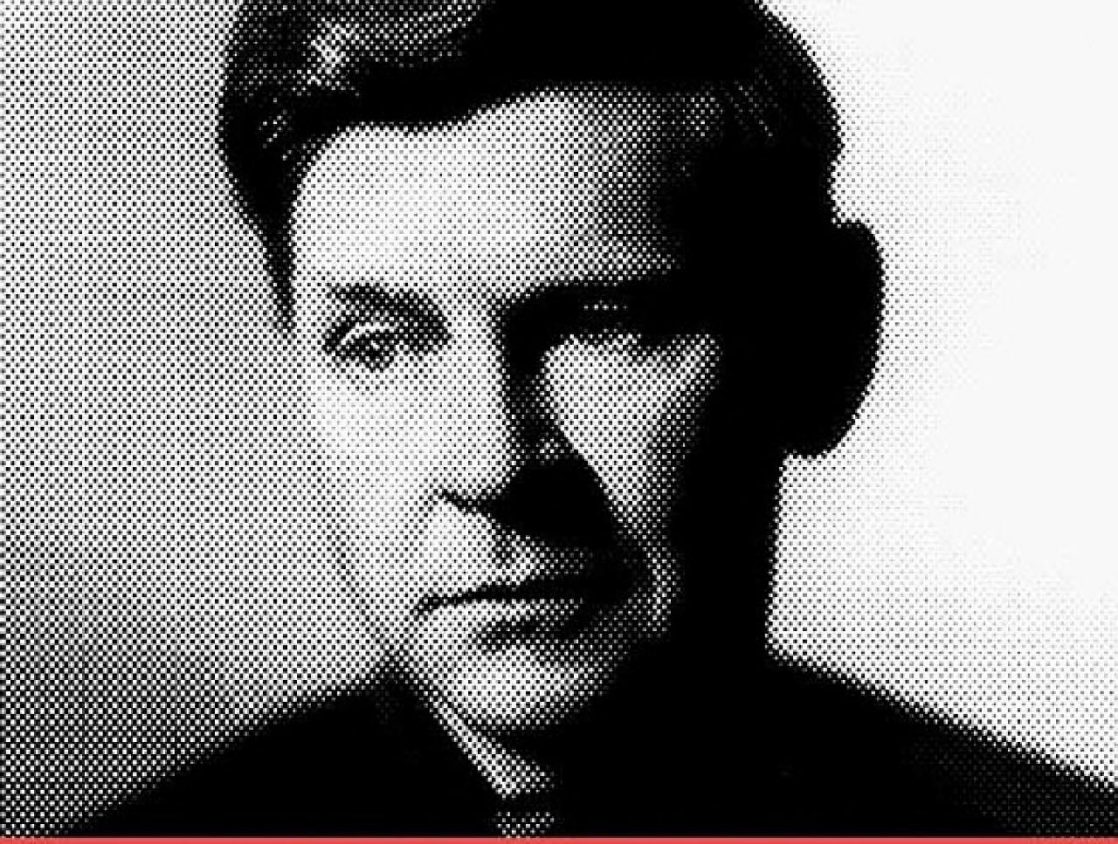

OLAF STAPLEDON

ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

The Author

Stapledon was born in Seacombe, Wallasey, on the Wirral Peninsula in Cheshire, the only son of William Clibbett Stapledon and Emmeline Miller. The first six years of his life were spent with his parents at Port Said, Egypt. He was educated at Abbotsholme School and Balliol College, Oxford, where he acquired a BA degree in Modern History (Second Class) in 1909, promoted to an MA degree in 1913. After a brief stint as a teacher at Manchester Grammar School he worked in shipping offices in Liverpool and Port Said from 1910 to 1912. From 1912 to 1915 Stapledon worked with the Liverpool branch of the Workers' Educational Association.

During the First World War he served as a conscientious objector. Stapledon became an ambulance driver with the Friends' Ambulance Unit in France and Belgium from July 1915 to January 1919; he was awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery. His wartime experiences influenced his pacifist beliefs and advocation of a World Government. On 16 July 1919 he married Agnes Zena Miller (1894–1984), an Australian cousin. They had first met in 1903, and later maintained a correspondence throughout the war. They had a daughter, Mary Sydney Stapledon (1920–2008), and a son, John David Stapledon (1923–2014). In 1920 they moved to West Kirby.

Stapledon was awarded a PhD degree in philosophy from the University of Liverpool in 1925 and used his doctoral thesis as the basis for his first published prose book, A Modern Theory of Ethics (1929). However, he soon turned to fiction in the hope of presenting his ideas to a wider public. The relative success of Last and First Men (1930) prompted him to become a full-time

writer. He wrote a sequel, Last Men in London, and followed it up with many more books of both fiction and philosophy.

For the duration of the Second World War Stapledon abandoned his pacifism and supported the war effort. In 1940 the Stapledon family built and moved into a new house on Simon's Field, in Caldy, in Wirral. During the war Stapledon become a public advocate of J.B. Priestley and Richard Acland's left-wing Common Wealth Party, as well as the British internationalist group Federal Union.

After 1945 Stapledon travelled widely on lecture tours, visiting the Netherlands, Sweden and France, and in 1948 he spoke at the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wrocław, Poland. He attended the Conference for World Peace held in New York City in 1949, the only Briton to be granted a visa to do so. In 1950 he became involved with the anti-apartheid movement. After a week of lectures in Paris, he cancelled a projected trip to Yugoslavia and returned to his home in Caldy, where he died very suddenly of a heart attack.

Stapledon was cremated at Landican Crematorium. His widow and their children scattered his ashes on the sandy cliffs overlooking the Dee Estuary, a favourite spot of his that features in more than one of his books. Stapledon Wood, on the south-east side of Caldy Hill, is named after him.

Stapledon's fiction often presents the strivings of some intelligence that is beaten down by an indifferent universe and its inhabitants who, through no fault of their own, fail to comprehend its lofty yearnings. It is filled with protagonists who are tormented by the conflict between their "higher" and "lower" impulses.

Stapledon's writings directly influenced Arthur C. Clarke, Brian Aldiss, Stanisław Lem, Bertrand Russell, John Gloag, Naomi Mitchison, C. S. Lewis, Vernor Vinge, John Maynard Smith and indirectly influenced many others, contributing many ideas to the world of science fiction. The "supermind" composed of

many individual consciousnesses forms a recurring theme in his work. Star Maker contains the first known description of what are now called Dyson spheres. Freeman Dyson credits the novel with giving him the idea, even stating in an interview that "Stapledon sphere" would be a more appropriate name. Last and First Men features early descriptions of genetic engineering and terraforming. Sirius describes a dog whose intelligence is increased to the level of a human being's.

Some commentators have called Stapledon a Marxist, although Stapledon distanced himself from the label. Stapledon's work also refers to then-contemporary intellectual fashions (e.g. the belief in extrasensory perception).

Last and First Men, a "future history" of 18 successive species of humanity, and Star Maker, an outline history of the Universe, were highly acclaimed by figures as diverse as Jorge Luis Borges, J. B. Priestley, Bertrand Russell, Algernon Blackwood, Hugh Walpole, Arnold Bennett, Virginia Woolf (Stapledon maintained a correspondence with Woolf) and Winston Churchill. In contrast, Stapledon's philosophy repelled C. S. Lewis, whose Cosmic Trilogy was written partly in response to what Lewis saw as amorality, although Lewis admired Stapledon's inventiveness and described him as "a corking good writer". In fact Stapledon was an agnostic who was hostile to religious institutions, but not to religious yearnings, a fact that set him at odds with H. G. Wells in their correspondence.

Together with his philosophy lectureship at the University of Liverpool, which now houses the Olaf Stapledon archive, Stapledon lectured in English literature, industrial history and psychology. He wrote many non-fiction books on political and ethical subjects, in which he advocated the growth of "spiritual values", which he defined as those values expressive of a yearning for greater awareness of the self in a larger context ("personality-in-community"). Stapledon himself named his spiritual values as intelligence, love and creative action. His philosophy was strongly influenced by Spinoza.

Stapledon is considered one of forerunners of the contemporary transhumanist movement.

Last And First Men

Preface

This is a work of fiction. I have tried to invent a story which may seem a possible, or at least not wholly impossible, account of the future of man; and I have tried to make that story relevant to the change that is taking place today in man's outlook.

To romance of the future may seem to be indulgence in ungoverned speculation for the sake of the marvellous. Yet controlled imagination in this sphere can be a very valuable exercise for minds bewildered about the present and its potentialities. Today we should welcome, and even study, every serious attempt to envisage the future of our race; not merely in order to grasp the very diverse and often tragic possibilities that confront us, but also that we may familiarize ourselves with the certainty that many of our most cherished ideals would seem puerile to more developed minds. To romance of the far future, then, is to attempt to see the human race in its cosmic setting, and to mould our hearts to entertain new values.

But if such imaginative construction of possible futures is to be at all potent, our imagination must be strictly disciplined. We must endeavour not to go beyond the bounds of possibility set by the particular state of culture within which we live. The merely fantastic has only minor power. Not that we should seek actually to prophesy what will as a matter of fact occur; for in our present state such prophecy is certainly futile, save in the simplest matters. We are not to set up as historians attempting to look ahead instead of backwards. We can only select a certain thread out of the tangle of many equally valid possibilities. But we must select with a purpose. The activity

that we are undertaking is not science, but art; and the effect that it should have on the reader is the effect that art should have.

