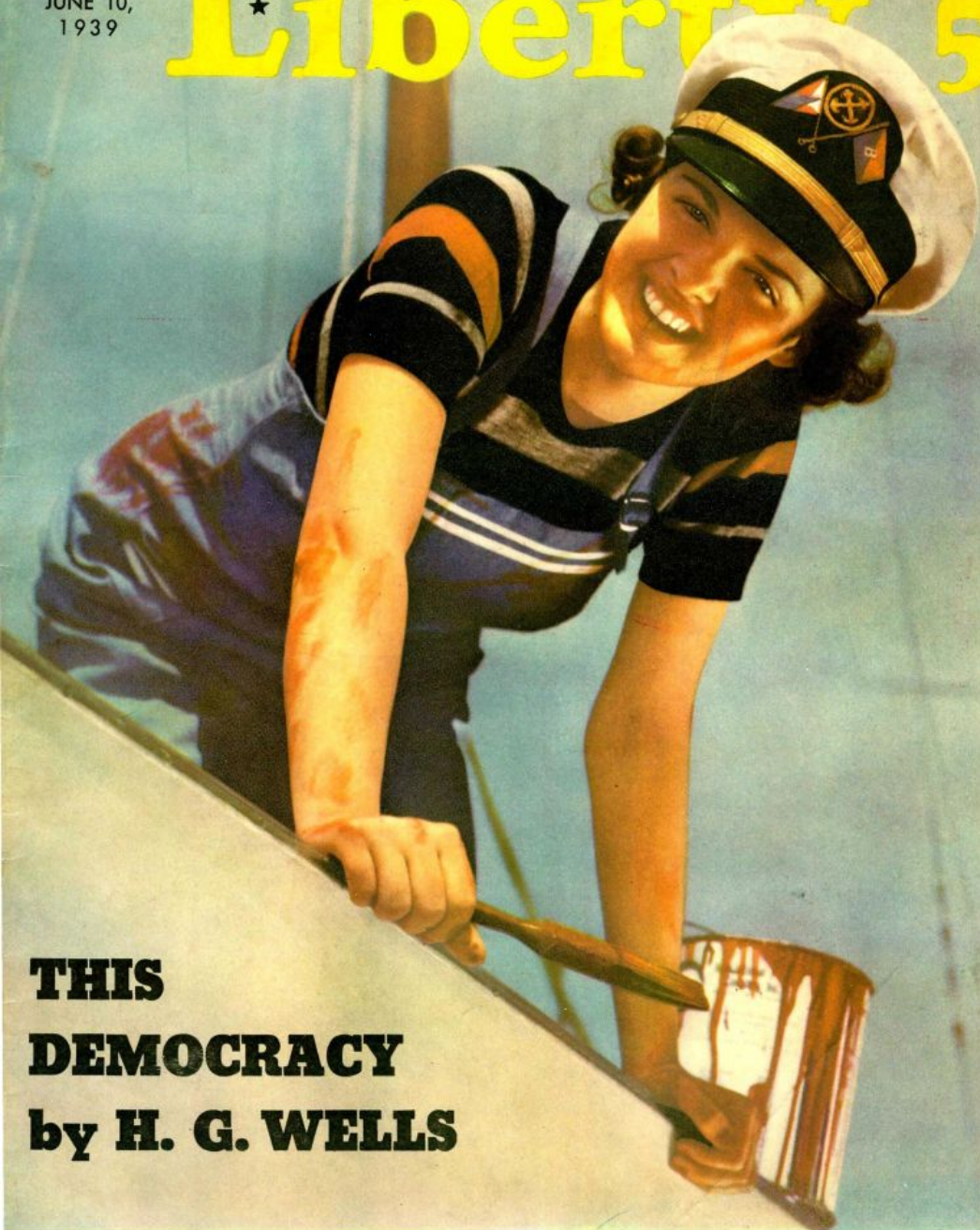


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**THIS
DEMOCRACY
by H. G. WELLS**

My Husband Was Rejuvenated ★ Are Colleges Any Good?

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MR. POPE'S *Thoroughbred*

BY
WALTER BROOKS

First published *Liberty*, June 10, 1939.

Laughs! Here's Ed, the talking horse, again—in a sparkling new tale of hilarious blackmail and the happy outwitting of a wife.

I guess I have told you about that talking horse of Wilbur Pope's. Mr. Pope was an account executive with the advertising firm of Weatherbee Overstreet & Ochiltree and he lived in Mount Kisco with Mrs. Pope who was tall and dark and beautiful and one eighth Spanish. She had slanting languid eyes that a lot of young men in Mount Kisco and neighboring towns drove over to Mr. Pope's on Saturdays and Sundays to look into while drinking Mr. Pope's liquor. Those slanting eyes are lovely to look at but don't mean a thing. At least they seldom mean what you think they mean.

