it, although my poetry referred to the best class of dry goods on the market.

"Britishers were lords of creation in those

days. They'd lost the lead in pig-iron an' rails, but they held the record in aristocracy an' solid conceit. They weren't pertic'lar strong at book-learnin', but no one could touch 'em at football an' cricket an' fox-huntin'.

"But someone was always breakin' their records. You scarcely ever opened a paper without readin' that a Yankee or a German had left 'em miles behind in somethin'. Still the Britishers were quite cheerful about it. You see, they held so many records. A big geologer made a list of 'em at the end of the nineteenth century, when I was a lad, an' even then we led the field in 972 lines. I've forgotten most of 'em, but I remember they included cavalry uniforms, the House of Lords, marmalade, an' peggy-tubs. So seated on 972 pinnacles, the British nation could afford to start the new century with the bands playin' 'Cock-a-Doodle-Do!' with encore verses.

"Well, it seemed that this royal geologer, instead of doin' a service to his country by makin' out his stupenjus list, had just turned the few level heads that were left in the land, for the British made no attempt to add to the 972 pinnacles, an' their neighbours spent most of their time in subtractin' from them. By 1920 the same geologer discovered that the British had lost 560 leads, an' now held only 412; an' the nex' day's paper said that Sprankenstein's Aut'matic Peggies could mend the wristbands an' buttonholes, an' wash, starch, iron, an' deliver shirts, within fifteen minutes of receipt—which meant another record lost for the United Kingdom. The *Times* had a leadin' article on peggy-tubs, an' Consols dropped five p'ints. An' a fortnight after that came the O.P.Q. Rays, an' the end.

"There was a young man managin' the German Empire just then. I've forgotten his name, but we'll call him Richard for short. He was an emperor, a king, a poet, a scene-painter, an orator, a musician, a soldier, an' a sailor. He'd broken more records than any single emperor since Julius Cæsar, an' he was determined to wind up with breakin' the British Empire. An' he did it.

"Richard had started trade early in life,

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"A Sauerkraut, armed to the teeth, was standing over them."

an' was up to all the tricks of the emperor business. He did the finest line in soldiers, bar none; an' his fleet was always assimilat'in'. His grandfather hadn't left him any colonial branches for his store, an' Richard's main object in life was to open some. But most of 'em were held by the United Kingdom, so Richard had to bide his time till the United Kingdom was abstracted, when he reckoned he'd just pop in an' collar colonial branches an' main establishment as well.

"He chose his time well, did Richard. I remember we were all busy decidin' whether football should be included in the modern or the classical side of our schools' curriculums. The Tories said the Romans played football, an' if that was proved, it would have settled the matter; but the Radicals opined that it wasn't football at all that the Romans played, but deck-quoits, an' they maintained that football was discovered in Charles the First's time by the same man who invented bottled beer, which brought

the game well into the modern section. The whole nation was divided on the subject, an' elections were lost an' won on it, an' heads opened out.

"It was summer-time, so football was off, but cricket was patronised strong by both classical and moderns. There's no darned antiquity about cricket. It was the 19th of August when the big game of the year—*Egypt versus London*—took place at Park Avenue, Bradford. The match had been well advertised, an' Britishers came by motor from New Zealand, Africa, an' other Colonies to see it. There was a fair amount of airships as well, an' only an odd dozen or so foundered. People that stayed at home saw the match by wireless telecopy, an' applauded through the absentees' megaphone over the reporters' stand. I remember the committee had to plug the instrument half-way through the game.

"There were over a hundred thousand spectators ranged round the amphitheatre, which was built after the original at Athens. Cricket was cricket in those days, an' the Prince of Wales an' the Commander-in-Chief in full uniform were with the Lord Lieutenant of the county on the grand-stand, an' behind the spectators were the Army an' swell club tents runnin' with salmon an' champagne jest as at the horse-races. They'd elevated cricket about as high as it could go, an' the captains of first-class counties rode before the youngest sons of marquises in the Lord Mayor's Show.

"I didn't cotton to cricket myself. I only went there that day to see if Egyptians took to battin' as well as they did to pyramids. I don't know who was winnin'. I don't think I ever knew, for my thoughts were runnin' on a poem I was writin' for the agony column of a daily newspaper, an' all the time I was watchin', my brain was strivin' to get the rhymes to fit. But 'twarn't no blamed use with a prince of the House of Pharaoh distractin' me with his swipes, so at three o'clock I slipped away to walk across the moors to Ilkley, an' finish my poem amidst the smell of the heather an' the wild-fowl. It was about somebody's hair-curlers, an' I knew that if I gave myself freely up to Nature, I should find the adjectives I wanted. An' I wasn't disappointed. Before I reached Ilkley I'd finished that poem, an' started another on all-wool pants an' vests for a Society print.

