

## CHAPTER I

### THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

“THIS is far more than a war between Britain and America,” said the Lord Paramount. “Or any war. It is a struggle for the soul of man. All over the world. Let us suppose the President is hypocritical—and he *may* be hypocritical; nevertheless, he is appealing to something which has become very real and powerful in the world. He may be attempting only to take advantage of that something in order to turn the world against me, but that does not make that something to which he appeals less considerable. It is a spirit upon which he calls, a powerful, dangerous spirit. It is the antagonist to the spirit that sustains me, whose embodiment I am. It is my real enemy.”

“You say things so wonderfully,” said Mrs. Pinchot.

“You see this man, entrusted in war time with the leadership of a mighty sovereign state, spits his venom against all sovereign states—against all separate sovereignty. He, the embodiment of a nation, deprecates nationality. He, the constitutional war leader, repudiates war. This is Anarchism enthroned—at the White House. Here is a mighty militant organisation—and it has no face.

## THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

Here is political blackness and night. This is the black threat at the end of history."

He paused and resumed with infinite impressiveness:

"Everywhere this poison of intellectual re-statement undermines men's souls. Even honest warfare, you see, becomes impossible. Propaganda ousts the heroic deed. We promise. We camouflage. We change the face of things. Treason calls to treason."

She sat tense, gripping her typewriter with both hands, her eyes devouring him.

"Not *thus*," said the Lord Paramount, his fine voice vibrating. "Not *thus*. . . ."

"The jewels of life I say are loyalty, flag, nation, obedience, sacrifice. . . . The Lord of Hosts! . . . Embattled millions! . . ."

"I will fight to the end," said the Lord Paramount. "I will fight to the end. . . . Demon, I defy thee! . . ."

His hands sought symbolic action. He crumpled the Presidential address into a ball. He pulled it out again into long rags and tore it to shreds and flung them over the carpet. He walked up and down, kicking them aside. He chanted the particulars of his position. "The enemy relentless—false allies—rebels in the Empire—treachery, evasion, and cowardice at home. God above me! It is no light task that I have in hand. Enemies that change shape, foes who are falsehoods! Is crown and culmination in the succession of empires ours to close in such a fashion? I fight

diabolical ideas. If all the hosts of evil rise in one stupendous alliance against me, still will I face them for King and Nation and Empire."

He was wonderful, that lonely and gigantic soul pacing the room, thinking aloud, hewing out his mighty apprehensions in fragmentary utterances. The scraps of the torn Presidential address now, in hopeless rout, showed a disposition to get under tables and chairs and into odd corners. It was as if they were ashamed of the monstrous suggestions of strange disloyalties that they had brought to him.

"Curious and terrifying to trace the growth of this Adversary, the Critical Spirit, this destroyer of human values. . . . From the days when Authority ruled. When even to question was fatal. . . . Great days then for the soul. Simple faith and certain action. Right known and Sin defined. Now we are nowhere. Sheep without a shepherd. . . . First came little disloyalties rebellious of sense and sloth. Jests—corrosive jests. Impatience with duty. One rebel seeking fellowship by corrupting his fellow. The simple beliefs, incredible as fact but absolutely true for the soul. That was the beginning. If you question them they go; the ages of faith knew that. But man must question, question, question. Man must innovate—stray. So easy to question and so fatal. Then Science arises, a concatenation of questions, at first apologetic and insidious. Then growing proud and stubborn. Everything shall be investigated, everything shall be made plain, everything shall be

certain. Pour your acids on the altar! It dissolves. Clearly it was nothing but marble. Pour them on the crown! It was just a circle of metal—alloyed metal. Pour them on the flag! It turns red and burns. So none of these things matter. . . .

“Why was this not arrested? Why did authority lose confidence and cease to strike? What lethargy crept into the high places? . . .

“And so at last the human story comes to a pause. The spirit of human history halts at her glorious warp and weft, turns aside, and asks; ‘Sha’l I go on?’

“*Shall she go on?* With God’s help I will see that she goes on. One mighty struggle, one supreme effort, and then we will take Anarchy—which is Science the Destroyer—by the throat. This Science, which pretends to be help and illumination, which illuminates nothing but impenetrable darkness, must cease. Cease altogether. We must bring our world back again to tradition, to the classical standards, to the ancient and, for man, the eternal values, the historical forms, which express all that man is or can ever be. . . .

“I thought that Science was always contradicting herself, but that is only because she contradicts all history. Essential to science is the repudiation of *all* foundations, her own included. She disdains philosophy. The past is a curiosity—or waste paper. Anarchism! Nothing is, but everything is going to be. She redeems all her promises with fresh promissory notes. . . .

“Perpetually Science is overthrown, and per-

petually she rises the stronger for her overthrow. It is the story of Antæus! Yet Hercules slew him!"

"My Hercules!" whispered Mrs. Pinchot, just audibly.

"Held him and throttled him!"

"Yes, yes," she whispered, "with those strong arms."

The manner of the Lord Paramount changed.

He stood quite still and looked his little secretary in her deep, dark eyes. For one instant his voice betrayed tenderness. "It is a great thing," he said, "to have one human being at least in whose presence the armour can be laid aside." She made no answer, but it was as if her whole being dilated and glowed through her eyes.

Their souls met in that instant's silence.

"And now to work," said the Lord Paramount, and was again the steely master of his destiny.

"Oh, God!" he cried abruptly and jumped a foot from the ground.

There was no need for her to ask the reason for this sudden reversal of his dignity.

A whining overhead, a long whining sound, had grown louder, and then a loud explosion close at hand proclaimed that another enemy aeroplane had slipped through the London cordon. She leapt to her feet and handed him his gas mask before she adjusted her own, for one must set a good example and wear what the people have been told to wear.