

The Blue Wound

The Blue Wound

by
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To
J. O'H. C.

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PROEMIAL

He seemed not to know how night parted the days. He behaved as one who required neither food nor sleep. The telegraphers left him there at 2 A.M. The first down of the editorial crowd at 12 o'clock noon found him going still. When he was not in a spasm of conflict with the typewriter he was either beating his breast or embracing it, alternately, as one would think, threatening or wheedling the untransferred thought. In moments of despair he combed his dry, black hair with thick, excited fingers until it stood on end and flared out all around like a prehistoric halo.

This had been going on for two weeks.

Then one day the City Editor spoke about it to the Managing Editor, saying: "My curiosity seldom overcomes me. You have unearthed many strange specimens in our time. But what of that person now over there in the telegraph room?"

"I don't know who he is," said the Managing Editor.

"You put him there and told us to let him alone."

"He is unclassified," said the Managing Editor. "Four or five days after the armistice was signed he came walking into my office here and said, with an air obsessed, that he had given up everything else in the world to go an errand for mankind.

"Yes?" I said, wondering how he had got in and how long it would take to get rid of him.

"I am going to interview the man who caused the war," he said next.

"And who is that?" I asked him.

"He can be found," he answered.

“Where shall you look for him?’ I asked, beginning to be interested by a poignant quality in his voice. Besides, I am a very credulous person, believing in hunches and all manner of minor miracles.

“Up and down, anywhere in the world,’ he replied.

“I supposed of course he would come immediately to the familiar request for credentials, passport, and money. They always do, in the most naïve manner. Not so. All he wanted was an undertaking by me to provide him on his return with a desk, typewriter, and paper. He had to know that when he got back there would be a place where he could sit down and write—a place in a newspaper office. He couldn’t write in any other atmosphere, and for some reason he didn’t wish to go back to where he was from. He was from Omaha—I think he said Omaha. He wished to be among strangers who would ask him no questions and let him alone. I promised. It was an easy way to get free of him. There was no other obligation. We were not even to pay for the stuff if it came off. It was to be ours for nothing, provided we would print it.

“Well,” continued the Managing Editor, after a long pause, “two weeks ago he walked in again. I had quite forgotten him.

“Did you find the man who caused the war?’ I asked.

“Yes,’ he said, with a constrained manner.

“Does he admit it?’ I asked.

“Yes,’ he said.

“That’s news,’ I said. ‘Who is he?’

“At that question he began vacantly to stare about at the ceiling and walls. Some strange excitement was in him. I thought he would fall off the edge of the chair. When he got his faculty of speech back he said: ‘I can’t tell you who he is. I only know that he exists. I have been with him nearly all this time.’

“Then where have you been?’ I asked him.

“He was most vague about where he had been. Some of the cities he named I knew and I asked him where he had lived and

what some of the well-known places were like to look at after the war. He became incoherent, behaving as a man waking from a dream. When I pressed him hard he grew more and more uneasy. Then I said, impatiently: 'Well, describe your man—the being who mused the war, whose name you do not know and whose habitat is everywhere.

"The effect was astonishing. Tears burst from his eyes. I had been a little steep with him, but that wasn't it. He was neither chagrined nor embarrassed. He was overwhelmed by an emotion that I could not understand. I had a feeling that he was but dimly aware of me or the surroundings.

"'I can write it,' he said, presently. 'I will write it. But I cannot talk about it, as you see.'

"I don't know what he meant I could see. I said, 'Well, then go to it.'

"With that I fixed him out with an old desk and typewriter over there in one corner of the telegraph room. I haven't seen a line of the stuff. And that's all I know about it. The world is mad in any case. One mad man more or less among us will not make any difference. Let him alone. He'll disappear some day."

Day and night for weeks more on end he struggled and wrote, attracting less and less notice and becoming at length a part of the office background. Then suddenly he was gone. Nobody saw him go. He was still there, behaving as usual, when the telegraphers left, for they were questioned. He was not there when the City Editor arrived at noon. He had entirely vanished. The desk was cleared bare. Not a scrap of paper remained. When the Managing Editor came in he found on his own desk a manuscript, much soiled from handling, and there was nothing else—no note of explanation or comment. The manuscript, as it follows, was not even signed.

The Managing Editor grunted and put it aside, expecting the writer to re-appear. He never did.

CHAPTER I

MERED

“Whence comest thou?”

“From going to and fro in the earth.”

IN setting out to find the man who caused the war I was guided by two assumptions, namely:

First, that he would proclaim the fact, for else he could not endure the torture of it, and,

Second, that none would believe him.

So, therefore, I hoped to discover the object of my search not by any rational process of thought, as by deduction from the historical nature of events or the facts of belief, but by an apperceptive sense of hearing. Somewhere, sometime, I should overtake the original testimony of guilt, uttered openly and received with ridicule by the multitude.

More than this I had no thought or plan. Purposely, by an act of will, I delivered control of my movements to unconscious impulse. Why I turned now right instead of left, why I lingered here and hastened on from there, I cannot tell. For many weeks I wandered about Europe mingling with people, in trains, in the streets, in all manner of congregating places, listening. I was in Berlin, in Warsaw, in a city which I think was Vienna, and then in a very ancient place called Prague. I mention only a few of them. I stopped in many cities I had never heard of and in some the names of which I have forgotten. I had not been in Europe before. I walked great distances. My wants were very

few. None of this is material, yet I put it down briefly in its place. Often I had the subtle sensation of having touched a path, of following and overtaking. Then it would go and my wanderings were blind again.

In this way I came to London, as I had come to all the other places, and here the sense of overtaking which I had been without for many days poignantly returned.

One evening, about 9 o'clock, I discovered a crowd heaving and writhing in that lustful excitement with which many alike surround one dissimilar, whether to torment or destroy the dissimilar one you never know at first; you cannot be sure until it ends. This tumult was taking place at the base of a monument standing in an open space at the conjunction of several streets. The monument is indistinct. My recollection is that it had a very large square base, with a lion on each of the four corners, a shaft or possibly an heroic figure rising from the centre to a considerable height.

At the core of the crowd, with a space around him which no one had yet crossed, was the figure of a man so very unlike ordinary men in aspect and feeling as to be outside the range of all the chords of human sympathy. The difference in aspect I did not analyse at once; the difference in feeling reached me whole, at one impact. Yet it is not easy to define. It was as if you were in contact with a being outwardly fashioned somewhat in your own image and yet otherwise so strange as to radiate absolutely nothing to which the heart could willingly or spontaneously respond. A thought rose in my mind, which was: "It has ceased to be with him as with other men—if it ever was."

I could make almost nothing of what he was trying to say, owing to the ribald manner in which he was continually interrupted. Besides, his words seemed incoherent. I caught phrases about labour and trade and English wool in the fifteenth century, each one drowned in cries of ironic encouragement or of

vulgar and irrelevant comment. No one was attending in the least to what he said; but everyone nevertheless was fascinated as by an object immediately liable to torture and destruction. I heard him exclaim:

“The dead are mine—all mine—bought and paid for. Shall I have wasted them for fools like these?”

The mind of the crowd turned suddenly sultry. A menacing cry was on its lips, when a policeman thrust himself through to the centre, laid hold of the figure speaking, and dragged him out. I was where the crowd broke to let them through, and as they passed I heard the policeman say: “Most unreasonable conduct. . . . Blocking traffic. . . . Raising a mob. . . . What were y’saying? I believe y’re daft.”

The behaviour of the crowd was peculiar. It gave up its victim readily, with what seemed an air of relief, and rapidly dispersed in all directions. Only a few had the impulse to follow, and these disappeared almost at once, leaving me alone in the wake of the policeman and his prisoner. The policeman kept on talking in a growly, admonishing, but not ill-tempered way, as I could hear without being able to distinguish the words. The man was silent and passive.

Under a light they stopped. Which one stopped first I could not tell. It was as if they halted by a joint compulsion. The man turned his countenance upon the policeman and appeared literally to transfix him with a look. So they stood for full half a minute. Then the man went on alone. The policeman stood in his spot as one dazed. I passed him close by and he was not aware of me.

As I followed the stalking figure a feeling of depression and utter wretchedness assailed my spirit. This rose by degrees to the pitch of a physical sensation, as if the world, departed from its plane, were tilting downward. An impulse to overtake the man swiftly before he had walked out of the earth was checked

by the fear of facing misery incarnate.

A dreadless melancholy went out from him like an emanation. There was desolation in the shape of his movements, in the weight of his shoulders, in the dreary alternations of his legs, in the ancient flutter of his garments.

He stopped again after a long time, and I came up. He spoke without looking at me.

“Do you follow me?”

“I must,” I answered.

“You dare not find the truth you seek—almost you dare not.”

“I seek the man who brought the war to pass,” I said.

That was not what I had meant to say. His challenge took me unawares. As I pronounced the words my rational self broke its passive role and passed comment on the situation, to the effect that all the circumstances were utterly preposterous and that a sense of their being so was my only hold upon sanity. My irrational self set forth its defences weakly and might easily at that moment have lost control of my conduct had not curiosity overwhelmed reflection.

The figure at my side was an admissible fact; the senses could not reject it. Yet nothing more intrinsically improbable could have ever existed in the imagination. It gave no sign of treating my statement as absurd. To the contrary, I felt its silence to be receptive.

After a long time, and still without looking at me, it spoke, saying:

“I am he. I proclaim it. . . . But you are too late.”

“Why am I too late?”

“A god peddling truth to the multitude: a fish-wife crying pearls at a dollar a pound. They are equally mad. At last one is weary of all this futile consequence. I am departing.”

“Is truth not irresistible in its own right?” I asked.

“For what he believes, or to destroy what he disbelieves, man willingly lays down his life. It is the only grandeur he has.”

“If he will fight for truth why should gods despair?”

“Not for truth,” he answered. “For what he believes or wishes were true—for that he will die sublimely. And always it is untrue. Truth destroys strife and is free. Precisely for these reasons man will not accept it, almost as if he feared more than anything else that there should be nothing left to fight for.”

“Through strife shall he not find truth at last and believe it also?”

“To believe is a perverse act of the human will,” he replied, speaking remotely. “Belief says these things shall be true, and all these other things which are contradictory shall be untrue. Truth does not require to be believed. Contradiction is a principle of force and therefore true in itself. Yet with man are two passions: one to believe and one to reconcile the contradictions.”

With that he was walking on.

“I would go with you,” I said.

“Where with me would you go?” he asked.

“To anywhere.”

“To the haunted places of the world?”

“Yes.”

“To places that have no where in time or space?”

“There also.”

“Willingly?” he asked. “One thought of hesitation might destroy you.”

“With my whole free will,” I said.

Now he stopped under a light, took my face between his hands, and moved it into the plane of his own. His hands were dry and cool and unpulsating. I knew then what had happened to the policeman. I knew without understanding it. I do not understand it yet. He stared into me long and deeply.

The face was old—older than anything you can imagine—with the smooth stillness of stone and the streaked ashen lustre of some very ancient sculpture. The lower eyelids fell in V-shapes to the cheek bones like twin torrent beds. Enormous white eyeballs were thus exposed, with dark, bloodless caverns underneath. But what truly monumentalized the countenance was its nose, a form in itself of pure geometric intensity, which rose high in the forehead and seemed to pass out of the face altogether. Somewhere in the face, especially about the nose, there was some spatial or dimensional contradiction which I was never able to analyse.

The eyes were blue and grey. The colours did not mix or blend but radiated separately from the centre.

Just when I thought I should be unable to endure his regard for one moment more he released me suddenly and looked away, speaking:

“The spirit is rash but the mind is afraid. You would wish to turn back.”

“No,” I said.

“At the sound of a demon weeping in the darkness?”

“I should not turn back.”

“A serpent groaning on a rock?”

“No.”

“A voice lifted in blasphemy against your special god? . . . You hesitate.”

“Only to be sure,” I said. “Still I would go.”

“Come!” he said.

The word was so final, so precipitous and so alarmingly unexpected that courage certainly would have failed me but for something that immediately happened. This was an experience which, as it has no kind of relation to common sensations, cannot be described in terms of itself. It was both physical and psychic. The physical or sensorial content was the minor part.

There was first the mental perception that man in his quest of absolute knowledge presses in the wrong direction. He contemplates form, wherein it is perpendicular, horizontal, concave, or convex, and tries to imagine the infinite consequences of these qualities; or he seeks a dimension beyond length, breadth and thickness; and he is baffled because what he mistakes for barriers are in fact terminations. There is nothing beyond. The outwardness of a thing is its culmination. You may multiply it endlessly, as you may multiply numbers, but this is merely repetition. You will never find the mystery of numbers by beginning at one and going forward; you must begin at one and go in the other direction. The infinite lies away from the culmination. And whereas the outwardness of things is in three dimensions, the inwardness of them is an infinite dimension.

The other part of the experience was exquisitely thrilling to the tactile sense. The texture of common reality became like the texture of dreams. Sensations were without physical reactions. To be specific, there was a sense of standing but no feeling of resistance in what was stood upon. There was the sense of moving, but no feeling of effort or of friction overcome. Forms remained as before in outline, only they were ethereal and unresisting. One could pass through.

All of this happened to me swiftly, in a breath. I think it did. It seems to me now that after I had lost sense of my own weight and substance the sound of his imperative "Come!" was still ringing in my other ears, like an echo at twilight.

Then suddenly we were gone.

CHAPTER II

THE CURSE THAT WAS

IN the chill darkness which strives against dawn we sat on a fragment of hewn stone, facing the east. A star fell. A serpent passed. I heard it walking on its belly in the sand. My marrow ached with dread and loneliness. The silence of immense space filled my ears with roaring. I summoned all my strength to speak.

“I should like to call you by some name,” I said.

My voice fell upon the air like a frightened squeak. The words went a little way off and returned, then farther away and returned again, then away and back again from a greater distance, magnified each time, until at length they mocked me from all directions at once and I was hot with humiliation. No sooner had the din subsided than I was tempted to renew it. The stillness bare was stifling. Then he spoke, saying:

“Cease the babble.”

Babble! Heaven say what babble is. His voice was like the taste of brass. Though it made me shudder, yet to my great astonishment it pulled my spirits up.

“That is not the voice I put my trust in,” I said. “Then it had some trace of kindness in it. Now it reeks of hate and ironies.”

I wondered what would happen.

When he spoke again, which was not at once, the voice was as I had heard it first.

“By any word that means rebellion,” he said. “Name me

so.”

“Mered means rebellion,” I said. “I shall think of you as Mered.”

“Look!” he said.

Dawn had dispatched the adversary suddenly, and with one sweep of soft blue light re-established the horizon. We were at the centre of a vast, wonderfully modelled plain, falling away east, west, north, and south in gentle sinuosities which dissolved with the stretch of vision into restful levels, except in the east, where lay a line of low mountains. The sun, lifting himself cautiously, peered into the plain over this high edge, darted suspicious rays about and I could have imagined that he stopped for a moment in astonishment at the sight of us.

The fragment of stone we sat upon was one of three. Two were rectangular pieces crushed at the ends. The third was round and fluted, evidently part of what had once been a magnificent column. In a depression at our left, which might have been the foundation of a forgotten temple, was a pool scummed over. Obliquely to the right on a slight eminence was the ruin of an heroic stone figure—a woman seated, facing the sun. At a great distance, perhaps twenty miles, a small and lonely pyramid reflected the early light. There was nothing else—no tree, no habitation, no sign of human life.

It was desolate enough to the eye, God knows, but immensely more desolate in the feeling of one’s soul for a reason that clarified slowly in the understanding. All this plain had been abandoned. Once it was rich and lovely and seething with barbaric life. And the memory of races haunted it still.

For a moment I had forgotten Mered. I shall call him by this word. It does not comprehend him. No word could. But it is necessary to use a name. He had risen and was standing a little apart, behind me. I surprised him in the moment of a gesture performed with both arms raised and overhanging, the extraor-

dinary power and effect of which lay in its awful uncouthness.

Without dropping it when I looked at him he spoke, again in that voice with the taste of brass.

“Here was that which happened,” he said.

“What happened here?” I asked.

There was no need to ask, for he meant to go on. In time I learned how not to ask unnecessary questions. They did not irritate him. He was altogether beyond common irritations. But his contempt for superfluous language was appalling.

“Here man emerged and became conscious,” he continued. “Here was the tree of knowledge. Here the torment was improvised. Here was laid upon man the curse of toil. Would that in the same instant there had been the power to recall the gift of knowledge, for then might he have toiled as the ants, which also are cursed and know it not. Too late! Knowledge is irrevocable. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.* Thus was he cursed, to appease a jealous wrath. Since then all things to man are full of labour which to the unaccursed are miraculous and abundant. And this is not the measure full. He is conscious of his state. He finds the spirit to despair, saying, ‘For what hath man of all his labour?’”

“The Expulsion,” I said, incredulously, as the drift of it reached me. “The myth divine.”

“Myth,” he repeated wearily. “Meaning thereby something fabulous, a phantasy, untrue. Man in his present vanity rejects the myth. It cannot be demonstrated in a tiny test tube. He practises, instead, idolatry of facts. He will perish by facts alone. They are the momentary data of experience. Truth lies outside of facts. Simple verities cannot be demonstrated. They may be expressed in myths.”

“But did the expulsion of the first man and woman from the Garden of Eden happen?” I asked.

“Knowledge exists,” he replied. “Can you say how knowl-

edge happened, and why it is in the beasts unconscious and in man both conscious and unconscious? But let us not dispute together. A thing need not have happened to be true. This myth perfectly expresses man's intuitive sense of his condition. He exists by the curse of toil. He flees continually, he revolts perpetually, and there is no escape. He invokes his conscious knowledge and performs prodigious miracles, always with one result. Toil is multiplied. To the snake fell the lesser evil. Though he drags his belly in the dust he fills it without thought and lives unconsciously. Of the man it is true, *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*. And man, being conscious, wonders bitterly. Do you ask if this happened?"

"I am rebuked," I answered.

He continued: "The greatest catastrophes in all this affair of conscious human existence have issued from man's futile efforts to escape the curse. It began with Cain. You know of him? It is a continuation of the myth."

"Yes," I said.

"Cain was the first rebel. He would be free. The earth was bounteous; its fruits were pleasant to the taste. Abel, his brother, tilled the soil and multiplied the domestic beasts, and was mocked by Cain, who said, 'What availeth thy toil but to increase thy wants and add labour unto thy hands?' When these two went to make their offering to the jealous wrath Cain naïvely brought the natural fruits of the earth which were without labour; but Abel brought the produce of toil. Cain's offering was despised. Abel's was respected. There for the first time was drawn the distinction between two kinds of labour, namely, preferred and despised. Cain's offering represented free and spontaneous effort. Abel's offering represented toil according to the curse. Cain hated the labour of Abel, which was respected; Abel envied the labour of Cain, which was despised. This was the beginning of the feud. It was not a feud between Cain and

Abel, nor between either of them and the jealous wrath, but between that wrath and another power.”