"My intention was to have my tea, an' then walk home. There was a full moon due, which would see me well through my

underclothin' sonnet, an' like as not give me a notion ahead. I struck the town at seven o'clock, an' noticed a cluster of folk round a news-shop door. I shouldered my way through them, an' read the poster myself—

"GERMAN ARMY
LANDED AT HULL.
YORK CAPTURED."

And it wasn't a comic journal, either, but one that spent its time in runnin' England, Home, an' Beauty on first-class lines.

"The Germans at Hull. York Captured.' I ain't much of a fighter. I haven't got it in size nor yet in blood, but as I read this the letters seemed to rise oute the poster. Somethin' wanted to burst inside me, an' I'd like to have smashed a big china bowl or an emperor. But as neither of these articles was handy, I jest slipped inside the shop an' fought for a paper. This is what I read—

"Sheffield, 3 p.m. A Midland fireman has jest brought the astounding news that German troops landed at Hull at ten this mornin', an' captured the town without the Mayor an' Coppelation strikin' a blow in its defence.

"At twelve o'clock a regiment of Imperial Sauerkrants detrained at York, which is now in the possession of the Teutons.

"Where are our soldiers?

"Our electric communications have apparently been in the hands of the enemy since daybreak. The last news from London came through at 5 a.m. Since that hour our Marconi instrument has steadily recorded Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' which some humorist is supplyin' gratis to this office. We are now wadin' through the last canto, an' we will report what follows in our next edition. Since five o'clock our wireless telescopic view has remained fixed on the monkey-house of the Zoological Society's Gardens at Regent's Park, an' no notice is taken of our signals for release. The only news of the outside world which we had this morning is the lunch cricket-score, which has come through by carrier-pigeon from Bradford, an' which will be found on page 4.

"The wires have evidently been cut.

"An' the Germans hold Yorkshire."

"I stood there transmixed. Was I myself or somebody else? Was I stark mad, or dreamin', or what? But there was Ilkley, jest as usual. A wagonette full of happy tipplers returnin' from the country taprooms

passed me. There were the bath-chairs with the old ladies inside, an' the donkeys with the kids on top, jest as you see them on the post-cards. Two pierrots with illuminated faces crossed the road. One was hummin' 'Haughty Hilda Hopkins,' an' I remember he had the music in his hand. The sun was

not carin' whether it took me to Timbuctoo or the Scilly Isles. As a matter of fact, it steered straight for my own city.

"There were two other folk in the compartment—a parson an' his wife. I asked 'em what they thought of the German invasion. They hadn't heard of it. The parson pulled out a temperance paper, an' read it ostentatious under my nose, an' his wife looked reprovin' at me over her tattin'. At Otley two farmers got in. They had heard about the Germans. They had three cows grazin' Hull way, an' they were goin' to fetch 'em off any prospective battlefields.

"The parson put his paper away an' said somethin' about the German invasion bein' the natural consequence of our refusin' to adopt the metric system of calculatin'. It was a new idea to me, an' I wanted to argue it out. We were discussing it when the train drew up outside Holbeck. Snakes! but it was close, though both windows were down. The parson's wife dropped her tattin' an' went to sleep. The parson's tongue stopped in the middle of a big word it was elocutin', an' he began to nod. We looked on, sleepy-like. I wanted to lift the tattin' from the floor, but I couldn't move my legs. It was funny to be like that. Only eight o'clock in the evenin', an' the Germans in Yorkshire, an' all of us droppin' off to sleep! I struggled hard, and then I remembered no more for a bit.

"I awoke shiverin'; we were in Leeds Station. It was four o'clock in the mornin', an' chilly at that. I tried to remember things. Was it all a dream, the Germans an' the railway talk?

But there was the parson, an' his wife, an' the farmers.

"'All out!' shouted a station help in a sort o' muffled voice. We stretched our lim's an' got out, an' there on the platform was a file of blue-vested, white-trousered, brass-bound men in helmets—Germans!



