

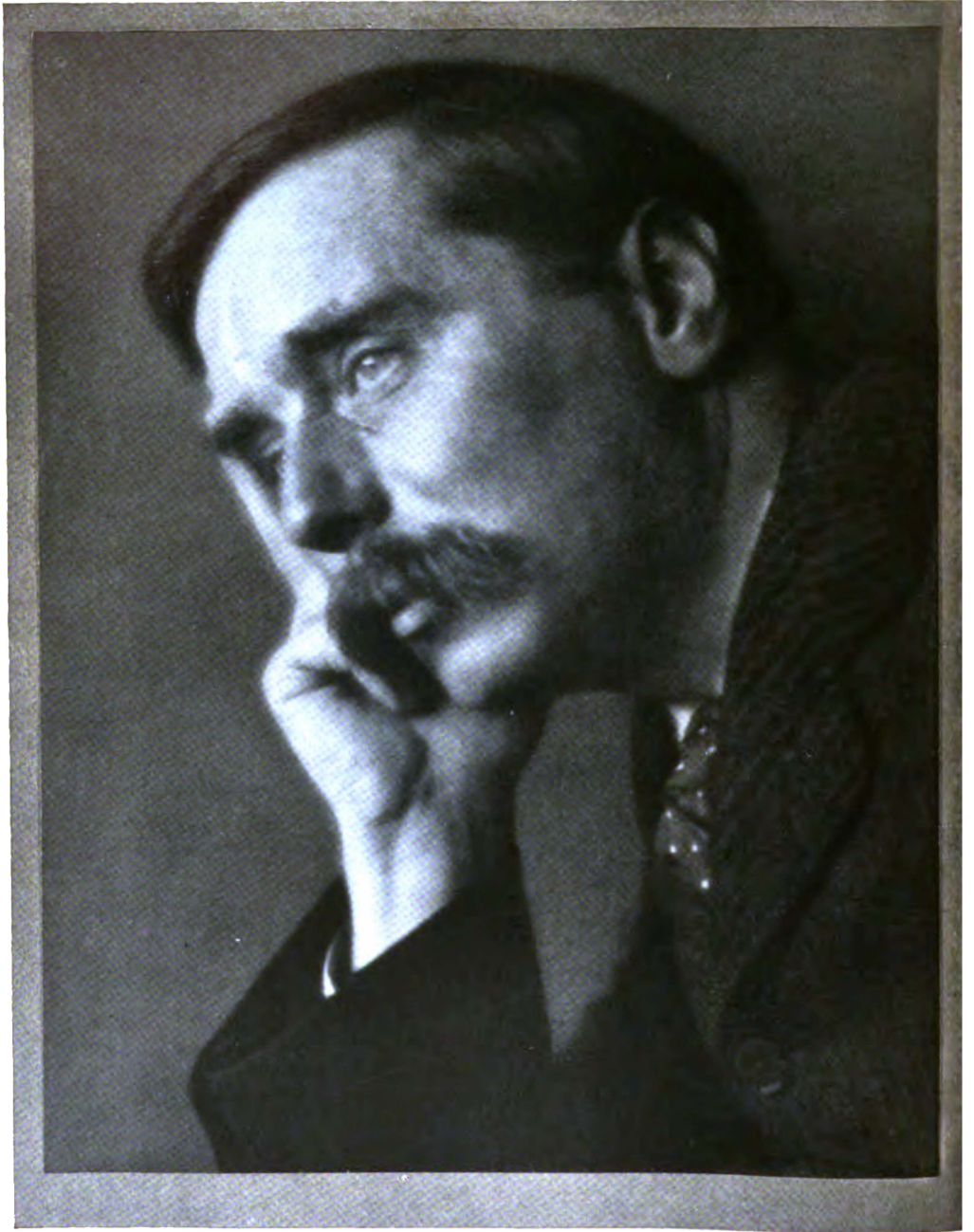
THE CENTURY

MARCH, 1914

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

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- "Truly this Man was the Son of God."..... Frontispiece
From the painting by..... GEORGE INNESS, JR.
- The Education of Popo. A Story.....MARÍA CRISTINA MENA
By the author of "John of God, the Water-Carrier," etc.....653
Pictures by F. Luis Mora.
- Three Sisters.....Facing page 662
From charcoal drawings by.....JOHN S. SARGENT
- What Have Women Done with the Vote?.....GEORGE CREEL
663
- Catching It. A Story..... AMY WENTWORTH STONE
672
- Opera in English.....REGINALD DE KOVEN
676
- The Golden Temple of Amritsar..... E. F. BENSON
By the author of "The Relentless City," etc..... 680
- Léon Bakst. A Brilliant Russian ColoristADA RAINEY
Eight Designs for Costumes from the Color Sketches by Bakst..... 682
- "Hares".....PAUL BARCHAN
693
- The World Set Free..... H. G. WELLS
By the author of "Tono Bungay," etc.....697
Portrait of the author, and picture by George Inness, Jr.
- Origins of the American People....EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS
Picture by Paul J. Meylan.....712
- The Crucible. Verse.....ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER
Decorations by Charles S. Chapman719
- What Happened Afterward.
A Story.....CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS
Picture by Herman Pfeifer.....724
- What About Russia?.....JAMES DAVENPORT WHELPLEY
By the author of "The Trade of the World," etc.....731
- The Quality of Genius. A Story..KATHARINE HOLLAND BROWN
By the author of "The New Nest," etc.....735
Picture by Robert McCaig.



Color-Tone, engraved for THE CENTURY, by H. Davidson

H. G. WELLS

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY ALVIN LANGDON COBURN

THE WORLD SET FREE

A PROPHETIC TRILOGY

BY H. G. WELLS

Author of "Tono Bungay," "The New Machiavelli," "Marriage," etc.

WITH A PICTURE BY GEORGE INNESS, JR.

