

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE OUTLOOK OF MANKIND

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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§ 1. *The Next Phase Latent in the Present Situation*

WE have now completed our general account of this little world of men, our survey of the activities and interaction of the one thousand nine hundred million souls who make up the human garment of our globe. We have shown how things are with that film of life to-day. We have shown how it stirs and carries on. We have ranged from the financial adventurer in his aeroplane to the miner hacking at the seam, and from the work girl in the atelier, and the peasant bent down to his soil, to the film star and the military commander; clerks and machine menders, stokers and cabmen, the parson in the pulpit, and the fur trapper in the snow have all figured in the reckoning. We have noted, if only by mere indicative gestures, a hundred culs-de-sac and out-of-the-way corners, the prisoner in his cell, the burglar "at work," the lunatic under treatment, the religious ascetic wrung with prayer, the noiseless jungle savage. It is the main masses that have chiefly held our attention; it is the broad realities we have examined. So human beings live, so they work, so hating and loving and bickering and bargaining they serve and depend upon one another and pass away.

What has evolved this multitude? What has woven this magic network of aid and service between them? That has been asked and in a manner answered here. Example, imitation, teaching, intricate educational processes. It is a psychological net. Why has this world of ours so many corrupting kinks and morbid developments, so many parasites, rebels and betrayers? Because of the imperfections of its educational adaptations. The web is not perfectly woven. To crown our work we turned to the teachers, preachers, writers, innovators, propagandists and all that miscellany of people who keep ideas alive and operative and weave new conceptions of action and new threads of relationship into the dispersed

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millions of our kind. We showed their retardations and their difficulties. They are always a little behind the mechanical drift of things, as the upthrust of a wave is behind its crest.

This planetary ant-hill of interrelated living creatures is changing as the reader turns these pages. It never pauses in its changes. In the past six seconds twelve human beings have been born upon this globe as it spins steadily through space, from day to night and from night to day, born each with a blank new brain, upon which the first writing has already begun: those first impressions, those foundations of dim experience which will be built at length into a unique, unprecedented persona with all the intricate reactions of self-conscious, self-directive individual life. And in the last six seconds—unless there has been some exceptional catastrophe—ten human beings have died, taking with them, each one of them, a world.

Many of those so recently dead, dying while the last few paragraphs were read, were quite young creatures, some just born; but most of them carried with them out of the impulses of mankind, unforgettable memories, obstinate prepossessions, life-worn traditions, obsolete skills and responses, unteachable determinations. Over the teeming minds of the young play the suggestions, traditions, examples, preachments and reasonings of our newer time. These minds in their turn are going on to hope and desire, struggle and consume, suppress disagreeable facts and exaggerate pleasant ones, embrace self-protective delusions, conduct themselves according to their lights and so act their parts. They too will be shaped and set and hardened, but not exactly as their predecessors were. The pattern is always changing. Work goes on day by day about the planet, and wealth is gathered and spent. The threads interweave, and the pattern passes into new shapes and new promises. In the end these others also will pass away. Man is for ever dying and for ever being born, and it is impossible to tell of what is, without passing on forthwith to the only aspect that gives the present significance and reality, the things that now arise out of the things that are.

§ 2. *Uncertainties in the Human Outlook*

Let us before we conclude devote a section to the possibility that this human adventure will fail. We have no guarantee whatever

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against many sorts of cosmic disaster. There is the risk, an infinitesimal but real risk, of meteoric bodies hurtling through our system, bodies so large and coming so near to us as to destroy our planet as a home for life. So remote is such a mischance that Sir James Jeans can dismiss it as negligible. If the lot falls against us in spite of the odds, there is nothing more to be said or done. Fate will end the story.