But don't get me started on Mrs. Pope. I want to tell you about Mr. Pope's horse. He was pretty plain even for a horse and his name was Ed. The only remarkable thing about him was that he could talk. As a matter of fact Ed says that all horses can talk. But they don't because he says What would it get them? And if you think about that you see it's so.

So while the neighbors were gazing into Mrs. Pope's eyes Ed and Mr. Pope clumped around over the Westchester hills occasionally stopping at a dog stand for a bottle of beer. They could have had all the beer in Westchester for there was always somebody ready to stand Ed a bottle or two just to see the way he took the neck in his teeth and tipped it up and let it gurgle down without swallowing. But usually after a few bottles they would go off somewhere and sit and talk.

Ed had no ambition and so he was good company. He could talk about most anything and very sensibly too. He was rather coarse sometimes but coarseness is refreshing to the healthy minded and after all he'd been brought up in a stable. The only thing he and Mr. Pope fundamentally disagreed on was Mrs. Pope. Those languid eyes meant nothing but bad temper to him and when he'd had one or two beers over the quota he'd sometimes say so.

Well usually Mr. Pope wouldn't argue for he was proud in a way of Mrs. Pope's temper which he called temperament. But sometimes he'd try to defend her to Ed and then the argument—particularly if it was well laced with beer—got pretty acrimonious. And at last one day Mr. Pope got so mad he wouldn't talk to Ed any more.

Well they were sitting under a tree by the roadside a couple of miles from home and Ed got on the subject of Mrs. Pope's admirers. Maybe I'm kind of old fashioned about some things he said but I don't like the way she kind of gives some of those boys the eye. Maybe she don't mean anything but folks notice it. And you know Wilbur I ain't strict but your wife ought to be like what they say about who's this—Potiphar's wife. Potiphar's! said Mr. Pope. Sure said Ed Above suspicion. Gosh Ed even for a horse you're not very well read said Mr. Pope. You mean Caesar's. But Ed was stubborn and stuck to Potiphar's wife and so Mr. Pope lay back and pulled his hat over his eyes and pretended to go to sleep.

Ed wandered around a while and ate a few daisies and then he came back and said Hey Wilbur what's the use getting sore? I'm not sore Ed said Mr. Pope I'm just disgusted. O yeah? said Ed Well how about me? I don't blame you for sticking up for your wife. After all you must like her or you wouldn't have married her. And if you like to be a doormat half the time and a standing joke the other half that's your business. But what makes me good and sick is your not standing up for me when she gets on that line about how disreputable I look and why don't you send me to the boneyard and get a decent horse.

You know perfectly well that's just talk said Mr. Pope. See here Ed if you can't be pleasant why don't you keep still? It's getting so you spoil all our rides with this kind of stuff. I've a good mind to sell you at that and get a dumb horse.

Well that made Ed angrier than ever and one word led to another and finally Mr. Pope got so mad that he jumped up and started off down the road. Ed followed a little ways but he had his pride and when Mr. Pope wouldn't look at him he turned off into a field so Mr. Pope walked home.

So Ed trotted along home the back way and when Mr. Pope came limping up the drive there was Ed in the middle of the lawn and a little knot of people with glasses in their hands were standing looking at him. When they caught sight of Mr. Pope they gave a shout and Mrs. Pope came running and threw herself around his neck and sobbed hysterically O darling are you all right? I thought you'd been thrown and were lying somewhere in a ditch with a broken neck!

Well riding boots aren't made for walking and Mr. Pope had plodded two miles under a July sun so he just said Sure sure I'm all right and hooked Ed's bridle over his arm and led him up to the corner of the porch and hitched him. Mrs. Pope went with him with her arm around him and Mr. Pope gave the horse a triumphant look. But Ed just stared at him sullenly and then looked away. So he went up on the porch and some one pushed a glass into his hand and shoved him into a chair. And then they all wanted to know what had happened.

Well it was the usual crowd of Mrs. Pope's friends—Fitch Parmenter and Georgie Van Slyke and the Lawtons and Annabelle Stanton—but they all seemed strangely polite and they were being almost deferential to a slim dark man who somehow gave the impression of being in white tie and tails although he was dressed as carelessly as the other men. And then Mrs. Pope said Wilbur I don't think you know Count Peyras—Count Peyras my husband.