He made again that colossal gesture. When the emotion which accompanied it had subsided he said: “But that is another thing.” He referred, I supposed, to the cryptic sentence before the pause. “Cain walked with Abel,” he went on, “and slew him. This was not because he, Cain, was empty-handed and despised, nor because Abel had prospered in the favour of the wrath, but because Cain’s spirit was in revolt. He rebelled against the curse. Abel was its symbol.”

“And then?” I said, after a long time, for he had become utterly oblivious of me.

“Then Cain went and built him a city,” he resumed. “The first city was as the last city is—a forethought of escape. It represents man’s intention to evade the despised forms of toil, by means of trade, invention, bauble-making, cunning, and magic. The most despised form of toil at this time was peasant labour, like Abel’s. Therefore, in Cain’s state artisanship was preferred. His city harboured artificers in brass and iron, masons and architects, harpists, witches, harlots, and drones, the keepers of order, the givers of law, and slaves. There were many cities in the pattern of Cain’s. Look!”

CHAPTER III

URBANITIES

“And when thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it.”

HE drew my eyes to the north-east part of the plain.

A scene of intense activity was enacting there, like a moving picture unrolling swiftly, with the illusion of being so enormously foreshortened in time and space that days were as moments. Yet every detail of the drama was microscopically clear. Thus I saw a city rise—first the walls and gates, then houses and a temple, then many little houses forming streets, as you might see a spider cast its web. It was an immense labour.

“Who are the hewers and bringers?” I asked. “They seem like all the rest.”

“They are,” he said. “It is willing labour, voluntarily performed at first, since it is by everyone preferred over peasant labour from which all of these have fled. . . . Wait.”

From all directions, converging upon the city, moved thin, slow files of people driving flocks and bearing grain and oil. They were met at each of the four gates by traders who higgled with them shrewdly and invariably with one outcome. The food disappeared within the walls and those who brought it returned in the directions whence they had come, bearing things that

glittered in the sun.

Suddenly the watchers on the walls sounded a shrill alarm. The gates were slammed. Out of the north came a hostile host. It surrounded the city, battered at the gates, tried scaling the walls but desisted on finding that method of attack too costly, and presently settled down in a circle and waited. The city was besieged. In a short time it surrendered. The invaders entered, joyously looted and destroyed it, and disappeared again into the north, taking with them a great number of men and women prisoners.

“Living machines in bondage,” said Mered, gloomily. “The original labour-saving device. . . . Look!”

On the same site another city was rising, larger and grander than the first, with towers on the walls and walled gardens inside and structures that were neither for habitation nor trade, being purely ornamental.

“The hewers and bringers are now slaves,” said Mered. “Kingship and stewardship and the relation of master and bondsman are evolved. The curse is thus heavier on many and lighter on a few—lighter for a time only.”

And what happened to the first city happened also to this one.

There was a third city, and then a fourth, each successive one more magnificent because of so many more hewers and bringers, but all alike vulnerable to attack. All were similarly besieged, and all presently fell.

“No city withstands the assault,” I said. “Why is it so much harder to defend a city than to take it?”

“A city,” he answered, “is like a giant hanging by the umbilical cord. Its belly is outside of itself, at a distance, in the keeping of others. Cut it off from its belly and it surrenders or dies. As the first city was so the last one is. No city endures. . . . Look!”

He swept the whole plain with a gesture, and now I saw many cities, some in the plain, some against the horizon, and one with a tower that touched the clouds. And wherever I looked there was battle. Armies were continually issuing from the gates of the cities and falling upon each other in terrific combat.

“How now?” I asked. “Here, instead of the hostile roving force that besieged a city, I see cities themselves contending together.”

“It is as you see it,” he answered. “Man progresses. It now is the ambition of each city to conquer and enslave the others. The one that should succeed in that would hope thereafter to live in idleness and luxury by the tribute of the others and itself be free. But the triumphant city in that case would inevitably destroy itself from within.”

I saw three cities combine against two, and the two were destroyed with all their inhabitants, save only the strong men and women. Three cities remained. Then I saw two combine against one, and two remained. Between these two the strife continued until only the one with the great tower survived. All the others had been destroyed because they would not submit to be enslaved.

The city now lonely and paramount was the most beautiful one, and I had almost prayed that it should have the victory, for I hated to see it fall. Only now I dreaded the appearance of a marauding force from outside, to besiege it. This did not happen. Instead, there was strife within that city, thirstier than any combat which had taken place between it and the others. In this struggle the hewers and bringers were on one side, and all the rest were on the other side, and the former outnumbered the latter five-fold. Presently, therefore, it was consumed from within. The tower burned and fell. Those of the inhabitants who did not perish in the fight fled in little groups out of the

plain in all directions, weeping and looking back.

And the plain was again as I had seen it first.

“Thus the barbarian overwhelmed himself,” said Mered, “fleeing always from something he could not define. Next was the trial of political civilization. . . . Come!”

I cast a look backward and saw that darkness had swallowed up the plain, suddenly, as when the lights go out in the theatre.

CHAPTER IV

ALL EAST OF EDEN

“LOOK!” said Mered.

For I know not how long I had been again without any sense of being. I shall not mention this hereafter. It was so invariably that we went from place to place. What intervened of time, space, or other phenomena I do not know; nor was I at any time very curious about it. Simply I accepted it.

On hearing his imperative word I exercised my vision. We were at a great height, on a mountain, facing south. Below us, stretching far away into a land-locked sea, was a bewildering panorama of islands and estuaries of surpassing variety in size contour, and outline, all very definite and distinct, like cameos. What transacted here, as with the drama on the plain, took place in dimensions of time and space that cannot be explained in terms of common reality. As to the foreshortening of time I cannot describe it at all. The spatial illusion was as if one looked through an inverted telescope which, though it made everything small, yet at the same time so intensified vividness that the minutest details were clearly perceived.

The first total impression that reached me was that of people existing idyllically. They lived in the greatest simplicity and apparent comfort of mind, with the very minimum of irksome labour.

In the hills were flocks, mainly goats. On the uplands were figs, olives, and grapes. On the lowlands of greater fertility was

grain.

You could not say that the people were all alike, yet in some indefinable manner they were all of one character. The shepherds were men apart, practising rites and mysteries peculiar to their environment and temperament, but that even these had vital interests in common with all the rest of the people was proved by the events of intercourse. The tillers and fruit growers were continually coming up to the hills to converse with the shepherds, or else they, the shepherds, were descending to the lowlands for supplies, news, and social contact.

One important thing they had all in common was poverty. This was owing not so much to the hard and unexuberant nature of their surroundings as to choice. They could have produced much more, had they been minded to do so, and a few might even have been rich; but no one was rich, no one was more industrious than his neighbour, the land was equally divided in very small parcels among them, and all were of one opinion concerning work—that it was a necessary part of existence, but the less of it the better beyond the point of bare livelihood.

And so they lived, as we would think, most uncomfortably. Their houses were mean and cold and badly roofed. Their dress consisted uniformly of two pieces of fabric, one over the other loose, worn without pins, buttons, or conformation to the body. Their fare was rude and of no variety. But the body will thrive on what it does without. Their bodies, though cold and unpampered, were stout and durable; and their souls were spontaneous and warm. They were continually leaving their fields and vineyards, men, women, and children, to congregate in certain places to sing and dance and invoke the deities. The young men engaged in athletic exercises, which were enormously appreciated; the old men gathered to wrangle and make decisions touching the common welfare.

The family was the fundamental social unit. Families clus-

tered together in clans. Often a fierce dispute over boundaries would blaze up between clans, even culminating in combat with the letting of blood; but their fighting like everything else they did was filled with joyous spontaneity and served to spill out the natural venom of spirit, so that afterward they were friends again and cherished no implacable hatreds.

Besides, this was a very useful practice. Proficiency in fighting was important. From time to time hostile hosts swept down from the north or east, for goodness knows what purpose, since there was nothing here to steal. Perhaps it was for the purpose of capturing slaves. At any rate, they never got what they came for, as they were always repulsed with great slaughter. After each of these victories there were festivals, to the neglect of work.

For defence against invaders it was necessary to build walls around certain strategical areas within which all might take refuge in time of danger. The task of building these walls and other military works, such as trenches, was managed in a characteristic manner. All the people together, even the women and children, dropped their private labours and joined hands in a mighty communal effort, so that the enterprise instead of being tedious and hateful was performed in a gay holiday spirit; and when it was finished there were special festivities and rejoicing.

In the course of time these defended areas became cities, and the people grew to be very ambitious in thought concerning their cities, wishing them to be grand and beautiful. To the fulfillment of this wish they contributed labour in common lavishly, as in the building of the military defences. Labour which they scorned to perform for private profit or personal aggrandizement they gave to their cities with passionate enthusiasm. It was not drudgery. The work was full of joy, no matter how toilsome, for what the people felt was the free expression of an innate art consciousness. Thus were they recompensed.

"These have learned the use of knowledge," I said to Mered.

“Wait,” he answered, coldly.

One city grew steadily greater, more important and beautiful, beyond its share, and assumed an authority over all the others, which were increasingly envious and distrustful of it. The permanent population of this one city multiplied rapidly. More and more men spent their whole time there wrangling and debating, and this avocation, formerly a respite from labour, became a profession, so that many did nothing else. Besides these were craftsmen, traders, artists, singers, and teachers. There began also to be some who did nothing at all and wore finer cloth than was common.

Now ships appeared, first one, then three, then a dozen, and the number wonderfully increased. They made voyages distantly to Asia Minor and Egypt, bearing away the products of the craftsmen in the city and returning with exotic cargoes such as perfumes, frankincense, spices, and palatable food.

Then one ship returned with a cargo of slaves!

I sighed and looked at Mered. He was oblivious. I think he was not watching the scene at all.

More ships came with slaves, and whereas in the beginning the slaves were divided among the families of the adventurous sailors like any other booty, they began now to be sold for money. In the great city there was a regularly conducted slave mart.

I saw with relief that the slaves were treated kindly. The women were taken into the households to be nurses and serving maids; the men were employed in agriculture in place of citizens now wholly occupied in the cities. Also, many of the slaves were worked in the quarries whence came stones needed to build new temples in the great city. For the work of making this one city more beautiful went on unceasingly.

Life became more complicated. Money was introduced. Taxes were levied. And the number of slaves increased enor-

mously, until the population of the great city was more than one half slave. Inevitably came an economic crisis. The production of food was insufficient for two reasons. One was the growth of population. The other was that so many people had abandoned agriculture to take up the life of the city.

This dilemma was met in an unexpected manner. Population was exported. Thousands of families were sent off in ships to found colonies on distant and fertile shores, where they should be able not only to sustain themselves but to produce a surplus of food which the people who remained might purchase from them in exchange for manufactures. All this affair was managed by the great city, which became in consequence a sea power, with lines of ships diverging to all points of the compass like a web of umbilical cords.

And still the one most ambitious city was in straits for means wherewith to bring the vision of its own magnificence to pass. Food alone did not suffice. It required labour in vast quantities to carry out its architectural plans.

In the mountains were deposits of precious metal which had never been developed because none could be found willing to perform the drudgery of underground mining. This difficulty was solved at last by the importation of a new class of slaves—human beings of the very lowest grade, only enough above the intelligence of brutes to be able to understand spoken commands. These by the tens of thousands were set toiling in subterranean passages three feet high and three feet wide. It was thought a waste of time and labour to make the mining galleries larger than the ore vein, which was narrow and shallow. The slaves were unable to stand at their toil. But they were chained to it.

Thus the great city was in funds with which to prosecute its work, which it did with feverish haste, as if with a foreboding of its own doom it were yet resolved to make itself an eternal

epic in pure beauty.

As I saw the abominable toil of the mine slaves translating itself into the city's works of egoistic aggrandizement I forgot how beautiful those works were and felt only the pity. I turned to Mered, who answered my thought, saying:

"The grandeur of cities like the splendour of individuals is in proportion to the amount of human labour they can waste. So they propose in their vanity to defy the curse and end by accomplishing their own destruction. . . . Watch!"

As the one city progressed in artistic determination, in power and wealth, so all the other cities hated it more; but for a long while through fear and custom, and also with some lingering affection among the people, they continued to pay the tribute which by one pretext or another it increasingly laid upon them. This could not last.

There came a time when the other cities began to revolt; and as they were put down and laid each time under heavier tribute they began to make alliances with foreign enemies, until at last the beautiful city was a thing apart, standing alone, and compelled for food to rely entirely upon its sea power. It now received all its food through those umbilical ship cords which radiated through three seas.

When at length its money was exhausted and it had not enough goods of its own manufacture to barter and exchange with foreigners on other shores for the food it required, it turned its sea power to uses of plunder, sending forth armed armadas to conquer distant cities, even its own colonies, looting and destroying them if they refused to submit and laying the docile under heart-breaking tribute.

The proud and beautiful city, struggling for life, turned outright to piracy.

That was almost the end. A barbarian horde descending from the north mercifully terminated the tragedy.

“So they pass,” said Mered, bitterly.

“What a shame!” I cried, my mind contrasting the idyllic beginning with the relentless end.

“In the development of political civilization,” Mered added, “there have been many such experiments, lesser and greater, none so promising at first, all with the same sequel.”

“What threw them off,” I said, thinking I was by way of expounding a truth, “was outside interference. Invasion by foreigners made them to build cities, and that was the beginning of change. If that had not happened it might all have endured as it was at first.”

“Do you think so?” said Mered. “Come!”

CHAPTER V

WAGES OF THRIFT

“Then is the offence ceased.”

BY moonlight we came to a lovely valley lying deep in the protective embrace of mountains. Ingress was by a steep and difficult way, apparently seldom used.

“I have had nothing to do with what you will see here,” said Mered. The significance of this remark passed me then. Later I remembered it. The air was fragrant with the nocturnal chemistries of plant life. Here and there the deep peace was broken by the barking of a dog, the crowing of a cock, the faint tinkling of a bell. The inhabitants one would have thought were all abandoned to the sleep of perfect security.

Near the centre of the valley were twelve houses, not close together, yet clustered with a friendly, communal aspect.

As we approached the first house a man issued from it silently, walked in a purposeful manner to the next one, and knocked lightly. A second man immediately appeared. These knocked at the door of another house and were joined by a third. The three found a fourth man waiting, and so they increased until they were eleven. We walked near them and they were unaware of us. Not a word was spoken. All the eleven were masked in a kind of rude hood with openings only for the eyes.

In this way we came to the twelfth house. Three of the

eleven placed themselves in front of the others and then, lifting their voices in unison, as if speaking a part rehearsed, they called loudly for the head of that family to appear.

He came in surprise and stood in the doorway.

The three spoke together as before, saying:

“We have come to pronounce the sentence of this community upon you and what is yours. We have concealed our faces, not that we are in the least ashamed of what we are about to do, but in order, first, that you may be spared the temptation of calling for sympathy to those among us with whom you might claim special friendship and, second, that they may be spared the pain of withholding it as individuals. And we speak in unison as you hear for the same reason. The sentence is that you, your wife, and your children shall rise immediately, clothe yourselves, take such food and goods as you may think wise to carry, and depart from this valley forever. And lest you should suspect that we covet for ourselves your house, your stores, and the use of your fields, we announce our intention to burn your house and all your stores and let your fields lie wild among us for all time as a reminder of this night.”

“What have we done?” asked the man in the doorway. “Wherein is the offence with which we are thus unexpectedly blamed? Are we charged with any crime? If so, and we cannot prove our innocence, we shall humbly accept your judgment and depart. Otherwise our rights here are equal to any one’s.”

“We expected you to ask,” said the three. “Our answer is ready. As to the condition on which you say you would accept our judgment, that is of no interest whatever. The sentence is final. As for what you have done, we do not ourselves clearly understand the nature of the thing, and we are too simple to examine into it deeply.”

“Have we not been with you from the beginning here?” asked the man in the doorway. “Have we not been industri-

ous? Have we not tended the sick and helped bury the dead? Have we not shared your hardships and tasted your sorrows?"

"This also we expected," said the three, "and it grieves us. It is true as you say. You have done all of these things. Nevertheless, you must go."

"But why?"

"What we know," continued the three, "is this: in the beginning we were all co-equal and free. Then the time came when we began not to be free. All of us were in debt to you. It was not much at first—only one tenth of our produce, or in the extreme case one fifth. But your claims increased. It now is one quarter of our produce which you require from us each year, and we are no longer free. You say it is the law. We do not understand the law. We wish to be again as we were, all equal together, with no one having rights in the produce of another or putting a cloud upon the land of his neighbours. However, we are come not to parley but to execute the sentence. Make haste, please, and do as we have said. And you are never to return."

The door closed.

Within were sounds of lamentation and protest, turning to anger. The victims evidently knew the temper of their neighbours. Presently they issued forth—the man, his wife, two sons, two grown daughters, and a child. The women were voluble in their satiric comment on the character of the valley's inhabitants, the men cursed and the child wept. So they passed, bearing each a load apportioned to the strength.

As we followed them stumbling out of the valley our steps were fitfully lighted by the flames of the burning house.

"I do not understand it," I said to Mered.

"Nor do they," he answered. "The expelled family," he went on saying, "was from the first the most industrious and the most efficient. Its wick was the last to flicker out at night and the first to be lighted in the morning. The exiles were not bad neigh-

bours. They were only desperate workers. They bore their share of the hardships and were kind in their ministrations, but they avoided the festivities of leisure which the others enjoyed, and toiled instead. For this they were rather looked down upon. However, they had always a surplus of produce beyond their own needs, and when others were in want they loaned freely, though invariably with the stipulation that it should be returned with increase, that is, with interest. Thus, ten measures of grain loaned brought back eleven in payment. In this way the one family multiplied its surplus, but instead of consuming it in leisure and working less it began to perform for others many forms of irksome and disagreeable labour. If two or three families wished to make holiday or visit the city and there was work in the way of their pleasure this family would forego its own pleasure to perform for recompense the work which the others wished to shirk. They were all very simple people—the others were—and therefore willing to promise deferred value in exchange for the enjoyment of a present wish. In time all the other eleven families came to be in debt to this one, and when they could not pay at the end of the year the one was willing to settle for the pledge of a piece of ground. So the one family increased its wealth by claims upon the produce of others and by mortgages on their land. Ultimately it would have owned the whole valley, and the eleven would have been tenants or serfs—all working for one. When this had gone so far that the eleven could never hope to pay themselves out they resolved to expel the capitalistic family.”

“You said they did not understand it themselves. What was it they did not understand?”