Yet our aim is not merely to create aesthetically admirable fiction. We must achieve neither mere history, nor mere fiction, but myth. A true myth is one which, within the universe of a certain culture (living or dead), expresses richly, and often perhaps tragically, the highest admirations possible within that culture. A false myth is one which either violently transgresses the limits of credibility set by its own cultural matrix, or expresses admirations less developed than those of its culture's best vision. This book can no more claim to be true myth than true prophecy. But it is an essay in myth creation.

The kind of future which is here imagined, should not, I think, seem wholly fantastic, or at any rate not so fantastic as to be without significance, to modern western individuals who are familiar with the outlines of contemporary thought. Had I chosen matter in which there was nothing whatever of the fantastic, its very plausibility would have rendered it unplausible. For one thing at least is almost certain about the future, namely, that very much of it will be such as we should call incredible. In one important respect, indeed, I may perhaps seem to have strayed into barren extravagance. I have supposed an inhabitant of the remote future to be communicating with us of today. I have pretended that he has the power of partially controlling the operations of minds now living, and that this book is the product of such influence. Yet even this fiction is perhaps not wholly excluded by our thought. I might, of course, easily have omitted it without more than superficial alteration of the theme. But its introduction was more than a convenience. Only by some such radical and bewildering device could I embody the possibility that there may be more in time's nature than is revealed to us. Indeed, only by some such trick could I do justice to the conviction that our whole present mentality is but a confused and halting first experiment.

If ever this book should happen to be discovered by some future individual, for instance by a member of the next generation sorting out the rubbish of his predecessors, it will certainly raise a smile; for very much is bound to happen of which no hint is yet discoverable. And indeed even in our generation circumstances may well change so unexpectedly and so radically that this book may very soon look ridiculous. But no matter. We of today must conceive our relation to the rest of the universe as best we can; and even if our images must seem fantastic to future men, they may none the less serve their purpose today.

Some readers, taking my story to be an attempt at prophecy, may deem it unwarrantably pessimistic. But it is not prophecy; it is myth, or an essay in myth. We all desire the future to turn out more happily than I have figured it. In particular we desire our present civilization to advance steadily toward some kind of Utopia. The thought that it may decay and collapse, and that all its spiritual treasure may be lost irrevocably, is repugnant to us. Yet this must be faced as at least a possibility. And this kind of tragedy, the tragedy of a race, must, I think, be admitted in any adequate myth.

And so, while gladly recognizing that in our time there are strong seeds of hope as well as of despair, I have imagined for aesthetic purposes that our race will destroy itself. There is today a very earnest movement for peace and international unity; and surely with good fortune and intelligent management it may triumph. Most earnestly we must hope that it will. But I have figured things out in this book in such a manner that this great movement fails. I suppose it incapable of preventing a succession of national wars; and I permit it only to achieve the goal of unity and peace after the mentality of the race has been undermined. May this not happen! May the League of Nations, or some more strictly cosmopolitan authority, win through before it is too late! Yet let us find room in our minds and in our hearts for the thought that the whole enterprise of our race may

be after all but a minor and unsuccessful episode in a vaster drama, which also perhaps may be tragic.

Any attempt to conceive such a drama must take into account whatever contemporary science has to say about man's own nature and his physical environment. I have tried to supplement my own slight knowledge of natural science by pestering my scientific friends. In particular, I have been very greatly helped by conversation with Professors P. G. H. Boswell, J. Johnstone, and J. Rice, of Liverpool. But they must not be held responsible for the many deliberate extravagances which, though they serve a purpose in the design, may jar upon the scientific ear.

To. Dr. L. A. Reid I am much indebted for general comments, and to Mr. E. V. Rieu for many very valuable suggestions. To Professor and Mrs. L. C. Martin, who read the whole book in manuscript, I cannot properly express my gratitude for constant encouragement and criticism. To my wife's devastating sanity I owe far more than she supposes.

Before closing this preface I would remind the reader that throughout the following pages the speaker, the first person singular, is supposed to be, not the actual writer, but an individual living in the extremely distant future.

W. O. S.
WEST KIRBY
July, 1930

Introduction By One Of The Last Men

This book has two authors, one contemporary with its readers, the other an inhabitant of an age which they would call the distant future. The brain that conceives and writes these sentences lives in the time of Einstein. Yet I, the true inspirer of this book, I who have begotten it upon that brain, I who influence that primitive being's conception, inhabit an age which, for Einstein, lies in the very remote future.

The actual writer thinks he is merely contriving a work of fiction. Though he seeks to tell a plausible story, he neither believes it himself, nor expects others to believe it. Yet the story is true. A being whom you would call a future man has seized the docile but scarcely adequate brain of your contemporary, and is trying to direct its familiar processes for an alien purpose. Thus a future epoch makes contact with your age. Listen patiently; for we who are the Last Men earnestly desire to communicate with you, who are members of the First Human Species. We can help you, and we need your help.

You cannot believe it. Your acquaintance with time is very imperfect, and so your understanding of it is defeated. But no matter. Do not perplex yourselves about this truth, so difficult to you, so familiar to us of a later aeon. Do but entertain, merely as a fiction, the idea that the thought and will of individuals future to you may intrude, rarely and with difficulty, into the mental processes of some of your contemporaries. Pretend that you believe this, and that the following chronicle is an authentic message from the Last Men. Imagine the consequences of such a belief. Otherwise I cannot give life to the great history which it is my task to tell.

When your writers romance of the future, they too easily imagine a progress toward some kind of Utopia, in which beings like themselves live in unmitigated bliss among circumstances perfectly suited to a fixed human nature. I shall not describe any such paradise. Instead, I shall record huge fluctuations of joy and woe, the results of changes not only in man's environment but in his fluid nature. And I must tell how, in my own age, having at last achieved spiritual maturity and the philosophic mind, man is forced by an unexpected crisis to embark on an enterprise both repugnant and desperate.

I invite you, then, to travel in imagination through the aeons that lie between your age and mine. I ask you to watch such a history of change, grief, hope, and unforeseen catastrophe, as has nowhere else occurred, within the girdle of the Milky Way. But first, it is well to contemplate for a few moments the mere magnitudes of cosmical events. For, compressed as it must necessarily be, the narrative that I have to tell may seem to present a sequence of adventures and disasters crowded together, with no intervening peace. But in fact man's career has been less like a mountain torrent hurtling from rock to rock, than a great sluggish river, broken very seldom by rapids. Ages of quiescence, often of actual stagnation, filled with the monotonous problems and toils of countless almost identical lives, have been punctuated by rare moments of racial adventure. Nay, even these few seemingly rapid events themselves were in fact often long-drawn-out and tedious. They acquire a mere illusion of speed from the speed of the narrative.

The receding depths of time and space, though they can indeed be haltingly conceived even by primitive minds, cannot be imaged save by beings of a more ample nature. A panorama of mountains appears to naive vision almost as a flat picture, and the starry void is a roof pricked with light. Yet in reality, while the immediate terrain could be spanned in an hour's walking, the sky-line of peaks holds within it plain beyond plain. Similarly with time. While the near past and the near

future display within them depth beyond depth, time's remote immensities are foreshortened into flatness. It is almost inconceivable to simple minds that man's whole history should be but a moment in the life of the stars, and that remote events should embrace within themselves aeon upon aeon.

In your day you have learnt to calculate something of the magnitudes of time and space. But to grasp my theme in its true proportions, it is necessary to do more than calculate. It is necessary to brood upon these magnitudes, to draw out the mind toward them, to feel the littleness of your here and now, and of the moment of civilization which you call history. You cannot hope to image, as we do, such vast proportions as one in a thousand million, because your sense-organs, and therefore your perceptions, are too coarse-grained to discriminate so small a fraction of their total field. But you may at least, by mere contemplation, grasp more constantly and firmly the significance of your calculations.

Men of your day, when they look back into the history of their planet, remark not only the length of time but also the bewildering acceleration of life's progress. Almost stationary in the earliest period of the earth's career, in your moment it seems headlong. Mind in you, it is said, not merely stands higher than ever before in respect of percipience, knowledge, insight, delicacy of admiration, and sanity of will, but also it moves upward century by century ever more swiftly. What next? Surely, you think, there will come a time when there will be no further heights to conquer.

This view is mistaken. You underestimate even the foothills that stand in front of you, and never suspect that far above them, hidden by cloud, rise precipices and snow-fields. The mental and spiritual advances which, in your day, mind in the solar system has still to attempt, are overwhelmingly more complex, more precarious and dangerous, than those which have already been achieved. And though in certain humble respects

you have attained full development, the loftier potencies of the spirit in you have not yet even begun to put forth buds.

Somehow, then, I must help you to feel not only the vastness of time and space, but also the vast diversity of mind's possible modes. But this I can only hint to you, since so much lies wholly beyond the range of your imagination.

Historians living in your day need grapple only with one moment of the flux of time. But I have to present in one book the essence not of centuries but of aeons. Clearly we cannot walk at leisure through such a tract, in which a million terrestrial years are but as a year is to your historians. We must fly. We must travel as you do in your aeroplanes, observing only the broad features of the continent. But since the flier sees nothing of the minute inhabitants below him, and since it is they who make history, we must also punctuate our flight with many descents, skimming as it were over the house-tops, and even alighting at critical points to speak face to face with individuals. And as the plane's journey must begin with a slow ascent from the intricate pedestrian view to wider horizons, so we must begin with a somewhat close inspection of that little period which includes the culmination and collapse of your own primitive civilization.

The Chronicle

I
BALKAN EUROPE

1
THE EUROPEAN WAR AND AFTER

Observe now your own epoch of history as it appears to the Last Men.

Long before the human spirit awoke to clear cognizance of the world and itself, it sometimes stirred in its sleep, opened bewildered eyes, and slept again. One of these moments of precocious experience embraces the whole struggle of the First Men from savagery toward civilization. Within that moment, you stand almost in the very instant when the species attains its zenith. Scarcely at all beyond your own day is this early culture to be seen progressing, and already in your time the mentality of the race shows signs of decline.

