

ZEN OF THE Y.D.

A Novel of the Foothills

By ROBERT STEAD

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The spirit of the West, especially of the prairies and foothills through the medium of the pen of Robert Stead. He was born west of Winnipeg and for 30 years made his home on what is now a disappearing but not quite vanished frontier. He served alternately in farming, commercial and newspaper lines until called upon by the Canadian Government to occupy a responsible position in its immigration and colonization work.

While still in his teens he was writing poems inspired by the tawny prairies, the foothill trails, the great limestone cliffs and the hardy settlers of the region, for the Canadian Magazine. These poems were collected in a volume and published under the title of "The Empire Builders." Other volumes of poems which appeared later were "Prairie-Born," "Songs of the Prairie" and "Kitchener and Other Poems." He has also written a number of interesting novels about the country, the better known titles being "The Bail Jumper," "The Cow Puncher," "The Homesteaders" and "Neighbors." He visualizes the zestful, virile characters who conquer a wilderness and make it fruitful. His prose has the graces of diction and beauties of sentiment to be expected from one who has excelled in poetical expression.

His latest novel "Zen of the Y.D." is the fruit of a mature skill acting upon stirring incidents and characters of western life that have come, more or less, under his actual observation. Where so much of a thrilling nature and so much color existed, and where human types were ready at hand, it was only necessary for the author to employ his story-telling ability without drawing greatly upon his imagination. This tale differs slightly from his others in that he has chosen for the principal male figure a rather unusual man from the eastern part of the United States. The heroine is a typical girl of the plains.

CHAPTER XIX

"Zen!"
"How is he—how is Wilson?" she demanded, breathlessly.

"Sound as a bell," he answered, alarmed by her manner. The self-assured Zen was far from self-assurance now. "Come, see, he is asleep."

He led her into the whim-room and turned up the lamp. The lad was sleeping soundly, his teddy-bear clasped in his arms, his little pink and white face serene under the magic skies of slumberland. Grant expected that Zen would throw herself upon the child in her agitation, but she did not. She drew her fingers gently across his brow, then, turning to Grant:

"Rather an unceremonious way to break into your house," she said, with a little laugh. "I hope you will pardon me . . . I was uneasy about Wilson."

"But tell me—how—where did you come from?"

"From town. Let me stand in your kitchen or somewhere."

"You're wet through. I can't offer you much change."

"Not as wet as when you first met me, Dennison," she said with a smile. "I have a good waterproof, but my hat blew off. It's somewhere on the road. I could not see through the windshield, so I put my head out, and away it went."

"The hat?"

They both laughed, and an atmosphere that had been tense began to settle back to normal. Grant led her out to the living room, removed her coat and started a fire.

They sat in silence for some time, and presently they became aware of a gray light displacing the yellow glow from the lamp and the ruddy reflection of the fire. "It is morning," said Grant. "I believe the storm has cleared." He stood beside her chair and took her hand in his. "Let us watch the dawn break on the mountains," he said, and together they moved to the windows that overlooked the valley and the grim ranges beyond. Already shafts of crimson light were firing the scattered drift of clouds far overhead . . .

"Dennison," she said at length, turning her face to his. "I hope you will understand, but—I have thought it all over. I have not hidden my heart from you. For the boy's sake, and for your sake and for the sake of a 'scrap of paper'—that was what the war was over, wasn't it?"

"I know," he whispered. "I know."

"Then you have been thinking, too? . . . I am so glad!" In the growing light he could see the moisture in her bright eyes glisten, and it seemed to him this wild, daring daughter of the hills had never been lovelier than in this moment of confession and of high resolve.

"I am so glad," she repeated, "for your sake—and for my own. Now, again, you are really the Man-on-the-Hill. We have been

in the valley of late. You can go ahead now with your high plans, with your Big Idea. You will marry Miss Bruce, and forget."

"I shall remember with chastened memory, but I shall never forget," he said at length. "I shall never forget Zen of the Y.D. And you—what will you do?"

