The Shape of Things to Come

by

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José Ortega y Gasset

Explorador
INTRODUCTION

The Dream Book of Dr. Philip Raven

The unexpected death of Dr. Philip Raven at Geneva in November 1930 was a very grave loss to the League of Nations Secretariat. Geneva lost a familiar figure — the long bent back, the halting gait, the head quizzically on one side — and the world lost a stimulatingly aggressive mind. His incessant devoted work, his extraordinary mental vigour, were, as his obituary notices testified, appreciated very highly by a world-wide following of distinguished and capable admirers. The general public was suddenly made aware of him.

It is rare that anyone outside the conventional areas of newspaper publicity produces so great a stir by dying; there were accounts of him in nearly every paper of importance from Oslo to New Zealand and from Buenos Aires to Japan — and the brief but admirable memoir by Sir Godfrey Cliffe gave the general reader a picture of an exceptionally simple, direct, devoted and energetic personality. There seems to have been only two extremely dissimilar photographs available for publication: an early one in which he looks like a blend of Shelley and Mr. Maxton, and a later one, a snapshot, in which he leans askew on his stick and talks to Lord Parmoor in the entrance hall of the Assembly. One of his lank hands is held out in a characteristic illustrative gesture.

Incessantly laborious though he was, he could nevertheless find time to assist in, share and master all the broader problems that exercised his colleagues, and now they rushed forward with their gratitude. One noticeable thing in that posthumous eruption of publicity was the frequent acknowledgments of his aid and advice. Men were eager to testify to his importance and resentful at the public ignorance of his work. Three memorial volumes of his more important papers, reports, memoranda and addresses were arranged for and are still in course of publication.

Personally, although I was asked to do so in several quarters, and though I was known to have had the honour of his friendship, I made no contribution to that obituary chorus. My standing in the academic world did not justify my writing him a testimonial, but under normal circumstances that would not have deterred me from an attempt to sketch something of his odd personal ease and charm. I did not do so, however, because I found myself in a position of extraordinary embarrassment. His death was so unforeseen that we had embarked upon a very peculiar joint undertaking without making the slightest provision for that risk. It is only now after an interval of nearly three years, and after some very difficult discussions with his more intimate friends, that I have decided to publish the facts and the substance of this peculiar cooperation of ours.

It concerns the matter of this present book. All this time I have been
Book the First

Today and Tomorrow: The Age of Frustration Dawns
holding back a manuscript, or rather a collection of papers and writings, entrusted to me. It is a collection about which, I think, a considerable amount of hesitation was, and perhaps is still, justifiable. It is, or at least it professes to be, a Short History of the World for about the next century and a half. (I can quite understand that the reader will rub his eyes at these words and suspect the printer of some sort of agraphia.) But that is exactly what this manuscript is. It is a Short History of the Future. It is a modern Sibylline book. Only now that the events of three years have more than justified everything stated in this anticipatory history have I had the courage to associate the reputation of my friend with the incredible claims of this work, and to find a publisher for it.

Let me tell very briefly what I know of its origin and how it came into my hands. I made the acquaintance of Dr. Raven, or to be more precise, he made mine, in the closing year of the war. It was before he left Whitehall for Geneva. He was always an eager amateur of ideas, and he had been attracted by some suggestions about money I had made in a scrappy little book of forecasts called What is Coming? published in 1916. In this I had thrown out the suggestion that the waste of resources in the war, combined with the accumulation of debts that had been going on, would certainly leave the world as a whole bankrupt, that is to say it would leave the creditor class in a position to strangle the world, and that the only method to clear up this world bankruptcy and begin again on a hopeful basis would be to scale down all debts impartially, by a reduction of the amount of gold in the pound sterling and proportionally in the dollar and all other currencies based on gold. It seemed to me then an obvious necessity. It was, I recognize now, a crude idea — evidently I had not even got away from the idea of intrinsically valuable money — but none of us in those days had had the educational benefit of the monetary and credit convulsions that followed the Peace of Versailles. We were without experience, it wasn’t popular to think about money, and at best we thought like precocious children. Seventeen years later this idea of appreciating gold is accepted as an obvious suggestion by quite a number of people. Then it was received merely as the amateurish comment of an ignorant writer upon what was still regarded as the mysterious business of “monetary experts.” But it attracted the attention of Raven, who came along to talk over that and one or two other post-war possibilities I had started, and so he made my acquaintance.