1

THE whole world was flaring into a monstrous phase of destruction. Power after power about the armed globe sought to anticipate attack by aggression. They went to war in a delirium of panic in order to use their bombs first. China and Japan had assailed Russia and destroyed Moscow; the United States had attacked Japan; India was in anarchistic revolt, with Delhi a pit of fire spouting death and flame; the redoubtable King of the Balkans was mobilizing. It must have seemed plain at last to every one in those days that the world was slipping headlong to anarchy. By the spring of 1959, from nearly two hundred centers—and every week added to their number—roared the unquenchable, crimson conflagrations of the atomic bombs; the flimsy fabric of the world's credit had vanished; industry was completely disorganized; and every city, every thickly populated area, was starving or trembled on the verge of starvation. Most of the capital cities of the world were burning, millions of people had already perished, and over great areas government was at an end. Humanity has been compared by one contemporary writer to a sleeper who handles matches in his sleep, and wakes to find himself in flames.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE NEW CIVILIZATION

ON the mountain-side above the town of Brissago, and commanding two long stretches of Lake Maggiore, looking eastward to Bellinzona and southward to Luino, there is a shelf of grass meadows which is very beautiful in springtime with

a great multitude of wild flowers. More particularly is this so in early June, when the slender asphodel, with its spike of white lily blossom, is in flower. To the westward of this delightful shelf there is a deep and densely wooded trench, a great gulf of blue a mile or so in width, out of which arise great precipices, very high and wild. Above the asphodel-fields themselves the mountains climb in rocky slopes to solitudes of stone and sunlight that curve round and join that wall of cliffs in one common sky-line. This desolate and austere background contrasts very vividly with the glowing serenity of the great lake below, with the spacious view of fertile hills and roads and villages and islands to south and east, and with the hotly golden rice-fields of the Val Maggia to the north.

And because it was a remote and insignificant place, far away out of the crowding tragedies of that year of disaster and of universal war, away from burning cities and starving multitudes, bracing and tranquilizing and hidden, it was here that there gathered the conference of rulers that was to arrest, if possible, before it was too late the *débâcle* of civilization. Here, brought together by the indefatigable energy of that impassioned humanitarian Leblanc, the French ambassador at Washington, the chief powers of the world were to meet in a last desperate conference to "save humanity."

Leblanc was one of those simple, spirited men whose lot would have been insignificance in any period of security, but who have been caught up to an immortal rôle in history by the sudden simplification of human affairs to the measure of their simplicity through some tragical

crisis. Such a man was Abraham Lincoln, and such was Garibaldi. And Leblanc, with his transparent, childish innocence, his entire self-forgetfulness, came into this confusion of distrust and intricate disaster with an invincible appeal for the manifest sanities of the situation. His voice, when he spoke, was "full of remonstrance." He was a little, bald, spectacled man, full of that intellectual idealism which has been one of the peculiar gifts of France to humanity. He was possessed of one clear persuasion: that war must end, and that the only way to end war was to have only one government for mankind. He brushed aside all other considerations. At the very outbreak of the war, so soon as the two capitals of the belligerents had been wrecked, he went to the President in the White House with this proposal; he made it as if it was a matter of course. He was fortunate to be in Washington and in touch with that gigantic childishness which was the characteristic of the American imagination. For the Americans also were among the simple peoples by whom the world was saved. He won over the American President and the American Government to his general ideas. At any rate, they supported him sufficiently to give him a standing with the more skeptical European governments, and with this backing he set to work—it seemed the most fantastic of enterprises—to bring together all the rulers of the world and unify them. He wrote innumerable letters, he sent messages, he went desperate journeys, he enlisted whatever support he could find. No one was too humble for an ally or too obstinate for his advances; through the terrible autumn of the last wars this persistent little visionary in spectacles must have seemed rather like a hopeful canary twittering during a thunder-storm. And no accumulation of disasters daunted his conviction that they could be ended.

For many months it was an open question whether there was to be found throughout all the race the will and intelligence to face these new conditions and make even an attempt to arrest the downfall of the social order. For a time the war spirit defeated every attempt to rally the forces of preservation and construction. Leblanc seemed to be protesting against earthquakes, and as likely to find

a spirit of reason in the crater of Etna. Even though the shattered official governments now clamored for peace, bands of irreconcilables and invincible patriots, usurpers, adventurers, and political desperados, were now everywhere in possession of the simple apparatus for the discouragement of atomic energy and the initiation of new centers of destruction. The stuff exercised an irresistible fascination upon a certain type of mind. Why should any one give in while he could still destroy his enemies? Surrender? While there is still a chance of blowing them to dust? The power of destruction which had once been the ultimate privilege of government was now the only power left in the world, and it was everywhere. There were few thoughtful men during that phase of blazing waste who did not pass through such moods of despair and declare, "This is the end."

And all the while Leblanc was going to and fro with glittering glasses and an inexhaustible persuasiveness, urging the manifest reasonableness of his view upon ears that ceased presently to be inattentive. Never at any time did he betray a doubt that all this chaotic conflict would end. No nurse during a nursery uproar was ever so certain of the inevitable ultimate peace. From being treated as an amiable dreamer, he came by insensible degrees to be regarded as an extravagant possibility. Then he began to seem even practicable. The people who listened to him in 1958 with a smiling impatience were eager before 1959 was four months old to know just exactly what he thought might be done. He answered with the patience of a philosopher and the lucidity of a Frenchman. He began to receive responses of a more and more hopeful type.

THE GATHERING OF THE RULERS OF THE WORLD

HE came across the Atlantic to Italy, and there he gathered in the promises for this congress. He chose those high meadows above Brissago for the reasons we have stated. "We must get away," he said, "from old associations." He set to work requisitioning material for his conference with an assurance that was justified by the replies. With a slight incredulity the conference, which was to begin a new order in the world, gathered itself together.

Leblanc summoned it without arrogance; he controlled it by virtue of a vast humility. Men appeared upon those upland slopes with the apparatus for wireless telegraphy; others followed with tents and provisions; a little cable was flung down to a convenient spot upon the Locarno road below. Leblanc arrived, sedulously directing every detail that would affect the tone of the assembly. He might have been a courier in advance rather than the originator of the gathering.

And then there arrived, some by the cable, most by *aéroplane*, a few in other fashions, the men who had been called together to confer upon the state of the world. It was to be a conference without a name. Nine monarchs, the presidents of four republics, several ministers and ambassadors, powerful journalists, and such-like prominent and influential men took part in it. There were even scientific men, and that world-famous old man Holsten came with the others to contribute his amateur statecraft to the desperate problem of the age. Only Leblanc would have dared so to summon figureheads and powers and intelligence, or have had the courage to hope for their agreement.