The first, and some would say the greatest, achievement of your own "Western" culture was the conceiving of two ideals of conduct, both essential to the spirit's well-being. Socrates, delighting in the truth for its own sake and not merely for practical ends, glorified unbiased thinking, honesty of mind and speech. Jesus, delighting in the actual human persons around him, and in that flavour of divinity which, for him, pervaded the world, stood for unselfish love of neighbours and of God. Socrates woke to the ideal of dispassionate intelligence, Jesus to the ideal of passionate yet self-oblivious worship. Socrates urged intellectual integrity, Jesus integrity of will. Each, of course, though starting with a different emphasis, involved the other.

Unfortunately both these ideals demanded of the human brain a degree of vitality and coherence of which the nervous system of the First Men was never really capable. For many centuries these twin stars enticed the more precociously human of human animals, in vain. And the failure to put these ideals in practice helped to engender in the race a cynical lassitude which was one cause of its decay.

There were other causes. The peoples from whom sprang Socrates and Jesus were also among the first to conceive admiration for Fate. In Greek tragic art and Hebrew worship of divine law, as also in the Indian resignation, man experienced, at first very obscurely, that vision of an alien and supernal beauty, which was to exalt and perplex him again and again throughout his whole career. The conflict between this worship and the intransigent loyalty to Life, embattled against Death, proved insoluble. And though few individuals were ever clearly conscious of the issue, the first human species was again and again unwittingly hampered in its spiritual development by this supreme perplexity.

While man was being whipped and enticed by these precocious experiences, the actual social constitution of his world kept changing so rapidly through increased mastery over physical energy, that his primitive nature could no longer cope with the complexity of his environment. Animals that were fashioned for hunting and fighting in the wild were suddenly called upon to be citizens, and moreover citizens of a world-community. At the same time they found themselves possessed of certain very dangerous powers which their petty minds were not fit to use. Man struggled; but, as you shall hear, he broke under the strain.

The European War, called at the time the War to End War, was the first and least destructive of those world conflicts which display so tragically the incompetence of the First Men to control their own nature. At the outset a tangle of motives, some honourable and some disreputable, ignited a conflict for

which both antagonists were all too well prepared, though neither seriously intended it. A real difference of temperament between Latin France and Nordic Germany combined with a superficial rivalry between Germany and England, and a number of stupidly brutal gestures on the part of the German Government and military command, to divide the world into two camps; yet in such a manner that it is impossible to find any difference of principle between them. During the struggle each party was convinced that it alone stood for civilization. But in fact both succumbed now and again to impulses of sheer brutality, and both achieved acts not merely of heroism, but of generosity unusual among the First Men. For conduct which to clearer minds seems merely sane, was in those days to be performed only by rare vision and self-mastery.

As the months of agony advanced, there was bred in the warring peoples a genuine and even passionate will for peace and a united world. Out of the conflict of the tribes arose, at least for a while, a spirit loftier than tribalism. But this fervour lacked as yet clear guidance, lacked even the courage of conviction. The peace which followed the European War is one of the most significant moments of ancient history; for it epitomizes both the dawning vision and the incurable blindness, both the impulse toward a higher loyalty and the compulsive tribalism of a race which was, after all, but superficially human.

2
THE ANGLO-FRENCH WAR

One brief but tragic incident, which occurred within a century after the European War, may be said to have sealed the fate of the First Men. During this century the will for peace and sanity

was already becoming a serious factor in history. Save for a number of most untoward accidents, to be recorded in due course, the party of peace might have dominated Europe during its most dangerous period; and, through Europe, the world. With either a little less bad luck or a fraction more of vision and self-control at this critical time, there might never have occurred that aeon of darkness, in which the First Men were presently to be submerged. For had victory been gained before the general level of mentality had seriously begun to decline, the attainment of the world state might have been regarded, not as an end, but as the first step toward true civilization. But this was not to be.

After the European War, the defeated nation, formerly no less militaristic than the others, now became the most pacific, and a stronghold of enlightenment. Almost everywhere, indeed, there had occurred a profound change of heart, but chiefly in Germany. The victors on the other hand, in spite of their real craving to be human and generous, and to found a new world, were led partly by their own timidity, partly by their governors' blind diplomacy, into all the vices against which they believed themselves to have been crusading. After a brief period in which they desperately affected amity for one another they began to indulge once more in physical conflicts. Of these conflicts, two must be observed.

The first outbreak, and the less disastrous for Europe, was a short and grotesque struggle between France and Italy. Since the fall of ancient Rome, the Italians had excelled more in art and literature than in martial achievement. But the heroic liberation of Italy in the nineteenth Christian century had made Italians peculiarly sensitive to national prestige; and since among Western peoples national vigour was measured in terms of military glory, the Italians were fired, by their success against a rickety foreign domination, to vindicate themselves more thoroughly against the charge of mediocrity in warfare. After the European War, however, Italy passed through a phase of social disorder and self-distrust. Subsequently a flamboyant

but sincere national party gained control of the State, and afforded the Italians a new self-respect, based on reform of the social services, and on militaristic policy. Trains became punctual, streets clean, morals puritanical. Aviation records were won for Italy. The young, dressed up and taught to play at soldiers with real fire-arms, were persuaded to regard themselves as saviours of the nation, encouraged to shed blood, and used to enforce the will of the Government. The whole movement was engineered chiefly by a man whose genius in action combined with his rhetoric and crudity of thought to make him a very successful dictator. Almost miraculously he drilled the Italian nation into efficiency. At the same time, with great emotional effect and incredible lack of humour, he trumpeted Italy's self-importance, and her will to "expand." And since Italians were slow to learn the necessity of restricting their population, "expansion" was a real need.

Thus it came about that Italy, hungry for French territory in Africa, jealous of French leadership of the Latin races, indignant at the protection afforded to Italian "traitors" in France, became increasingly prone to quarrel with the most assertive of her late allies. It was a frontier incident, a fancied "insult to the Italian flag," which at last caused an unauthorized raid upon French territory by a small party of Italian militia. The raiders were captured, but French blood was shed. The consequent demand for apology and reparation was calm, but subtly offensive to Italian dignity. Italian patriots worked themselves into short-sighted fury. The Dictator, far from daring to apologize, was forced to require the release of the captive militia-men, and finally to declare war. After a single sharp engagement the relentless armies of France pressed into North Italy. Resistance, at first heroic, soon became chaotic. In consternation the Italians woke from their dream of military glory. The populace turned against the Dictator whom they themselves had forced to declare war. In a theatrical but gallant attempt to dominate the Roman mob, he failed, and was killed. The new government made a hasty peace, ceding to France a frontier territory which she had already annexed for "security."

Thenceforth Italians were less concerned to outshine the glory of Garibaldi than to emulate the greater glory of Dante, Giotto and Galileo.

France had now complete mastery of the continent of Europe; but having much to lose, she behaved arrogantly and nervously. It was not long before peace was once more disturbed.

Scarcely had the last veterans of the European War ceased from wearying their juniors with reminiscence, when the long rivalry between France and England culminated in a dispute between their respective Governments over a case of sexual outrage said to have been committed by a French African soldier upon an Englishwoman. In this quarrel, the British Government happened to be definitely in the wrong, and was probably confused by its own sexual repressions. The outrage had never been committed. The facts which gave rise to the rumour were, that an idle and neurotic Englishwoman in the south of France, craving the embraces of a "cave man," had seduced a Senegalese corporal in her own apartments. When, later, he had shown signs of boredom, she took revenge by declaring that he had attacked her indecently in the woods above the town. This rumour was such that the English were all too prone to savour and believe. At the same time, the magnates of the English Press could not resist this opportunity of trading upon the public's sexuality, tribalism and self-righteousness. There followed an epidemic of abuse, and occasional violence, against French subjects in England; and thus the party of fear and militarism in France was given the opportunity it had long sought. For the real cause of this war was connected with air power. France had persuaded the League of Nations (in one of its less intelligent moments) to restrict the size of military aeroplanes in such a manner that, while London lay within easy striking distance of the French coast, Paris could only with difficulty be touched by England. This state of affairs obviously could not last long. Britain was agitating more and more insistently for the removal of the

restriction. On the other hand, there was an increasing demand for complete aerial disarmament in Europe; and so strong was the party of sanity in France, that the scheme would almost certainly have been accepted by the French Government. On both counts, therefore, the militarists of France were eager to strike while yet there was opportunity.

In an instant, the whole fruit of this effort for disarmament was destroyed. That subtle difference of mentality which had ever made it impossible for these two nations to understand one another, was suddenly exaggerated by this provocative incident into an apparently insoluble discord. England reverted to her conviction that all Frenchmen were sensualists, while to France the English appeared, as often before, the most offensive of hypocrites. In vain did the saner minds in each country insist on the fundamental humanity of both. In vain, did the chastened Germans seek to mediate. In vain did the League, which by now had very great prestige and authority, threaten both parties with expulsion, even with chastisement. Rumour got about in Paris that England, breaking all her international pledges, was now feverishly building giant planes which would wreck France from Calais to Marseilles. And indeed the rumour was not wholly a slander, for when the struggle began, the British air force was found to have a range of intensive action far wider than was expected. Yet the actual outbreak of war took England by surprise. While the London papers were selling out upon the news that war was declared, enemy planes appeared over the city. In a couple of hours a third of London was in ruins, and half her population lay poisoned in the streets. One bomb, falling beside the British Museum, turned the whole of Bloomsbury into a crater, wherein fragments of mummies, statues, and manuscripts were mingled with the contents of shops, and morsels of salesmen and the intelligentsia. Thus in a moment was destroyed a large proportion of England's most precious relics and most fertile brains.