Raven was as free from intellectual pompousness as William James; as candidly receptive to candid thinking. He could talk about his subject to an artist or a journalist; he would have talked to an errand boy if he thought he would get a fresh slant in that way. “Obvious” was the word he brought with him. “The thing, my dear fellow” — he called me my dear fellow in the first five minutes — “is so obvious that everybody will be too clever to consider it for a moment. Until it is belated. It is impossible to persuade anybody responsible that there is going to be a tremendous financial and
monetary mix-up after this war. The victors will exact vindictive penalties and the losers of course will undertake to pay, but none of them realizes that money is going to do the most extraordinary things to them when they begin upon that. What they are going to do to each other is what occupies them, and what money is going to do to the whole lot of them is nobody’s affair.”

I can still see him as he said that in his high-pitched remonstrating voice. I will confess that for perhaps our first half-hour, until I was accustomed to his flavour, I did not like him. He was too full, too sure, too rapid and altogether too vivid for my slower Anglo-Saxon make-up. I did not like the evident preparation of his talk, nor the fact that he assisted it by the most extraordinary gestures. He would not sit down; he limped about my room, peering at books and pictures while he talked in his cracked forced voice, and waving those long lean hands of his about almost as if he was swimming through his subject. I have compared him to Maxton plus Shelley, rather older, but at the first outset I was reminded of Svengali in Du Maurier’s once popular Trilby. A shaven Svengali. I felt he was FOREIGN, and my instincts about foreigners are as insular as my principles are cosmopolitan. It always seemed to me a little irreconcilable that he was a Balliol scholar, and had been one of the brightest ornaments of our Foreign Office staff before he went to Geneva.

At bottom I suppose much of our essential English shyness is an exaggerated wariness. We suspect the other fellow of our own moral subtleties. We restrain ourselves often to the point of insincerity. I am a rash man with a pen perhaps, but I am as circumspect and evasive as any other of my fellow countrymen when it comes to social intercourse. I found something almost indelicate in Raven’s direct attack upon my ideas. He wanted to talk about my ideas beyond question. But at least equally he wanted to talk about his own. I had more than a suspicion that he had, in fact, come to me in order to talk to himself and hear how it sounded — against me as a sounding-board.

He called me then a Dealer in the Obvious, and he repeated that not very flattering phrase on various occasions when we met. “You have,” he said, “defects that are almost gifts: a rapid but inexact memory for particulars, a quick grasp of proportions, and no patience with detail. You hurry on to wholes. How men of affairs must hate you — if and when they hear of you! They must think you an awful mug, you know — and yet you get there! Complications are their life. YOU try to get all these complications out of the way. You are a stripper, a damned impatient stripper. I would be a stripper too if I hadn’t the sort of job I have to do. But it is really extraordinarily refreshing to spend these occasional hours, stripping events in your company.”

The reader must forgive my egotism in quoting these comments upon
myself; they are necessary if my relations with Raven are to be made clear and if the spirit of this book is to be understood.

I was, in fact, an outlet for a definite mental exuberance of his which it had hitherto distressed him to suppress. In my presence he could throw off Balliol and the Foreign Office — or, later on, the Secretariat — and let himself go. He could become the Eastern European Cosmopolitan he was by nature and descent. I became, as it were, an imaginative boon companion for him, his disreputable friend, a sort of intelligent butt, his Watson. I got to like the relationship. I got used to his physical exoticism, his gestures. I sympathized more and more with his irritation and distress as the Conference at Versailles unfolded. My instinctive racial distrust faded before the glowing intensity of his intellectual curiosity. We found we supplemented each other. I had a ready unclouded imagination and he had knowledge. We would go on the speculative spree together.