II

AND one at least of those who were called to this conference of governments came to it on foot. This was King Egbert, the young king of the most venerable kingdom in Europe. He was a rebel, and had always been of deliberate choice a rebel against the magnificences of his position. He affected long pedestrian tours and a disposition to sleep in the open air. He came now over the Pass of Sta. Maria Maggiore, and by boat up the lake to Brissago; thence he walked up the mountain, a pleasant path set with oaks and sweet chestnuts. For provision on the walk, for he did not want to hurry, he carried with him a pocketful of bread and cheese. A certain small retinue that was necessary to his comfort and dignity upon occasions of state he sent on by the cable-car, and with him walked his private secretary, Firmin, a man who had thrown up the professorship of world politics in the London School of Sociology, Economics, and Political Science, to take up these duties.

Firmin was a man of strong rather than of rapid thought; he had anticipated great influence in this new position, and after some years he was still only beginning to apprehend how largely his function was to listen. Originally he had been something of a thinker upon international politics, an authority upon tariffs and strategy, and a valued contributor to various of the higher organs of public opinion; but the atomic bombs had taken him by surprise, and he had still to recover completely from his preatomic opinions and the silencing effect of those sustained explosions.

As they walked up,—it was the king who made the pace rather than Firmin,—they talked of the conference before them, and Firmin, with a certain want of assurance that would have surprised him in himself in the days of his professorship, sought to define the policy of his companion.

"In its broader form, sir," said Firmin, "I admit a certain plausibility in this project of Leblanc's; but I feel that although it may be advisable to set up some sort of general control for international affairs,—a sort of Hague court with extended powers,—that is no reason whatever for losing sight of the principles of national and imperial autonomy."

"Firmin," said the king, "I am going to set my brother-kings a good example."

Firmin intimated a curiosity that veiled a dread.

"By chucking all that nonsense," said the king.

He quickened his pace as Firmin, who was already a little out of breath, betrayed a disposition to reply.

"I am going to chuck all that nonsense," said the king as Firmin prepared to speak. "I am going to fling my royalty and empire on the table, and declare at once I don't mean to haggle. It's haggling about rights that has been the devil in human affairs for—always. I am going to stop this nonsense."

Firmin halted abruptly.

"But, sir!" he cried.

The king stopped six yards ahead of him, and looked back at his adviser's perspiring visage.

"Do you really think, Firmin, that I am here as an infernal politician to put my crown and my flag and my claims and

so forth in the way of peace? That little Frenchman is right, and you know he is right as well as I do. Those things are over. We—we kings and rulers and representatives have been at the very heart of the mischief. Of course we imply separation, and of course separation means the threat of war, and of course the threat of war means the accumulation of more and more atomic bombs. The old game's up. But, I say, we must n't stand here, you know. The world waits. Don't you think the old game's up, Firmin?"

Firmin adjusted a strap, passed a hand over his wet forehead, and followed earnestly.

"I admit, sir," he said to a receding back, "that there has to be some sort of hegemony, some sort of amphictyonic council—"

"There's got to be one simple government for all the world," said the king over his shoulder.

"But as for a reckless, unqualified abandonment, sir—"

"*Bang!*" cried the king.

Firmin made no answer to this interruption, but a faint shadow of annoyance passed across his heated features.

"Yesterday," said the king by way of explanation, "the Japanese very nearly got San Francisco."

"I had n't heard, sir."

"The Americans ran the Japanese aeroplane down into the sea, and there the bomb got bu'sted."

"Under the sea, sir?"

"Yes. Submarine volcano. The steam is in sight of the Californian coast; it was as near as that. And with things like this happening, you want me to go up this hill and haggle. Consider the effect of that upon my imperial cousin—and all the others!"

"*He* will haggle, sir."

"Not a bit of it," said the king.

At length, as it seemed to Firmin, or quite soon, as it seemed to the king, the gradient of the path diminished, the way widened out, and they found themselves in a very beautiful place indeed. It was one of those upland clusters of sheds and houses, still to be found in the mountains of northern Italy, that were used only in the high summer and were left locked up and deserted through all the winter and spring and up to the middle of June. The

buildings were all of a softened gray stone, buried in rich green grass, shadowed by chestnut-trees, and lit by an extraordinary blaze of yellow broom. Never had the king seen broom so glorious; he shouted at the light of it, for it seemed to give out more sunlight even than it received. He sat down impulsively on a lichenous stone, tugged out his bread and cheese, and bade Firmin thrust the beer into the shaded woods to cool.

"The things people miss, Firmin," he said, "who go up into the air in ships."

Firmin looked around him with an ungenial eye.

"You see it at its best, sir," he said, "before the peasants come here again and make it filthy."

"It would be beautiful anyhow," said the king.

"Superficially, sir," said Firmin. "But it stands for a social order that is fast vanishing away. Indeed, judging by the grass between the stones and in the huts, I am inclined to doubt if it is in use even now."

"I suppose," said the king, "they would come up immediately the hay on this flower meadow is cut. It would be those slow, creamy-colored beasts, I suspect, one sees on the roads below, and the swarthy girls with red handkerchiefs over their black hair. It is wonderful to think how long that beautiful old life lasted. In the Roman times, and long ages before ever the manners of the Romans had come into these parts, men came driving their cattle up into these places as the summer came on. How haunted is this place! There have been quarrels here, hopes; children have played here and lived to be old crones and old gaffers and died: and so it has gone on for thousands of lives. Lovers, innumerable lovers, have caressed amid this golden broom."

"Sire," protested Firmin, with his voice full of bread and cheese and genuine emotion, "have you no respect for your kingship?"

The king paused before he answered with unwon'ted gravity:

"It's just because I have, Firmin, that I won't be a puppet in this game of international politics." He regarded his companion for a moment and then remarked: "Kingship! What do *you* know of kingship, Firmin? Yes," cried the king to his

astonished counselor, "for the first time in my life I am going to be a king. I am going to lead, and lead by my own authority. For a dozen generations my family has been a set of dummies in the hands of their advisers. Now I am going to be a real king, and I am going to—to abolish, dispose of, finish, the crown to which I have been a slave. But what a world of paralyzing shame this roaring stuff has ended! The rigid old world is in the melting-pot again, and I, who seemed to be no more than the stuffing inside a regal robe—I am a king among kings. I have to play my part at the head of things and put an end to blood and fire and idiot disorder."

"But, sir—" protested Firmin.

"This man Leblanc is right. The whole world has got to be a republic, one and indivisible. You know that, and my duty is to make that easy. A king should lead his people; you want me to stick on their backs like some Old Man of the Sea. To-day must be a sacrament of kings. Our trust for mankind is done with and ended. We must part our robes among them, we must part our kingship among them, and say to them all, now the king in every one must rule the world. Have you no sense of the magnificence of this occasion? You want me, Firmin—you want me to go up there and haggle like some damned little solicitor for some price, some compensation, some qualification."