"I have the boy. I did not realize how much I had until tonight. Suddenly it came upon me that he was everything. You won't understand, Dennison, but as we grow older our hearts wrap up around our children with a love quite different from that which expresses itself in marriage. This love gives—gives—gives lavishly, unselfishly, asking nothing in return."

"I think I understand," he said again. "I think I do."

They turned their eyes to the mountains, and as they looked the first shafts of sunlight fell on the white peaks and set them dazzling like mighty diamond-points against the blue bosom of the West.

"It is morning on the mountains—and on you!" Grant exclaimed. "Zen, you are very, very beautiful." He raised her hand and pressed her fingers to his lips.

As they stood watching the sunlight pour into the valley a sharp knock sounded on the door.

"Come," said Dennison, and the next moment it swung open and Phyllis Bruce entered, followed immediately by Linder. A question leapt into her eyes at the remarkable situation which greeted them, and she paused in embarrassment.

"Phyllis!" Grant exclaimed. "You here!"

"It would seem that I was not expected."

"It is all very simple," Grant explained, with a laugh. "Little Willie Transley was my guest overnight. On account of the storm his mother became alarmed, and drove out from the city early this morning for him. Mrs. Transley, let me introduce Miss Bruce—Phyllis Bruce, of whom I have told you."

Zen's cordial handshake did more to reassure Phyllis than any amount of explanations, and Lin-

der's timely observation that he knew Wilson was there and was wondering about him himself had valuable corroborative effect.

"But now—your explanations?" said Grant. "How comes it, Linder?"

"Simple enough, from our side. When I got your telephone call all I could catch was the fact that you were mighty glad to get me, and had some urgent message for Miss Bruce. Then the connection broke."

"I see. And you, of course, assured Miss Bruce that I was being murdered, or meeting some such happy and effective ending, out here in the wilderness."

"Not exactly that, but I reported what I could, and Miss Bruce insisted upon coming out at once. The roads were dreadful, but we had daylight. Also, we have a trophy."

Linder went out and returned in a moment with a sadly bedraggled hat.

"My poor hat!" Zen exclaimed. "I lost it on the way."

"It is the best kind of evidence that you had but recently come over the road," said Linder, significantly.

"I think no more evidence need be called," said Phyllis. "May I lay off my things?"

"Certainly—certainly," Grant apologized. "But I must introduce one more exhibit." He handed her the note he had written during the night.

"That is the message I wanted Linder to rush to you," he said, and as she read it he saw the color deepen in her cheeks.

"I'm going to make breakfast, Mr. Grant," Zen announced, with a sudden burst of energy. Everybody keep out of the kitchen."

"Guess I'll feed up for you this morning, old chap," said Linder, knowingly. At the door he glanced back. "I think Miss Bruce has something to say to you," he added mysteriously.

They were alone—Phyllis and Dennison. He caught her hand in his and led her to the French windows. The sun was filling the valley with a flood of silver, and there was sunshine, too, in the heart of Dennison Grant. He had drunk his cup of renunciation, but he had not dreamed that at the bottom could lie a pearl so beautiful.

"Phyllis—Phyllis!" he breathed. He reached out to take her in his arms, but she held him gently away; when he looked in her eyes they shone back at him through tears.

"Oh, Denny, you mustn't! I'm so sorry. You know what you've

been to me. But you were so long, so long! Yesterday I promised Linder."

In the days that followed Dennison Grant drank his cup of renunciation anew. He worked his fields early and late; he noted the tiny spirals of smoke ascending like incense from Zen's cottage; but he went no nearer the Transley home than the end of his furrow. He had handed back Transley's wife from the edge of the abyss; he had made up his mind; that much was settled.

The battle that raged within him now centred about Linder and Phyllis Bruce. When he had recovered from the first shock of Phyllis' revelation and was able to think sanely he was sure that her heart might still be his if he went after it—and took it. It was another case of a man being worth his salt. But Linder was not Transley. He had spared Transley; could he be less generous with Linder? And what of Phyllis? Would she be happy with Linder?