Then occurred one of those microscopic, yet supremely potent incidents which sometimes mould the course of events for

centuries. During the bombardment a special meeting of the British Cabinet was held in a cellar in Downing Street. The party in power at the time was progressive, mildly pacifist, and timorously cosmopolitan. It had got itself involved in the French quarrel quite unintentionally. At this Cabinet meeting an idealistic member urged upon his colleagues the need for a supreme gesture of heroism and generosity on the part of Britain. Raising his voice with difficulty above the bark of English guns and the volcanic crash of French bombs, he suggested sending by radio the following message: "From the people of England to the people of France. Catastrophe has fallen on us at your hands. In this hour of agony, all hate and anger have left us. Our eyes are opened. No longer can we think of ourselves as English merely, and you as merely French; all of us are, before all else, civilized beings. Do not imagine that we are defeated, and that this message is a cry for mercy. Our armament is intact, and our resources still very great. Yet, because of the revelation which has come to us today, we will not fight. No plane, no ship, no soldier of Britain shall commit any further act of hostility. Do what you will. It would be better even that a great people should be destroyed than that the whole race should be thrown into turmoil. But you will not strike again. As our own eyes have been opened by agony, yours now will be opened by our act of brotherhood. The spirit of France and the spirit of England differ. They differ deeply; but only as the eye differs from the hand. Without you, we should be barbarians. And without us, even the bright spirit of France would be but half expressed. For the spirit of France lives again in our culture and in our very speech; and the spirit of England is that which strikes from you your most distinctive brilliance."

At no earlier stage of man's history could such a message have been considered seriously by any government. Had it been suggested during the previous war, its author would have been ridiculed, execrated, perhaps even murdered. But since those days, much had happened. Increased communication, increased cultural intercourse, and a prolonged vigorous

campaign for cosmopolitanism, had changed the mentality of Europe. Even so, when, after a brief discussion, the Government ordered this unique message to be sent, its members were awed by their own act. As one of them expressed it, they were uncertain whether it was the devil or the deity that had possessed them, but possessed they certainly were.

That night the people of London (those who were left) experienced an exaltation of spirit. Disorganization of the city's life, overwhelming physical suffering and compassion, the consciousness of an unprecedented spiritual act in which each individual felt himself to have somehow participated--these influences combined to produce, even in the bustle and confusion of a wrecked metropolis, a certain restrained fervour, and a deep peace of mind, wholly unfamiliar to Londoners.

Meanwhile the undamaged North knew not whether to regard the Government's sudden pacificism as a piece of cowardice or as a superbly courageous gesture. Very soon, however, they began to make a virtue of necessity, and incline to the latter view. Paris itself was divided by the message into a vocal party of triumph and a silent party of bewilderment. But as the hours advanced, and the former urged a policy of aggression, the latter found voice for the cry, "*Viva l'Angleterre, viva l'humanité.*" And so strong by now was the will for cosmopolitanism that the upshot would almost certainly have been a triumph of sanity, had there not occurred in England an accident which tilted the whole precarious course of events in the opposite direction.

The bombardment had occurred on a Friday night. On Saturday the repercussions of England's great message were echoing throughout the nations. That evening, as a wet and foggy day was achieving its pallid sunset, a French plane was seen over the western outskirts of London. It gradually descended, and was regarded by onlookers as a messenger of peace. Lower and lower it came. Something was seen to part from it and fall. In a few seconds an immense explosion occurred in the

neighbourhood of a great school and a royal palace. There was hideous destruction in the school. The palace escaped. But, chief disaster for the cause of peace, a beautiful and extravagantly popular young princess was caught by the explosion. Her body, obscenely mutilated, but still recognizable to every student of the illustrated papers, was impaled upon some high park-railings beside the main thoroughfare toward the city. Immediately after the explosion the enemy plane crashed, burst into flame, and was destroyed with its occupants.

A moment's cool thinking would have convinced all onlookers that this disaster was an accident, that the plane was a belated straggler in distress, and no messenger of hate. But, confronted with the mangled bodies of schoolboys, and harrowed by cries of agony and terror, the populace was in no state for ratiocination. Moreover there was the princess, an overwhelmingly potent sexual symbol and emblem of tribalism, slaughtered and exposed before the eyes of her adorers.

The news was flashed over the country, and distorted of course in such a manner as to admit no doubt that this act was the crowning deviltry of sexual fiends beyond the Channel. In an hour the mood of London was changed, and the whole population of England succumbed to a paroxysm of primitive hate far more extravagant than any that had occurred even in the war against Germany. The British air force, all too well equipped and prepared, was ordered to Paris.

Meanwhile in France the militaristic government had fallen, and the party of peace was now in control. While the streets were still thronged by its vociferous supporters, the first bomb fell. By Monday morning Paris was obliterated. There followed a few days of strife between the opposing armaments, and of butchery committed upon the civilian populations. In spite of French gallantry, the superior organization, mechanical efficiency, and more cautious courage of the British Air Force soon made it impossible for a French plane to leave the

ground. But if France was broken, England was too crippled to pursue her advantage. Every city of the two countries was completely disorganized. Famine, riot, looting, and above all the rapidly accelerating and quite uncontrollable spread of disease, disintegrated both States, and brought war to a standstill.

Indeed, not only did hostilities cease, but also both nations were too shattered even to continue hating one another. The energies of each were for a while wholly occupied in trying to prevent complete annihilation by famine and pestilence. In the work of reconstruction they had to depend very largely on help from outside. The management of each country was taken over, for the time, by the League of Nations.

It is significant to compare the mood of Europe at this time with that which followed the European War. Formerly, though there had been a real effort toward unity, hate and suspicion continued to find expression in national policies. There was much wrangling about indemnities, reparations, securities; and the division of the whole continent into two hostile camps persisted, though by then it was purely artificial and sentimental. But after the Anglo-French war, a very different mood prevailed. There was no mention of reparations, no possibility of seeking security by alliances. Patriotism simply faded out, for the time, under the influence of extreme disaster. The two enemy peoples co-operated with the League in the work of reconstructing not only each one itself, but each one the other. This change of heart was due partly to the temporary collapse of the whole national organization, partly to the speedy dominance of each nation by pacifist and anti-nationalist Labour, partly to the fact that the League was powerful enough to inquire into and publish the whole story of the origins of the war, and expose each combatant to itself and to the world in a sorry light.

We have now observed in some detail the incident which stands out in man's history as perhaps the most dramatic

example of petty cause and mighty effect. For consider. Through some miscalculation, or a mere defect in his instruments, a French airman went astray, and came to grief in London after the sending of the peace message. Had this not happened, England and France would not have been wrecked. And, had the war been nipped at the outset, as it almost was, the party of sanity throughout the world would have been very greatly strengthened; the precarious will to unity would have gained the conviction which it lacked, would have dominated man not merely during the terrified revulsion after each spasm of national strife, but as a permanent policy based on mutual trust. Indeed so delicately balanced were man's primitive and developed impulses at this time, that but for this trivial accident, the movement which was started by England's peace message might have proceeded steadily and rapidly toward the unification of the race. It might, that is, have attained its goal, before, instead of after, the period of mental deterioration, which in fact resulted from a long epidemic of wars. And so the first Dark Age might never have occurred.

3
EUROPE AFTER THE ANGLO-FRENCH WAR

A subtle change now began to affect the whole mental climate of the planet. This is remarkable, since, viewed for instance from America or China, this war was, after all, but a petty disturbance, scarcely more than a brawl between quarrelsome statelets, an episode in the decline of a senile civilization. Expressed in dollars, the damage was not impressive to the wealthy West and the potentially wealthy East. The British Empire, indeed, that unique banyan tree of peoples, was henceforward less effective in world diplomacy; but since the bond that held it together was by now wholly a bond of

sentiment, the Empire was not disintegrated by the misfortune of its parent trunk. Indeed, a common fear of American economic imperialism was already helping the colonies to remain loyal.

Yet this petty brawl was in fact an irreparable and far reaching disaster. For in spite of those differences of temperament which had forced the English and French into conflict, they had co-operated, though often unwittingly, in tempering and clarifying the mentality of Europe. Though their faults played a great part in wrecking Western civilization, the virtues from which these vices sprang were needed for the salvation of a world prone to uncritical romance. In spite of the inveterate blindness and meanness of France in international policy, and the even more disastrous timidity of England, their influence on culture had been salutary, and was at this moment sorely needed. For, poles asunder in tastes and ideals, these two peoples were yet alike in being on the whole more sceptical, and in their finest individuals more capable of dispassionate yet creative intelligence, than any other Western people. This very character produced their distinctive faults, namely, in the English a caution that amounted often to moral cowardice, and in the French a certain myopic complacency and cunning, which masqueraded as realism. Within each nation there was, of course, great variety. English minds were of many types. But most were to some extent distinctively English; and hence the special character of England's influence in the world. Relatively detached, sceptical, cautious, practical, more tolerant than others, because more complacent and less prone to fervour, the typical Englishman was capable both of generosity and of spite, both of heroism and of timorous or cynical abandonment of ends proclaimed as vital to the race. French and English alike might sin against humanity, but in different manners. The French sinned blindly, through a strange inability to regard France dispassionately. The English sinned through faint-heartedness, and with open eyes. Among all nations they excelled in the union of common sense and vision. But also among all nations they were most ready to betray their visions

in the name of common sense. Hence their reputation for perfidy.