“That the motive was the same on both sides. All of them were seeking the same thing, namely, respite from irksome toil. The eleven pledged future toil for snatches of freedom, which is fatal. The one family pledged present toil for future freedom,

meaning ultimately to gain such claims in the toil of others as to be able itself to desist from toil and live in leisure. Thus is capital created: first by such prodigious industry and self-privation that you have a surplus to lend and then by receiving back that surplus with increment. Few are willing to toil beyond their immediate needs in order to be able to lend. Many are willing to pledge future toil for immediate pleasure. Thus, lenders are few and borrowers many, and capital, if it grew unmolested, would enslave the world. It is the new phase. The lesson is complete in this valley. None can afford to buy labour which they are able to perform for themselves; and it is risky to sell labour to those who cannot afford to buy it, for the many are in the end possessed of the power to liquidate the debt by force. You shall see this repeated over and over, between groups within communities, between communities within nations, and between nations within the world. . . . Come!”

CHAPTER VI

THE IRON BELLY

THEN I saw a thought of the planetary system reduced to a mechanical principle and hitched to a revolving wheel.

I saw the birth of the engine.

This miraculous event took place in a wretched little house hardly more than a hut; the interior was all in one space. There were two tiny windows high on one side. The roof was unsealed and admitted wind and rain. The floor was of black, hard earth, littered with rough iron, moulding tools, tongs, hammers, ladles, and fragments of many things. At one end was a melting furnace; near it a forge and anvil. Along one side was a bench littered like the floor, but with smaller objects, and at one end of the bench was a retort with which evidently there had been many adventures in the phenomena of ebullition, that is, the conversion of water into steam.

At a rude table in the centre of the room was the inventor, drawing a plan of the machine to be made, or, rather, another plan for another machine to be made, for the whole place was encumbered with the evidence of past failures. It was very hard work, much more arduous than any hewing and bringing under the yoke; and there was the air of its having gone on and on through weary years, disappointing the hope and surviving despair.

The inventor, who was lame and pale, seemed to live without sleep, save when he fell nodding over his drawing board.

For interminable lengths of time he would stare his mind into the plan without adding a line to it; then he would draw feverishly for a little while and after long thought erase all that part and begin over again.

Unexpectedly the tall figure of Mered appeared at the inventor's back, looking on. With a start I glanced at the spot on my right where I thought he was standing, because I had not seen him cross the room—*and there he was still.*

He had not moved.

I looked again, and there was his figure bending over that of the inventor, fifteen feet away. I began to make comparisons. The Mered at the inventor's back was not the same as the Mered at my side. The one at the table, although very distinct in outline, was without a feeling of volume. But that was not the striking difference. The expression of the Mered there was that of powerfully concentrated intention, whereas the expression of the Mered at my side was that of one who stirs the ashes of a mighty dream.

The Mered at the table was an apparition.

Its interest in the development of the plan was impatient and intense. As the inventor built up the drawing its features betrayed at one time elation and at another chagrin. During the inventor's periods of inaction it seemed horribly bored. Once the inventor by a sustained and hectic impulse brought the drawing to completion and turned with an exclamation of triumph to the tools of creation. He melted and poured and forged and wrought and raised a machine. The apparition looked on with an air of resigned disgust.

When it came to the last thing, which was to connect the machine by tube with a little pot boiler, the inventor's excitement was almost uncontrollable, so that he fumbled and wasted time, whereat the apparition was in an ugly temper.

At last the steam was turned on. The machine made half a

revolution—*and stopped.*

A new drawing was started. It went fast to a certain point and there it stuck. The apparition was now in a delirium of anxiety. Its hand hovered over that of the inventor, as if to guide it. But the inventor's hand was a lump of clay.

Of a sudden, after a time of black despair, the true light burst through. The obstruction in the inventor's mind gave way. He did not finish the drawing. He had seen the thing to do. Instead of raising a new machine he went to work reconstructing the old one.

And this time, when the steam was turned on, the miracle happened. The engine revolved steadily with a rhythmic hissing.

When I looked to see how the apparition was reacting to the event it had vanished.

"Come!" said Mered, in his ironic voice.

I would have thought he had been elated.

CHAPTER VII

MERED SLEEPS

“Or is my flesh of brass?”

I WAS mildly surprised presently to find myself walking with Mered in a tangible city, very dirty and colourful. The architecture was mixed, in some places modern and elsewhere archaic. The two most characteristic forms were the spherical and the cylindrical, endlessly repeated. Humanity was exceedingly dense, especially in the old and tortuous streets. People were listless in their movements and talked very little. The women were salacious and hot-eyed; the men disdainful and frigid. And this was real. One could not imagine life so repugnant, so baffled, so stark, and yet so shamefully intoxicating.

“They have abandoned virtue and are weary of sin,” I said.

“They pray for a Heaven that shall be grosser than this,” Mered answered.

I fancied that some of the people recognized Mered in a distant, fearful way. Several times it happened that women, on the impulse of ingratiating approach, suddenly stopped with a look of dismay and turned off shuddering. My curiosity was enormously excited by the probability that here I should learn something human and personal about the man—something about his life and habits and state of earthly being.

We stopped at an iron gate, which opened at touch. Immediately a solid door swung open and a negroid male person

admitted us to a triangular vestibule through which we passed directly into a chamber forty paces square. The roof was a dome, gorgeously painted with meaningless figures. The floor was mosaic. In the centre was a carved, circular wall, perhaps twenty feet in diameter, enclosing a well, out of which a shaft of beautiful pearl light rose into the dome and was reflected back in soft effulgence. There was no other illumination. A stone bench, inclined at an angle of twenty degrees, stood midway between the light-well and the wall, its foot or low end toward the well. Here and there were rugs. There was nothing else in the whole vast room. Nothing more was needed.

With no word or sign to me Mered cast himself on the bench, with an air of one at home.

As he did so a door noiselessly opened at the farthest corner and the chamber was instantly flooded with the movement and colour of an oriental ballet. There were twenty women at least, all so much alike that but for differences of costume you could not have distinguished one from another. Their costumes were such as are supposed to be worn in a Turkish harem. They surrounded Mered airily, performed the salaam, and then rising approached him with overtures of welcome. He hardly noticed them at first, and when he did it was only to dismiss them wearily with a gesture which they accepted as final.

As they came so they went. I could hardly be sure it had happened. But I watched the door close behind them, and I heard Mered speaking.

He spoke continuously, in a mood of smouldering excitement, addressing not me but the matter of his thought. I understood the words, as one understands the words on the page of a book opened at random, without knowing either the subject or the writer's relation to it. As these two points establish themselves the memory, like a servant with the key, overtakes the mind with the sense of what has passed.

Thus, after he had been speaking for some time, I realized what Mered was doing and understood him from the beginning. He was scorifying the human biped. With no apparent effort of thought he developed the thesis systematically. He had taken man in the plasma, had exhibited him in his successive embryonic aspects, and was arrived at the dreadful act of parturition when I caught up. He employed neither adjectives nor invectives. But by choosing precisely the grossest term or word or definition by which to identify each ensuing act of nature, and by comparisons most unexpected and shocking, he built up the idea of an ape so botched and disgusting that if you could bear to look at it at all without a feeling of uncontrollable horror you could not help weeping for pity and chagrin.

And these were but the first premises. He then turned a withering light into the wretched creature's psychic life. That was worse. One by one he took the motives that govern human conduct, especially those by merit of which man claims divine kinship, and stripped them until they were naked and abominable, having been all derived from the pit. The principle of polarity applied to actions made every impulse to have an opposite origin. By exhibiting the positive end of a negative virtue or the negative end of a positive one he inverted all values. Courage was cowardice, love was hate, generosity was vanity, modesty was lewdness, piety was lust. And the hideous fact was that the reason was powerless to refute the argument. Only the soul could respond, saying over and over in the silence of faith, "Nevertheless, it is not true."

Then with a vast gesture, as it were, he held aloft this pitiable, abject thing called man for its creator to see, saying:

"In his own image created he him."

When I fully realized the import of this unexpected climax I shuddered with fear. There is, I suppose, no agnostic so hardened that he can curse God without some twinge. It is in any

case an inverted confession of belief.

The extent and audacity of Mered's blasphemy were appalling. But the sincerity of it was a challenge to unbelief. I, an unbeliever, was converted instantly—by the implications of the blasphemy and not by what happened.

A bolt of thunder fell on the dome.

Mered, reclining on his right side, held the gesture, which had been performed with his left arm. He was stone rigid. His dull eyes for the first time were lighted. They burned with a cold blue fire.

There was a second crash of thunder.

The door at the far corner burst open and the women reappeared, not dancing as before, but running. They were followed by a number of older, heavier women and several men, and from the other direction came the negroid person who admitted us from the street, all in one paroxysm of fear. They fell on their knees in a circle around Mered, huddling and quaking. The women covered their faces with their hands or held out their arms beseechingly. Mered paid them not the slightest heed.

The thunder crashes increased in violence and frequency, falling upon the dome as sledge hammer blows upon an egg shell. The house trembled. The women screamed. Mered was immovable.

At each onset of thunder he spoke in a strange tongue, defiantly. His words were like fumes.

I have no idea how long this went on. No storm so violent continues for very long. It seemed an hour. Gradually it subsided, and Mered with it; and as he slowly abandoned the gesture which had been superhumanly sustained through the whole time the group timidly and silently dispersed.

Then Mered slept.

CHAPTER VIII

PROGRESS

“All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.”

I HAD seen Mered in many moods. In any mood he was colossal. And now I was to see him weep, and he was colossal still. When I awoke from a sleep of sheer exhaustion he was on his knees, beating his head against the edge of the stone bench. The whole tree of him shook, as if the roots were snapping. I could hear the trickle of his tears on the mosaic door.

My heart was moved; and yet there was no impulse to comfort him. As I have noticed before, he was as one cut off from the ministrations of common sympathy.

An African woman brought food on a tray, put it at my side on the floor, and went silently away, not so much as looking at Mered.

Presently he rose, stretched himself upon the bench, and addressed me in his usual manner. referring abruptly to the birth of the engine.

“If you had known then, as I knew, what was to come of that hissing toy—that it would multiply man’s productive power ten thousandfold, that it would give him strength to disem-bowel mountains, change the course of waters, cut continents in twain, drive a floating city across the sea in seven days, move a thousand caravans at once overland at the speed of a bird’s

flight—if you had known all that would you have been so stupid as to imagine it would deliver him from the curse?”

“But it has wonderfully transformed the character of civilization,” I said. “Man’s ability to satisfy his wants has been unimaginably enlarged. May one not say that never before in the history of the world were people generally so well fed and clothed and educated and entertained as in the year 1914?”

“Man’s way with the curse,” he answered, “is still as it has been always. He flees and it pursues him. The many are still condemned to perform despised and irksome tasks and eat their bread in the sweat of the face. The few acquire leisure in the performance of preferred tasks; but these few continue as of old to live in dread and anxiety, for the many whose labour is despised are powerful and threatening. This is the red dispute. It continues in the original terms.”

“Nevertheless,” I said, “it is believed that there is more freedom in the world than formerly. Slavery at any rate has disappeared.”

“Civilization acquires merit in its own sight for having abandoned what you name slavery,” Mered answered, scornfully. “This did not take place until the living machine was replaced by the mechanical machine; and the mechanical machine not only was more profitable, but it re-enslaved the living machine in a cruel, anonymous way. The experience of the ancients was that civilization could not flower without the living machine. We see, however, that the flower was a mortuary emblem. It was a product of leisure; and leisure was the property of those who commanded the living machine. But no civilization built upon the relation of master and slave could long endure, since the slave, by a law of his nature, multiplies in misery, then aspires, and lastly exerts his power of destruction.

“The mechanical machine made an end of chattel slavery, not, as you suppose, because the heart of man was moved with

compassion or seized of a sudden with a passion to set toilers free, but because of certain obvious advantages. Formerly the master of slaves was responsible to them for two things, namely, sustenance and security. When he was no longer able to feed and protect them they passed to another, who assumed the responsibility. The practical reason for this was that the slave was property. Under the new system you have, instead of master and slave, employer and employee. Only now observe that the employer is not responsible for the sustenance and security of the employee, namely, the toiler. The employer does not own the employee. He owns productive machinery, and for the machinery he is responsible. It represents a large capital outlay. It is a fixed charge upon his income. He houses it carefully, insures it, protects it from rust in its hours of idleness, and if for any reason he cannot continue to be responsible for it, then it passes to another. But the toilers, who now are free—he is not responsible for them. He hires them when he needs them and sends them away when he doesn't, and they are responsible for themselves, because they are free. In political theory they are free. In fact, they are enslaved by necessity and cowed by fear of unemployment, and so pass their existence under the yoke of the curse, with the added torment of insecurity. They may be willing to eat bread in the sweat of the face, but the bread is not always forthcoming."

"These are thought to be social and political questions, susceptible of solution," I said.

"Yes," he answered. "As if either the few or the many may be trusted to say by whom and on what terms the despised labour shall be performed, or how it shall be consumed and wasted. Or as if master and slave could agree finally upon a division of toil. But if these were political questions and you had the formula of solution, still it would be too late. For whereas formerly the dispute was between groups within one community,

and then between communities within one state, as to which should sweat and which should flower, the dispute now lies between nations in the same terms. . . . Look! Here is the dream and what came of it—the hissing toy at work.”

CHAPTER IX

GREAT BUSINESS

“They are crushed in the gate.”

HE led me to what I have called the light-well, out of which issued the shaft of pearl light. Looking over the carved wall into this well I saw the earth as a luminous sphere. It turned slowly with two movements. One was a movement of rotation on its own axis; the other was an elliptical movement of the pole of the axis, which inclined as the angle of the earth's axis is to the sun. The surface was smooth and translucent over the water areas. The land areas were raised and modelled, minutely resembling the configuration of the earth's crust. It seemed that the luminous quality of the sphere had its origin at the centre, but by no physical law which I could comprehend. Though the light was intense it was without glare and rose from the water areas only. The land was coloured as land is; and the colours were continually changing in a slow mystical manner from the cool green of germination to the warm tones of fructification, these in turn dissolving in grey, according to the seasons. The seasons being never the same at one time in all parts of the globe, there was an unceasing throb and rhythm of colour running round and round.

I was so dazzled by the sheer beauty of this wonderful orb that I was slow to orient myself, that is, to fix north and south, and identify continents, oceans, islands, and countries. And,

then, to my great delight, I discovered that by looking intently I could distinguish life in its varied processes, revealed by some miracle of minute vividness.

What struck me first, I think, was the physical insignificance of Europe. It is not a continent, as we think, but a fragment of Asia, so broken and sprawled that if you knew not where to look you would have to search for it. The thought that next occurred to me was how limited and precariously placed is the phenomenon we name civilization. This I studied with amazement. An overwhelming proportion of the human species lived in huts or issued from crevices and forests like herds of gregarious animals. In only a few places, constituting hardly one hundredth part of the earth's surface, were people living in durable houses and transacting life in an organized, purposeful manner. These developed areas were most numerous in Europe; but I was surprised to see that even in Europe, obviously the strongest leasehold of civilization, they were not continuous.

There were many cities in Europe, articulating the developed areas; there were several cities in Asia Minor, only a very few and those widely separated in all the vastness of Asia, none in Africa outside of Egypt, some just beginning in North America, and here and there one of a very antique pattern in South America.

Sailing ships loitered about in the seven seas. They were numerous in the vicinity of Europe, moving among the islands and peninsulas; between Europe and North America there was a thin, continuous line of them; elsewhere over the globe they were infrequent and slow.

And as by various indications I placed it in time, this was the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Then I saw the becoming of the industrial age and the rise of modern commerce.

The first premonition was a stand of greyish vapour upon an island which I recognized as England. The sign was very faint at first, but grew steadily more dense and visible.

Next little wisps of the same vapour rose from parts of continental Europe. At the same time life underwent a kind of vivification. Cities widened very fast, and the vapour grew all the while more dense.

On the sea a new kind of ship appeared. It travelled at high speed, passing all the sailing ships, and left in its wake a ribbon of the same grey vapour. These new ships multiplied with astonishing rapidity; and whereas the old sailing ships had tramped and loitered about, the new vessels were always in haste, with a definite objective, at which they had no sooner arrived than they turned immediately back.

Presently traces of the vapour appeared in North America, and wherever it appeared life speeded up at once, as if, though people were able to do many things in less time, there was even less time in which to get them done. Glistening roadways were laid between cities, both in Europe and North America, and in place of wagons drawn by horses and oxen, now strings of wagons were drawn at high speed by one mechanical beast, breathing the grey vapour.

When I looked again upon the sea new things had happened. There were many more of the fast ships, now working in lanes. New routes had been appointed. Formerly a ship from England to India had gone around Africa. Now it went a shorter way via the Mediterranean through a ditch that had been opened between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. A new kind of ship had appeared. It was not a cargo carrier, but a fighting ship, and spent its time going leisurely to and fro over the lanes of commerce or lying in groups at strategical points, especially where traffic passed through narrow places.

I could see that the population of Europe had enormously

increased; moreover, that a high proportion thereof lived in the vapour areas, engaged in industry to the neglect of agriculture. This naturally would lead to a food problem. I looked with new interest at the ships working unremittingly in lanes between Europe and the New World, and between Europe and all the other continents, including now Australia.

“The umbilical cords again,” I said. “The industrial population has to be fed from outside.”

“That is not all,” said Mered. “Not only do the people require to be fed who have turned from agriculture to the preferred toil of tending machines, but the hissing toy and its progeny are voracious. They demand increasing quantities of fuel, fibres, metals, timber, rubber, acids, alkalies and elements never heard of before. Thus men are continually going forth from the vapour areas to find both food for themselves and provender for their machines. If the people are unable to import food they will starve; if they are unable to import the materials with which to feed their machines they will starve no less, for then they will have no manufactures to exchange abroad for food.”

Struggles were continually taking place in Europe—collisions, I mean, between masses of men—which ended as they began, abruptly, after more or less loss of life on both sides. Generally they seemed very unimportant. A greater one occurred on the Black Sea, lying between Europe and Asia. This I recognized.

“The Crimean War,” I said.

“Over two undeveloped provinces, Wallachia and Moldavia,” said Mered. “They are fertile and produce a great deal of food; much more important is the fact that they are rich in minerals and oil.”

In mid-Europe a much fiercer combat developed. Great armies were transported to and fro with incredible swiftness.

“The Franco-Prussian War,” I said.

“Ostensibly a dispute about a crown in Spain,” said Mered, “but the vanquished will pay in iron ore—the iron of Lorraine. The hissing toy roars unceasingly for iron. If you haven’t got it you buy it, or, better still, you take it. You see the Germans taking it.”

I began now to trace the ships as they set out from Europe toward every point of the compass and to study their activities. They were all very much of one character—the ships were—save that they flew different flags, representing the nations that sent them forth. There were more British flags than of any other kind; next came the French, German, Dutch, Italian, and Scandinavian, with now and then one of six or eight other countries.

I discovered that commerce was of two kinds.