Firmin shrugged his shoulders and assumed an expression of despair. Meanwhile, he conveyed, one must eat.

For a time neither spoke, and the king ate, and turned over in his mind the phrases of the speech he intended to make to the conference. By virtue of the antiquity of his crown he was to preside, and he intended to make his presidency memorable. Reassured of his eloquence, he considered the desponded and sulky Firmin for a space.

"Firmin," he said, "you have idealized kingship."

"It has been my dream, sir," said Firmin, sorrowfully, "to serve."

"At the levers, Firmin," said the king.

"You are pleased to be unjust," said Firmin, deeply hurt.

"I am pleased to be getting out of it," said the king. "Firmin," he went on,

"have you no thought for me? Will you never realize that I am not only flesh and blood, but an imagination—with its rights? I am a king in revolt against that fetter they put upon my head. I am a king awake. My reverend grandparents never in all their august lives had a waking moment. They loved the job that you, you advisers, gave them; they never had a doubt of it. It was like giving a doll to a woman who ought to have a child. They delighted in processions, and opening things, and being read addresses to, and visiting triplets and nonagenarians, and all that sort of thing. They used to keep albums of cuttings from all the illustrated papers showing them at it, and if the press-cutting parcels grew thin, they were worried. It was all that ever worried them. But there is something atavistic in me; I hark back to unconstitutional monarchs. They christened me too retrogressively I think. I wanted to get things done. I was bored. I might have fallen into vice,—most intelligent and energetic princes do,—but the palace precautions were unusually thorough. I was brought up in the purest court the world has ever seen. So I read books, Firmin, and went about asking questions. The thing was bound to happen to one of us sooner or later. Perhaps, too, very likely I 'm not vicious. I don't think I am."

Firmin cleared his throat.

"I don't think you are, sir," he said. "You prefer—" He stopped short. He had been going to say "talking." He substituted "ideas."

"That world of royalty!" the king went on. "In a little while no one will understand it any more. It will become a riddle.

"Among other things, it was a world of perpetual best clothes. Everything was in its best clothes for us, and usually wearing bunting. With a cinema watching to see we took it properly. If you are a king, Firmin, and you go and look at a regiment, it instantly stops whatever it is doing, changes into full uniform, and presents arms. When my august parents went in a train, the coal in the tender used to be whitened. It did, Firmin, and if coal had been white instead of black, I have no doubt the authorities would have blackened it. That was the spirit of our treatment. People were always walking

astonished counselor, "for the first time in my life I am going to be a king. I am going to lead, and lead by my own authority. For a dozen generations my family has been a set of dummies in the hands of their advisers. Now I am going to be a real king, and I am going to—to abolish, dispose of, finish, the crown to which I have been a slave. But what a world of paralyzing shame this roaring stuff has ended! The rigid old world is in the melting-pot again, and I, who seemed to be no more than the stuffing inside a regal robe—I am a king among kings. I have to play my part at the head of things and put an end to blood and fire and idiot disorder."

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about with their faces to us. One never saw anything in profile. One got an impression of a world that was insanelly focused on ourselves. And when I began to poke my little questions into the lord chancellor and the archbishop and all the rest of them, they thought I was n't displaying the royal tact expected of me."

He meditated for a time.

"The spirit of kingship is a fine thing, Firmin. I feel it in my bones; I do not know what I might not be if I were not a king. I could die for my people, Firmin, and you could n't. No, don't say you could die for me, because I know better. Don't think I forget my kingship, Firmin; don't imagine that. I am a king, a kingly king, by right divine. The fact that I am also a chattering young man makes not the slightest difference to that."

Firmin turned himself round and faced his royal master.

"What do you intend to do, sir?" he asked. "If you will not listen to me, what do you propose to do this afternoon?"

"Manifestly war has to stop forever, Firmin. Manifestly this can be done only by putting all the world under one government. Our crowns and flags are in the way. Manifestly they must go."

"Yes, sir," interrupted Firmin, "but *what* government? I don't see what government you get by a universal abdication!"

"Well," said the king, with his hands about his knees, "*we* shall be the government."

"The conference?" exclaimed Firmin.

"Who else?" asked the king, simply.

"It's perfectly simple," he added to Firmin's tremendous silence.

"But," cried Firmin, "you must have sanctions. Will there be no form of election, for example?"

"Why should there be?" asked the king with intelligent curiosity.

"The consent of the governed."

"Firmin, we are just going to lay down our differences and take our government. Without any election at all. Without my sanction. The governed will show their consent by silence. If any effective opposition arises, we shall ask it to come in and help. The true sanction of kingship is the grip upon the scepter. We are n't going to worry people to vote for us.

I'm certain the mass of men does not want to be bothered with such things. We'll contrive a way for any one interested to join in. That's quite enough in the way of democracy. Perhaps later, when things don't matter— We shall govern all right, Firmin. Government becomes difficult only when the lawyers get hold of it, and since these troubles began, the lawyers are shy. Indeed, come to think of it, I wonder where all the lawyers are. Where are they? A lot, of course, were bagged, some of the worst ones, when they blew up my legislature. You never knew the late lord chancellor—

"Necessities bury rights. Lawyers live on rights. We've done with that way of living. We won't have more law than a code can cover, and beyond that government will be free.

"Before the sun sets to-day, Firmin, trust me, we shall have made our abdications, all of us, and declared the world republic, supreme and indivisible. I wonder what my august grandmother would have made of it. All my rights! And then we shall go on governing. What else is there to do?"

"All over the world we shall declare that there is no longer mine or thine, but ours. China, the United States, two thirds of Europe, will certainly fall in and obey. They will have to do so. What else can they do? Their official rulers are here with us. They won't be able to get together any sort of idea of not obeying us. Then we shall declare that every sort of property is held in trust for the republic."

He stood up.

Firmin, forgetting the habits of a score of years, remained seated.

At last he said:

"And I have known nothing!"

The king smiled very cheerfully. He liked these talks with Firmin.

III

THAT conference upon the Brissago meadows was one of the most heterogeneous collections of prominent people that has ever met together. Principalities and powers, stripped and shattered until all their pride and mystery were gone, met in a marvelous new humility. Here were

kings and emperors whose capitals were lakes of flaming destruction, statesmen whose countries had become chaos, scared politicians, and financial potentates. Here were leaders of thought and learned investigators dragged reluctantly to the control of affairs. Altogether there were ninety-three of them, Leblanc's conception of the head men of the world. They had all come at last to the realization of the simple truths that the indefatigable Leblanc had hammered into them; and drawing his resources from the King of Italy, he had provisioned it with a generous simplicity quite in accordance with the rest of his character, and here he made his astonishing and entirely rational appeal.