Differences of national character and patriotic sentiment were not the most fundamental distinctions between men at this time. Although in each nation a common tradition or cultural environment imposed a certain uniformity on all its members, yet in each nation every mental type was present, though in different proportions. The most significant of all cultural differences between men, namely, the difference between the tribalists and the cosmopolitans, traversed the national boundaries. For throughout the world something like a new, cosmopolitan "nation" with a new all-embracing patriotism was beginning to appear. In every land there was by now a salting of awakened minds who, whatever their temperament and politics and formal faith, were at one in respect of their allegiance to humanity as a race or as an adventuring spirit. Unfortunately this new loyalty was still entangled with old prejudices. In some minds the defence of the human spirit was sincerely identified with the defence of a particular nation, conceived as the home of all enlightenment. In others, social injustice kindled a militant proletarian loyalty, which, though at heart cosmopolitan, infected alike its champions and its enemies with sectarian passions.

Another sentiment, less definite and conscious than cosmopolitanism, also played some part in the minds of men, namely loyalty toward the dispassionate intelligence, and perplexed admiration of the world which it was beginning to reveal, a world august, immense, subtle, in which, seemingly, man was doomed to play a part minute but tragic. In many races there had, no doubt, long existed some fidelity toward the dispassionate intelligence. But it was England and France that excelled in this respect. On the other hand, even in these two nations there was much that was opposed to this allegiance. These, like all peoples of the age, were liable to bouts of insane emotionalism. Indeed the French mind, in general so clear sighted, so realistic, so contemptuous of ambiguity and mist, so

detached in all its final valuations, was yet so obsessed with the idea "France" as to be wholly incapable of generosity in international affairs. But it was France, with England, that had chiefly inspired the intellectual integrity which was the rarest and brightest thread of Western culture, not only within the territories of these two nations, but throughout Europe and America. In the seventeenth and eighteenth Christian centuries, the French and English had conceived, more clearly than other peoples, an interest in the objective world for its own sake, had founded physical science, and had fashioned out of scepticism the most brilliantly constructive of mental instruments. At a later stage it was largely the French and English who, by means of this instrument, had revealed man and the physical universe in something like their true proportions; and it was chiefly the elect of these two peoples that had been able to exult in this bracing discovery.

With the eclipse of France and England this great tradition of dispassionate cognizance began to wane. Europe was now led by Germany. And the Germans, in spite of their practical genius, their scholarly contributions to history, their brilliant science and austere philosophy, were at heart romantic. This inclination was both their strength and their weakness. Thereby they had been inspired to their finest art and their most profound metaphysical speculation. But thereby they were also often rendered un-self-critical and pompous. More eager than Western minds to solve the mystery of existence, less sceptical of the power of human reason, and therefore more inclined to ignore or argue away recalcitrant facts, the Germans were courageous systematizers. In this direction they had achieved greatly. Without them, European thought would have been chaotic. But their passion for order and for a systematic reality behind the disorderly appearances, rendered their reasoning all too often biased. Upon shifty foundations they balanced ingenious ladders to reach the stars. Thus, without constant ribald criticism from across the Rhine and the North Sea, the Teutonic soul could not achieve full self-expression. A vague uneasiness about its own sentimentalism and lack of

detachment did indeed persuade this great people to assert its virility now and again by ludicrous acts of brutality, and to compensate for its dream life by ceaseless hard-driven and brilliantly successful commerce; but what was needed was a far more radical self-criticism.

Beyond Germany, Russia. Here was a people whose genius needed, even more than that of the Germans, discipline under the critical intelligence. Since the Bolshevic revolution, there had risen in the scattered towns of this immense tract of corn and forest, and still more in the metropolis, an original mode of art and thought, in which were blended a passion of iconoclasm, a vivid sensuousness, and yet also a very remarkable and essentially mystical or intuitive power of detachment from all private cravings. America and Western Europe were interested first in the individual human life, and only secondarily in the social whole. For these peoples, loyalty involved a reluctant self-sacrifice, and the ideal was ever a person, excelling in prowess of various kinds. Society was but the necessary matrix of this jewel. But the Russians, whether by an innate gift, or through the influence of agelong political tyranny, religious devotion, and a truly social revolution, were prone to self-contemptuous interest in groups, prone, indeed, to a spontaneous worship of whatever was conceived as loftier than the individual man, whether society, or God, or the blind forces of nature. Western Europe could reach by way of the intellect a precise conception of man's littleness and irrelevance when regarded as an alien among the stars; could even glimpse from this standpoint the cosmic theme in which all human striving is but one contributory factor. But the Russian mind, whether orthodox or Tolstoyan or fanatically materialist, could attain much the same conviction intuitively, by direct perception, instead of after an arduous intellectual pilgrimage; and, reaching it, could rejoice in it. But because of this independence of intellect, the experience was confused, erratic, frequently misinterpreted; and its effect on conduct was rather explosive than directive. Great indeed was the need that the

West and East of Europe should strengthen and temper one another.

After the Bolshevic revolution a new element appeared in Russian culture, and one which had not been known before in any modern state. The old regime was displaced by a real proletarian government, which, though an oligarchy, and sometimes bloody and fanatical, abolished the old tyranny of class, and encouraged the humblest citizen to be proud of his partnership in the great community. Still more important, the native Russian disposition not to take material possessions very seriously co-operated with the political revolution, and brought about such a freedom from the snobbery of wealth as was quite foreign to the West. Attention which elsewhere was absorbed in the massing or display of money was in Russia largely devoted either to spontaneous instinctive enjoyments or to cultural activity.

In fact it was among the Russian townsfolk, less cramped by tradition than other city-dwellers, that the spirit of the First Men was beginning to achieve a fresh and sincere readjustment to the facts of its changing world. And from the townsfolk something of the new way of life was spreading even to the peasants; while in the depths of Asia a hardy and ever-growing population looked increasingly to Russia, not only for machinery, but for ideas. There were times when it seemed that Russia might transform the almost universal autumn of the race into a new spring.

After the Bolshevic revolution the New Russia had been boycotted by the West, and had therefore passed through a stage of self-conscious extravagance. Communism and naïve materialism became the dogmas of a new crusading atheist church. All criticism was suppressed, even more rigorously than was the opposite criticism in other countries; and Russians were taught to think of themselves as saviours of mankind. Later, however, as economic isolation began to hamper the Bolshevic state, the new culture was mellowed and broadened.

Bit by bit, economic intercourse with the West was restored, and with it cultural intercourse increased. The intuitive mystical detachment of Russia began to define itself, and so consolidate itself, in terms of the intellectual detachment of the best thought of the West. Iconoclasm was harnessed. The life of the senses and of impulse was tempered by a new critical movement. Fanatical materialism, whose fire had been derived from a misinterpreted, but intense, mystical intuition of dispassionate Reality, began to assimilate itself to the far more rational stoicism which was the rare flower of the West. At the same time, through intercourse with peasant culture and with the peoples of Asia, the new Russia began to grasp in one unifying act of apprehension both the grave disillusion of France and England and the ecstasy of the East.

The harmonizing of these two moods was now the chief spiritual need of mankind. Failure to integrate them into an all-dominant sentiment could not but lead to racial insanity. And so in due course it befell. Meanwhile this task of integration was coming to seem more and more urgent to the best minds in Russia, and might have been finally accomplished had they been longer illumined by the cold light of the West.

But this was not to be. The intellectual confidence of France and England, already shaken through progressive economic eclipse at the hands of America and Germany, was now undermined. For many decades England had watched these newcomers capture her markets. The loss had smothered her with a swarm of domestic problems, such as could never be solved save by drastic surgery; and this was a course which demanded more courage and energy than was possible to a people without hope. Then came the war with France, and harrowing disintegration. No delirium seized her, such as occurred in France; yet her whole mentality was changed, and her sobering influence in Europe was lessened.

As for France, her cultural life was now grievously reduced. It might, indeed, have recovered from the final blow, had it not

already been slowly poisoned by gluttonous nationalism. For love of France was the undoing of the French. They prized the truly admirable spirit of France so extravagantly, that they regarded all other nations as barbarians.

Thus it befell that in Russia the doctrines of communism and materialism, products of German systematists, survived uncriticized. On the other hand, the practice of communism was gradually undermined. For the Russian state came increasingly under the influence of Western, and especially American, finance. The materialism of the official creed also became a farce, for it was foreign to the Russian mind. Thus between practice and theory there was, in both respects, a profound inconsistency. What was once a vital and promising culture became insincere.

4
THE RUSSO-GERMAN WAR

The discrepancy between communist theory and individualist practice in Russia was one cause of the next disaster which befell Europe. Between Russia and Germany there should have been close partnership, based on interchange of machinery and corn. But the theory of communism stood in the way, and in a strange manner. Russian industrial organization had proved impossible without American capital; and little by little this influence had transformed the communistic system. From the Baltic to the Himalayas and the Behring Straits, pasture, timber lands, machine-tilled corn-land, oil fields, and a spreading rash of industrial towns, were increasingly dependent on American finance and organization. Yet not America, but the far less individualistic Germany, had become in the Russian mind the symbol of capitalism. Self-righteous hate of Germany

compensated Russia for her own betrayal of the communistic ideal. This perverse antagonism was encouraged by the Americans; who, strong in their own individualism and prosperity, and by now contemptuously tolerant of Russian doctrines, were concerned only to keep Russian finance to themselves. In truth, of course, it was America that had helped Russia's self-betrayal; and it was the spirit of America that was most alien to the Russian spirit. But American wealth was by now indispensable to Russia; so the hate due to America had to be borne vicariously by Germany.