First was what you might name open commerce. This entailed a simple, direct exchange of one form of merchandise for another. In this trade the ships of all countries engaged alike. Such commerce was very heavy between Europe and the United States.

The other kind of commerce took place between the European nations and special areas elsewhere, and apparently entailed extraordinary measures. Thus, each of the great European nations had a special area in Africa, to which it sent the products of its industrial skill and from which it received precious ores and raw substances to feed its machines. This trade required many cargo vessels; *also* warships going to and fro, and armed white forces to mind the natives. Egypt and India were special areas to which England was continually dispatching armies and warships, along with her cargo carriers. There was much trade with China, in which the several European nations all engaged, apparently by some joint understanding as to privileges, for all alike sent armed forces there and established them in fixed places, protected by warships.

All the time in one or another of these special areas a conflict was going on between the small white European forces and the black, brown, and yellow natives.

I saw this happen repeatedly in India—"Because the lazy natives revolt," said Mered).

Then in remote Afghanistan—"Because the natives declined to receive foreigners in an amicable spirit," said Mered).

Then in Egypt on a very large scale—"Because English authority is threatened by a rebellious native party," said Mered, "and the English must control the supply of Egyptian cotton for their machines.")

Then in China—"Because the Chinese in their futile way resolved to expel all the meddling white foreigners and began by murdering a missionary," said Mered).

At first I was thrilled by the romance of the white man's adventure. How purposefully he pushed his enterprise into the dark and tangled places of the earth! His spirit was like a clean, thin blade, quivering and irresistible. Never did he fail to get what he went for. Desperately he fought against great odds.

However, there was another side. On deeper reflection I understand that the odds against which he fought were numerical only and therefore illusory. Native hordes were no match for the disciplined, resolute and well—armed European forces. The outcome of their collisions was invariable. One of three things happened. The natives were sometimes expelled, sometimes destroyed, and sometimes subdued and made docile. In the latter case they were bent to the yoke and made productive. This obviously was the outcome preferred by the white man generally; but the methods by which he brought it about were often horrible. Natives who rebelled against work were treated abominably. Instances of torture and mutilation were frequent, because only through terror could these uncivilized and inert people be made to understand the sincerity of the white man's

passion for production. Back of him, in the far off vapour areas, were hungry machines that could not wait. This could not be explained to savages. After a long series of particularly nasty atrocities in the rubber regions I looked at Mered.

“The iron belly of industrial Europe is now so enormous,” he said, “that the white man by his own labour could not fill it, even if he would. When he sets out in quest of more raw materials for his machines he carries the yoke. Those who refuse to wear it are either scattered or destroyed. Those who accept it live by the curse thereafter.”

“It is not the white man’s fault,” I argued, “that so much of the world’s elemental wealth lies in countries where the people are too backward or slothful to develop it on their own account. What shall be done in that case? Measures are cruel and the yoke is heavy, but is it not true that by even such abhorrent means as these mankind at large is benefitted?”

“Mankind at large is a fiction of the afterthought,” said Mered. “Nobody thinks of benefitting it by these means until a theory is wanted to ease the conscience. In the act men think only of benefitting themselves, first as individuals, then as groups, lastly as nations. Though they talk of spreading civilization by trade and colonization you will observe that they spread it only in places where there is something to be exploited by the toil of others. They have learned nothing since the Greeks, who enjoined the citizens setting forth from Athens to found colonies on foreign shores in this wise: ‘three things are needful to the success of your undertaking, namely, fertile land, good harbours and tame slaves.’”

“But you are going back to the age of piracy,” I protested.

“Modern commerce is a complicated improvement over piracy which for obvious practical reasons it has displaced,” said Mered. “Piracy on a universal scale is not feasible. It consumes itself, and therefore is not a solvent enterprise, as men at length

perceived. The pirate squanders his loot and when it is gone goes in search of more, going farther and farther each time, until there are no more places or people to be plundered. Then his business is bankrupt. The pirate's successor is an intelligent person. He conceives that the means to wealth must be continuously produced. He aims not to destroy but to coerce and enslave the toilers. Thus, what you call international trade is a dangerous and turbulent relation between, on the one side, that eight or ten per cent. of the human race which is efficient and skilled and has reserved to itself the preferred labour, and, on the other side, the inert and unskilled people, fit only to perform the drudgery. It is a turbulent relation because the unskilled chafe under the yoke, and are continually threatening to revolt. It is a dangerous relation because the materials produced by this unwilling labour are essential to the existence of the over-people, so that in the end absolute power over the few rests in the hands of the many who toil complainingly and multiply. Civilization is ultimately put on the defensive. Under the old system the toiling caste was enslaved. Under the new system the inferior nations are economically enslaved. Beware of the enslaved nation!"

"I cannot see clearly wherein this relation is inevitable," I said. "There is another kind of trade which surely is open to unlimited extension in principle. I mean trade such as even now is transacting on a very large scale among equals, for example, between Europe and the United States. In this trade there is a voluntary exchange of commodities for mutual advantage without coercion on either side."

"Your country has been miraculously preserved for a greater experiment," Mered answered. "It was saved by two events, the first of which was so rare and magnificent that you are unable yet to see it in true perspective. That was the revolt of the red natives whom the European colonists found in North America

living a free, spontaneous life. The red man was not a tame slave. He could not be made to work. With a superb gesture to fate he refused the yoke and perished. If this tragic thing had not happened modern history would have been very different. The colonists would have become traders and taskmasters, holding the natives in productive bondage. Instead, the colonists found themselves alone in economic possession of the richest and most exuberant portion of the earth. Still they had to fight for it. Europe exerted her strength to hold the New World colonies in a peasant, dependent status. The American colonists were forbidden to weave their own wool into cloth for sale. Why? Because weaving was thought a higher form of labour than sheep-raising, and England would have reserved it for herself. She wanted raw wool. America was rich in beaver and began to make hats. This was likewise forbidden. Why? Because the English would be the hatters; the colonists should produce only the raw material. Then the colonists turned to iron working, and England decreed that no iron mill should be set up in America. Why? Because what she wanted from the colonies was raw iron and no competition in the skilled labour of working it. Thus you have the perfect illustration in your own colonial history. Europe wished to exchange her own skilled labour for the raw products of despised toil in the fields and mines and forests of the New World. In this she would have succeeded if only the red man had been a tame slave. After he had failed, the colonists declined to substitute for him under the yoke. They rose in revolt. And when they were free they set up looms and iron mills and hatteries and all manner of agencies whereby skilled labour is applied to raw materials, and became in a little while themselves competitors with Europe for access to places where skilled labour might be exchanged for unskilled. Meanwhile, finding more drudgery to do than it had the patience or time to perform for itself, your country

imported tame slaves from all over the world, in vast numbers, to make railroads, build highways, dig in the mines, tend the furnaces and gut the forests—calling it immigration.”

“Immigrants are not slaves, however,” I said. “They are admitted to citizenship and enjoy full political rights.”

“They are free to come and go,” said Mered. “Therefore you do not call them slaves. But they call themselves slaves—wage slaves. Their part is drudgery. Upon it you have reared an edifice of wealth unique. It is insecure. Those whose toil it consumes in a reckless manner have eyes to see and hearts wherewith to be envious and revengeful. They pity themselves as oppressed. They complain, then demand, and at length revolt. Then the terrifying discovery is made that their toil, though it has been despised, is vital. If the sultry masses who dig the coal and mine the iron suddenly refuse to be docile hewers and bringers, what will happen? You may say they will in that case destroy themselves. That is nothing. People are continually destroying themselves, and yet they go on forever. But civilization is rare and fragile. The power to destroy *it* lies in the hands of those whose labour it wastes contemptuously and by whom it is hated accordingly.”

“A change in the enlightened world’s attitude toward labour is taking place,” I ventured.

“Only to propitiate its power of destruction,” he replied, “and it is not thereby deceived. You cannot tell the man who digs coal that he is an inferior human being and is for that reason assigned to an irksome task. His ego will not stand it. He would be moved at once upon a path of destruction. And if you cannot tell him that, you cannot account to him for the fact that he receives less pay and less honour than another person performing in linen a preferred and less essential task.”

“And as to the kind of trade which you suppose to be conducted among equals for mutual advantage without coercion,”

he said, going back, "this also is primarily a struggle on both sides to exchange the products of skilled labour for the products of unskilled and peasant labour. Only, the means employed are more subtle. There is resort to stratagems and coercions of a political and financial nature. Therein is the meaning of the row continually going on over tariffs and trade privileges."

"I am not skilful in these matters of economics," I said.

"Once the Dutch had a profitable monopoly in the manufacture of briar pipes," he said. "In Flanders for sound economic reasons there was a desire to cultivate craftsmanship, and they said: 'Why should we send our money to Holland for pipes. We can make pipes, too. Let us do it, not only that we may keep our own money at home, but that we may do also as the Dutch and sell our pipes to other people at a profit.' So it began. Seeing what this competition might lead to, the Dutch said: 'We will sell our pipes at a loss in Flanders until this upstart industry shall have been ruined. Then we can raise the price higher than before.' To this the people of Flanders retorted by laying a prohibitive import tax upon Dutch pipes, to keep them out. Thereupon the Dutch loaded a ship with pipes, sailed it over to the coast of Flanders and wrecked it there. It was salvaged, of course, and the people of Flanders got a cargo of pipes for nothing. This was a piece of momentary good fortune; but for the next two or three years pipes were so ruinously cheap in Flanders that the new industry perished. Thus the Dutch, by sacrificing one ship-load of pipes, saved their monopoly. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," I said.

"That principle governs international trade to this day," said Mered. "The Germans, for example, had a monopoly of dye-making. Your country used great quantities of dyes and imported them from Germany. Repeatedly the effort was made to create a dye industry in America, just as there was the effort

to create a pipe industry in Flanders, and each time the Germans figuratively wrecked cargoes of their dyes on the American coast, causing the stuff to be for a while so cheap that no American manufacturer could compete with it.”

“The instances are easy enough to understand,” I said, “the generalizations are somewhat bewildering.”

“Let us try it in another dimension,” said Mered, patiently. “Come!”

Afterward I realized how completely I had been disappointed in the expectation of learning something personal about Mered in the place which evidently was his habitation. In fact, he seemed as remote from me there in that tangible environment as in ethereal spaces. There was occasion later to upbraid myself bitterly for not having marked the street and the iron gate. But I had not even made sure of the city. I thought it was Constantinople, and I think so still, though I cannot be sure. When I searched it through and through there was not the slightest trace of Mered. However, that comes at the very end.

CHAPTER X

APEX

The hand of the strong is ruthless; but the hand of the weak is terrible.

WE now came to an island country in the east where the people were so quaint and naïve and blithesomely sad that the heart yearned and a mist rose in the eyes, not out of pity, but as it is with one sometimes in beholding a wistful landscape.

And at the same time I perceived what Mered had meant by another dimension. Instead of seeming to occupy a fixed point in space as before, reviewing events as time unrolled them out of its past, we now were on a plane with the events observed. Our spatial relation to them was normal; our time relation to them was abnormal. Our movement through the element of time was much swifter than that of natural events. We had the sensation of overtaking and passing them. Before it had been as if we saw the train from a point in the landscape. Now we saw the landscape from the train.

I spoke of it.

“Time and space are relations,” said Mered. “We may do with them what we like. Only that which happens is immutable for ever.”

Life in these islands was leisurely and immemorial. People took it seriously and touched it lightly. Tasks were accepted and performed as if all the arrangements and contrasts of daily existence were inevitable. The environment, though not fertile

or munificent, was extremely lovely; and the people treated it not as masters, free to act upon it as they wished, but as careful tenants. It seemed never to have occurred to them to change or contort the course of streams or in any way to serve their own convenience by laying ruthless hands upon natural things. Their houses were dainty and uncomfortable, without foundations. Their bridges were frail and impermanent. They had no beasts of burden. Their religion was a form of ancestor worship. Temples were of all their handiwork the most substantial; yet these were more artistic than magnificent. This world they evidently conceived to be a stopping place only, where everything was transient but itself. Thus, they were indifferent to its discomforts, fancifully aware of its beauties, grateful for its benefits, and otherwise much centred in themselves and enthralled by the nature of their journey.

I thought there must be some word that would express the feeling I had of their way with life, and while I was searching for it Mered gave me the clue by saying:

“Here long ago the feud was abandoned. These people have embraced the curse without bitterness or complaint. They take everything for granted.”

Then I got the word. Here was life reconciled. Everything taken for granted. The sense of it was in the attitude of the people toward the trees and mountains and rivers, in their patience with all living things, and especially in their uncomplaining way with work. None of it was heroic or stirring; but it was in a certain aspect very beautiful.

Although it was an island empire it had no ships. There was no intercourse with the outside world—no trade whatever. Foreigners were feared and distrusted. When any of them by chance came sailing out of the unknown to this cloister they were sent directly away.

One day an alarm spread like a wind through all the islands.

People gathered in tense groups to detain the news bearers, and remained long afterward in excited conversation. Some foreigners had come in ships. That was the news: but it was not all of it. Foreigners had come before and had been made to go away. These came in ships of incredible size, bearing weapons that smoked and roared; and they had sent a message ashore demanding to see the Emperor, whose person was sacred and belonged to the gods. The Emperor nevertheless had appeared before the foreigners, who said:

“You have lived long enough in this absurd isolation. You must wake up and begin to take part in the affairs of the world. You shall trade with us. Everybody now trades together. You are the only exception, and such aloofness cannot any longer be tolerated. We come in a friendly spirit, but we do insist. We leave you to think it over. In three months we shall return and begin to trade.”

Then they made their weapons roar until the earth quaked and sailed away.

The people were greatly distressed. Counsels were bitterly divided. Some said it was of no use to resist the foreigners any longer. They were too powerful. It were better to receive them on their own terms than to be conquered. Suppose those roaring weapons had been turned upon the islands instead of the other way!

Others stood upon the legends of past experience. Several centuries before foreigners had been received. They quarrelled among themselves, cheated, created no end of uproar, and had at last to be expelled by violent means. Far better resist, even to perish, than to endure all of that again.

First one and then the other of these arguments prevailed. There was a commencement of feverish activities toward building ships and creating defences against the reappearance of the visitors. This futile impulse was almost immediately overtaken

by thoughts of despair. Not in a generation could they hope to build one ship like those of the foreigners; and no doubt the foreigners had hundreds.

In the midst of this confusion the foreigners returned. There were those who had promised to come back and others with them. They jointly demanded admittance and rights of trade. The people being helpless submitted.

The foreigners began by establishing themselves in zones which they called their own. In these zones their laws and customs prevailed, and the islanders were forbidden jurisdiction therein. Next the foreigners laid down the terms on which trade should be conducted. These terms were very simple. Foreign merchandise should be admitted free of any duty or tax. That was all.

Presently the little island empire was flooded with the cheap machine-made wares of the western world. The people were delighted and beguiled. They were particularly fascinated by the western trader's matches. They had never seen matches before. In a little while all through the empire at night you could see them lighting matches wantonly; They were cheap and most exciting. But the immediate and unexpected effect of the introduction of matches was to destroy the ancient and honourable craft of flint working. There was no longer any demand for flint pieces, since fires were so much more easily kindled with matches. And all the old flint workers were out of employment.

This was a typical case. It happened first with one thing and then with another. The foreigners had a way of bringing into the country the very things, cheap and machine made, that would at once displace the hand-wrought things natively produced; also they brought, of course, a great many baubles and articles of no utility whatever which the people bought like children in a gaudy bazaar, with no thought of value or economic consequences. The foreigners in exchange took raw silk and tea

and gold and silver.

When the traders came ten pieces of silver were worth four pieces of gold, and these four pieces of gold in the world outside were worth twenty pieces of silver. Seeing this, the foreigners brought silver into the country, changed it for gold, and took the gold away to be changed for silver again at a profit of 100 per cent. In this way the islanders lost a great part of the gold which they had been accumulating for centuries. At the same time they began to realize that since they had been trading with the foreigners they had grown steadily poorer. Unemployment had distressingly appeared. Before there had never been an evil of that kind. Many precious handicrafts had been destroyed by the competition of the cheap machine-made wares of the West; and more people each day were crowding into the thin and unbountiful fields to gain a livelihood.

Nobody quite understood it. Somehow the foreigners were to blame. That everyone knew. But what then? They could not be expelled. They were permanently entrenched and grew all the time more numerous and powerful. There was much distress and unhappiness among the islanders. Agitation was unceasing, though they knew not what to agitate for. After much anxious discussion the elders got an inspiration. They picked a number of the most intelligent young men and sent them forth into the lands of the foreigners, to learn their languages and methods, and particularly to see why other people also were not impoverished by trade, provided it was true, as the foreigners said, that all people did trade together.

These young men began presently to return with important information. It was true, as the foreigners had said, that all people did trade together; but this was true also, which the foreigners had not told them, namely, that there was a modern science called economics by which other people were often able to foretell whether trade on certain terms, or trade of a given

kind, would be advantageous to them or not; and that wherein it might seem disadvantageous they prohibited or regulated it by means of tariff arrangements. That was to say, if people wished to produce their own matches by machines in order that their flint workers or their children might have a new trade in place of the old one, and foreign matches were so cheap that a match industry of their own could not profitably begin, then they barred foreign matches out by laying upon them a high import tax. The examples were many. The young men translated their information into terms of matches because that was something all the islanders could understand. The point never to be lost sight of was that the people who made their own things so far as they could, instead of buying them from foreigners, were always more prosperous than those who sold the raw produce of their fields and mines and bought manufactured goods from others.

Thereupon the elders went to the foreigners, saying: "We now perceive the true nature of trade and that so far as possible the things exchanged between people should be of equal labour value. If one nation produces only the raw materials and delivers them to other nations in exchange for manufactured goods representing the exercise of higher skill, that one nation will bear a heavy burden and permanently sink to the lowest level of human toil. We find ourselves coming to that situation. We see that we ought to make for ourselves a great many of the things we buy from you. This we cannot do so long as you press your goods upon us at prices with which no factory of our own, beginning without skill or experience, can possibly compete. Therefore, we wish to do as you do in your own countries. We shall lay an import tax, please, upon foreign merchandise until such time as we are industrially strong and skilled enough to compete with you as equals. We thank you for having opened our eyes to these possibilities."

"But don't you see," said the foreigners, "that by putting a

tax on the things you buy from us you will only be making them dearer to yourselves. Take matches. We are selling you matches for a penny a hundred. Now suppose you lay upon them an import tax of a penny more. Then everybody will have to pay two pennies for a hundred matches. Where is the sense of that?"