King Egbert spoke, as he was expected to speak, and Leblanc's spectacles moistened at that flow of generous sentiment, most amiably and lightly expressed.

"We have n't to stand on ceremony," said the king; "we have to govern the world. We have always pretended to govern the world, and here is our opportunity."

"Of course," whispered Leblanc, nodding his head rapidly, "of course."

"The world has been smashed up, and we have to put it on its wheels again," said King Egbert. "And it is the simple common sense of this crisis for all to help and none to seek advantage. Is that our tone or not?"

THE NEW DIVINE RIGHTS OF KINGS

THE gathering was too old and seasoned and miscellaneous for any great displays of enthusiasm, but that was its tone, and with an astonishment that somehow became exhilarating it began to resign, repudiate, and declare its intentions. Firmin, taking notes behind his master, heard everything that had been foretold among the yellow broom come true. With a queer feeling that he was dreaming he assisted at the proclamation of the world state, and saw the message taken out to the wireless operators to be throbbled all round the habitable globe.

Firmin was not alone in his incredulity. There was not a man there who was not a very amiable, reasonable, benevolent creature at bottom. Some had been born to power, and some had happened upon it; some had struggled to get it, not clearly

knowing what it was and what it implied; but none was irreconcilably set upon its retention at the price of cosmic disaster. Their minds had been prepared by circumstances and sedulously cultivated by Leblanc; and now they took the broad, obvious road along which King Egbert was leading them with a mingled conviction of strangeness and necessity. Things went very smoothly: the King of Italy explained the arrangements that had been made for the protection of the camp from any fantastic attack; a couple of thousand aëroplanes, each carrying a sharp-shooter, guarded them, and there was an excellent system of relays, and at night all the sky would be searched by scores of lights, and the admirable Leblanc gave luminous reasons for their camping just where they were and going on with their administrative duties forthwith.

The members of the new world government dined at three long tables on trestles, and down the middle of these tables Leblanc, despite the barrenness of his menu, had contrived to have set a great multitude of beautiful roses. There was similar accommodation for the secretaries and attendants at a lower level down the mountain. The assembly dined, as it had debated, in the open air, and over the dark crags to the west the glowing June sunset shone upon this epoch-making banquet. There was no precedence now among the ninety-three, and King Egbert found himself between a pleasant little Japanese stranger in spectacles and his cousin of central Europe, and opposite a great Bengali leader and the President of the United States of America. Beyond the Japanese was Holsten, the old chemist, and Leblanc was a little way down on the other side.

The king was still cheerfully talkative, and abounded in ideas. He fell presently into an amiable controversy with the American, who seemed to feel a lack of impressiveness in the occasion.

It was ever the transatlantic tendency, due no doubt to the necessity of handling public questions in a bulky and striking manner, to overemphasize and overaccentuate, and the President was touched by his national failing. He suggested now that there should be a new era, starting from that day as the first day of the first year.

The king demurred.

"From this day forth, sir, man enters upon his heritage," said the American.

"Man," said the king, "is always entering upon his heritage. You Americans have a peculiar weakness for anniversaries, if you will forgive me saying so. Yes, I accuse you of a lust for dramatic effect. Everything is happening always, but you want to say this or this is the real instant in time, and subordinate all the others to it."

And then, since the American pressed his idea, the king contrived to shift the talk from the question of celebrating the epoch they were making to the question of the probabilities that lay ahead. Here every one became diffident. They could see the world unified and at peace, but what detail was to follow from that unification they seemed indisposed to discuss. This diffidence struck the king as remarkable. He plunged upon the possibilities of science. All the huge expenditure that had hitherto gone into unproductive naval and military preparations must now, he declared, place research upon a new footing.

"Where one man worked, we will have a thousand." He appealed to Holsten. "We have only begun to peep into these possibilities," he said. "You, at any rate, have sounded the vaults of the treasure-house."

"They are unfathomable," said Holsten, and smiled.

"Man," said the American with a manifest resolve to justify and reinstate himself after the flickering contradictions of the king—"man, I say, is only beginning to enter upon his heritage."

"Tell us some of the things you believe we shall presently learn; give us an idea of the things we may presently do," said the king to Holsten.

Holsten opened out the vistas.

"Science," the king cried presently, "is the new king of the world."

"Our view," said the President, "is that sovereignty resides with the people."

"No," said the king, "the sovereign is a being more subtle than that, and less arithmetical; neither my family nor your emancipated people. It is something that floats about us and above us and through us. It is that common impersonal will and sense of necessity of which science is the best understood and most typical

aspect. It is the mind of the race. It is that which has brought us here, which has bowed us all to its demands."

He paused, glanced down the table at Leblanc and then reopened at his former antagonist.

"There is a disposition," said the king, "to regard this gathering as if it were actually doing what it appears to be doing, as if we ninety-odd men of our own free will and wisdom were unifying the world. There is a temptation to consider ourselves exceptionally fine fellows and masterful men and all the rest of it. We are not. I doubt if we should average out as anything abler than any other casually selected body of ninety-odd men. We are no creatures; we are consequences, we are salvagers—or salvagees. The thing to-day is not ourselves, but the wind of conviction that has blown us hither. The greatest thing about me is my manhood, the least thing is myself."

THE UNITY OF THE WORLD

So it was that King Egbert talked at Brissago after they had proclaimed the unity of the world. Every evening after that the assembly dined together, and talked at their ease, and grew accustomed to one another, and sharpened one another's ideas, and every day they worked together and really for a time believed that they were inventing a new government for the world. They discovered a constitution, but there were matters needing attention too urgently to wait for any constitution. They attended to these incidentally. The constitution it was that waited. It was presently found convenient to keep the constitution waiting indefinitely, as King Egbert had foreseen, and meanwhile, with an increasing self-confidence, that council went on governing.

IV

THE world on which the council looked did, indeed, present a task quite sufficiently immense and altogether too urgent for any wanton indulgence in internal dissension. It may be interesting to sketch in a few phrases the condition of mankind at the close of the period of warring states, in the year of crisis that followed the release of atomic power. It was a

world extraordinarily limited when one measures it by later standards, and it was now in a state of the direst confusion and distress.