The Count bowed as if he was doing a jackknife dive and Mr. Pope struggled to rise and then gave up and said How do you do—er—Count. As soon as he heard the name he knew who the Count was. He was a Spaniard who had come to America in the early days of the Spanish Revolution. He had come with a manner and an idea and as a Spanish title was something new in a day when Russian titles had dropped to three for a dollar he had been able to capitalize them very profitably. He made a line of products which he had called Ancien Régime and under such names as Grandee and Hidalgo and Aragon had built up a nice business in the luxury belt. It was an account that would have plumed the hat of any advertising man in New York but Mr. Pope knew it was no use. Peyras was Georgie Van Slyke's client and Georgie's introductions were priceless to him for not only did Georgie have both feet firmly planted in the Social Register but his sister had married a duke.

So Mr. Pope sighed and as Mrs. Pope asked again rather impatiently what had happened he said O Ed and I had a disagreement so I walked home. Why didn't you ride? said Mrs. Pope. And Fitch Parmenter said Made you walk did he? Don't you know enough to carry carfare when you go out with him? I should think you could tell just by looking at him.

I don't think I understand said Peyras. You are angry with your horse and so you refuse to ride him home? But that is temperament! That is as a Spaniard might act. Ha! said Mr. Pope. You hear that Ed? And then he said No I was just mad at a remark he made. My husband insists said Mrs. Pope that Ed talks to him when they are out together. Ah? said the Count. Yes I think I have heard of this horse. But he talks only to Mr. Pope so who is to know that he is so clever? O said Mr. Pope Ed's rather reserved. You have to know him a long time.

This is all very funny said Mrs. Pope but I've had about enough of Ed. Of course you won't admit it but you know perfectly well he threw you. He's dangerous. You've got to get rid of him Wilbur. I've said it before but this time I mean it. Besides she added look at him! He is not handsome no said the Count. But I would not think him dangerous. Want to take a little ride on him? said Mr. Pope. Good heavens Wilbur said Mrs. Pope what a thing to suggest! But the Count got up and went over to Ed and patted his neck. Don't do it Peyras said Mr. Van Slyke. Gosh remember what he did to Doug Hendry?

Well they crowded around him and tried to dissuade him but the Count merely laughed. Do not be afraid he said. I served two years with the Italian cavalry and though their school is not what it was years ago it should be advanced enough for this mount. And if indeed he comes back without me—The Count shrugged. Well I can only hope señora he said to Mrs. Pope that you will worry just one little as you did before. And he kissed her hand and got into the saddle.

If you can't steal 'em Wilbur said Mr. Van Slyke bitterly you kill 'em. If that guy gets hurt—Don't worry said Mr. Pope Ed'll just jounce a couple of carrambas out of him. And indeed after half an hour or so the Count came cantering easily up the drive without a hair out of place. Mr. Pope took the bridle and led Ed off. They walked side by side into the stable and neither of them said anything. But when they got to the watering trough Mr. Pope lugged a bottle of whisky out of his pocket and uncorked it. Hey Ed he said better have a little of this first to cut the water. I sneaked it off the table while they were admiring his lordship.

Then you ain't mad at me any more? Ed said. Sure I'm mad at you said Mr. Pope but that don't mean I'd cut off your liquor. Or sell me down the river? said Ed. Well I don't know Ed I don't know said Mr. Pope doubtfully. I do wish you'd make some effort to please Carlotta. Well I tell you Wilbur said Ed I got to take back some of the things I said. She was certainly all stewed up when I came back without you. But boy! the things she said about me! That's what I mean said Mr. Pope. Couldn't you spruce up a little? Hold your head up and prance. You know the kind of thing she likes. Count Peyras— When you say that smile said Ed. That guy ain't any more of a Spaniard than I am. And that reminds me—how'd you like to have his advertising account? I've as much chance of that said Mr. Pope as you have of a blue ribbon at the horse show.

We might get both at that said the horse. Wilbur you know when the Count rode me down the drive? Notice how he rode—all slouched down and pushing against the stirrups as if the leathers were too short? Well take it from me he never learned to ride in no Italian cavalry. I worked four years in that riding school by Central Park and we got all kinds there. That boy is used to a Mexican saddle too. He might have ridden in Mexico said Mr. Pope. Yeah said Ed and maybe he was talkin' Mexican when he slapped me and yelled Hi kid do your stuff!

That's funny said Mr. Pope. You're darn right said Ed. And I'll tell you something funnier. You know lots of people—specially lonely people—talk to animals. Kind of a safety valve I suppose. About a mile down the road he said Well Ed so you can talk? Then he kind of

laughed to himself and said You're better off than I am then for I haven't been able to talk my own language in four years.