"We see that," said the elders. "We see also that so long as matches are a penny a hundred we shall have to go on buying them from you, because, beginning as we shall have to begin without your knowledge of machines and your aptitude for industrial processes, we cannot make them for that price and be able at the same time to pay our labour a living wage. But at two pennies a hundred we could reasonably try. It is true, as you say, that the first effect would be to make matches dearer. But we perceive that there are two interests among us. On one hand lies the interest of the individual, whose advantage is served by the present cheapness of things; on the other hand lies the interest of the people, whose future is at stake. These two interests we find to be antagonistic, for the reason that the life of the individual is brief and discontinuous whereas the life of the people is continuous and forever. Thus, it is better that the individual for the present should pay two pennies a hundred for matches if thereby it becomes possible for the people in the future to have industries of their own. As we acquire experience the cost of making our own things will fall and in time our manufactures may be as cheap as yours."

The elders were very proud of this simple exposition. They had spoken naïvely and waited hopefully for the answer.

"It is a highly controversial matter," said the foreigners, "and we cannot argue it with you. Your country is in honour bound by the treaties it has made with us. These treaties guarantee free trade. This means that our goods shall enter your markets without duty or tax. We cannot allow you to lay a tax upon them."

“What we propose is only what you do among yourselves,” said the elders, much cast down.

“It is all a matter of treaty,” said the foreigners. “The arrangements we have among ourselves are carefully covered by treaties. And we keep our treaties, as you must keep yours with us.”

The elders in their disappointment reflected deeply and took counsel with the young men who were continually returning from the lands of the foreigners in the west. They had no machines, no mechanical knowledge, no experience whatever in the ways of the modern world. Yet one thing they had more than the foreigners. They had the most docile and uncomplaining labour in the whole world. So they said: “What we lack in skill we can perhaps make up in the cheapness of our labour. At least, we will try, provided the foreigners will sell us machines to begin with and instruction in the uses thereof. It is the only way.”

Happily the foreigners would sell anything, even machines and instruction. The islanders thereupon began to import machines; and at the same time they sent young men to all parts of the western world to learn the technique of industry.

In a short time the phenomena of western industrialism began to be reproduced under a cloud of grey vapour. The beginnings were halting and painful, and nothing would have come of the effort but for the self-sacrificing spirit of the toilers. Never had human labour been sweated like this. Its hours were unending, its days interminable, its years unremembered. The more it produced the less it consumed. Material wealth increased almost magically; as fast as it increased it was invested in the means to further production, that is, in more machines, and then by another great step, in the machines that make machines. Inevitably the attitude of the people toward their environment changed. They blackened their beloved landscape with smoke

and polluted their streams with the waste matter of industrial processes. Cities grew. Population increased, as it always will under excitement and pressure, no matter how hard the conditions are.

Within the span of one generation the people mastered machine craft, learned how to build ships as big and formidable as any the foreigners had, how to make the weapons that roared, and—most amazing of all—how to import raw materials upon which to bestow their own labour, thus producing finished merchandise for export and turning the tables on the world. And one of the commodities they produced a great surplus of for sale outside was matches!

Having become an industrial people with machine-made wares of their own to sell they needed markets of outlet. Their young men were still returning from foreign lands with ideas, and one of these ideas was the thought of economic expansion. As the foreigners had done to them, so they would do unto others, for everybody was doing it and it was the way of the world.

Taking this idea literally and in the same grim, fatalistic spirit with which they had adopted all the rest of machine-made civilization, the elders began to look about for a people fit to be exploited, even as they had been exploited by the foreigners.

Against the sun, across a little sea, on the mainland of Asia, lived a people much more inert and backward than they themselves had been when the western traders came—a people so very poor and unindustrious that the foreigners had not thought it worth while to wake them up.

“Let us penetrate that land as a beginning,” said the elders.

In doing so they collided with the great power of Asia just beyond, a sleepy, illimitable people who did not wish the islanders to get a foothold on the Asiatic continent. There was a war, and the islanders, although outnumbered as ten to one

by the great power, won the fight handily. The foreigners first took it as a splendid sporting event and clapped the islanders heartily on the back. On reflection, however, they—the foreigners—began to feel uneasy. It would be unwise, they said, to let these little islanders go too far. So the western powers conferred and then interfered on behalf of the great power of Asia and deprived the islanders of a great part of their hard-won spoils of conquest. The islanders, not yet strong enough to resist the western coalition, brooked their disappointment and went on working. They did succeed in keeping a toe-hold on the Asiatic continent. Little by little they went further and presently for the first time they collided with one of the great western powers. It had undertaken to check their surreptitious progress in Asia. There was another war, and to the amazement of the foreigners they defeated this western power almost as easily as they had beaten the great drowsy people first encountered on the mainland. And the whole world then realized that a miracle had happened unawares. In one generation the little people, whose cloister had been so rudely broken open and whose only weapon of defence was its docile and self-sacrificing labour, had become a power to be feared.

All of this the elders shrewdly understood, and now, with a record of two wars won and with warships and troops and modern weapons to back up their economic intelligence, they went again to the foreigners, saying:

“The time at last has come for us to control our own trade. Those treaties which you wrote with us when we knew no better, whereby you gained entry for your merchandise tax free, and which you refused to change when we thought ourselves on the verge of ruin—those treaties we denounce, as you denounce treaties among yourselves. We will write new treaties, please, as equals. We shall say on what terms you may trade with us; and more than that, we shall have as much to say as you about the

terms on which trade may be conducted throughout the whole eastern part of the world.”

With a very wry face the foreigners consented.

And now I observed an inevitable thing. The tools men use and the materials they work in shape and colour their minds. Having borrowed a material civilization whole, as it were, the islanders were powerless to avoid its evils. Labour ceased to be docile. It began to be clamorous, as western labour is, demanding that the severities of toil be mitigated and that more of the wealth it produced be made available for present enjoyment. There began to be riots and violent internal dissensions. All the ills of western industrialism developed in acute forms; and the elders in their perplexity could think of nothing better than to adopt the western panacea.

This was to hold before the people a vision of power and grandeur to be realized through economic conquest. A thought crystallized in their minds. They carried it into the country of the sleepy people whom they had beaten in the first war, and beyond them to India. The thought was: Asia for the Asiatics. In the minds of the little islanders, however, there was a secret afterclause. They were thinking: Asia for the Asiatics, under our domination.

“It is one of the sublime ironies,” said Mered.

As he spoke I realized that we had overtaken contemporary time and were at the end of that chapter.

“What is one of the sublime ironies?” I asked.

“These little island people,” he said, “broke the western yoke and made a weapon of it. But now they propose themselves to forge a yoke for half a billion eastern people.”

“Can they do it?” I asked.

“If they can,” said Mered, “the feud will reach its apex. Then east and west will contend together to see which shall exploit the other.”

“It appears,” I said, “that human life is in four phases, namely, that of the individual who is discontinuous, that of the group which is continuous, that of the state which is political, and that of the species which is biological.”

“Yes,” said Mered.

“And it appears,” I continued, “that the individual is at strife with his group, that within a state class stands against class, and that the people of one state seek to put their will upon those of another state—always with one end, which is to exploit the toil of others.”

“Since all flee from the same thing,” said Mered.

“Then is this to be forever?”

“None can escape the curse,” said Mered, “but even so it need not wreck the world. There is a certain way of salvation, as you shall know. Meanwhile there is more to see. . . . Come!”

CHAPTER XI

IVORY AND APES AND PEACOCKS

WE now went walking up and down the world.

I was to see, Mered said, that the most hateful and precious thing under the sun, namely, human toil, was wasting as never before. It continued to be wasted ostentatiously by the rich; but this was no longer the principal waste. I was to observe that now as never before in the history of mankind it was wasted by the multitude, by the toilers themselves; and that while people were everywhere groaning under the curse and demanding that the burden be made lighter they were at the same time wasting each other's labour in a blind, competitive manner, everyone according to his vanity. And I should see, he said, that the relations between those who toiled and those who wasted the fruits of toil were become anonymous and impersonal. Thus had the folly been worse compounded. This was owing to the universal introduction of money as the requital of toil and to the minute division of tasks on modern economic lines by the wage system.

These ideas were more than I could manage all at once. I expected them to clear up as we went along.

We looked at palaces and hovels. We spent much time in cities. We walked in the gaudy streets where people are lured to buy so many things they do not need. We explored the industrial centres, getting at the original sources of wealth, where the toilers think of themselves as wage slaves and torment their minds with schemes of revolt.

I saw nothing unexpected; yet in all that I saw there was a new significance, since in the background was always the thought of the curse from which men flee and never escape.

We began at the top and worked downward.

There was a marble house, quite new, set upon a hill, the crown of which had been sliced off to make a level space of ten or more acres. The hill commanded a pivotal view of miles of beautiful land, all privately parked, enclosed within stone walls. In the house were probably one hundred rooms, and fifty servants. The grounds would require the constant attention of twenty or thirty men. There was a private golf course.

This I saw in terms of labour. To remake the landscape and build the house one individual had consumed in his own aggrandizement thousands of *labour years*, meaning by a *labour year* the product of one human being in a year's time. This had been labour performed in quarries, mines, forests, mills, shops, and factories. When the labour of creation ended the labour of continuous service had begun. Perhaps as many as two hundred persons here and there were engaged in the work of maintaining this palace, keeping it warm, filling its larders, and dusting its rooms, all for the use and comfort of one human family.

"The grandeur of men, like the grandeur of cities," said Mered again, "is in proportion to the amount of human labour they can waste."

"This is the most ostentatious form of waste," I said.

"It is conspicuous," said Mered, "and for that reason it provokes social complaint and excites envy in the hearts of the multitude. But the total sum of this kind of waste is relatively unimportant. The people themselves are now the great wasters."

"I did not quite comprehend your meaning when you said the waste of labour in modern times I should see to be anonymous and impersonal."

"Formerly," Mered answered, "only a king or a feudal lord

who owned a great many slaves could do what this rich man has done. The difference is that whereas in the other time one bought the slave, now one buys the labour. The lord who owned slaves and wasted their labour was at least conscious of a relation between himself and the human beings who toiled for him, no matter how much he may have abused that relation. The man who buys labour bears an impersonal relation to those who perform it. He thinks of his gratifications not in terms of labour but in terms of money. And as the rich man does, so the poor man does. People no longer own slaves. But any one who has money may command the labour of others in what way he likes, be it whimsical, grotesque, or mad. Hence the craze for money. It gives the possessor instant power over the toil of his fellow beings. A rich man may raise a mountain in a swamp, set upon it a tower built of stones brought from the other side of the earth, change the course of a river to make him a private waterfall, and transplant an adult forest. Everyone can see what waste this is, and how all the labour consumed in such works is a loss to society as a whole. But the unrich, aping the rich, waste very much more in the same spirit, and this nobody sees. Diamonds represent a waste of labour; so also do imitation diamonds. It is in both cases the same thing."

We loitered in the great merchandise shops of the cities, watching people spend their money for baubles, tinsel products, filmy things to wear, ornaments, and novelties, laces and embroideries, made by little wage slaves of whose human existence the buyers had no thought at all. Everyone was anxious to have the newest styles, no matter how frail and indurable they might be. And these people were not rich. They were for the great part wage earners themselves, exchanging their money for the toil of other wage earners, with a fatuous preference for those products of others' toil which represented the most wasteful use of human labour.

It seemed as if by some cunning law of perversity beauty and inutility were woven together. All stout and durable things were ugly, not that they had to be, but that no one had taken thought to make them otherwise. The sheer, the fragile, the most perishable things, containing the maximum of labour and the minimum of resistance to wear—these were the things most admired in the shops, as by a point of honour. I noticed that the silliest and most wasteful buyers of all, those who bought always with their eyes and were in the greatest anxiety to carry off the showy goods guaranteed to be latest in vogue, undoubtedly were themselves low in the scale of wage earners.

The consequences of this attitude were multiple. For example, in a New England shoe town the workers tending miles of automatic shoe-making machinery called themselves wage slaves and were incessantly stirring themselves up to revolt; but when they spent their wages they were good snobs and kept up with the styles. They bought wearing apparel made by the garment workers of New York, and as far as their money would go they selected the brightest, the least substantial and the most decorative things. This I had seen.

Now in the New York shops I saw the garment workers, likewise calling themselves wage slaves, buying the thin, indurable, high-heeled shoes with fancy leather tops produced by the complaining toil of those other wage slaves.

I desired Mered's comment.

"Their starved little egos require it," he said. "They spent their lives performing monotonous, unappreciated toil, and in order not utterly to despise themselves they must have their fling at the curse. They must be able to say, 'We can be a little like the rich. We may have expensive things, too.' So they waste the toil of others, even as others waste theirs, for it is a mark of human distinction to be wasteful of labour. The use of high-heeled shoes with white kid tops on the feet of a garment worker

is the same as the use of a palace on a hill. Blessed are the rich so long as the toilers save their vanity in this way. It does not last—never for very long.”

And now I saw as for the first time those luxurious feasting places which are among the costliest attractions of a great city, especially New York. I made a point of remembering one distinctly, for I meant to describe it afterward.

The room was as wide and as high as the interior of a temple. The ceiling was of opaque glass, supported by four stone columns. Illumination was by artificial light rays sifting through the ceiling. At intervals about the room were decorative lights mounted on Roman torch holders. The floor was marble, covered with rich, deep carpet. On a dais at one side was a group of stringed instrument players dressed all alike in white with red sashes around their middles. The walls were brilliantly painted with scenes of love, pursuit, ecstasy, triumph, and satiety. Belshazzar had nothing so grand as this.

It was public, of course, and yet not therefore democratic. Any one with money could participate; but participation for its own sake was not the idea. I watched the people. Some were abashed as they entered, looked about, moved cautiously, and so betrayed their awe. These the waiters despised and ill treated. Others were indifferent, looked at nothing, took all for granted with an air of being bored and regarded the waiters impersonally, like so many automatons. To these the waiters were polite and obsequious.

The competition was not in democratic feasting, as one might vulgarly think, but in snobbish manners. It was a contest in nonchalance. The honours went to those who were most apathetic and the least impressed, for it was clear that they were the most accustomed to waste human labour without thought. This was the mark of superior culture. It placed them in the higher ranks of personal distinction. And all the rest were envi-

ous of the manner in which they carried it off.

"It is everywhere," said Mered. "It is there." He indicated those modern apartment houses which stand solidly one against another for miles without end in New York,—warrens of the middle class. I could think only of the conveniences and of the aggregate amount of creative labour which is thought to have been saved by substituting apartments for detached houses.

"What is there?" I asked.

"In every one of those apartments," Mered said, "the highest problem is the induration of a servant. For now a counter clerk or a bookkeeper aspires to keep a wife for recreation only. She shall be fragile, decorative, and unmarked by toil, like a rich man's wife, and have at least one tame slave to conquer."

I saw that one of the essential commodities enormously wasted, this one perhaps more than any other, was coal. Though it was mainly the source of that energy required to move the fearfully ramified industrial machine, yet the wasting of it was by habit and custom, unnoticed and thoughtless. It was wasted by people going continually to and fro on trivial errands or with no errand at all, just to be idly moving from a sense of boredom. It was wasted in the blaze of great electric light signs advertising unimportant merchandise, like chewing gum and face powder, old things in new labels. It was wasted in the hauling of raw commodities, such as cotton, back and forth across the world as the price might rise or fall a little here or there. It was wasted in the unnecessary duplication of haulage, as when staple articles of commerce made in Chicago are sent to New York, and the like goods made in New York are sent to Chicago, crossing on the way. It was wasted throughout the whole system of railroad transportation in consequence of the mania to develop longer instead of shorter hauls, so that it came to be cheaper to ship a ton of freight a thousand miles than to ship it one hundred, though ten times as much coal were consumed to haul

it the greater distance. It was wasted by the fatuous perpetuation of obsolete industries in wrong places, hundreds of miles from their sources of fuel and labour and raw materials, causing millions of tons of unnecessary haulage.

And the reason why coal could be wasted in this manner was that very cheap labour had always been found willing to dig it. Almost no form of labour was so much despised; almost no other form of labour was so essential.

We explored the mining regions. We looked into many of the miners' wretched houses. In one lived a miner, his wife, and three children, all in two rooms—one a combination kitchen and living room and the other a bedroom. It was night. Before the stove hung the miner's damp pit clothes, steaming and stinking. The furniture was poor and scarred from much moving about. I shuddered to think how desperately the world's prosperity rested upon this form of labour and how recklessly it was wasted and exploited in an impersonal manner, even by millions of others calling themselves wage slaves. And then, in one corner of the bedroom I saw a pair of patent leather shoes and on a nail over them a red-striped silk shirt. These were his own contributions to the waste of toil. And he slept with his wife in a gilded bed.

In a long, low hall lighted with kerosene lamps we found a thousand miners shouting—shouting at each other, all together and at a man on a table who was trying to shout louder than any one else. This was a local union debating the proposal that the miners should go on strike for higher wages and shorter hours. The discussion was punctuated by much denunciation of capitalism.

“Listen not to what they say, but to what they mean,” said Mered. “The question at the end is not one of pay or hours. It is whether the half million who dig coal hold the power of destruction over a society of one hundred million.”

“And if they have?”

“If they have they will exercise it,” he said, “ostensibly to mitigate the curse of their toil, though actually with the thought of escaping from it. The least they would do would be to extort a fabulous wage for the labour of mining. Coal would become too valuable to burn.”

In the halls of Congress at the same time we heard men anxiously debating whether the power of the law could be invoked to restrain the miners from going on strike, on the ground that their doing so would be a conspiracy against the life of the public.

“Again,” said Mered, “listen rather to what they mean than what they say. The question here is whether the state has still the strength to say on what terms half a million shall continue to perform the drudgery of digging coal. Their dilemma is that the coal diggers are politically free. Therefore they cannot be chained to their work. But on no account can they be allowed to stop; nor can they be permitted to name their own terms. Thus you approach involuntary servitude under conditions of political freedom!”

CHAPTER XII

THE ANSWER

“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

“YOU are tired,” Mered announced, not looking at me.

I was miserably tired. My marrow ached. Yet until that instant I had been unconscious of it.

We now were in New York. The hour was late. The streets were empty. We turned abruptly into a large office building and entered the all-night elevator cage. The sleepy attendant followed us in and seemed strangely unaware of Mered. He regarded me as if I were alone, and asked where I wished to go. Without knowing why I said, “Eighteenth floor, please.” At that floor he stopped the cage and let us out, still behaving as if I were alone. Mered preceded me down a long corridor, past many doors bearing commonplace firm names and business legends, and stopped at one on which I read the word: “Laboratory.” We entered in the dark. He turned on the light and closed the door.

This place was evidently a working chemical laboratory. Along the walls were tables and racks encumbered and filled with retorts, electric furnaces, test tubes, glass containers, bottled fluids, and the like. It was a very large room. In the centre were several tables. Two were cluttered with books, papers, broken vessels, and the residue of many chemical reactions. One was crowded with glass jars and dishes containing live things,

such as small reptiles, frogs, crustaceans, and forms of life of a very low order which I was unable to identify. I guessed that the experiments conducted here were mainly in the department of biology.