THE SPREADING OF THE PEOPLES

IT must be remembered that at this time men had still to spread into enormous areas of the land surface of the globe. There were vast mountain wildernesses, forest wildernesses, sandy deserts, and frozen lands. Men still clung closely to water and arable soil in temperate or subtropical climates; they lived abundantly only in river valleys, and all their great cities had grown upon large navigable rivers or close to ports upon the sea. Over great areas even of this suitable land, flies and mosquitos, armed with infection, had so far defeated human invasion, and under their protection the virgin forests remained untouched. Indeed, the whole world, even in its most crowded districts, was filthy with flies and swarming with needless insect life to an extent which is now almost incredible. A population map of the world in 1950 would have followed sea-shore and river course so closely in its darker shading as to give an impression that *homo sapiens* was an amphibious animal. His roads and railways lay also along the lower contours, only here and there to pierce some mountain barrier or reach some holiday resort did they clamber above three thousand feet. And across the ocean his traffic passed in definite lines; there were hundreds of thousands of square miles of ocean no ship ever traversed except by mischance.

Into the mysteries of the solid globe under his feet he had not yet pierced for five miles, and it was still not forty years since, with a tragic pertinacity, he had clambered to the poles of the earth. The limitless mineral wealth of the arctic and antarctic circles was still buried beneath vast accumulations of immemorial ice, and the secret riches of the inner zones of the crust were untapped and indeed unsuspected. The higher mountain regions were known only to a sprinkling of guided climbers and the frequenters of a few gaunt hotels, and the vast rainless belts of land that lay across the continental masses, from Gobi to Sahara and along the backbone of America, with their per-

fect air, their daily baths of blazing sunshine, their nights of cool serenity and glowing stars, and their reservoirs of deep-lying water, were as yet only desolations of fear and death to the common imagination.

V

FROM the first the new government handled affairs with a certain greatness of spirit. Indeed, it was inevitable that they would act greatly. From the first they had to see the round globe as one problem; it was impossible any longer to deal with it piece by piece. They had to secure it generally from any fresh outbreak of atomic destruction, and they had to insure a permanent and universal pacification. On this capacity to grasp and wield the whole round globe their existence depended. There was no scope for any further performance.

THE BREAKING UP OF THE OLD ORDER

THE disbanding of social utilization of the various masses of troops still under arms had to be arranged, the salvation of the year's harvests, and the feeding, housing, and employment of the drifting millions of homeless people. In Canada, in South America, and Asiatic Russia there were vast accumulations of provision that were immovable only because of the breakdown of the monetary and credit systems. These had to be brought into the famine districts very speedily, if entire depopulation was to be avoided, and their transportation and the revival of communications generally absorbed a certain proportion of the soldiery and more able unemployed. The task of housing assumed gigantic dimensions, and from building camps the housing committee of the council speedily passed to constructions of a more permanent type. They found far less friction than might have been expected in turning the loose population on their hands to these things. People were extraordinarily tamed by that year of suffering and death; they were disillusioned of their traditions, bereft of once obstinate prejudices; they felt foreign in a strange world and ready to follow any confident leadership. The orders of the new government came with the best of all credentials, rations. The people every-

where were as easy to control, one of the old labor experts who had survived until the new time witnesses, "as gangs of immigrant workers in a new land."

And now it was that the social possibilities of the atomic energy began to appear. The new machinery that had come into existence before the last wars increased and multiplied, and the council found itself not only with millions of hands at its disposal, but with power and apparatus that made its first conceptions of the work it had to do seem pitifully timid. The camps that were planned in iron and deal were built in stone and brass; the roads that were to have been mere iron tracks became spacious ways that insisted upon architecture; the cultivation of food-stuffs that were to have supplied emergency rations were presently, with synthesizers, fertilizers, actinic light, and scientific direction, in excess of every human need.

The government had begun with the idea of temporarily reconstituting the social and economic system that had prevailed before the first coming of the atomic engine, because it was to this system that the ideas and habits of the great mass of the world's dispossessed population was adapted. Subsequent rearrangement it had hoped to leave to its successors, whoever they might be. But this, it became more and more manifest, was absolutely impossible. As well might the council have purposed a revival of slavery. The capitalistic system had already been smashed beyond repair by the onset of limitless gold and energy; it fell to pieces at the first endeavor to stand it up again.

THE IDLERS

ALREADY, before the war, half of the industrial class had been out of work; the attempt to put them back into wages employment on the old lines was futile from the outset. The absolute shattering of the currency system alone would have been sufficient to prevent that, and it was necessary, therefore, to take over the housing, feeding, and clothing of this world-wide multitude without exacting any return in labor whatever. In a little while the mere absence of occupation for so great a multitude of people everywhere became an evident social danger, and the

government was obliged to resort to such devices as simple decorative work in wood and stone, the manufacture of hand-woven textiles, fruit-growing, flower-growing, and landscape-gardening on a grand scale to keep the less adaptable out of mischief, and of paying wages to the younger adults for attendance at schools that would equip them to use the new atomic machinery. So, quite insensibly, the council drifted into a complete reorganization of urban and industrial life and, indeed, of the entire social system.

Ideas that are unhampered by political intrigue or financial considerations have a sweeping way with them, and before a year was out the records of the council show clearly that it was rising to its enormous opportunity, and partly through its own direct control and partly through a series of specific committees it was planning a new common social order for the entire population of the earth. "There can be no real social stability or any genial human happiness while large areas of the world and large classes of people are in a phase of civilization different from the prevailing mass. It is impossible now to have great blocks of population misunderstanding the generally accepted social purpose or at an economic disadvantage to the rest." So the council expressed its conception of the problem it had to solve.

THE NEW AGRICULTURE

THE peasant, the field-worker, and all barbaric cultivators were at an "economic disadvantage" to the more mobile and educated classes, and the logic of the situation compelled the council to take up systematically the supersession of this stratum of a more efficient organization of production. It developed a scheme for the progressive establishment throughout the world of the "modern system" in agriculture—a system that should give the full advantages of a civilized life to every agriculturist, and this replacement has been going on right up to the present day. The central idea of the modern system is the substitution of cultivating guilds for the individual cultivator and for cottage and village life altogether. These guilds are associations of men and women who take over areas of arable or pastureland and make themselves responsible for

a certain average produce. They are bodies small enough, as a rule, to be run on a strictly democratic basis, and large enough to supply all the labor, except for a certain assistance from townspeople during the harvest, needed upon the land farmed. They have watchers' bungalows or chalets on the ground cultivated, but the ease and costlessness of modern locomotion enables them to maintain a group of residences in the nearest town, with a common dining-room and club-house and usually also a guild house in the national or provincial capital.