The Germans, for their part, were aggrieved that the Americans had ousted them from a most profitable field of enterprise, and in particular from the exploitation of Russian Asiatic oil. The economic life of the human race had for some time been based on coal, but latterly oil had been found a far more convenient source of power; and as the oil store of the planet was much smaller than its coal store, and the expenditure of oil had of course been wholly uncontrolled and wasteful, a shortage was already being felt. Thus the national ownership of the remaining oil fields had become a main factor in politics and a fertile source of wars. America, having used up most of her own supplies, was now anxious to compete with the still prolific sources under Chinese control, by forestalling Germany in Russia. No wonder the Germans were aggrieved. But the fault was their own. In the days when Russian communism had been seeking to convert the world, Germany had taken over England's leadership of individualistic Europe. While greedy for trade with Russia, she had been at the same time frightened of contamination by Russian social doctrine, the more so because communism had at first made some headway among the German workers. Later, even when sane industrial reorganization in Germany had deprived communism of its appeal to the workers, and thus had rendered it impotent, the habit of anti-communist vituperation persisted.

Thus the peace of Europe was in constant danger from the bickerings of two peoples who differed rather in ideals than in

practice. For the one, in theory communistic, had been forced to delegate many of the community's rights to enterprising individuals; while the other, in theory organized on a basis of private business, was becoming ever more socialized.

Neither party desired war. Neither was interested in military glory, for militarism as an end was no longer reputable. Neither was professedly nationalistic, for nationalism, though still potent, was no longer vaunted. Each claimed to stand for internationalism and peace, but accused the other of narrow patriotism. Thus Europe, though more pacific than ever before, was doomed to war.

Like most wars, the Anglo-French War had increased the desire for peace, yet made peace less secure. Distrust, not merely the old distrust of nation for nation, but a devastating distrust of human nature, gripped men like the dread of insanity. Individuals who thought of themselves as wholehearted Europeans, feared that at any moment they might succumb to some ridiculous epidemic of patriotism and participate in the further crippling of Europe.

This dread was one cause of the formation of a European Confederacy, in which all the nations of Europe, save Russia, surrendered their sovereignty to a common authority and actually pooled their armaments. Ostensibly the motive of this act was peace; but America interpreted it as directed against herself, and withdrew from the League of Nations. China, the "natural enemy" of America, remained within the League, hoping to use it against her rival.

From without, indeed, the Confederacy at first appeared as a close-knit whole; but from within it was known to be insecure, and in every serious crisis it broke. There is no need to follow the many minor wars of this period, though their cumulative effect was serious, both economically and psychologically. Europe did at last, however, become something like a single nation in sentiment, though this unity was brought about less by a common loyalty than by a common fear of America.

Final consolidation was the fruit of the Russo-German War, the cause of which was partly economic and partly sentimental. All the peoples of Europe had long watched with horror the financial conquest of Russia by the United States, and they dreaded that they also must presently succumb to the same tyrant. To attack Russia, it was thought, would be to wound America in her only vulnerable spot. But the actual occasion of the war was sentimental. Half a century after the Anglo-French War, a second-rate German author published a typically German book of the baser sort. For as each nation had its characteristic virtues, so also each was prone to characteristic follies. This book was one of those brilliant but extravagant works in which the whole diversity of existence is interpreted under a single formula, with extreme detail and plausibility, yet with amazing *naïveté*. Highly astute within its own artificial universe, it was none the less in wider regard quite uncritical. In two large volumes the author claimed that the cosmos was a dualism in which a heroic and obviously Nordic spirit ruled by divine right over an un-self-disciplined, yet servile and obviously Slavonic spirit. The whole of history, and of evolution, was interpreted on this principle; and of the contemporary world it was said that the Slavonic element was poisoning Europe. One phrase in particular caused fury in Moscow, "the anthropoid face of the Russian sub-man."

Moscow demanded apology and suppression of the book. Berlin regretted the insult, but with its tongue in its cheek; and insisted on the freedom of the press. Followed a crescendo of radio hate, and war.

The details of this war do not matter to one intent upon the history of mind in the Solar System, but its result was important. Moscow, Leningrad and Berlin were shattered from the air. The whole West of Russia was flooded with the latest and deadliest poison gas, so that, not only was all animal and vegetable life destroyed, but also the soil between the Black Sea and the Baltic was rendered infertile and uninhabitable for many years. Within a week the war was over, for the reason that the

combatants were separated by an immense territory in which life could not exist. But the effects of the war were lasting. The Germans had set going a process which they could not stop. Whiffs of the poison continued to be blown by fickle winds into every country of Europe and Western Asia. It was spring-time; but save in the Atlantic coast-lands the spring flowers shrivelled in the bud, and every young leaf had a withered rim. Humanity also suffered; though, save in the regions near the seat of war, it was in general only the children and the old people who suffered greatly. The poison spread across the Continent in huge blown tresses, broad as principalities, swinging with each change of wind. And wherever it strayed, young eyes, throats, and lungs were blighted like the leaves.

America, after much debate, had at last decided to defend her interests in Russia by a punitive expedition against Europe. China began to mobilize her forces. But long before America was ready to strike, news of the widespread poisoning changed her policy. Instead of punishment, help was given. This was a fine gesture of goodwill. But also, as was observed in Europe, instead of being costly, it was profitable; for inevitably it brought more of Europe under American financial control.

The upshot of the Russo-German war, then, was that Europe was unified in sentiment by hatred of America, and that European mentality definitely deteriorated. This was due in part to the emotional influence of the war itself, partly to the socially damaging effects of the poison. A proportion of the rising generation had been rendered sickly for life. During the thirty years which intervened before the Euro-American war, Europe was burdened with an exceptional weight of invalids. First-class intelligence was on the whole rarer than before, and was more strictly concentrated on the practical work of reconstruction.

Even more disastrous for the human race was the fact that the recent Russian cultural enterprise of harmonizing Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism was now wrecked.

II
EUROPE'S DOWNFALL

1
EUROPE AND AMERICA

Over the heads of the European tribes two mightier peoples regarded each other with increasing dislike. Well might they; for the one cherished the most ancient and refined of all surviving cultures, while the other, youngest and most self-confident of the great nations, proclaimed her novel spirit as the spirit of the future.

In the Far East, China, already half American, though largely Russian and wholly Eastern, patiently improved her rice lands, pushed forward her railways, organized her industries, and spoke fair to all the world. Long ago, during her attainment of unity and independence, China had learnt much from militant Bolshevism. And after the collapse of the Russian state it was in the East that Russian culture continued to live. Its mysticism influenced India. Its social ideal influenced China. Not indeed that China took over the theory, still less the practice, of communism; but she learnt to entrust herself increasingly to a vigorous, devoted and despotic party, and to feel in terms of the social whole rather than individualistically. Yet she was honeycombed with individualism, and in spite of her rulers she had precipitated a submerged and desperate class of wage slaves.

In the Far West, the United States of America openly claimed to be custodians of the whole planet. Universally feared and envied, universally respected for their enterprise, yet for their complacency very widely despised, the Americans were rapidly changing the whole character of man's existence. By this time every human being throughout the planet made use of

American products, and there was no region where American capital did not support local labour. Moreover the American press, gramophone, radio, cinematograph and televisor ceaselessly drenched the planet with American thought. Year by year the aether reverberated with echoes of New York's pleasures and the religious fervours of the Middle West. What wonder, then, that America, even while she was despised, irresistibly moulded the whole human race. This, perhaps, would not have mattered, had America been able to give of her very rare best. But inevitably only her worst could be propagated. Only the most vulgar traits of that potentially great people could get through into the minds of foreigners by means of these crude instruments. And so, by the floods of poison issuing from this people's baser members, the whole world, and with it the nobler parts of America herself, were irrevocably corrupted.

For the best of America was too weak to withstand the worst. Americans had indeed contributed amply to human thought. They had helped to emancipate philosophy from ancient fetters. They had served science by lavish and rigorous research. In astronomy, favoured by their costly instruments and clear atmosphere, they had done much to reveal the dispositions of the stars and galaxies. In literature, though often they behaved as barbarians, they had also conceived new modes of expression, and moods of thought not easily appreciated in Europe. They had also created a new and brilliant architecture. And their genius for organization worked upon a scale that was scarcely conceivable, let alone practicable, to other peoples. In fact their best minds faced old problems of theory and of valuation with a fresh innocence and courage, so that fogs of superstition were cleared away wherever these choice Americans were present. But these best were after all a minority in a huge wilderness of opinionated self-deceivers, in whom, surprisingly, an outworn religious dogma was championed with the intolerant optimism of youth. For this was essentially a race of bright, but arrested, adolescents. Something lacked which should have enabled them to grow up.

One who looks back across the aeons to this remote people can see their fate already woven of their circumstance and their disposition, and can appreciate the grim jest that these, who seemed to themselves gifted to rejuvenate the planet, should have plunged it, inevitably, through spiritual desolation into senility and age-long night.

Inevitably. Yet here was a people of unique promise, gifted innately beyond all other peoples. Here was a race brewed of all the races, and mentally more effervescent than any. Here were intermingled Anglo-Saxon stubbornness, Teutonic genius for detail and systematization, Italian gaiety, the intense fire of Spain, and the more mobile Celtic flame. Here also was the sensitive and stormy Slav, a youth-giving Negroid infusion, a faint but subtly stimulating trace of the Red Man, and in the West a sprinkling of the Mongol. Mutual intolerance no doubt isolated these diverse stocks to some degree; yet the whole was increasingly one people, proud of its individuality, of its success, of its idealistic mission in the world, proud also of its optimistic and anthropocentric view of the universe. What might not this energy have achieved, had it been more critically controlled, had it been forced to attend to life's more forbidding aspects! Direct tragic experience might perhaps have opened the hearts of this people. Intercourse with a more mature culture might have refined their intelligence. But the very success which had intoxicated them rendered them also too complacent to learn from less prosperous competitors.