My attention returned to Mered. He was thoughtfully mixing some fluids in a test tube. I marvelled at the swiftness and unerring touch of his large hands.

As I watched him my heart swelled until I thought it should burst. I was stricken with sorrow. What was I sorry for? Not for him, nor for anything concerning him that I knew of; yet somehow by reason of him I was pierced with sorrow. I loved him. I loved him as I had never loved any living thing. And it gave me deep pain to realize that in spite of this I had not the faintest impulse of human friendliness toward him. How shall I explain it?

He was altogether removed from the possibility of human sympathy not because his emotions were repulsive or intrinsically strange, since they were neither, but because they were transcendental. When he wept it was terrible. When he laughed I thought of deep, unrighteous caverns full of demons at their antics. His contempt for human kind, when he was contemptuous, made the blood run cold and stop. Then again, his power of commiseration, if that were his mood, passed my understanding.

It made me desolate to think how little I knew about him. What were my facts? They were three only, all equally incomprehensible. He possessed some strange power of revelation, he had a freedom of action in time and space outside of any physical laws scientifically known, and he was evidently engaged in a feud with forces that baffled him.

No rational conclusion was possible. In lieu of one a phantasy had been building in my thoughts. It was dim. Purposely I left it so. Therefore, I cannot be more definite than to say that

it expressed itself in my imagination allegorically, in the words of the prophet:

“How art thou fallen from Heaven, O, Lucifer, son of the morning.”

On a sudden the stuff he had been mixing in the test tube began to glow with opalescent colours which rapidly, almost explosively, increased in their intensity until my eyes were dazzled. Then he handed it to me swiftly, saying: “Drink this.” It was hot and cold, both extremely, and without any taste whatever. It gave me a feeling of permanent warmth, comfort, and well being. My sorrow lifted.

Then he stood and talked. In standing as in sitting or in any other sustained pose his stillness was like that of a statue. There was also a very curious effect of stillness in his movements, but this I cannot hope to describe.

“What have you seen?” he asked.

“I have seen a mad world,” I answered. “One that apparently has been mad always.”

“Since the curse it has been mad,” he said. “But tell me what you have seen.”

“Everywhere,” I said, “I have seen people in strife over the allotment of tasks, for that always there is a lighter, pleasanter task to be preferred, and one heavier and more toilsome to be despised. I have seen that the few who are resourceful and inventive and have the strength to command, reserve for themselves the preferred tasks, or live in leisure, and put the despised toil upon the many others who are submissive and strong only in physical endurance. I have seen that it may be the individual who puts the heavy toil off upon others, or a class that does likewise with another class, or one nation that puts the yoke upon another and thereafter exploits its labour. I have seen that this produces endless bitterness and often war.”

“You must have seen also that the despised toil is essential?”

said Mered. "It has to do with the production of food and raw materials without which none of the preferred tasks could be performed at all."

"That I have seen," I said.

"But have you seen—and this is vital—have you seen that the relation between those who impose the yoke and those who bear it is catastrophic in a dual sense? It brings ruin upon all."

"I have seen it," I said. "Yet I am not able to conceive it clearly."

"Take the miners," he said; "if they are fit to be citizens and politically free they cannot be reconciled to the thought of forever, themselves and their progeny, performing a work of drudgery for the rest of society. They must struggle to rise and escape from it. How else may they rise save by the power of revolt? This power in its mildest form is the power collectively to refrain from the performance of labour that is essential to the existence of the nation, that is, to withhold their toil until society yields. That is the miners' side. On the other hand, all society above, having flourished in the performance of preferred tasks, having acquired culture and leisure while hiring its drudgery done, swings suddenly over an abyss. The labour without which it cannot continue to exist is performed by lower groups of people whose hearts rankle. Thoughts of revenge are easily stirred up among them and they are moved to exert their power of destruction, not only because they toil wearily but because they are despised. Thus the life preferred is in the keeping of its enemies—in the hands of its wage slaves."

"That I can see," I said.

"And do you see it then as between nations—as between the skilled and unskilled people, one exploiting the labour of another?"

"Yes," I said.

"The end may be long postponed," he continued, "but the

sequel is remorseless. Brute strength prevails. The yoke is turned into a weapon and all the precious illusions with which the over-people have surrounded themselves are suddenly destroyed."

"Hence those frequent headlong crashes of civilization?" I asked.

"Yes," said Mered. "Civilization is artificial. Man succeeds with it only as he is able to create and defend a fictitious environment. The forces of nature are arrayed against his work, *because it is artificial*. As if this were not enough, man is arrayed against himself. There is a delusion that civilization is widespread and that the thought of it is universal. To the contrary, even in those areas where its uses prevail its own existence is extremely perilous. A great majority of the people whose lives appear to be governed by it are indifferent or secretly hostile, and would sooner revert to primevalness than of their own choice embrace its discipline and restraints. Between the few who uphold civilization for its own sake and the many who possess the blind power of upheaval against it there lies a very thin crust of custom, inertia, and taboo. It is easily broken through."

"These are words of deep pessimism," I said. "It might go on so forever."

"It has gone on for so long already," Mered answered, "that civilizations lie buried three and four deep in the dust of the world."

"One may believe there is yet a way," I said.

"Man knows the way in his heart," said Mered. "He loses it in his mind. If he would but open his eyes!"

"What would he see?" I asked.

"First he would see that there is no hope for mankind to escape the curse. Those who succeed in putting their toil off upon others have not escaped. They have only the delusion of escape. For a little time of ease and leisure they have delivered

their future to the powers of destruction.”

“Then what would he see?”

From a change in Mered's voice I understood that a climax was coming, and that the thought approaching its apex was one that stirred him to his depths. As with the volume of an enormous weight slowly slipping his head sank. He clasped his hands against his breast, then parted them a little and turned the palms outward, pushing. I have tried before to describe his gestures. They were as beginnings of events in space. This one was a gesture of acknowledgment, and what it acknowledged was the fact of *defeat!*

When he spoke his voice came from afar.

“*Man must embrace the curse,*” it said.

He was lost in that otherwhereness to which from time to time he suddenly went, to my terror and mystification. I waited. It was of no use to speak.

After a long time he returned and bent his attention upon me, saying:

“He cannot be delivered from it. Therefore he must embrace the curse. There is no other way.”

“I understand it as logic,” I said, “though I have no sense of its practical application. How shall man embrace the curse?”

“Everyone to assume his fair share of it,” he said. “No one to exploit the toil of another. No one to hire that to be done for him, or on account of him, which he is *loath* to do for himself. Let there be no despised form of toil whatever. Then everyone will know the nature of toil and what it costs the soul, and to waste it will be the sin of sins.”

“Do you mean that everyone should dig his share of coal?” I asked, explicitly.

“The principle comes first,” he answered. “When that is fixed as an ideal of human conduct such questions as the one you have just asked will answer themselves. Everyone should

know what it is to dig coal. Then no one would waste it. Nor would any one despise the miner. Once man had embraced the curse he would no longer take pride in shirking the drudgery which is inseparable from existence. Then adjustments between groups within a nation could not fail to be worked out with sympathetic understanding. This would be the outcome and not the beginning. The beginning must be between nations. In place of the disastrous idea of economic necessity, which is fictitious, there must come the ideal of self-containment. . . . *A self-contained people cannot be economically exploited by others. . . . A self-contained people will not think it necessary to exploit the toil of others. . . .* For the uses of this ideal it is necessary to perceive clearly two basic facts: First—No people can afford to export the products of inferior toil and import the products of preferred toil in return, since by so doing they are doomed to bear the heavy end of the yoke. Second—A skilled nation cannot afford to hire its drudgery to be performed by others, for although it may grow rich by the exchange its own civilization will not endure. The power to destroy it will presently rest in the hands of those who fill its belly and the bellies of its machines.”

“Many difficulties will appear,” I said. “May I debate it with you, please? If nations were self-contained what would become of international trade?”

“All that which is wastefully parallel would cease,” he answered. “All that which is governed by the thought of exchanging skilled labour for unskilled would perish. Reflect. . . . When two or more skilled nations invade each other’s markets with competitive staples, like cotton fabrics, cutlery, knitted wear, glass, crockery, and steel rails, they are silly rivals, wasting their strength in economic strife. . . . When two or more nations compete for privileges in an unskilled country, to command its raw materials in exchange for manufactures, *they are antagonists. . . .* And when two or more skilled nations build warships to guard

the umbilical cords by which they receive vital sustenance for themselves and their industrial processes and to protect the foreign markets in which they have made special outlets for their manufactures, *they are enemies*. . . . One fatuity leads to another, and the sequel is war. All that kind of international trade would disappear.”

“What would come in place of it, if anything?”

“Nations like individuals are unique,” he said, “owing to facts of chemistry, environment, and heritage. No two are alike. Each has some special gift, some singular power of differentiation, or at least the possibility thereof; so that in addition to its self-sustaining labours each would be able, as it were so minded, to produce for sale a surplus of such things as naturally and spontaneously expressed its own genius. There could be no parallel competition in goods of that character. International trade, therefore, would be non-competitive, non-explosive, intelligent, and free, taking place in unlike things—in art, in literature, and the peculiar excellencies of handicraft.”

“But if people had of their own no coal or iron?”

“All the more would they do other things according to their genius, determined by the nature of their environment. Is civilization so flat and unresourceful that it must express itself all alike in coal and iron? Will it perish a few years hence when there is no more coal and iron? However, within the principle there might fairly be an exchange of raw materials by voluntary arrangement. That would be an exchange of equal toil on a plane of drudgery, and no people would go further with this than to supply its own internal needs. What throws the yoke out of balance is the exchange of raw materials for finished products—the exchange of unskilled for skilled labour. The unskilled are thereby exploited.”

“In the industrial areas of the world I have observed a momentous increase of population,” I said. “Is it possible for na-

tions like Great Britain, France, Germany, and Japan to become self-contained in terms of food and clothes?"

"There are two answers to that question," said Mered. "As nations have never pursued the ideal of self-sufficiency the limits of the earth's bounty in any given area are unknown. Tillage was the form of labour from which man first fled, and for that reason agriculture to this day is of all man's occupations the one conducted in the most unscientific and superstitious manner. Generally it has been left in the hands of the heavy, slow-minded people, especially so in Europe. In the cities the laboratories amass knowledge in chemistry and biology and there it lies, while millions of peasants invoke the saints and deities to increase their crops. Although the means of obtaining water in regular and unlimited amounts from the veins of the earth are well understood in the science of hydraulic engineering, prayers for rain to fall upon the fields from heaven are universal. Prayers for ore to be turned into iron by magic or supernatural consent are unknown. The agricultural output of almost any nation could be increased two, three, or four-fold by the application of scientific methods. There is probably yet no nation in Europe that could not feed itself if it were resolved to do so. If people continued to multiply a time would come when the limits were reached. This calls for the second answer.

"Man has not yet obliged the earth in earnest. It torments him, deceives him, forbids him, but when he lays his hands upon it purposefully it can deny him nothing. Vast areas are still untamed. With the labour he wastes in the strife of parallel competition he may turn the whole world into a garden as fast as he needs it. He can spill water on the deserts and make them to bloom. He can expel water from the low places and make his harvest there. He can fix the life-giving elements out of the air and set them with his seeds. When in one preferred spot he has touched the limits of food supply, if that shall happen, then let

him swarm and coerce the earth anew, but with his own labour and to the end of his own self-sufficing, instead of coercing the toil of others, as now he is doing.”

“Since it seems so clear, how shall we account for the fact that man is so perversely inclined to his own undoing?” I asked.

“Life is lived one day at a time,” he answered. “People have first the direct and imperative sense of living. After that they have a gregarious sense of living all in one direction, and only some great catastrophe can deflect them. Say to people: ‘You are going in the wrong direction; that way lies a precipice.’ They will answer: ‘How do you know? What is a precipice? We are indestructible and go on forever.’ That is true. Address your warning to the individual, and he will answer: ‘What you say may or may not be true. Who knows for sure? There is always a precipice ahead. I may not live to see the disaster. Besides, it is safer to go over the precipice with the people than to live alone in the world. Nothing that I can do will change it.’”

“Can you make it a little more definite?” I asked. “You have uttered a parable.”

“The mind of Europe was obsessed by the idea of economic conquest,” he continued. “All the high-craft nations were going headlong in a suicidal direction. They were helpless by reason of their own momentum. None could turn back. Exhortation was futile. The intelligent would say: ‘Yes, it is all very mad, but how can we stop?’ The need was for some convulsive, premature catastrophe that should break the spell before western civilization had sealed its own doom. A war among the competing nations would be the lesser cataclysm; it might avert the greater one.”

“How?” I asked.

“They would attack each other’s umbilical cords, not to destroy them outright, as would inevitably happen in the greater disaster to be averted, but to pinch them. And even if one or two

nations should be irreparably injured, that were little enough to sacrifice for a lesson to all in self-containment.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE WOUND WAS REAPED

At last he had touched the war. I was disappointed and shocked at his cold and logical way of bringing it in.

“You mention the war as if it were an exhibit coming at a certain place in a scientific thesis,” I said. “I would think. . .” I stopped. “Especially as. . .” I couldn’t go on.

“As I have avowed the fact of bringing it to pass,” he said, finishing my thought. His manner was gentle and for the first time personal. At that moment our feelings almost touched. It was he, Mered, who now wished to be understood, in a sense apart from ideas. There was place in him, therefore, for the deepest need of the human soul, which is the need to be by its faith justified. Or is it human merely? One remembers that the Lord was very anxious to be himself justified in the eyes of His servant Job.

“You get excited at the wrong place,” Mered continued in the same manner. “Release your mind from its habits of attitude. Incline it in this wise: Suppose you had possessed the power to alter and influence man’s thoughts by some dynamic power of suggestion. Suppose you had been interfering in his affairs since the hour of the curse, meaning to deliver him, the motive being what you please—vanity, compassion, or revenge. Suppose you had been saying to him, ‘Here is the way of escape,’ and then, ‘No, here it is,’ and found always that the state to which you had last brought him by suggestion was worse

than the one before, owing to the absolute nature of the curse. Suppose that at length he became heedless, that you saw him moving by an uncontrollable impulse toward oblivion, and that he could be stopped, if at all, only by some terrible midway disaster like the war. What would be your feeling toward the war itself?"

"My mind cannot do it," I said. "I do not know how I should feel."

"But imagine what your feelings would be if the war had failed, . . . if men had been so scourged in vain, and were only the more madly determined in the direction they were going?"

As he said this his mood underwent an abrupt transition. Though he had continued the personal form of address, he was no longer talking to me. He had gone a great distance away. He was once more as at dawn in the haunted plain, and he had never again been like that until now. The same feeling of dread overcame me. I groped in my mind for a question that might arrest him.

"Do you mean literally that you brought the war to pass?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, indifferently; still I felt that I might hold him.

"How did you do it?"

I was relieved that he regarded me fixedly for some time, as if undecided whether to rebuke the impertinence or gratify my curiosity. Then without a word he brought a large glass dish, half filled with water, in which a number of small shrimps were swimming about. At one side of the dish, quite close, he brought two ends of wire almost together, forming an arc, and passed an electric current through the wire, producing between the ends an intense light. He beckoned me to come and look. I saw the shrimps still swimming about in an aimless manner, apparently impervious to the brilliant light at one side of the dish. This light was so powerful that the opposite side of the

dish seemed by contrast to be in darkness.

“Now observe,” said Mered. “I put three little drops of acid into the water—so.”

The drops of acid no sooner touched the water than the shrimps stopped milling about and rushed with one headlong impulse to that side of the dish where the light was. Mered turned the dish. They rushed again to the light. He repeated the experiment several times.

“The behaviour of the shrimps is an uncontrollable reflex action,” said Mered. “When the acid is introduced into their medium they can no more help moving swiftly to the light than they can help being shrimps.”

“What is the application of that fact?” I asked.

“It applies to people,” he answered. “Reflex actions may be produced in people as easily as in shrimps. You have only to find the right acid and then introduce it into the medium in which they live. Their behaviour will be automatic and utterly beyond their own control.”

“I may be able to imagine it,” I said, “but I have no sense of it whatever. How may it be demonstrated?”

“You have seen it many times,” said Mered. “You have often yourself behaved precisely in the manner of the shrimps, being no more aware than they are of why it happened. I seat you at a table with nine friends. You are all talking amicably together about a number of things. You intend to spend the evening in this pleasant manner. Now I tell you that it lies in your power, without any extraneous aids whatever, but merely by producing certain sounds, suddenly to derange the chemistry of the other nine men so that their lips and veins will swell, their nostrils will dilate, their muscles will become tense, and they will rise violently, perhaps tipping over the table and chairs. The sounds you have made will produce all those effects uncontrollably.”

“I’m thinking of the sounds. What would they be?”

“The sound of two or three monosyllables.”

“You mean I could so insult them that they would rise in anger to assault me?”

“Your words might refer either to them directly or to something outside of themselves—to their flag, their country, their president or king, or to a symbol of faith. They would afterward say they behaved in that manner because you had insulted them. This is not the point. The physical phenomena are instantaneous and uncontrollable. The quality of the indignation is defined later. If the shrimps could talk they would give you a reason for rushing to the light, and believe it themselves. Put all that aside. Consider merely the power of a few drops of acid to produce reflex action among shrimps; then the power of a thought put into the ear by words to produce reflex action among human beings.”

“Yes, now I begin to perceive the application,” I said.

“In the twelfth century a mad monk, spilling upon the mind of Europe an acid compounded of piety, lust, and avarice, caused armies of men, women, and children to rise and march singing to destruction on a continent they had never seen.”

“The Crusades,” I said.

“To bring on the war,” he continued, “it was necessary only to introduce certain acids of thought into a bowl of seventy-millions of Germans. The Germans, being people, were bound to react violently when emotionalized in terms of fear, greed, vanity, and self-love. And for certain reasons they were peculiarly susceptible. Their passion of self-commiseration was abnormal to the point of being grotesque. Their souls were of an inferior order—gloomy, resentful, cringing, and destructive. As they were industrious, so they were powerful. They were the desperate workers of the valley. They played less and drudged more than any other high-craft people in the world. In war they would be terrible. They had started late in the game of eco-

nomic conquest and had only just begun to import food on a large scale. And they had the most cowardly stomach that was ever fastened upon a strong people. Lastly, there was the geographical accident of their being surrounded by competitive neighbours. Given this state of facts, the bowl and the Germans, the acids are easy to make.”

“Yes,” I said. “What were the acids?”