Among other gifted and original friends who, at all too rare intervals, honour me by coming along for a gossip, is Mr. J. W. Dunne, who years ago invented one of the earliest and most “different” of aeroplanes, and who has since done a very considerable amount of subtle thinking upon the relationship of time and space to consciousness. Dunne clings to the idea that in certain ways we may anticipate the future, and he has adduced a series of very remarkable observations indeed to support that in his well-known Experiment with Time. That book was published in 1927, and I found it so attractive and stimulating that I wrote about it in one or two articles that were syndicated very extensively throughout the world. It was so excitingly fresh.

And among others who saw my account of this Experiment with Time, and who got the book and read it and then wrote to me about it, was Raven. Usually his communications to me were the briefest of notes, saying he would be in London, telling me of a change of address, asking about my movements, and so forth; but this was quite a long letter. Experiences such as Dunne’s, he said, were no novelty to him. He could add a lot to what was told in the book, and indeed he could EXTEND the experience. The thing anticipated between sleeping and waking — Dunne’s experiments dealt chiefly with the premonitions in the dozing moment between wakefulness and oblivion — need not be just small affairs of tomorrow or next week; they could have a longer range. If, that is, you had the habit of long-range thinking. But these were days when scepticism had to present a hard face to greedy superstition, and it was one’s public duty to refrain from rash statements about these flimsy intimations, difficult as they were to distinguish from fantasies — except in one’s own mind. One might sacrifice a lot of influence if one betrayed too lively an interest in this sort of thing.

He wandered off into such sage generalizations and concluded abruptly. The letter had an effect of starting out to tell much more than he did.
Then he turned up in London, dropped into my study unexpectedly and made a clean breast of it.

“This Dunne business,” he began.

“Well?” said I.

“He has a way of snatching the fleeting dream between unconscious sleep and waking.”

“Yes.”

“He keeps a notebook by his bedside and writes down his dream the very instant he is awake.”

“That’s the procedure.”

“And he finds that a certain percentage of his dream items are — sometimes quite plainly — anticipations of things that will come into his mind out of reality, days, weeks, and even years ahead.”

“That’s Dunne.”

“It’s nothing.”

“But how — nothing?”

“Nothing to what I have been doing for a long time.”

“And that is — ?”

He stared at the backs of my books. It was amusing to find Raven for once at a loss for words.

“Well?” I said.

He turned and looked at me with a reluctant expression that broke into a smile. Then he seemed to rally his candour.


“Of the past?”

“There’s a lot about the past. With all sorts of things I didn’t know and all sorts of gaps filled in. Extraordinary things about North India and Central Asia, for instance. And also — it goes on. It’s going on. It keeps on going on.”

“Going on?”
“Right past the present time.”

“Sailing away into the future?”

“Yes.”

“Is it — is it a PAPER book?”

“Not quite paper. Rather like that newspaper of your friend Brownlow. Not quite print as we know it. Vivid maps. And quite easy to read, in spite of the queer letters and spelling.”

He paused. “I know it’s nonsense.”

He added. “It’s frightfully real.”

“Do you turn the pages?”

He thought for a moment. “No, I don’t turn the pages. That would wake me up.”

“It just goes on?”

“Yes.”

“Until you realize you are doing it?”

“I suppose — yes, it is like that.”

“And then you wake up?”

“Exactly. And it isn’t there!”

“And you are always READING?”

“Generally — very definitely.”

“But at times?”

“Oh — just the same as reading a book when one is awake. If the matter is vivid one SEES the events. As if one was looking at a moving picture on the page.”

“But the book is still there?”

“Yes — always. I think it’s there always.”

“Do you by any chance make notes?”

“I didn’t at first. Now I do.”

“At once?”
“I write a kind of shorthand. . . . Do you know — I’ve piles of notes THAT high.”

He straddled my fireplace and stared at me.

“Now you’ve told me,” I said.

“Now I’ve told you.”

“Illegible, my dear sir — except to me. You don’t know my shorthand. I can hardly read it myself after a week or so. But lately I’ve been writing it out — some I’ve dictated.

“You see,” he went on, standing up and walking about my room, “if it’s — a reality, it’s the most important thing in the world. And I haven’t an atom of proof. Not an atom. Do you — ? Do you believe this sort of thing is possible?”

“POSSIBLE?” I considered. “I’m inclined to think I do. Though what exactly this kind of thing may be, I don’t know.”