"The sentry was starin' at my permit."

still stuck up in the sky, shinin' hard all the time. And the Germans held Yorkshire!

"With a curse I crumpled up the paper an' hustled into the railway station. The newspaper-stall was besieged. It might have been Derby Day. A train was jest startin'. I felt I must keep movin', an' I jumped in,

"I went up to the officer with the Methuselah beard.

"What's the meanin' of this, captain?" I asked. "I've been asleep."

"He grinned down to his boots. 'Ja, ja, mein Freund,' he said. 'You haf all been to sleep. You are in Leeds, but you are in Tehermany.'

"Before I could condemn his geography I was hustled along. Below the clock was a bigger lot of Sauerkrauts, munchin' their early mornin' sausage. A donnerblitzen lieutenant with spectacles an' drawn sword formed us into single file, an' marched us to the cloak-room window. At the other side of it was another officer, with a couple of Sauerkrauts behind him. Some penmen were writin' at desks.

"Name an' address?"

"John Daniels, 21, Marlin's Terrace, Headingly."

"Occupation?"

"Poet."

"Ha!" spurted the officer. "Dis man is dantcherous. Mark dis, sare, if dere is drouble, de boets vill first be shot. Oonterstant?"

"Your Emperor is a poet," I replied, for I was marked.

"Vat!" he blazed out. "You are a temagogue also? Boet and temagogue! See, I note your name, an' he splodged the register. 'You will be vatched. You are a lucky man if you come out of dis mess alive. Mark me, neider write nor talk. I vatch you. Take dis.' He handed me a paper. 'It is a bearmit exbirin' in von hour. If you are found in de streets after dat, you are shot. Be off, boet an' temagogue. Bah!"

"Then I found myself in City Square. Blue-tanicked soldiers marched round the statue of Edward the Black Prince. They were h'istin' the German flag over the post-office. I was a stamp-collector, so I made my way across to get some of the new issues. A patrol stopped me. I showed my paper.

"Hasten up," said the Sauerkraut, p'intin' to the clock. "De minutes fly, do not delay."

"I made a note of that sentence for a poem. It was rather catchin' metre, an' I'd got it into persition before I'd lost sight of the tail of Edward's charger—

"Our sale will close the end of May,
The minutes fly, so don't delay.

"Seemed sorter sardonic, compositin' poetry in the midst of the enemy; but in warfare the venter of civilisation is dropped, an' the nat'ral man shows himself.

"I walked to Headingly, where I was lodgin'. The streets were empty save for German soldiers an' civilians, like myself, hurryin' home. Every ten lamp-posts I was stopped by an inquisitive patrol. I got inter the way of showin' my permit to every soldier I met, whether he asked for it or not; but there was no gratitude expressed in their replies.

"My permit expired at six. It was after time when I reached my road, five minutes past the hour when I got to No. 21. There was a Sauerkraut bearin' down on me fifty yards away. I flourished my permit at him, stuck it on the top of the gate-palin', and got inside.

"I lived in the attic, as is the habit of poets. The downstairs rooms were let to a college coach. He came into the passage when he heard the door open. He said that at one o'clock the day before he was pilotin' a medical student through the campaigns of Julius Caesar. The student fell asleep as they were crossin' a river; an' right in the middle of the battle of Hastings or Marathon he dozed off again. Nex' time he fell asleep his master j'ined him, an' when they woke in the evenin' a Sauerkraut, armed to the teeth, was standin' over them. They were so astonished that they called him 'Julius' at first.

"Read dis," he said, showin' a paper.

"In the name of his Imperial Majesty, Richard, Emperor of the Germans on Land and over Sea, King of Prussia, etsettery, etsettery.

"Your country is in the possession of the Imperial troops.

"Your Army is impotent, an' your Government is grouse-shootin'.

"Resistance to the Imperial by-laws an' regulations will be punished by instant death.

"You will keep to your domicile. If you venture into the open without permit, you will be destroyed.

"Provision carts will call regularly for orders. In case of incivility or inattention, communicate with the Imperial Central Office, Town Hall, Leeds. Telephone number, 883.

"(Signed) GENERAL STUFFMACHER,
"Chief of the Staff."

"Then the Deutscher grinned fiercely an' clattered away.

"What does it all mean?" asked the college man. "What's goin' on outside?"

"Alarums, excursions, an' Hohenzollerns!" I replied. "They've evaded our



"They could roll out German songs."