“The first was to excite the emotion of fear, which of all the human passions is the most destructive. A man will not rest or sleep until he has destroyed what he fears. The thought-acid that moved the Germans to abject fear was this: *Your enemies surround you like an iron band. You will not be safe until you burst through.* Next was to focus the fear, and for that there was this thought-acid: *Your chiefest rival controls the door through which you get your food. She holds over you the power of life and death. She could close the door!* Thus the fear was fixed upon an object, as fear must be to become destructive. For hatred there was this very simple compound: *The English, who hold the sea power, despise your manners. They say they are better than you because they know how to eat soup and take leisure.* To excite the passion of self-pity required only this thought: *You work harder than any other people and are therefore the most deserving, yet you have none of the warm, velvety places under the sun.* All that remained was to induce the reflexes of revenge, greed, and ego-mania. One acid for each purpose. To move them in revenge, this: *Your enemies, having pre-empted the riches of the earth, are secretly combined against you because they fear the day of reckoning.* To move them in greed, this thought: *If you but dared to put forth your strength you might possess the world.* And to move their ego, this: *You have a destiny, which is to make your own universal.*”

“I see it,” I said. “Those were the thoughts that became German war cries:

“*The Iron Band.*

“*Gott Strafe England.*

“*A Place in the Sun.*

“*Der Tag.*

“*Deutschland Über Alles.*

“*‘Kultur.’*”

For a moment the spell of the recital broke. The whole background of Mered’s revelations disappeared. All that I could think or feel was that here was a creature, man or demon, calmly demonstrating the technique of producing in the conglomerate mind of the seventy million most destructive people on earth the *chemistry* of an uncontrollable impulse to war. It was utterly monstrous.

“But it wasn’t true,” I said. I must have been hysterical. In my ears there is the recollection of having shrieked the words. “None of it was true. The fiend could not have done this! And there you stand. . . . My God!”

I was quite outside myself. The impulse was to put forth my hands against him.

But he was so cold, so still, so remotely impervious, that my horror seemed inadequate and childish. I looked at him and was powerless.

“Back of it all,” he went on, in a voice unchanged, so that I actually wondered whether my outburst had been audible, “was the disastrous idea of economic necessity—the idea of its being necessary to have rights of exploitation in other lands, to have foreign markets in which to exchange manufactured goods for food and raw materials. That was the thing to be destroyed. That is what the war was for. The lesson appeared. Its truth was proved. But nobody learned it. The world scanned it and threw it away. Greater tragedy than this there was never but one.”

“I have lost the theme,” I said. “What was the lesson thrown away?”

“The war proved,” he answered, “that there was no vital ne-

cessity for the Germans to expand their dominions—to import food either for their own belly or the bellies of their machines, to have and to hold colonies, to fight for markets called places in the sun, where there is inferior labour to be exploited. There was only the idea of it, and that idea was derived from the example of other nations. For four years the German Empire, besieged, out of its own resources, fought all the rest of the world. It gave out at last for two reasons, namely, that it spent its strength in aggressive tactics, and that it had never entertained the ideal of self-containment. Nobody would have believed that a country such as Germany was could live a year with her umbilical cords cut. She lived four and fought desperately to the end. Before the war, with her flair for chemistry, her genius in alternatives, her disciplined habits of industry, she might have pursued an adventure in self-containment to almost the point of complete realization. Then she had been really indestructible, with the strength to stand on the defensive against her enemies forever. Only, of course, in that case she would have had no enemies, for she would not at the same time have been pursuing a dream of commercial aggrandizement. There would have been no war. There would have been in the German mind no greed, no fear, no lust for revenge, no ego-mania for the thought-acids to act upon. You might have poured them out upon her with as little effect as if you insulted a species of bacteria in the presence of your nine friends. . . . Two things are proved: *First*, that peace and security lie in self-containment, within the conditions of the curse. *Second*, that the idea of economic necessity, wanton mother of wars, is false. . . . Proved in blood and ashes.”

He stopped.

“That was the lesson nobody learned?”

“Not only is the lesson unheeded,” he said, “but as a serpent coileth tighter at the tail as you unwind it by the neck, so the idea of economic necessity has entwined itself through all the

fabric of the peace. Thus, in the outcome, the war was a greater waste of human labour than a million castles set upon hills. The feud is made worse in its largest dimension. There now are three kinds of nations—slave, neutral, and free. And of these three the most dangerously placed are the free nations. The slave people will outbreed all others and bitterly bide their time.”

With each word of that last speech he grew more ominous. He was passing into the colossal mood again when I brought forward a question reserved for this time.

“Does your power of revelation extend also to the future?” I asked.

“What would you see in the future?”

“What lies ahead of my own country,” I said.

“All that has been *is* and exists forever,” he said. “The future is a mist, full of premonitions which may never bring themselves to pass.”

“Yet anything one should see in the mist might reasonably happen?”

“It is so,” he answered.

“I would see what lies in the mist for my own country,” I said.

He seemed to hesitate and then assented by an act of intention without words.

What now he was about to do required elaborate preparations. He removed the dish of shrimps and deftly assembled a number of other things. With deep care he mixed a colourless fluid and let it stand. Next he selected a large glass tube within which he brought the two ends of wire together, forming an arc as before. He sealed one end of the tube around the wire. Then he pored the fluid in and sealed the other end. This tube, now hermetically sealed at both ends, he mounted in a horizontal position, level with my eyes, and I understood that when the electric current was turned on a spark would pass from one end

to the other, through the fluid, producing some kind of light.

Having watched it intently for some time he came and stood at my back, saying: "Think nothing. Feel nothing. Look steadily at the light. Look through it."

For several minutes more there was no light. It appeared gradually—first as a blue point at a great distance, scarcely visible, but definite. Then as it grew slowly it seemed to be approaching at high velocity, the colour each instant becoming more active, subtle and dazzling. Presently I could see nothing else. There was the sensation of being enveloped. From far off I heard Mered's voice saying: "Now you can go through. The year is 1950. The place is New York."

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE UTERINE MIST

“Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook? or bore his jaw through with a thorn?”

MERED had been thoughtful to name the place. I should not have known it was New York.

First was a terrific impact of volume in all of its properties, save one. In the sense of volume there was no feeling of pressure. Something was missing, and as I was trying rationally to account for it I became audible to myself, saying: “How quiet!” That was it. No uproar, no clangorous sounds, no confusion, no crowding: yet there were people without end, moving in masses with a strange appearance of exerting no effort.

It took some time to comprehend what transformations had taken place.

Traffic was in three planes. All vehicular movement was below. From there people were lifted by escalators to the pedestrian level, on which there were endless platforms, or, as we would say, moving sidewalks, running at three rates of speed. Above was rapid transit, by means of aerial tramways suspended from monorails. At intervals were towers upon which people were lifted by cages on a continuous belt to the tramway stations.

Everything that moved was electrically driven and muffled. The only noise from all that dense traffic below, here and overhead, was a dull, pleasant rhythmic roar, like the sound of the

surf.

Crowding was prevented by police regulations which touched all activities and governed them rigorously. Thus, the hours of business were staggered, to use a mechanical term, or zigzagged. For one kind of workers the day was from 8 to 3 o'clock, for another it was from 9 to 4, and for another from 10 to 5, and so on through until 10 P.M. Shoppers and leisure seekers had their hours appointed. By this method traffic was balanced. Also, the distribution of population was regulated to avoid congestion in areas already full enough or upon facilities that were up to their comfortable capacity.

Richness was everywhere, in measures large and small, down to the trivial details; but nothing was gaudy or gorgeous. Luxury and comfort seemed to have been realized not as the means to anything but as ends in themselves. People were uniformly well dressed, though not with any conscious show. Shop windows were filled with costly merchandise from all the corners of the world.

Presently I became aware that with all their air of security, well-being, and self-satisfaction, the people were uneasy by reason of some thought that was troubling their minds. They were continually reassuring themselves with such phrases as—

“Nothing will come of it.”

“The president will tell them how to behave.”

“The Germans are crazy.”

And then by overhearing one connected conversation I learned that the disquieting thought was one of war.

I made my way to Times Square, where three of the principal newspapers were published, expecting to find crowds waiting for news bulletins. I was disappointed. There were no crowd and no bulletins. The exterior of a newspaper office was as blank and unexciting as that of a wholesale merchandise house. The reason for this was that the business of distributing news had

radically changed.

News itself, that is, the news of facts and happenings, had been standardized, like the time of day. Four times in twenty-four hours the news editors of all the papers sat down in council and agreed upon a statement of the news facts. This statement was then transferred by telephone to a receiving disc at the central telephone station, which in turn transferred it to receiving discs at hundreds of sub-stations.

When one wanted the news one took up one's telephone instrument and asked for it, thus: "General news, please," or "Political news, thank you," or "Sporting news, quick!" And the telephone operator thereupon connected you with the proper disc. When it was at the end of its story it rang itself off automatically.

The old-fashioned newspapers, therefore, had disappeared. In place of them were journals of opinion, whose function it was to discuss and interpret the news according to their politics and points of view. These journals were small and very well printed, and instead of being hawked about the streets by vendors they were delivered at homes and offices once a day.

Well, the disquieting news was this:

A contumacious little state on the Balkan peninsula had repudiated its indebtedness to the United States, saying that we were an overbearing people, that our ways were usurious, that we sat in wealth and luxury taking toll from all the other people of the world. Its language was most insulting. However, that was not the point. The United States had enormous investments of capital in other countries, and if one could behave in this manner with impunity, so then might any other. A principle was at stake.

Acting quite within our moral and legal rights we had sent a delegation to seize the customs house of this impertinent and fraudulent little state, meaning only to put its finances in order,

as those of a bankrupt, and collect our due, without any thought of war.

Then the Germans had interfered on behalf of the debtor, taking ground on three points, namely:

First, that the little state could not pay.

Second, that it ought not to be expected to pay, since the American capital, as everybody knew, had been loaned to it for the purpose of exploiting its wealth in certain raw materials which were required in our own industries.

Third, that they, the Germans, took this occasion to proclaim a new principle in international relations, which was that a state unable to pay its debts should be permitted to go through a process of bankruptcy, as individuals do, and be forgiven its obligations, or such part of them as an international court of equity might decree. And the Germans claimed the right to assert this principle on behalf of ten small European states, including of course the one from which we were demanding payment.

All of this was extremely unexpected; and there was a violent panic in Wall Street in securities which represented loans to foreign countries.

For the settlement of such matters there was a Council of Nations to which the United States subscribed; but for several years adherence to its authority on the part of the great powers had been growing more and more lax, and there were now on file so many exceptions and notices of release that in any special situation everybody could reasonably claim the right to act independently.

Washington did appeal to the Council of Nations; the response, however, was slow and equivocal. Meanwhile the panic in Wall Street continued. Presently the resolve was taken to have the thing out with Germany in our own American way.

A note had that day been dispatched to Berlin. The text was not yet public. However, the Washington correspondents

all agreed in the statement that it was a high and mighty composition which would put the Germans in their place. It utterly rejected the new theory of international relations.

Prices rallied on the Stock Exchange and people went home in a serene state of mind. This feeling increased as the ensuing day passed without news. But on the third day there was an answer from Germany which had to be read several times before its audacious import could be fully realized. We had been answered with peremptory demands.

Germany demanded three things:

First, that we should forgive outright the debt of the little nation that had defied us.

Second, that we should recognize the legality of an international bankruptcy court for debtor nations.

Third, that we should formally recognize Germany's right to act as Equity Court and Lord of Bankruptcy for the ten small states previously referred to.

At the end there was a clumsy, sinister paragraph to the effect that she was expressing not only her own views, but those also of other states which were pledged to support them to any extent. This might mean that the ten little states were prepared to resist, or, it might mean that several of the great powers were secretly aligned with Germany.

In any case it was evident that Germany's original interference on behalf of the one contumacious little Balkan state had been only the pretext for picking a quarrel with us.

Naturally the panic in Wall Street resumed with much violence, and the Stock Exchange closed with a rumour going about that the Administration was meditating a conciliatory reply. Thousands of messages were sent from all parts of the country exhorting the President to maintain an inflexible position. There was, in fact, nothing else for him to do.

A note was immediately sent off to Germany which was

in effect an ultimatum. She was to have twenty-four hours in which to withdraw her demands.

The German reply to this was to hand the American Ambassador his passports.

Events had moved so swiftly that when the sequel came people were dazed, almost unbelieving. There had been no preparation for war. For one reason, there hadn't been time to think of it. For another, nobody knew what form a war could possibly assume, beyond economic reprisals, which were of course immediately expected.

Conditions in the whole world as affecting the conduct of war had been radically altered. Nowhere had the change been greater than on the sea. Commerce between nations had enormously increased, but on all the seven seas you would seldom see a ship's funnel, save now and then that of a dirty old tramp steamer working out its sins in some coastwise service.

Trans-oceanic shipping instead of taking to the air had dived under water. It was almost entirely conducted in submarine vessels, the evolution of which had been rapid and amazing. The reasons were quite natural.

For several years after the Great War there was a furious competition in navy building, accompanied by a formidable development of coast defences. In this ruinous contest the United States had three invincible advantages.

It could build warships faster than any other nation.

Owing to its geographical isolation it could rely heavily upon coast defences—and it was clear that never could warships prevail against guns mounted ashore on concrete, provided the science of coast defence gunnery kept pace with that of naval gunnery.

Lastly, the United States, with a prodigious idle shipbuilding capacity surviving from the Great War, began suddenly to develop the submarine cargo carrier, and perfected it so rapidly

that in a few years its own commerce went mainly underseas. Thus, to the despair of its rivals, it was able to maintain a superiority in warships, it had a strategical advantage in coast defences, and its merchant vessels were now slipping under the waves, as safe as wise whales.

Meanwhile everybody had been deeply disappointed in the uses of aerial navigation. After many costly programmes had been scrapped a scientific truth displaced romantic expectations. This truth was that to acquire stability a thing must overcome resistance. Its stability is in proportion to the amount of resistance overcome. The resistance of the air is slight. Therefore, an airship of any design in order to acquire stability derived from resistance is obliged to increase its own surface in a very high ratio, thus assuming a size which makes it vulnerable. Beyond a certain point all things are penalized for size by an immutable law of nature—the same law by the operation of which the huge monsters that once roamed over the earth were displaced by smaller animals. So flying machines and airships had been developed as swift messengers and vehicles of pleasure, but not as burden carriers. They could not compete with ships and railways.

To all this conflict of discoveries and experiences there came an intelligent sequel. By common agreement the navies of the world were scrapped. Coast defences were to remain as they were. It was permissible to maintain small, swift armed boats for harbour and coast patrol. Fighting submarines were not prohibited; but they were almost useless. The undersea cargo boat carried one light gun. Thus a fighting submarine and a merchant vessel were equal in combat. By chance either might destroy the other. A duel between them might be doubly fatal. Submarine warfare on these terms became a form of futile suicide. And now, obviously, coast defences were absolutely supreme. Invasion by sea was out of the question.

A collateral outcome was that the Americans became the great ship-builders of the world. The submarine cargo carrier, in the development of which they had taken the lead, not only cheated the warship and made navies absurd, but it was on its merits of utility a truly scientific evolution. Once the technical difficulties are overcome, it seems as natural for a swimming vessel as for a fish to go under water. And as we could build ships of this type faster and more cheaply than any one else, we built them in enormous quantities for all other countries, supplying about two thirds of the world's requirements.

We had willingly left the development of aircraft to others; and Europe was as far ahead of us in that field as we were ahead of it in the new ship-building. However, our unpreparedness in the air seemed nothing to worry about. As a military matter it was negligible, since the one thing now strictly taboo in warfare was the bombing of cities; and as an economic matter it was unimportant because aircraft were not cargo carriers.

So there was no fear that we should be invaded by the Germans.

War measures, it was thought, would be feasible only in the economic field. We were dependent upon Germany for a variety of essential things, notably potash and chemical products, and of course she would now cut off our supplies. The matter would be serious, though not at all desperate.

As always, there were two classes of people—optimists and pessimists.

Optimists faced the facts cheerfully, saying: "Pooh! There is plenty of potash in this country. We can get it out of the alkaline lakes, out of seaweed, out of the dusts of cement kilns and blast furnaces. All we have to do is to get busy. As for the chemical products, we can make our own if we have to do it. We will build miles and miles of laboratories, mobilize our chemists and physicists, and the elements shall yield up to us all

the secrets the Germans possess. It will be a very good thing in the end that we have been obliged to do all this.”

The pessimists, including a small body of political idealists derisively called Self-Containers, replied in this wise: “You shall see what can happen in place of the miracles you predict. This thought of independence ought to have obsessed you long ago. It will take years to perfect processes whereby our own widely scattered potassium salts may be recovered in large quantities. And as for improvising a knowledge of modern chemistry in a few days, you are simply crazy. You are thinking only of the chemical products which we use in our industries. Some of these are produced by means of elements which we do not possess and for which substitutes may be sought in vain for many years. Besides all this, the Germans, for a generation, have been amassing a theoretical knowledge of chemistry the possibilities of which we cannot imagine. You don’t know what secrets to seek. If the Germans should turn their diabolical wisdom to destructive uses we should be without any defences at all.”

To which the others retorted: “Pessimists we have had with us always; and yet never have we failed to find the means to our own success and preservation. Nothing is impossible.”

Properly to understand these recriminations I found it necessary to furnish my mind with a picture of the economic state of the world.

The struggle between Germany and civilization thirty odd years before had made the United States the only great creditor among nations. All the other nations borrowed from this one—all except Japan and some very minor ones. And at the end of the Great War the aggregate sum of the debts owed by foreign peoples to the United States amounted to nearly \$700 for each American family. Nothing like this had ever been imagined in all the history of international credit.

Now, how may people pay their debts to each other? or,

in this case, how should all the other nations pay their debts to this one? They must pay not in money but in goods, that is, in merchandise and commodities produced by labour. So it was that the United States came to have a command over the productive labour of other nations such as no one people ever had had before.

When the Great War was ended and industry had been resumed the ships of the world began to converge upon American ports, bearing such goods and raw materials as we desired to take in payment of the interest regularly coming due on our loans to foreign people. Wealth multiplies by a law of its own. We became richer and richer, lending more and more, so that the world's indebtedness to us instead of diminishing actually increased, and the more it increased the more ships came bearing merchandise in payment.

This extraordinary power to command the products of foreign labour enabled us to solve many of our own domestic problems in a large and happy manner. If you are rich enough all economic dilemmas yield easily to treatment. And our sovereign remedy for social discontent was this: *Anything we did not wish to produce for ourselves because it entailed irksome labour we could buy from other people.*

Thus, American agriculture was conducted primarily with the comfort and happiness of the farmer in view. By harder and more intensive farming the country might have been self-sustaining in food up to 400,000,000 people; but the fact was that in 1950, with a population of 175,000,000, we were importing one third of the wheat we ate. People said: "Well, why not? It is cheaper to buy wheat from the peasants of Russia and Egypt and Argentina than to raise it for ourselves."