Already this system has abolished a distinctively "rustic" population throughout vast areas of the old world where it has prevailed immemorially. That shy, unstimulated life of the lonely hovel, the narrow scandals and petty spites and persecutions of the small village, that hoarding, half-inanimate existence away from books, thought, or social participation, and in constant contact with cattle, pigs, poultry, and their excrement, is passing away out of human experience. In a little while it will be gone altogether. In the nineteenth century it had already ceased to be a necessary human state, and only the absence of any collective intelligence and an imagined need for tough and unintelligent soldiers and for a prolific class at a low level prevented its systematic replacement at that time.

And while this settlement of the country was in progress, the urban camps of the first phase of the council's activities were rapidly developing, partly through the inherent forces of the situation and partly through the council's direction into a modern type of town.

VI

As the Brissago council came to realize that what it had supposed to be temporary camps of refugees were rapidly developing into great towns of a new type and that it was remolding the world despite itself, it decided to place this work of redistributing the non-agricultural population in the hands of a compacter and better qualified special committee. That committee is now far more than the council or any other of its delegated committees the active government of the world. Developed from an almost invisible germ

of "town-planning" that came obscurely into existence in Europe or America (the question is still in dispute) somewhere in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, its work, the continual active planning and replanning of the world as a place of human habitation, is now, so to speak, the collective material activity of the race. The spontaneous, disorderly spreadings and recessions of populations, as aimless and mechanical as the trickling of spilt water, which was the substance of history for endless years, giving rise here to congestions, here to chronic devastating wars, and everywhere to a discomfort and disorderliness that was at its best only picturesque, are at an end. Men spread now, with the whole power of the race to aid them, into every available region of the earth. Their cities were no longer tethered to running water and the proximity of cultivation, their plans were no longer affected by strategic considerations or thoughts of social insecurity. The aeroplane and the nearly costless mobile car have abolished trade routes, a common language and a universal law have abolished a thousand restraining inconveniences; and so an astonishing dispersal of habitations has begun. One may live anywhere. And so it is that our cities now are true social gatherings, each with a character of its own and distinctive interests of its own, and most of them with a common occupation. They lie out in the former deserts, those long-wasted sunbaths of the race; they tower amid eternal snows; they hide in remote islands and bask on broad lagoons. For a time the whole tendency of mankind was to desert the river valleys in which the race had been cradled for half a million years, but now that the war against insects has been waged so successfully that this pestilential branch of life is nearly extinct, they are returning thither with a renewed appetite for gardens laced by water-courses and for pleasant living amid islands and house-boats and bridges and nocturnal lanterns reflected on the sea.

MAN BECOMES A MAKER OF THINGS

MAN, who is ceasing to be an agricultural animal, becomes more and more a builder, a traveler, and a maker. How much he ceases to be an agriculturist the

returns of the Redistribution Committee showed. Every year the work of our scientific laboratories increases the productivity and simplifies the labor of those who work upon the soil, and now the food of the whole world is produced by less than one per cent. of its population, a percentage which still tends to decrease. Far fewer people are needed upon the land than training and proclivity dispose toward it, and as a consequence of this excess of human attention, the garden side of life, the creation of groves and lawns and vast regions of beautiful flowers, has expanded enormously and continues to expand. For as agricultural method intensifies and the quota is raised, one farm association after another, availing itself of the 1975 regulations, elects to produce a public garden and pleasure in the place of its former fields, and the area of freedom and beauty is increased. And the chemist's triumphs of synthesis, which could now give us an entirely artificial food, remain largely in abeyance because it is so much more pleasant and interesting to eat natural produce and to grow such things upon the soil. Each year adds to the variety of our fruits and the delightfulness of our flowers.

VII

THE early years of the world republic witnessed a certain recrudescence of political adventure. In a number of countries, as the first urgent physical needs were met, there appeared a variety of personalities having this in common, that they sought to revive political trouble and clamor by its aid to positions of importance and satisfaction. In no case did they speak in the name of kings, and it is clear that monarchy must have been far gone in obsolescence before the twentieth century began; but they made appeals to the large survivals of nationalist and racial feeling that were everywhere to be found, and they alleged with considerable justice that the council was overriding racial and national customs and disregarding religious rules. The great plain of India was particularly prolific in such agitators. The revival of newspapers, which had largely ceased during the terrible year because of the dislocation of the coinage, gave a vehicle and a method of

organization to these complaints. At first the council disregarded this developing opposition, and then it recognized it with an entirely devastating frankness.

THE WORLD POWER BROADENS ITS
GOVERNMENT

NEVER, of course, had there been so provisional a government. It was of an extravagant illegality. It was indeed hardly more than a club—a club of about a hundred persons. At the outset there were ninety-three, and these were increased afterward by the issue of invitations that more than balanced its deaths to as many at one time as one hundred and nineteen. Always its constitution has been miscellaneous. At no time were these invitations issued with an admission that they recognized a right. The old institution of monarchy had come out unexpectedly well in the light of the new régime. Nine of the original members of the first government were crowned heads who had resigned their separate sovereignty, and at no time afterward did the number of its royal members sink below six. In their case there was perhaps a kind of attenuated claim to rule, but except for them and the still more infinitesimal pretensions of one or two ex-presidents of republics, no member of the council had even the shade of a right to his participation in its power. It was natural, therefore, that its opponents should find a common ground in a clamor for representative government, and build high hopes upon a return to parliamentary institutions.