Army, captured our cities, an' ended up with insultin' our national literatoor at the Midland Railway cloak-room window.' Then I told all I knew, which was little enough. Leeds, like Hull an' York, had apparently been capture'd without a blow bein' struck. Where was our Army, our Militia, our Volunteers, our anythin'? Could nothin' be done?

"We looked outer the window. The sentry was starin' at my permit stuck on the gate. There was another pacin' the opposite side of the road. There was the sound of tootin', an' they turned briskly round as a

circus procession appeared at the end of the street. No, it was a squadron of Sauerkraut cavalry, with colours flyin', trumpets flarin', an' kettle-drums beatin', lookin' as if they were takin' a leadin' part in a coronation. Every window was soon filled with gloomy spectators. The dragoons passed, the sentries resumed their beats. People left the windows. We turned to each other. No, nothin' could be done. We might overpower the sentries; but we were not in a persition to receive cavalry. The Germans held Leeds. All we could do was to sit tight till the grouse-shootin' was over, an' in

the meantime file the address of the Sauerkraut Central Office.

"An hour later there was a ring at the front-door bell. Mrs. Tinker, our landlady, answered it, but at the sight of two fully rigged Hohenzollern troopers she fled down the cellar steps, callin' to us to save her.

"'What noo outrage is this?' I said sternly to the soldiers, who were now in the passage.

"They fixed up their helmets on the hatstand, looked at themselves in the mirror, an' then turned round an' said in chorus: 'Bier und breakfast.'

"They were billeted upon us. Before they left that afternoon they had eaten and drunk up everythin' in the house. They communicated with the Central Office to some tune, for two hours later a wagon arrived an' shot out bottled stuff an' provisions enough for startin' a store, an' it took the product of four summer fashion poems an' a course of Latin lectures to settle the bill the driver brought.

"We had those troopers with us for a week. They slept in their boots in our beds, an' they skeered Mrs. Tinker out of her wits every time she saw them with their lingo an' goin's on. They could roll out German songs to the piano till the sentries outside jined in the chorus, but the only English they knew related to the provision trade. They tried to talk Latin to the college man, but he'd only learnt the classical side of it, an' they only knew the modern, so they had to leave it at that. Never a word of information could we get. To all our questions they only shook their heads an' replied: 'Anodder Lager Bier,' till it got too expensive to talk to them.

"An' all the time, day an' night, the sentries marched outside, an' cavalry an' artillery rode up an' down. Was nothin' else ever goin' to happen? Was the grouse-shootin' never goin' to end, an' the fun begin? Were we never goin' to have a look-in?

"We passed notes to our neighbours; we bored holes in the walls and talked through hose pipes; we met at night on the roofs. Tommy Travers, who lived at 34, volunteered for active service, an' shammin' lunacy—with a Noah's ark in one hand an' his life in the other—he set out one midnight to make his way to the open country to gather information. In the outskirts, he was set upon by Imperial cavalry, but his Noah's ark saved him, an' he was flung into

a cell underneath the Imperial Central Office, where we eventually found him.

"By the Sunday we were in communication with the adjinin' districts, an' a gen'ral risin' of the whole city was planned for Tuesday. We spent Sunday night ilin' the castors of Mrs. Tinker's mangle, an' the college man's piano, as these articles were to be used for barricadin' the street end against Imperial troops.

"On Monday mornin' I was up early for lay'net exercise with the poker. I heard the front-door bell ring. I looked out the window, an' there was a British postman deliverin' letters from an Edward Rex parcel van. I rushed downstairs an' jined in the commotion. Where were the Sauerkrauts? Had we beaten 'em badly? Where was the shootin' done, an' who did it? An' what was the reason of the whole blamed thing?

"The postman looked at us stolidly. 'There's a penny to pay on that letter, missis, as it's over four ounces,' he said, 'an' I'm too hoarse for any more talkin'.'

"By this time the whole population was in the streets, shakin' hands, an' laffin', an' congratlatin' one another that the fightin' had come off at last with someone else's mangles an' pianos. Then we gave three cheers an' trooped down to the Town Hall, late the Imperial Central Office, an' learnt the worst.

"An' a pretty bad worst it was.

"The Emperor I have alluded to as Richard hadn't attended much to his army of late. He'd bought no new guns, an' he'd laid in no store of shot, an' instead of drillin' his men he'd spent his time learnin' chemistry an' lectricity an' science. Other sovereigns took it for granted that Richard was wamin' inter his dotage, an' sent him picture-books an' new phonygraph cylinders, but Richard was wideawaker than ever.