Yet there was a moment when this insularity promised to wane. So long as England was a serious economic rival, America inevitably regarded her with suspicion. But when England was seen to be definitely in economic decline, yet culturally still at her zenith, America conceived a more generous interest in the last and severest phase of English thought. Eminent Americans themselves began to whisper that perhaps their unrivalled prosperity was not after all good evidence either of their own spiritual greatness or of the moral rectitude of the universe. A minute but persistent school of writers began to affirm that

America lacked self-criticism, was incapable of seeing the joke against herself, was in fact wholly devoid of that detachment and resignation which was the finest, though of course the rarest, mood of latter-day England. This movement might well have infused throughout the American people that which was needed to temper their barbarian egotism, and open their ears once more to the silence beyond man's strident sphere. Once more, for only latterly had they been seriously deafened by the din of their own material success. And indeed, scattered over the continent throughout this whole period, many shrinking islands of true culture contrived to keep their heads above the rising tide of vulgarity and superstition. These it was that had looked to Europe for help, and were attempting a rally when England and France blundered into that orgy of emotionalism and murder which exterminated so many of their best minds and permanently weakened their cultural influence.

Subsequently it was Germany that spoke for Europe. And Germany was too serious an economic rival for America to be open to her influence. Moreover German criticism, though often emphatic, was too heavily pedantic, too little ironical, to pierce the hide of American complacency. Thus it was that America sank further and further into Americanism. Vast wealth and industry, and also brilliant invention, were concentrated upon puerile ends. In particular the whole of American life was organized around the cult of the powerful individual, that phantom ideal which Europe herself had only begun to outgrow in her last phase. Those Americans who wholly failed to realize this ideal, who remained at the bottom of the social ladder, either consoled themselves with hopes for the future, or stole symbolical satisfaction by identifying themselves with some popular star, or gloated upon their American citizenship, and applauded the arrogant foreign policy of their government. Those who achieved power were satisfied so long as they could merely retain it, and advertise it uncritically in the conventionally self-assertive manners.

It was almost inevitable that when Europe had recovered from the Russo-German disaster she should come to blows with America; for she had long chafed under the saddle of American finance, and the daily life of Europeans had become more and more cramped by the presence of a widespread and contemptuous foreign "aristocracy" of American business men. Germany alone was comparatively free from this domination, for Germany was herself still a great economic power. But in Germany, no less than elsewhere, there was constant friction with the Americans.

Of course neither Europe nor America desired war. Each was well aware that war would mean the end of business prosperity, and for Europe very possibly the end of all things; for it was known that man's power of destruction had recently increased, and that if war were waged relentlessly, the stronger side might exterminate the other. But inevitably an "incident" at last occurred which roused blind rage on each side of the Atlantic. A murder in South Italy, a few ill-considered remarks in the European Press, offensive retaliation in the American Press accompanied by the lynching of an Italian in the Middle West, an uncontrollable massacre of American citizens in Rome, the dispatch of an American air fleet to occupy Italy, interception by the European air fleet, and war was in existence before ever it had been declared. This aerial action resulted, perhaps unfortunately for Europe, in a momentary check to the American advance. The enemy was put on his mettle, and prepared a crushing blow.

2
THE ORIGINS OF A MYSTERY

While the Americans were mobilizing their whole armament, there occurred the really interesting event of the war. It so happened that an international society of scientific workers was meeting in England at Plymouth, and a young Chinese physicist had expressed his desire to make a report to a select committee. As he had been experimenting to find means for the utilization of subatomic energy by the annihilation of matter, it was with some excitement that, according to instruction, the forty international representatives travelled to the north coast of Devon and met upon the bare headland called Hartland Point.

It was a bright morning after rain. Eleven miles to the north-west, the cliffs of Lundy Island displayed their markings with unusual detail. Sea-birds wheeled about the heads of the party as they seated themselves on their raincoats in a cluster upon the rabbit-cropped turf.

They were a remarkable company, each one of them a unique person, yet characterized to some extent by his particular national type. And all were distinctively "scientists" of the period. Formerly this would have implied a rather uncritical leaning toward materialism, and an affectation of cynicism; but by now it was fashionable to profess an equally uncritical belief that all natural phenomena were manifestations of the cosmic mind. In both periods, when a man passed beyond the sphere of his own serious scientific work he chose his beliefs irresponsibly, according to his taste, much as he chose his recreation or his food.

Of the individuals present we may single out one or two for notice. The German, an anthropologist, and a product of the long-established cult of physical and mental health, sought to display in his own athletic person the characters proper to Nordic man. The Frenchman, an old but still sparkling psychologist, whose queer hobby was the collecting of weapons, ancient and modern, regarded the proceedings with kindly cynicism. The Englishman, one of the few remaining intellectuals of his race, compensated for the severe study of

physics by a scarcely less devoted research into the history of English expletives and slang, delighting to treat his colleagues to the fruits of his toil. The West African president of the Society was a biologist, famous for his interbreeding of man and ape.

When all were settled, the President explained the purpose of the meeting. The utilization of subatomic energy had indeed been achieved, and they were to be given a demonstration.

The young Mongol stood up, and produced from a case an instrument rather like the old-fashioned rifle. Displaying this object, he spoke as follows, with that quaintly stilted formality which had once been characteristic of all educated Chinese: "Before describing the details of my rather delicate process, I will illustrate its importance by showing what can be done with the finished product. Not only can I initiate the annihilation of matter, but also I can do so at a distance and in a precise direction. Moreover, I can inhibit the process. As a means of destruction, my instrument is perfect. As a source of power for the constructive work of mankind, it has unlimited potentiality. Gentlemen, this is a great moment in the history of Man. I am about to render into the hands of organized intelligence the means to stop for ever man's internecine brawls. Henceforth this great Society, of which you are the *elite*, will beneficently rule the planet. With this little instrument you will stop the ridiculous war; and with another, which I shall soon perfect, you will dispense unlimited industrial power wherever you consider it needed. Gentlemen, with the aid of this handy instrument which I have the honour to demonstrate, you are able to become absolute masters of this planet."

Here the representative of England muttered an archaism whose significance was known only to himself, "Gawd 'elp us!" In the minds of some of those foreigners who were not physicists this quaint expression was taken to be a technical word having some connexion with the new source of energy.

The Mongol continued. Turning towards Lundy, he said, "That island is no longer inhabited, and as it is something of a danger

to shipping, I will remove it." So saying he aimed his instrument at the distant cliff, but continued speaking. "This trigger will stimulate the ultimate positive and negative charges which constitute the atoms at a certain point on the rock face to annihilate each other. These stimulated atoms will infect their neighbours, and so on indefinitely. This second trigger, however, will stop the actual annihilation. Were I to refrain from using it, the process would indeed continue indefinitely, perhaps until the whole of the planet had disintegrated."

There was an anxious movement among the spectators, but the young man took careful aim, and pressed the two triggers in quick succession. No sound from the instrument. No visible effect upon the smiling face of the island. Laughter began to gurgle from the Englishman, but ceased. For a dazzling point of light appeared on the remote cliff. It increased in size and brilliance, till all eyes were blinded in the effort to continue watching. It lit up the under parts of the clouds and blotted out the sun-cast shadows of gorse bushes beside the spectators. The whole end of the island facing the mainland was now an intolerable scorching sun. Presently, however, its fury was veiled in clouds of steam from the boiling sea. Then suddenly the whole island, three miles of solid granite, leaped asunder; so that a covey of great rocks soared heavenward, and beneath them swelled more slowly a gigantic mushroom of steam and debris. Then the sound arrived. All hands were clapped to ears, while eyes still strained to watch the bay, pocked white with the hail of rocks. Meanwhile a great wall of sea advanced from the centre of turmoil. This was seen to engulf a coasting vessel, and pass on toward Bideford and Barnstaple.

The spectators leaped to their feet and clamoured, while the young author of this fury watched the spectacle with exultation, and some surprise at the magnitude of these mere after-effects of his process.

The meeting was now adjourned to a neighbouring chapel to hear the report of the research. As the representatives were filing through the door it was observed that the steam and smoke had cleared, and that open sea extended where had been Lundy. Within the chapel, the great Bible was decorously removed and the windows thrown open, to dispel somewhat the odour of sanctity. For though the early and spiritistic interpretations of relativity and the quantum theory had by now accustomed men of science to pay their respects to the religions, many of them were still liable to a certain asphyxia when they were actually within the precincts of sanctity. When the scientists had settled themselves upon the archaic and unyielding benches, the President explained that the chapel authorities had kindly permitted this meeting because they realized that, since men of science had gradually discovered the spiritual foundation of physics, science and religion must henceforth be close allies. Moreover the purpose of this meeting was to discuss one of those supreme mysteries which it was the glory of science to discover and religion to transfigure. The President then complimented the young dispenser of power upon his triumph, and called upon him to address the meeting.

At this point, however, the aged representative of France intervened, and was granted a hearing. Born almost a hundred and forty years earlier, and preserved more by native intensity of spirit than by the artifices of the regenerator, this ancient seemed to speak out of a remote and wiser epoch. For in a declining civilization it is often the old who see furthest and see with youngest eyes. He concluded a rather long, rhetorical, yet closely reasoned speech as follows: "No doubt we are the intelligence of the planet; and because of our consecration to our calling, no doubt we are comparatively honest. But alas, even we are human. We make little mistakes now and then, and commit little indiscretions. The possession of such power as is offered us would not bring peace. On the contrary it would perpetuate our national hates. It would throw the world into confusion. It would undermine our own integrity, and turn us

into tyrants. Moreover it would ruin science. And,--well, when at last through some little error the world got blown up, the disaster would not be regrettable. I know that Europe is almost certainly about to be destroyed by those vigorous but rather spoilt children across the Atlantic. But distressing as this must be, the alternative is far worse. No, Sir! Your very wonderful toy would be a gift fit for developed minds; but for us, who are still barbarians,--no, it must not be. And so, with deep regret I beg you to destroy your handiwork, and, if it were possible, your memory of your marvellous research. But above all breathe no word of your process to us, or to any man."