Then Truth stood up before him in the furrow, as he plowed its slow length one hazy summer afternoon, and called him a hypocrite. He heard the voice as clearly as the champing of his horses on their bits. "Hypocrite" cried Truth to him. "You make a great virtue of your generosity (Continued on Page 7)

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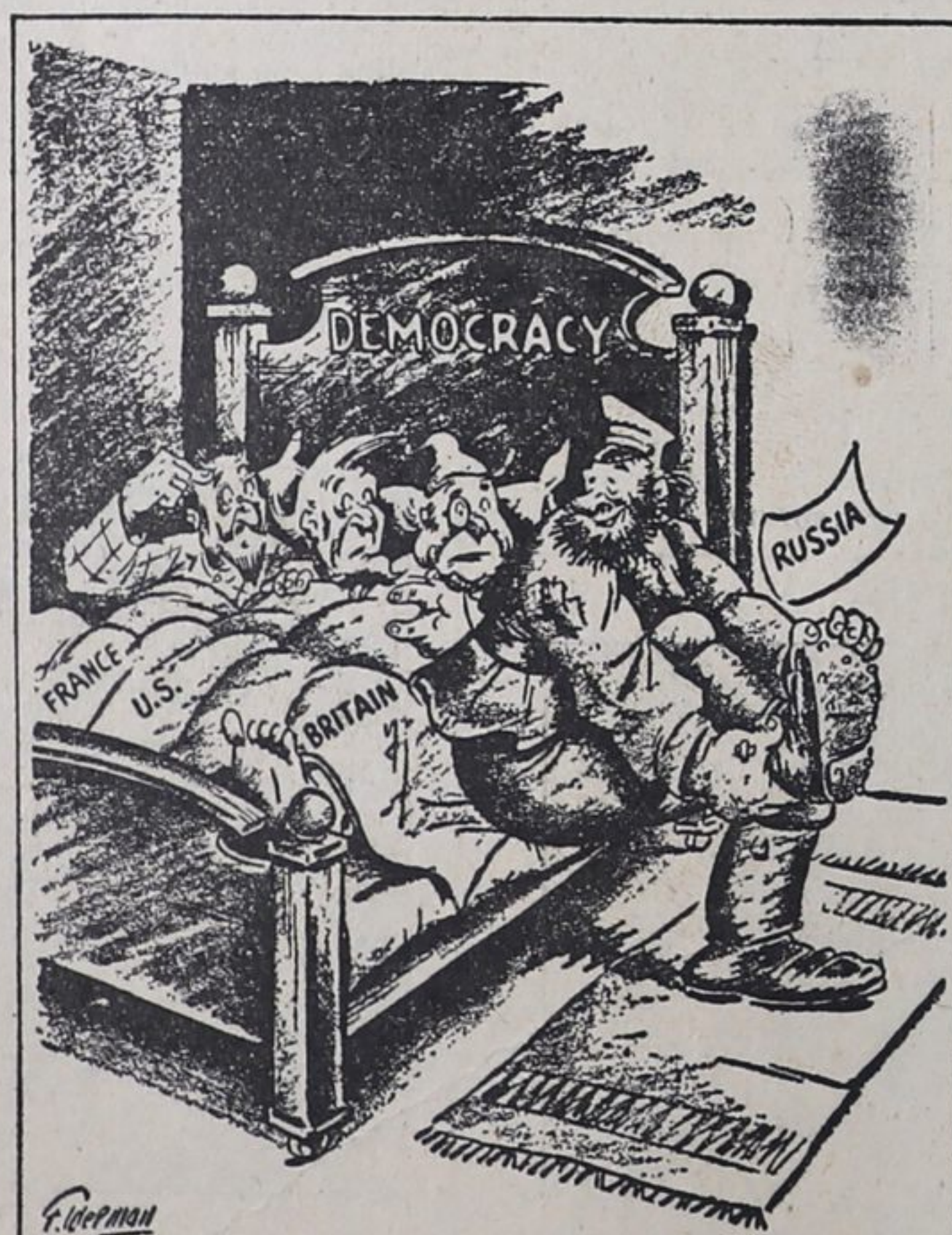
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