The council decided to give them everything they wanted, but in a form that suited ill with their aspirations. It became at one stroke a representative body. It became, indeed, magnificently representative. It became so representative that the politicians were drowned in a deluge of votes. Every adult of either sex from pole to pole was given a vote, and the world was divided into ten constituencies, which voted on the same day by means of a simple modification of the world post. Membership of the government, it was decided, must be for life, save in the exceptional case of a recall; but the elections, which were held quinquennially, were arranged to add fifty



Color-Tone, engraved for THE CENTURY, by H. Davidson and H. C. Merrill

"LOOK AT THE SUN BLAZING THERE AMONG THE PEAKS. . . . SOME DAY,
I TELL YOU, HE WILL BURN AS WE PLEASE AND
SPIN AT OUR COMMAND"

FROM THE PAINTING BY GEORGE INNESS, JR.

such things were in some exceptional way proper to the human constitution, and as though openness of mind and a preference for achievement over possession were abnormal and rather unsubstantial qualities. How wrong that was the history of the decades immediately following the establishment of the world republic witnesses. Once the world was released from the hardening insecurities of a needless struggle for life that was collectively planless and individually absorbing, it became apparent that there was in the vast mass of people a long-smothered passion to make things. The world broke out into making, and at first mainly into esthetic making. This phase of history, which has been not inaptly termed the "efflorescence," is still to a large extent with us. The majority of our population consists of artists, and the bulk of activity in the world lies no longer with necessities, but with their elaboration, decoration, and refinement. There has been an evident change in the quality of this making during recent years. It becomes more purposeful than it was, losing something of its first elegance and prettiness and gaining in intensity; but this is a change rather of hue than of nature. That comes with a deepening philosophy and a sounder education. For the first joyous exercises of fancy we perceive now the deliberation of a more constructive imagination. There is a natural order in these things, and art comes before science as the satisfaction of more elemental needs must come before art, and as play and pleasure come in a human life before the development of a settled purpose.

For thousands of years this gathering impulse to creative work must have struggled in man against the limitations imposed upon him by his social ineptitude. It was a long-smoldering fire that flamed out at last in all these things. The evidence of a pathetic, perpetually thwarted urgency to make something is one of the most touching aspects of the relics and records of our immediate ancestors. There exists still in the death area about the London bombs a region of deserted small homes that furnish the most illuminating comment on the old state of affairs. These homes are entirely horrible, uniform, square, squat, hideously proportioned, uncomfortable, dingy, and in some

respects quite filthy. Only people in complete despair of anything better could have lived in them; but to each is attached a ridiculous little rectangle of land called "the garden," containing usually a prop for drying clothes, a loathsome box of offal, the dust-bin, full of egg-shells, cinders, and such-like refuse. It is possible to trace in nearly every one of these gardens some effort to make. Here is a poor little plank summer-house, here it is a "fountain of bricks and oyster-shells," here a "rockery," here a "workshop." And in the houses everywhere there are pitiful little decorations, clumsy models, feeble drawings. These efforts are almost incredibly inept; like the drawings of blindfolded men, they are only one shade less harrowing to a sympathetic observer than the scratchings one finds upon the walls of old prisons; but there they are, witnessing to the poor buried instincts that struggled up toward the light. That god of joyous expression our poor fathers ignorantly sought our freedom has declared to us.

In the old days the common ambition of every simple soul was to possess a little property, a patch of land, a house uncontrolled by others, an "independence," as the English used to put it. And what made this desire for freedom and prosperity so strong was very evidently the dream of self-expression, of doing something with it, of playing with it, of making a personal delightfulness, a distinctiveness. Property was never more than a means to an end, or avarice more than a perversion. Men owned in order to do freely. Now that every one has his own apartments and his own privacy secure, this disposition to own has found its release in a new direction. Men study and save and strive that they may leave behind them a series of panels in some public arcade, a row of carven figures along a terrace, a grove, a pavilion. Or they give themselves to the penetration of some still opaque riddle in phenomena, as once men gave themselves to the accumulation of riches. The work that was once the whole substance of social existence—for most men spent all their lives in earning a living—is now no more than was the burden upon one of those old climbers who carried knapsacks of provisions on their backs in order that they might ascend

mountains. It matters little to the easy charities of our emancipated time that most people have made their labor contribution produce neither new beauty nor new wisdom, but are simply busy about those pleasant activities and enjoyments that reassure them that they are alive. They help, it may be, by reception, and they hinder nothing.

IX

Now all this phase of gigantic change in the contours and appearances of human life which is going on about us—a change as rapid and as wonderful as the swift ripening of adolescence to manhood after the barbaric boyish years, is correlated with moral and mental changes at least as unprecedented. It is not as if old things were going out of life and new things coming in; it is rather that the altered circumstances of men are making an appeal to elements in his nature that have hitherto been suppressed, and checking tendencies that have hitherto been overstimulated and overdeveloped. He has not so much grown and altered his essential being as turned new aspects to the light. Such turnings round into a new attitude the world has seen on a less extensive scale before. The Highlanders of the seventeenth century, for example, were cruel and bloodthirsty robbers; in the nineteenth their descendants were conspicuously trusty and honorable men. There was not a people in western Europe in the early twentieth century that seemed capable of hideous massacres, and none that had not been guilty of them within the previous two centuries. The free, frank, kindly, gentle life of the prosperous classes in any European country before the years of the last wars were in a different world of thought and feeling from that of the dingy, suspicious, secretive, and uncharitable existence of the respectable poor, or the constant personal violence, the squalor, and the naïve passions of the lowest stratum. Yet there was no real differences of blood and inherent quality between these worlds; their differences were all in circumstances, suggestion, and habits of mind. And turning to more individual instances, the constantly observed difference between one

portion of a life and another upon a religious conversion was a standing example of the versatile possibilities of human nature.

The catastrophe of the atomic bombs which shook men out of cities and businesses and economic relations, shook them also out of their old established habits of thought, and out of the lightly held beliefs and prejudices that came down to them from the past.

The moral shock of the atomic bombs had been a profound one, and for a while the cunning side of the human animal was overpowered. Men thought twice before they sought mean advantages in the face of the unusual eagerness to realize new aspirations, and when at last the weeds revived again and "claims" began to sprout, they sprouted upon the stony soil of law-courts reformed, of laws that pointed to the future instead of the past, and under the blazing sunshine of a transforming world.

A NEW literature, a new interpretation of history, is springing into existence; a new teaching is already in the schools, a new faith in the hearts of the young.

I see the crystal cup of human knowledge perpetually brimming. I see the fires of human thought rise from ten thousand altars of research, and flare out into the wilderness of space. I see the time when men will no longer be content with this little conquered planet.

I know not by what devices, by what miracle of patience, the method will be won, but I know that they will go out into the deeps. I can see those first pioneers, the little craft dwindle up into the sky, glittering, twinkling, a speck swallowed up at last by the quivering blue. They may be lost, but other men will follow them in this eternal adventure of mankind.

Look at the sun blazing there among the peaks, too blinding almost for our eyes. See how he touches the mountain-tops and how they dissolve into fire at his touch. Some day, I tell you, he will burn as we please and spin at our command. He will be our servant, our convenience, our instrument. He will be the fire before our door, the light of our first home as we spread out our power and our blood farther and farther amidst the stars.