Mining was conducted with an altruistic abhorrence of human drudgery; and owing to the high wages paid to miners in order that they should enjoy a high standard of living it be-

came in many cases cheaper to buy coal than to produce it. So, in 1950 we were importing at least a quarter of the coal consumed in the United States. On the western coast great industries flourished in the benefit of Chinese coal, mined with cheap coolie labour and hauled across the Pacific ocean. "Why not?" people asked again. "Why should we compete in mining with oriental labour? We are a high craft nation. It is good economics to buy raw materials and export finished products."

When the American oil pools were empty in 1935 we began to import petroleum from Asia, not that we had to do it, but because it was cheaper to buy oil abroad than to develop the vast oil shales of our own Western States.

And when at about the same time the nitrate beds of Chile were exhausted we began to import nitrates from the Germans, who had wonderfully developed processes for producing nitrates from the atmosphere. It was cheaper to buy this vital product from the Germans than to build fixation plants of our own.

Only a few typical cases are cited. The list was long. Although the United States was potentially able to produce sufficient, even surplus, quantities of every vital substance for itself, it came to be the largest importer in the world of fuel, food, and raw materials. And when the Self-Containers protested, saying that a country possessing in a miraculous manner all the means to economic independence was foolishly exposing its stomach and throat to foreign hands they were answered with this argument: "If we do not buy the commodities of other countries they cannot pay us. And since we have to buy, certainly it is better to buy raw materials than finished goods—the more the better. Not only is it cheaper but it is also very advantageous in an economic sense to obtain from others the products of drudgery and employ ourselves in tasks of higher skill."

"It may be advantageous as economics," the Self-Containers

replied, "but it is fatal politics. Better that the foreign countries should never pay us at all than that they should gain over us the power of life and death."

At this they were laughed out of hearing.

Now at last it was up to the optimists to prove their case, for of course Germany would cut us off immediately from all those substances we had been buying from her, especially potash and nitrates. Characteristic preparations were launched. A board was created to card-index America's undeveloped elemental resources; also all the scientists and chemists. Engineers and contractors were mobilized to design and magically erect plants for the fixation of atmospheric nitrogen on a grand scale. Other contractors were called upon to produce forthwith millions of square feet of laboratory space, with full technical equipment, so that explorations might begin without delay—explorations into the nature of elements. We should take the field of chemistry by storm. The first official requisition upon the work of the scientists would be for a process whereby we might hope to recover our own potassium salts and be forever independent of Germany's potash. We knew already how to fix atmospheric nitrogen. The first big problem was to build the plants. But there would follow immediately a second requisition upon the mobilized scientists, namely, for a substitute to act as a catalytic agent in the fixation of nitrogen. Platinum was the agent we had used when during the Great War we had started in the same gustful spirit to command nitrogen from the air, and there were people still living who remembered with what difficulty enough platinum for the purpose was amassed at that time. It was still scarce.

As these things were being said solemnly in the daily journals, and repeated by the people, the Self-Containers wept. We were children in the science of chemistry. The Germans had not used platinum in their fixation plants for many years. They had

processes we knew nothing about. We were talking chemistry of a bygone time, and did not know it.

More news came.

The ten little states in whose behalf Germany had claimed the right to speak all with one accord recalled their diplomatic representatives from Washington and dismissed the American ministers from their capitals. Then Germany and the ten states simultaneously announced that economic intercourse with the United States was ceased and that all the American ships then in their ports would be interned for the duration of the war. This meant that we were, in fact, cut off from our supplies of German potash, nitrates, and other chemical products; also that we should have to look elsewhere for the quantities of hides, grain, minerals, and oil which we had been receiving from the ten little states.

People said: "Of course. We expected that." And calmly went on with preparations for the great chemical adventure. The only serious problem was to supply ourselves with the chemical products we had been receiving from Germany, for luckily the ten little states had no monopoly of anything. The ships were a nasty loss; but we could make ships. Meanwhile the private initiative of importers could be relied upon to keep us well supplied with hides, grain, minerals, and petroleum. These were elsewhere abundant, and we had vast commercial credits in every country of the world.

Nobody was really worried. The daily journals devoted almost as much space to the acrimonious controversy between the Self-Containers on one side and all the optimists and opportunists on the other side as to the war *per se*. Generally the Self-Containers were denounced and abused, as people who wished evil to their country for the sake of proving a fantastic theory.

Then one evening was news most unexpected and alarming.

Three of the principal European powers, all heavily indebted

to the United States, and one of the great Asiatic nations, announced that they had allied themselves with Germany. All of them gave the same reason. They were resolved to support the new German principle of international bankruptcy whereby nations might be purged of their debts and begin with a clean slate. They dismissed the American diplomats from their capitals, stopped all intercourse with the United States, and interned the American cargo ships then in their ports.

Now the situation *was* serious, extremely.

Our umbilical cords were snapping. A third of our merchant marine was in the hands of our enemies, and when we began to take stock we discovered that these enemies had been supplying us with about one half our total imports of food, fuel, and raw materials. It would be very difficult, though not perhaps impossible, to make up the loss by increasing our demands upon other countries; but beyond this now was the difficulty of transportation, with so many of our ships locked up in hostile ports. Vast as our ship-building capacity was, to lose ships on this scale was terrifying. In any case, the question of supplies could no longer be left to private initiative. The government, therefore, mobilized the importers under a board of economic strategy and proceeded to make large contracts in neutral countries for the commodities we were going to be short of.

Worse news was on the way.

Suddenly throughout the whole world there was a volcanic outburst of popular hatred for the United States. Governments that wished to be neutral, and were so in a political sense, might almost as well have been aligned with our enemies. They were unable to control their own people, especially the mass workers, who refused to touch anything intended for sale and export to this country. Attempts to coerce them resulted in general strikes and violent uprisings. The idea had spread among them, contagiously, like a plague, that the United States exploited their toil

in the manner of a nabob nation, and that all their hardships were mainly owing to this fact.

We could place our contracts with merchants and producers in neutral countries, but they could not guarantee delivery. All they could say was what their governments said. They were sorry. Nothing could be done about it. Their people had declared a boycott against the United States and were unmanageable.

This state of feeling, being universal, was a profound shock to the pride and sensibilities of Americans. They reacted in anger, and visited a good deal of it upon the gentlemen of the diplomatic service for having failed to inform themselves of the popular sentiment of the world and put us upon notice. The diplomats replied that they had tried to perform precisely that service; they had only been laughed at and disbelieved by all those to whom it was proper to communicate the information. Naturally they could not have shouted it from the house tops. Besides, nothing at all like this could have been foreseen. It was a spontaneous conflagration of the human spirit. And as for the great powers that had turned all at once the face of enmity, the case was that they had been plotting together for years and had kept their secret well under extreme protestations of official good-will.

These recriminations soon ceased, or were postponed to another day. Everybody had now to face the facts of a desperate situation.

Thirty days after the opening of the quarrel with Germany the United States found itself in a state of complete economic isolation. The richest country on earth, with the grandest cities, the highest standard of living, the most ease and comfort, possessing only yesterday an unlimited power to command the produce of other people—such a country could be stabbed in the stomach from afar. The hand was invisible. The people of the

United States had only to be left suddenly to their own resources and they shook with dread.

The irony of the situation lay in the fact that this country was unique in the possibilities of perfect self-containment.

For what was the dreadful question? It was not whether 175,000,000 people inhabiting the most productive portion of the globe could entirely subsist on the products of their own labour. Everybody knew they could do so. The question was whether now they could reach that state of independence in time to save themselves.

Prosaic facts of husbandry, such as the time it takes to raise a hog or grow a steer or bring off a crop of grain, were studied with tragic anxiety.

The month was September.

People said: "Well, there is time to increase the fall planting. Let us appeal to the farmers."

But out of the confusion and hysteria of much counsel the realization emerged that production is a wonderful web of many related things. To increase the fall planting would take seed, and taking seed out of the existing reserves of grain would reduce the amount available to be eaten until the next crop came in. Moreover, it was not a matter merely of growing for ourselves that third of grain which we had been importing. We had to think also how we should produce our own meat, of which we had been importing at least a quarter; and livestock consumes enormous quantities of grain.

The country's grain production would have to be approximately doubled in one year. This could not be done without a prodigal use of nitrates in the soil. We had been cut off from the German source of our nitrates supply. True, we could produce atmospheric nitrogen for ourselves; only, before we could do that we should have to build fixation plants.

And this was but a segment of the circle. One thing always

touched another. There was plenty of coal in the ground, plenty of oil in the western shales, plenty of elements scattered far and wide from which to derive our chemical products, yet the solution of every problem required new factories, new machinery, immense structural undertakings, all of which meant an overwhelming imperative demand upon industries which were going to be crippled at once for lack of the fuel, the raw materials and the chemical products we had been buying so much of abroad.

It was like throwing an automobile into reverse gear. It is easy enough if you have time to stop. If you haven't, and try to do it while running at high speed forward, you strip the gears.

The government of course took over all supplies and all industries and put the country on short rations; and people were so intent upon the one great problem of economic self-preservation that the possibility of aggressive warfare was almost forgotten. There had been some discussion of sending armed forces to take the commodities in other countries to which we were justly entitled, just as you seize the assets of a debtor who has refused to pay his debts. However, on reflection, this procedure was seen to be impossible. Provided you could transport the forces and land them, which was impossible, then what would you do? You could not coerce millions of unwilling people. Nor could you occupy the whole world in a military sense.

And as it was impossible for us to act aggressively, so it was thought unlikely that our enemies would act in that way. They could not invade us. Forces could not be landed against our coast defences. They meant to strangle us by use of the economic weapon.

Now came the culminating surprise. The Self-Containers were responsible for it.

For years they had been preaching that it was dangerous to neglect the science of pure chemistry, especially as the Germans

were devoting themselves to it passionately. Nobody knew what would come of this. The Germans might all at once turn up in possession of secrets which would upset the world. The next war would very probably find men hurling the elements at one another like children playing with dynamite, or, more probably, the Germans hurling them at everybody else.

The country would not listen. It called the Self-Containers little Americans and alarmists who did not know that war had been put away. Did they say America was neglecting the science of chemistry? How then could they account for the fact that America was the mightiest of industrial nations and applied chemistry to manufacture with amazing success?

To this the Self-Containers replied that although we were proficient in the application of chemical knowledge to industry, the sources of that knowledge were mainly German. As we had been Germany's largest customer for nitrates and potash and other things, so we had been the largest buyer of her chemical knowledge. But we had not by any means got all of it. We had bought only what she was willing to disclose and sell. The Self-Containers called attention to the fact that some of the most important chemical processes had been the accidental by-product of those wonderful German laboratories where Germans tirelessly explored the nature of matter, bringing the elements together in a methodical infinity of reactions and card-indexing the results. That, they said, was what we should be doing, not that it was profitable, save now and then by reason of a chance discovery that had practical value, but that it was *vital*.

These Self-Containers were a vocal lot and maintained such a feud with things as they were (merely because they were, some said), that their counsels were unheeded. However, they were capable of action, besides. Secretly and by private subscription they had during a number of years kept three American scien-

tists at work in the German laboratories. These scientists had been very carefully picked. All three were of German origin and were accepted by the Germans as German; but they were true Americans at heart, abhorring the German philosophy; and their work was that of voluntary spies. They were under instructions to learn all that was possible of the Germans' explorations in matter, and then, if anything should happen, to make their way home by any means at all. Meanwhile they were not even to report, for it was vital to the success of the plan that they should never be suspected. Therefore, they were to take no risks.

All of this is explanatory. The news was as follows:

One of those scientists had miraculously escaped from Germany. On reaching this country by aircraft he had reported directly to the Self-Containers, and they, instead of laying his information before the government in confidence, resolved to publish it at once, partly on the ground that anything the Germans knew the American people were entitled to know, and partly, no doubt, on grounds of pride and vanity.

It was sensational almost beyond belief.

The Germans were prepared to bring war to this country aggressively. They were going to invade the air with a chemistry of elemental destruction.

At the heart of their laboratory system the Germans for a generation had maintained a shrine of revenge. This was a place where a consecrated group of scientists devoted their lives to the task of finding in the elements the means to physical conquest. They set out with the idea that the secret they sought lay in the nitrogen atom, which is of all the elements the most abundant, perhaps the most mysterious. It constitutes four fifths of the atmosphere, where it lives as a free, lazy, inert gas, very difficult to capture. When it is made to unite with other elements it is so volatile, so explosive, so dynamically rebellious, that as its nature and properties were gradually discovered it came to be

rated as the most potent source of life's universal driving power.

First these Germans, dedicating their work to revenge, completely solved the problem of "fixing" nitrogen for commercial purposes in a very cheap manner. That was how it came that after the Chilean nitrate beds were exhausted the Germans were able to supply the world with nitrates produced from the atmosphere at a cost so low that nobody else could compete. But this was not what the scientists were really after. They went on exploring the nitrogen atom and its relations and affinities; and at last they discovered what they expected.

They evolved a gas which, when ignited in the open air, acted as a catalytic or match-making agent between nitrogen and oxygen, causing them to burn together spontaneously. As a tiny sulphur match may cause oxygen and carbon to unite in a city-consuming conflagration, just so a small amount of this gas lighted and cast upon the air would cause the atmosphere to burn and fall upon the earth as a deluge of nitric acid. All life, of course, would be instantly destroyed.

Having made this discovery the Germans were terrified. Its liability was obvious. All people alike live in one atmosphere; therefore, in destroying their enemies by this diabolical means they might also destroy everyone else, including Germans. So they hid it from themselves and entered upon a new quest, which was to find a paralyzing agent, that is, something that would extinguish the atmospheric fire. After a long time they found that also. It was discovered in an element existing only in a few places in the earth and generally in very small quantities. They required it in large, workable quantities, and they searched the world over for a deposit suitable to their needs. And this they found—where would you think? In a clay bank of West Virginia, U. S. A. For several years thousands of tons of that clay had been going to Germany for a purpose nobody could guess. Here was the answer. This was almost a ludicrous

touch.

Now with a torch that would light the atmosphere and a defensive extinguisher to put it out, the Germans were still afraid of their knowledge. They began to experiment cautiously. It often happens that a laboratory experiment breaks down when transferred to outside conditions on a large scale. They built a great steel chamber which could be hermetically sealed. The torch worked and so did the extinguisher. They found when the air was set afire that instead of going off with a great roar it burned slowly. There was always time to apply the extinguisher.

Still there was the possibility that if the fire should spread over a wide area no amount of the paralyzing agent would stop it, for it had been noticed that although the fire burned slowly it augmented itself. By deduction they arrived at the conclusion that if let alone the fire ultimately would be stopped by natural causes. As the burned atmosphere fell down in the form of nitric acid a vacuum would be created and air would rush to fill it, bringing along such quantities of nitrogen as to put out the fire, just as you might put out any fire by suddenly piling a lot of raw fuel on top of it.

With just enough confidence in this theory to be able to hope that they should not destroy all the life in the world the fanatical Germans went to mid-ocean in a submersible vessel, cast their torch upon the air and dove.

The theory was proved. The air burned over a circular area, three hundred miles in diameter, as they afterward precisely determined, and the fire was then put out by a violent inrush of winds from all corners of the heavens.

This was the explanation of a series of phenomena at sea three years before which had left everybody, especially non-German scientists, a little daft. There had been a great upheaval of waters, owing to winds which were contrary to all meteorological probabilities; and afterward five vessels had been

found floating about, all in perfect condition, but with every air breathing thing aboard quite dead. The superstitious had said it was a visitation of Providence, and science could not answer them. Now it was clear. Those five vessels had been caught in the three-hundred-mile area.

There ended the tale. That was all the escaped scientist knew. He had never been permitted to enter the German shrine of revenge. He had not the faintest idea what the two secret formulas were. They could be found, if at all, only as the Germans had found them, by tediously and systematically bringing the elements into contact with each other in circumstances and conditions infinitely varied.

This, therefore, we proceeded to do. Laboratories were improvised overnight, and American scientists set out as if blindfolded upon that endless pathway into the mysteries of pure matter which the Germans alone had methodically pursued. And the Americans were one generation behind.

People were breathless and tremendously excited, but not hysterical. Perhaps it would be truer to say they were enormously interested.

Headlines in the daily journals soon made the symbols of chemistry as familiar to readers as the technical designations of guns had been during the Great War. There were those who said it was all a hoax, and questioned by innuendo the character of the spy. There were those who said if it were true we had better make peace with the Germans at once. One scientist gained notoriety by announcing that when the calamity came the higher one happened to be in the air at the time the better. Thereupon rents rose scandalously in the top storeys of high buildings. People occupied roofs with pallets and beds and little tents.

Almost in a day there arose a cult that called this the end of the world according to the Book of Revelation, and enjoyed it

ecstatically. The idea spread swiftly; and where it went human relations fell into a state of grotesque chaos.

Powerful search-lights and anti-aircraft guns raked the sky at night; though what good they could do nobody quite knew. A German aircraft flying so high as to be out of range and sight had only to toss overboard a torch of the flaming gas and fly away again. New York, Philadelphia, Boston, possibly Pittsburgh, everything within a radius of three hundred miles, would be deluged in nitric acid and perish.

Gazing one night at the eastern heavens with a feeling of resentment at their cool serenity I saw a strange blue light. Hardly larger than a star at first, it grew steadily in size, as if approaching at high velocity. It was an artificial light. That I was sure of. As it came it widened with astonishing rapidity. Suddenly I could see nothing else. There was the sensation of being enveloped, or of passing through. And I said:

“It is the end!”

CHAPTER XV

“ME—R——E——D!”

NOTHING had happened.

By degrees of unbewilderment I became aware of my surroundings. I was still sitting in the laboratory; only, now it was dark. My nerves were twitching. I must have been for a long time tense in one rigid posture.

The blue light in the glass tube had gone out.

I called to Mered, and knew in the same instant he was not there. My voice echoed about the room. There was no answer.

As I groped through the darkness toward the door I cried out in fright at stepping on something soft that squirmed and made no sound. It was one of the frogs that had got out of a glass jar.

When I had found the door it was easy to locate the electric switch and turn on the light. The place was empty. . . . The frog was dead.

The night elevator man eyed me askance when I asked him if any one had recently departed from the eighteenth floor. Nobody, he said, had either come or gone since he brought me up. He spoke of bringing me up as if I had been alone.

It was coming daylight. I walked up and down the street aimlessly. When people began to be around I went again to the laboratory. The door was locked. My knocking was unheeded. Down the hallway three doors was the office of the commercial chemical company that owned the laboratory. I inquired there

for a person resembling Mered, and succeeded only in creating the suspicion that I was insane.

Six months have passed. Everywhere I have looked for him. I have wandered through many cities, for it was in a city that I met him. I have cried his name at night in the drear places of the earth. I have searched Constantinople for the house. Once I thought I had found it. There was a house—one only—that might have been it. And it was not.

Then I remembered my part of the undertaking. What he revealed, that I was to write. This I have truthfully done.

And now I am free to renew my quest. Though I knew for sure I should never find him, still I would look and hope.

THE END