“I can’t tell anyone but you. How could I? Naturally they would say I had gone cranky — or that I was an impostor. You know the sort of row. Look at Oliver Lodge. Look at Charles Richet. It would smash my work, my position. And yet, you know, it’s such credible stuff. . . . I tell you I believe in it.”

“If you wrote some of it out. If I could see some of it.”

“You shall.”

He seemed to be consulting my opinion. “The worst thing against it is that I always believe in what the fellow says. That’s rather as though it was ME, eh?”

He did not send me any of his notes, but when next I met him, it was at Berne, he gave me a spring-backed folder filled with papers. Afterwards he gave me two others. Pencilled sheets they were mostly, but some were evidently written at his desk in ink and perhaps fifty pages had been typed, probably from his dictation. He asked me to take great care of them, to read them carefully, have typed copies made and return a set to him. The whole thing was to be kept as a secret between us. We were both to think over the advisability of a possibly anonymous publication. And meanwhile events might either confirm or explode various statements made in this history and so set a definite value, one way or the other, upon its authenticity.

Then he died.

He died quite unexpectedly as the result of a sudden operation. Some
dislocation connected with his marked spinal curvature had developed abruptly into an acute crisis.

As soon as I heard of his death I hurried off to Geneva and told the story of the dream book to his heir and executor, Mr. Montefiore Renaud. I am greatly indebted to that gentleman for his courtesy and quick understanding of the situation. He was at great pains to get every possible scrap of material together and to place it all at my disposal. In addition to the three folders Raven had already given me there were a further folder in longhand and a drawerful of papers in his peculiar shorthand evidently dealing with this History. The fourth folder contained the material which forms the concluding book of this present work. The shorthand notes, of which even the pages were not numbered, have supplied the material for the penultimate book, which has had to be a compilation of my own. Generally, Raven seems to have scribbled down his impressions of the dream book as soon as he could, before the memory faded, and as he intended to recopy it all himself he had no consideration for any prospective reader. This material was just for his own use. It is a mixture of very cursive (and inaccurate) shorthand, and for proper names and so forth, longhand. Punctuation is indicated by gaps, and often a single word stands for a whole sentence and even a paragraph. About a third of the shorthand stuff was already represented by longhand or typescript copy in the folders. That was my Rosetta Stone. If it were not for the indications conveyed by that I do not think it would have been possible to decipher any of the remainder. As it is, I found it impossible to make a flowing narrative, altogether of a piece with the opening and closing parts of this history. Some passages came out fairly clear and then would come confusion and obscurity. I have transcribed what I could and written-up the intervals when transcription was hopeless. I think I have made a comprehensible story altogether of the course of events during the struggles and changes in world government that went on between 1980 and 2059, at which date the Air Dictatorship, properly so called, gave place to that world-wide Modern State which was still flourishing when the history was published. The reader will find large gaps, or rather he will find large abbreviations, in that portion, but none that leave the main lines of the history of world consolidation in doubt.

And now let me say a word or so more about the real value of this queer “Outline of the Future”.

Certain minor considerations weigh against the idea that this history that follows is merely the imaginative dreaming of a brilliant publicist. I put them before the reader, but I will not press them. First of all this history has now received a certain amount of confirmation. The latest part of the MS. dates from September 20th, 1930, and much of it is earlier. And yet it alludes explicitly to the death of Ivar Kreuger a year later, to the tragic kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, which happened in the spring of 1932,
to the Mollison world flights of the same year, to the American debt
discussions in December 1932, to the Hitlerite régime in Germany, and
Japanese invasion of China proper in 1933, the election of President
Roosevelt II and the World Economic Conference in London. These
anticipations in detail I find a little difficult to explain away. I do not think
that they are of such a nature that they could have been foretold. They are
not events that were deducible from any preceding situation. How could
Raven have known about them in 1930?

And another thing that troubles me much more than it will trouble the
reader is the fact that there was no reason at all why Raven should have
attempted a mystification upon me. There was no reason on earth or
heaven why he should have lied about the way in which this material came
to him and he wrote it down.