But other sinister possibilities, less catastrophic but in the end as decisive, are not so easily dismissed. We still know very little of the secular changes of climate, and it is conceivable that in quite a few years, in a hundred thousand or a thousand thousand, that is to say, this planet may be returning to a phase of widespread glaciation, or temperature may be rising to universal tropical and ultra-tropical conditions. Within the sun, for all we know, explosive forces are brewing—or on our earth itself—to heat or chill or shatter. Or again, if steady urgencies of upheaval and disturbance are not still astir under the feet of our race, the rains and rivers and waves will presently wear down our mountains and hills and flatten out our lands until one monotonous landscape of plains of exhausted soil and swamps and lagoons of tepid water has replaced the familiar scenery of our time. Or if these terrestrial tensions increase, our race will pass into a period of volcanic violence and earthquakes, forces from within breaking loose to thrust up new mountain chains and giving fresh directions to wind and sea current, and the conditions of life may become extreme and diversified beyond adjustment.

Here plainly we are still under the sway of the Fates. Presently we may be able to foretell; later we may even control such fluctuations, but certainly the sun and planets and our little globe have their own motions and changes regardless of our needs and desires. The cards as they are played are being swept up for a fresh deal. The hand our race must play to-morrow may be very different from the hand we play to-day. There are no fixed conditions to human life, and if this new-born world community of ours is to go on through vast periods of time, man will have to be for ever guessing new riddles. Will he be able to get so far with his science as to map out at length in their due order all the coming throws of the planetary roulette? Or get a mastery of the wheel? There will have to be an encyclopædia of knowledge for such feats as that, vaster

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than anything we can dream of to-day There will have to be a mightier sort of man, very marvellously educated, and perhaps by virtue of an advancing science of eugenics innately better, to do things on that scale.

Such are the difficulties and problems for our descendants, that must slowly develop themselves age by age, even if they solve the riddles of our present civilization. But will mankind ever solve these immediate problems? There was recently published a very suggestive and amusing book by Olaf Stapledon, *First and Last Men*. It is an imaginary history upon an astronomical scale of the future of humanity, a grimly cheerful mixture of biology, burlesque and satire. He sees our present species blundering through some further great wars and unified at last under American rule into one world state, a world state of a harshly plutocratic type which undergoes an entirely incredible moral and intellectual degeneration and ends in a new Dark Age. *Homo sapiens* is then practically exterminated by a catastrophe he has himself provoked, and only a few individuals survive obscurely to become the progenitors of two species of *Homo* who presently increase and come into conflict. The remoter speculations of Mr. Stapledon about the succession of the latter Hominidae and their final extinction, vivid and amusing though they are, and stimulating as they will prove to those unversed in biological and cosmological possibilities, need not be discussed here. But the nearer issues he broaches, do pose very disturbingly the considerable probability of a failure in our contemporary civilization to anticipate and prevent fresh world warfare and an economic crash. I see that possible economic crash nearer and larger and more important than he does, as a greater menace, indeed, than the militarist nationalism from which it arises. But I believe in human sanity more than he does, I believe that that widely diffused will and understanding which I have termed "open conspiracy" may be strong enough to carry the race through the economic stresses ahead of us, and to delay, minimize and finally repulse the onset of war.

There has been a great quickening of the general intelligence about political and economic life in recent years, and the man of action and the man of thought have been drawn nearer together. There may be some dark chapters in human history still to be written, and provisional governments and a mightier Judge Lynch

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may figure in the drama. The forces that will carry on, develop and realize the abounding promise of our present civilization are by no means sure of victory; they may experience huge and tragic setbacks; but the balance of probability seems to be largely in their favour. If they win out, it will be men of our own kind, better, according to our present values, but men still—not beings specifically different and beyond our sympathy—who with a whole planet organized for the conflict, will face those greater problems, the long-period problems of terrestrial and cosmic changes which advance upon us behind the skirmishing dangers of to-day.