And then just before we got back he said So you're a talking horse and I'm Count Peyras eh? Then he laughed and leaned over and whispered in my ear What's *your* real name hey? Go on and tell me. I'm Albert Crane. Little Albie Crane from Albuquerque. Who are you? Well gosh Wilbur I told him!

I said Ed and he darn near fell out of the saddle. It took him about ten minutes before we could go on and he could persuade himself I'd just coughed or something.

For Pete's sake! said Mr. Pope. The guy's an impostor. O well I wouldn't say that said Ed. But he ain't any blue-blooded Peyras. What's in a name eh? A hell of a lot of business if you ask me. All you got to do Wilbur— No no said Mr. Pope that's blackmail Ed. Oh-oh! Look out! Ed whispered warningly as Mrs. Pope came into the stable.

Wilbur! she said Are you coming to lunch. O you're giving that horse whisky again! Just an old bottle said Mr. Pope turning it upside down to show that it was empty. H'm said Mrs. Pope The way that horse leers—Well come on then.

A thunderstorm came up during lunch and it drizzled afterward so they all went into the billiard room to play pool. Mr. Pope was sitting with his back to the window watching the game when he heard a rustle and turned to see Ed's head poked in through the Virginia creeper. Mr. Pope got up and leaned nonchalantly over the sill. Ed said in a hoarse whisper are we going to put the squeezer on the Count? Mr. Pope shook his head. Squeamish eh? said Ed. Thank heaven I'm a blackguard. You'll thank me for this in years to come. And in a low penetrating voice he said Albie! Albie Crane! Come here a minute.

Several of the players looked around and then turned back to the table but the Count flinched and made his way around to Mr. Pope. There's somebody here from dear old Albuquerque said Ed.

The Count came up and stood for a minute looking fixedly at Mr. Pope. Ed had disappeared. It—was it you that spoke then? asked the Count. I didn't say anything said Mr. Pope. The Count wiped his forehead and said You're a business man Mr. Pope. I'm not a blackmailer said Mr. Pope. See here said the Count I'm thinking of changing my account. I've been meaning to speak to you about it for some time. We're not entirely satisfied— I'm sorry interrupted Mr. Pope but Georgie Van Slyke and I are old friends. Count me out if you want to change. Sap! came a fierce whisper from outside.

What the!—said the count and leaned out of the window. Then he drew his head in. That horse! he said weakly. But it's incredible!

Mr. Pope took him by the arm. Well it's unlikely anyway he said pleasantly. I wonder if Ed's caught cold? He seems to be sneezing. Well there is one thing you can do if you wouldn't mind. Just speak a word for Ed to Carlotta. She feels that he's—well a sort of low class horse. That is all you want me to do? asked the Count. At the moment yes said Mr. Pope. Well said the Count I don't understand you Mr. Pope. But if you won't talk—Not to anybody but Ed said Mr. Pope with a grin. And excuse me. I must go take him back to the stable.

Well Ed was pretty disgusted with Mr. Pope for refusing to grab the Count's business and they were having an argument about it when they heard voices and Mrs. Pope and the Count came into the stable. Wilbur! cried Mrs. Pope Count Peyras wants to talk to you. He wants to buy Ed! Isn't it wonderful? The Count says he is just the type of thoroughbred he has been looking for.

Why it's nice to hear that you like him said Mr. Pope. But of course I wouldn't sell him. I would give you two thousand said the Count. Not for any money said Mr. Pope firmly. Ah well said the Count to be frank I did not think you realized what a wonderful horse he was. I have an old picture of the Darley Arabian at home—the horse from which most of the great race horses are descended—and I tell you Mr. Pope it is this very horse! Truly I would not have offered to buy if I had not heard Mrs. Pope say that he was to be sold. For I could certainly not afford to pay his full value. O I only said that when I thought Wilbur had been hurt said Mrs. Pope. We wouldn't think of selling him would we Wilbur? And she put her arm around Ed's neck.

So my noble Arabian! said Mr. Pope when he and Ed were alone again It's all fixed. You're going to stay. Think you're smart don't you? said Ed. I could have stayed all right anyway. Could you indeed? said Mr. Pope. I suppose you could have persuaded Carlotta that you were a blue-blooded Arabian hey? Listen boss said Ed. Do you realize if us horses weren't pretty high-minded what a lot of blackmail would be going on? Boy what I know! All I'd have to do would be have a little talk with— All right all right said Mr. Pope hastily. I don't know why you can't be pleasant. Here's everything all fixed and Carlotta actually patted you. And I still don't like her said Ed.

THE END

[The end of *Mr. Pope's Thoroughbred* by Walter Rollin Brooks]