If it were not for these considerations, I think I should be quite prepared to
fall in with what will no doubt be the general opinion, that the writing of
this History was deliberately chosen by Raven as an imaginative outlet.
That it is indeed a work of fiction by a late member of the Geneva
Secretariat with unusual opportunities for forming judgments upon the
trend of things. Or, let us say, a conditional prophecy in the Hebrew
manner produced in a quasi-inspired mood. The style in which it is written
is recognizably Raven’s style, and there are few of those differences in
vocabulary and locutions that one might reasonably expect in our language
a hundred and seventy odd years from now. On the other hand, the
attitude revealed is entirely inconsistent with Raven’s fully conscious
public utterances. The idiom of thought at least is not his, whatever the
idiom of expression. Either his marginal vision transcended his waking
convictions or we have here a clear case of suppressions making their way
to the surface. Is that what history is going to be?

I must admit that at first, while I was still under the impression that the
whole thing was a speculative exercise, I was tempted to annotate Raven’s
text rather extensively. I wanted to take a hand in the game. In fact I did
some months’ work upon it. Until my notes were becoming more bulky
than his history. But when I revised them I came to the conclusion that
many of them were fussy obtrusions and very few of them likely to be
really helpful to an intelligent and well-informed contemporary reader.
The more attracted he was by the book, the more likely he was to make his
observations for himself; the less he appreciated it, the less he was likely to
appreciate a superincumbent mass of elucidation. My notes might have
proved as annoying as the pencillings one finds at times in public library
books to-day. If the history is merely a speculative history, even then they
would have been impertinent; if there is anything more in it than
speculation, then they would be a very grave impertinence indeed. In the
end I scrapped the entire accumulation.

But I have had also to arrange these chapters in order, and that much
intervention was unavoidable and must remain. I have had indeed to arrange and rearrange them after several trials, because they do not seem to have been read and written down by Raven in their proper chronological sequence. I have smoothed out the transitions. Later on I hope to publish a special edition of Raven’s notes exactly as he left them.

We begin here with what is evidently the opening of a fresh book in the history, though it was not actually the first paper in the folders handed to me. It reviews very conveniently the course of worldly events in recent years, and it does so in what is, to me, a novel and very persuasive way. It analyses the main factors of the great war from a new angle. From that review the story of the “Age of Frustration”, in the opening years of which we are now living, flows on in a fairly consecutive fashion. Apart from this introduction the period covered by the actual narrative is roughly from about 1929 A.D. to the end of the year 2105. The last recorded event is on New Year’s Day 2106; there is a passing mention of the levelling of the remaining “skeletons” of the famous “Skyscrapers” of Lower New York on that date. The printing and publication probably occurred early in the new year; occurred — or should I write “will occur”?

H. G. W.
1. A Chronological Note

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the story of mankind upon this planet undergoes a change of phase. It broadens out. It unifies. It ceases to be a tangle of more and more interrelated histories and it becomes plainly and consciously one history. There is a complete confluence of racial, social and political destinies. With that a vision of previously unsuspected possibilities opens to the human imagination. And that vision brings with it an immense readjustment of ideas.

The first phase of that readjustment is necessarily destructive. The conceptions of life and obligation that have served and satisfied even the most vigorous and intelligent personalities hitherto, conceptions that were naturally partial, sectarian and limited, begin to lose, decade by decade, their credibility and their directive force. They fade, they become attenuated. It is an age of increasing mental uneasiness, of forced beliefs, hypocrisy, cynicism, abandon and impatience. What has been hitherto a final and impenetrable background of conviction in the rightness of the methods of behaviour characteristic of the national or local culture of each individual, becomes, as it were, a dissolving and ragged curtain. Behind it appear, vague and dim at first, and refracted and distorted by the slow dissolution of the traditional veils, the intimations of the type of behaviour necessary to that single world community in which we live to-day.