But nothing is certain. Men may breed and bicker too long, be overtaken by some swift universal epidemic they have had no time to arrest, perish of a phosphorus famine, or be destroyed by some war machine they have had the ability to invent but not the intelligence to control. In the Mesozoic Age great reptiles multiplied and dominated the earth, and suddenly they passed away. In the Miocene flourished countless varieties of huge mammals, now altogether extinguished. Why should we suppose that we are specially favoured items in the spectacle of existence? Millions of us are wearied, chased about, heartbroken, wounded and killed, for no evident good, in war; millions are destroyed by accidents without apparent reason or justice; beasts of prey in India and Africa slay and eat their thousands of "man the master" every year; millions die in unalleviated pain through a multitude of cruel diseases. Is there any difference in quality between one single case of a dear human being killed by cancer and the murder of a world? It is simply a difference of numbers and scale. If the universe can kill a child unjustly, so it can kill a race or a planet unjustly. If so many individual lives end tragically, why should not the whole species end tragically?

We may say, "It shall not," but what weight have such words?

§ 3. *Hope and Courage Are Inevitable*

What have we to put into the scale against this presentation of the whole human adventure, as nothing better than a freak of chance, flung up in the incomprehensible play of forces for ever outside our understanding, and destined to be reversed as casually and wiped out of being altogether?

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So far as our powers and knowledge go, we have nothing. We are forced back upon something more fundamental in us than knowledge or reason; the innate inevitable faith in itself that every healthy conscious being must necessarily possess. "Where there is life," says the old proverb, "there is hope." A creature with no faith in itself will die and pass out of reckoning, leaving the world to those whose faith remains. We are unable to believe that the universe that has evoked the will to live in us can be without will. We can no more believe the universe insane by our measure of sanity and altogether indifferent to our urgencies than we can prove it sane.

But the pessimist also can prove nothing. He argues that the antagonists are very strong; he does not show they are invincible. He reminds us that we are not insured against this or that gloomy mischance. But there is no inevitability about any of these gloomy mischances. The unknown is full of possible surprises for mankind. There is no more probability of these surprises being dreadful than there is of their being delightful. The chances are strictly even. When everything has gone into either scale, there still remains this fact to tilt the balance in our favour; that here we are with courage in us.

What is the culminating effect of a survey of history, of the science of life, and of existing conditions? It is an effect of steadily accelerated growth in power, range, and understanding. All these things lead up to us—and how could they seem to do otherwise? Progress continues in spite of every human fear and folly. Men are borne along through space and time regardless of themselves, as if to the awakening greatness of Man.

Why should we not believe that amidst the stars ahead of us the world-state will be won, and long ages of progressive civilization, ages of accumulating life and power open out before our kind? And though that is the present frame of our vision, why should we suppose that any end has been set to the growth and advancement of our race while the time garment still wraps about it and veils its eyes? For our history is just a story in space and time, and to its very last moment it must remain adventure. We have no ultimate measure of life's potentialities, no reason for supposing that what seems to us to be insurmountable obstacles will not dissolve to nothing before an ever-increasing knowledge and resourcefulness.

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Our vision is limited indeed, but not by any fated and assured end. Even these ingenious paradoxes by which space and time merge into one another and all our absolutes and infinities dissolve away have no quality of finality about them. One feels there is more to be said; much still to be thought out. They challenge; they do not capture and convince. Our most fundamental ideas are provisional ideas, no doubt, but as yet there is nothing to replace them. Ten thousand or ten million years from now will still be ten thousand or ten million years from now. So far and beyond, this adventure may continue and our race survive. The impenetrable clouds that bound our life at last in every direction may hide innumerable trials and dangers, but there are no conclusive limitations even in their deepest shadows, and there are times and seasons, there are moods of exaltation—moments, as it were, of revelation—when the whole universe about us seems bright with the presence of as yet unimaginable things.

THE END

We should have a religion of Conscious Evolution that is the Will to survive should guide us in all ways to act and regulate our lives and laws and institutions in such ways as will be best for the Survival of the Human Race, not just merely alive but happy and flourishing. Men such as ⁸¹³ Pasteur, Edison and Ford are Saints in this new Religion and should inspire us all.