The German then protested that to refuse would be cowardly. He briefly described his vision of a world organized under organized science, and inspired by a scientifically organized religious dogma. "Surely," he said, "to refuse were to refuse the gift of God, of that God whose presence in the humblest quantum we have so recently and so surprisingly revealed." Other speakers followed, for and against; but it soon grew clear that wisdom would prevail. Men of science were by now definitely cosmopolitan in sentiment. Indeed so far were they from nationalism, that on this occasion the representative of America had urged acceptance of the weapon, although it would be used against his own countrymen.

Finally, however, and actually by a unanimous vote, the meeting, while recording its deep respect for the Chinese scientist, requested, nay ordered, that the instrument and all account of it should be destroyed.

The young man rose, drew his handiwork from its case, and fingered it. So long did he remain thus standing in silence with eyes fixed on the instrument, that the meeting became restless. At last, however, he spoke. "I shall abide by the decision of the meeting. Well, it is hard to destroy the fruit of ten years' work, and such fruit, too. I expected to have the gratitude of mankind; but instead I am an outcast." Once more he paused. Gazing out of the window, he now drew from his pocket a field-glass, and

studied the western sky. "Yes, they are American. Gentlemen, the American air fleet approaches."

The company leapt to its feet and crowded to the windows. High in the west a sparse line of dots stretched indefinitely into the north and the south. Said the Englishman, "For God's sake use your damned tool once more, or England's done. They must have smashed our fellows over the Atlantic."

The Chinese scientist turned his eyes on the President. There was a general cry of "Stop them." Only the Frenchman protested. The representative of the United States raised his voice and said, "They are my people, I have friends up there in the sky. My own boy is probably there. But they're mad. They want to do something hideous. They're in the lynching mood. Stop them." The Mongol still gazed at the President, who nodded. The Frenchman broke down in senile tears. Then the young man, leaning upon the window sill, took careful aim at each black dot in turn. One by one, each became a blinding star, then vanished. In the chapel, a long silence. Then whispers; and glances at the Chinaman, expressive of anxiety and dislike.

There followed a hurried ceremony in a neighbouring field. A fire was lit. The instrument and the no less murderous manuscript were burnt. And then the grave young Mongol, having insisted on shaking hands all round, said, "With my secret alive in me, I must not live. Some day a more worthy race will re-discover it, but today I am a danger to the planet. And so I, who have foolishly ignored that I live among savages, help myself now by the ancient wisdom to pass hence." So saying, he fell dead.

3
EUROPE MURDERED

Rumour spread by voice and radio throughout the world. An island had been mysteriously exploded. The American fleet had been mysteriously annihilated in the air. And in the neighbourhood where these events had occurred, distinguished scientists were gathered in conference. The European Government sought out the unknown saviour of Europe, to thank him, and secure his process for their own use. The President of the scientific society gave an account of the meeting and the unanimous vote. He and his colleagues were promptly arrested, and "pressure," first moral and then physical, was brought to bear on them to make them disclose the secret; for the world was convinced that they really knew it, and were holding it back for their own purposes.

Meanwhile it was learned that the American air commander, after he had defeated the European fleet, had been instructed merely to "demonstrate" above England while peace was negotiated. For in America, big business had threatened the government with boycott if unnecessary violence were committed in Europe. Big business was by now very largely international in sentiment, and it was realized that the destruction of Europe would inevitably unhinge American finance. But the unprecedented disaster to the victorious fleet roused the Americans to blind hate, and the peace party was submerged. Thus it turned out that the Chinaman's one hostile act had not saved England, but doomed her.

For some days Europeans lived in panic dread, knowing not what horror might at any moment descend on them. No wonder, then, that the Government resorted to torture in order to extract the secret from the scientists. No wonder that out of the forty individuals concerned, one, the Englishman, saved himself by deceit. He promised to do his best to "remember" the intricate process. Under strict supervision, he used his own knowledge of physics to experiment in search of the Chinaman's trick. Fortunately, however, he was on the wrong scent. And indeed he knew it. For though his first motive was

findings of the High Court. But, since human loyalty was still in the main national rather than cosmopolitan, situations were all too frequent in which a nation would lose its head, run amok, throw its pledges to the winds, and plunge into fear-inspired aggression. Such a situation had produced the Anglo-French War. At other times the nations would burst apart into two great camps, and the League would be temporarily forgotten in their disunion. This happened in the Russo-German War, which was possible only because America favoured Russia, and China favoured Germany. After the destruction of Europe, the world had for a while consisted of the League on one side and America on the other. But the League was dominated by China, and no longer stood for cosmopolitanism. This being so, those whose loyalty was genuinely human worked hard to bring America once more into the fold, and at last succeeded.

In spite of the League's failure to prevent the "great" wars, it worked admirably in preventing all the minor conflicts which had once been a chronic disease of the race. Latterly, indeed, the world's peace was absolutely secure, save when the League itself was almost equally divided. Unfortunately, with the rise of America and China, this kind of situation became more and more common. During the war of North and South America an attempt was made to re-create the League as a Cosmopolitan Sovereignty, controlling the pooled armaments of all nations. But, though the cosmopolitan will was strong, tribalism was stronger. The upshot was that, over the Japanese question, the League definitely split into two Leagues, each claiming to inherit universal sovereignty from the old League, but each in reality dominated by a kind of supernational sentiment, the one American, the other Chinese.

This occurred within a century after the eclipse of Europe. The second century completed the process of crystallization into two systems, political and mental. On the one hand was the wealthy and close-knit American Continental Federation, with its poor relations, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, the bedridden remains of Western Europe, and part of the soulless

body that was Russia. On the other hand were Asia and Africa. In fact the ancient distinction between East and West had now become the basis of political sentiment and organization.

Within each system there were of course real differences of culture, of which the chief was the difference between the Chinese and Indian mentalities. The Chinese were interested in appearances, in the sensory, the urbane, the practical; while the Indians inclined to seek behind appearances for some ultimate reality, of which this life, they said, was but a passing aspect. Thus the average Indian never took to heart the practical social problem in all its seriousness. The ideal of perfecting this world was never an all-absorbing interest to him; since he had been taught to believe that this world was mere shadow. There was, indeed, a time when China had mentally less in common with India than with the West, but fear of America had drawn the two great Eastern peoples together. They agreed at least in earnest hate of that strange blend of the commercial traveller, the missionary, and the barbarian conqueror, which was the American abroad.

China, owing to her relative weakness and irritation caused by the tentacles of American industry within her, was at this time more nationalistic than her rival, America. Indeed, professed to have outgrown nationalism, and to stand for political and cultural world unity. But she conceived this unity as a Unity under American organization; and by culture she meant Americanism. This kind of cosmopolitanism was regarded by Asia and Africa without sympathy. In China a concerted effort had been made to purge the foreign element from her culture. Its success, however, was only superficial. Pigtails and chopsticks had once more come into vogue among the leisured, and the study of Chinese classics was once more compulsory in all schools. Yet the manner of life of the average man remained American. Not only did he use American cutlery, shoes, gramophones, domestic labour-saving devices, but also his alphabet was European, his vocabulary was permeated by American slang, his newspapers and radio were American in


image
not
available

Yet I have a lively sympathy with some of those "intellectuals" who declare that they have no useful contribution to make to the struggle, and therefore had better not dabble in it. I am, in fact, one of them. In our defense I should say that, though we are inactive or ineffective as direct supporters of the cause, we do not ignore it. Indeed, it constantly, obsessively, holds our attention. But we are convinced by prolonged trial and error that the most useful service open to us is indirect. For some writers the case is different. Gallantly plunging into the struggle, they use their powers to spread urgent propaganda, or they even take up arms in the cause. If they have suitable ability, and if the particular struggle in which they serve is in fact a part of the great enterprise of defending (or creating) civilization, they may, of course, do valuable work. In addition they may gain great wealth of experience and human sympathy, thereby immensely increasing their literary power. But the very urgency of their service may tend to blind them to the importance of maintaining and extending, even in this age of crisis, what may be called metaphorically the "self-critical self-consciousness of the human species," or the attempt to see man's life as a whole in relation to the rest of things. This involves the will to regard all human affairs and ideals and theories with as little human prejudice as possible. Those who are in the thick of the struggle inevitably tend to become, though in a great and just cause, partisan. They nobly forgo something of that detachment, that power of cold assessment, which is, after all, among the most valuable human capacities. In their case this is perhaps as it should be; for a desperate struggle demands less of detachment than of devotion. But some who have the cause at heart must serve by striving to maintain, along with human loyalty, a more dispassionate spirit. And perhaps the attempt to see our turbulent world against a background of stars may, after all, increase, not lessen the significance of the present human crisis. It may also strengthen our charity toward one another.

In this belief I have tried to construct an imaginative sketch of the dread but vital whole of things. I know well that it is a


image
not
available

Devil. I hope he will not strongly disapprove of my treatment of them.

My wife I must thank both for work on the proofs and for being herself.

At the end of the book I have included a note on Magnitude, which may be helpful to readers unfamiliar with astronomy. The very sketchy time scales may amuse some.

O. S. March 1937


image
not
available

Author and publisher: **August Nemo**

Contact: tacet.books@gmail.com

ISBN: **9783986474287**