"Professor Bamberger had invented a new gun in his laboratory. It wasn't a shot-gun. It fired invisible rays. They were funny sorter rays that hadn't been known before, an' for want of a better name they called 'em O.P.Q. Rays; an' this yarn of mine has been full of 'em all the time, though maybe you haven't noticed it.

"The O.P.Q. Rays didn't cure disease or take photographs. They did what chloroform does, but they did it nicer. They sent you to sleep, an' they could be worked in the open air, an' their action travelled miles, an' didn't hurt afterwards. That was Professor Bamberger's discovery, an' Richard worked it.

"He had five of these guns sent over to



"He was set upon by Imperial cavalry."

England as gas-engines. Then he had some manoeuvres on the coast that made the British *attachés* laugh. While they were laughing, Richard cabled to Professor Bamberger at Hull that the flowers were bloomin' in spring, tra la; an' the Professor rose at daybreak on the followin' mornin' an' turned the handle of his gas-engine, an' let the rays float inter Hull City. They didn't need to go in at a window or down a chimney. They jest went slick through the walls. You couldn't stop 'em with anythin' but muslin soaked in barley-water, an' nobody but Bamberger an' his Emperor knew this.

"No one got outer bed in Hull that mornin' after Professor Bamberger started twinin' his handle, an' those who were in the streets sat down an' snoozed off. Then the fleet of transports sailed up, an' the troops disembarked. They'd put Grimsby and district to sleep on the way up. They collared the railway lines an' ran trains on to York, leaving two regiments, ole Bamberger, an' a gas-engine behind for garrison duty, an' when the citizens awoke, they found their town in the possession of the enemy.

"At breakfast time that mornin' Professor Bamberger's head assistant had started to work his gas-engine outside York, an' the people were dozin' nicely when the Hohenzollern trains drove up. Leavin' strong detachments there, the main body proceeded to Leeds, where the third engine had commenced operations at noon. The fourth instrument started business at Bradford at three o'clock, an' the fifth at Halifax about ten-time. By six o'clock the Germans held the North of England from Hull to Halifax. They'd captured five cities, an' a cricket-field containin' the Prince of Wales an' the British Commander-in-Chief, without mentionin' a team of prime Egyptian batters. Then they turned the rays on incomin' trains, an' all arrivals were put to sleep, then examined, an' sent away with a permit, like me.

"News of the landin' had reached London by express engine, an' in the absence of the Secretary of State, who was playin' hockey in Scotland, the War Office clerks tried to save the nation. But they couldn't com-

municate quickly with the garrison towns, as the wires had been cut all over the country.

"However, in a couple of days they got together a strong force of cavalry, artillery, an' infantry at Sheffield, an' not havin' a notion of Bamberger's guns, they marched on to break the enemy at Leeds. Ten miles outside that city the leading columns of the Army sat down an' went to sleep, an' soon the whole force followed suit. When they woke, they found themselves disarmed, an' their own guns trained on 'em by the Sauerkrauts.

"They couldn't get at the Prime Minister, as he was lost on a grouse moor with the Home Secretary, but the Postmaster-General an' a friend or two got together an' made terms with the enemy, an' the treaty was signed at York.

"Richard would only leave the country on condition that we gave him Gibraltar, Malta, Africa, an' India, besides payin' an indemnity of six hundred millions sterling. He took the Egyptian cricket team an' the captains of all the first-class counties with him as hostages, an' his victorious Army entered Berlin with them in triumph, Bamberger an' his guns headin' the procession.

"Nex' week, when the Prime Minister had been found, an' the Secretary of State for War had finished his hockey match, Parliament met, an' taxation was settled. Outer every sovereign earned in future ten shillings had to go to Richard Hohenzollern."

"Poetry is an art that won't stand Parliamentary interference. No leadin' poem of any consequence has ever been composed with the knowledge that half the proceeds would go to swell the chest of a foreign invader. I couldn't cotton to such conditions. I looked up the trains to New York City that afternoon, an' landed five days later. That's how I became a citizen of the United States of Amurrica, an' that's why I call thishyer yarn 'The O.P.Q. Rays.'"

There was an impressive silence when the old man had ended.

"It's a good title, and a good yarn," the drummer at last remarked.

"An' what's more, it's a true one," said Mr. Daniels.