Until the Chronological Institute has completed its present labours of revision and defined the cardinal dates in our social evolution, it is best to refer our account of the development of man’s mind and will throughout this hectic period of human experience to the clumsy and irrelevant computation by centuries before and after the Christian Era, that is still current. As we have explained more fully in a previous book*, we inherit this system of historical pigeonholes from Christendom; that arbitrary chequerwork of hundred-year blocks was imposed upon the entire Mediterranean and Atlantic literatures for two thousand years, and it still distorts the views of history of all but the alertest minds. The young student needs to be constantly on his guard against its false divisions. As Peter Lightfoot has remarked, we talk of the “eighteenth century”, and we think of fashions and customs and attitudes that are characteristic of a period extending from the Treaty of Westphalia in C.E. [Christian Era] 1642 to the Napoleonic collapse in C.E. 1815; we talk of the “nineteenth century”, and the pictures and images evoked are those of the gas-lighting and steam-transport era, from after the distressful years of post-Napoleonic recovery to the immense shock of the World War in C.E. 1914. The phase “twentieth century”, again, calls forth images of the aeroplane, the electrification of the world and so forth; but an aeroplane was an extremely rare object in the air until 1914 (the first got up in 1905), and the replacement of the last steam railway train and the last steamship was not completed until the nineteen-forties. It is a tiresome waste of
energy to oblige each generation of young minds to learn first of all in any unmeaning pattern of centuries and then to correct that first crude arrangement, so that this long-needed revision of our chronology is one that will be very welcome to every teacher. Then from the very outset he or she will be able to block out the story of our race in significant masses.

* [Nothing of this is to be found in Raven's notes. — ED.]

The Chronological Institute is setting about its task with a helpful publicity, inviting discussion from every angle. It is proposing to divide up as much of the known history of our race as is amenable to annual reckoning, into a series of eras of unequal length. Naturally the choice of these eras is the cause of some extremely lively and interesting interchanges; most of us have our own private estimates of the values of events, and many issues affecting the earlier civilized communities remain in a state of animated unsettlement. Our chronology is now fairly sure as to the year for most important events in the last 4,000 years, and, thanks largely to the minute and patient labours of the Selwyn-Cornford Committee for Alluvial Research, to the decade for another hundred centuries. So far as the last 3,000 years are concerned, little doubt remains now that the main dividing points to be adopted will be FIRST the epoch of Alexander and the Hellenic conquests which will begin the phase of the great Helleno-Latin monetary imperialism in the western world, the Helleno-Latin Era. This will commence at the crossing of the Hellespont by Alexander the Great and end either with the Battle of the Yarmuk (636 C.E.) or the surrender of Jerusalem to the Caliph Omar (638 C.E.). NEXT will come the epoch of Moslem and Mongol pressure on the West which opened the era of feudal Christendom vis-à-vis with feudal Islam: the Era of Asiatic Predominance. This ends with the Battle of Lepanto (1571 C.E.). Then THIRDLY there will follow the epoch of the Protestant and the Catholic (counter) Reformations, which inaugurated the era of the competing sovereign states with organized standing armies: the Era of European Predominance, or, as it may also be called, the Era of National Sovereignty. Finally comes the catastrophe of the World War of 1914, when the outward drive of the new economic methods the Atlantic civilizations had developed gave way under the internal stresses of European nationalism. That war, and its long-drawn sequelae, released the human mind to the potentialities and dangers of an imperfectly Europeanized world — a world which had unconsciously become one single interlocking system, while still obsessed by the Treaty of Westphalia and the idea of competing sovereign states. This mental shock and release marks the beginning of the Era of the Modern State. The opening phase of this latest era is this Age of Frustration with which we are now about to deal. That is the first age of the Era of the Modern State. A second age, but not a new era, began with the Declaration of Mégève which was accepted by the general commonsense of mankind forty-seven years ago. This closed the Age of Frustration, which lasted therefore a little short of a century and a
half.

The date upon the title-page for the first publication of this History is C.E. 2106. Before many editions have been exhausted that will be changed to Modern Era (M.E.) 192 or M.E. 189 or M.E. 187, according to whether our chronologists decide upon 1914, the date of the outbreak of the Great War, or 1917, the beginning of the social revolution in Russia, or 1919, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, as the conclusive opening of the Age of Frustration and the conflict for world unity. The second date seems at present to be the more practicable one.

In C.E. 1914 the concept of an organized world order did not seem to be within the sphere of human possibility; in C.E. 1919 it was an active power in a steadily increasing proportion of human brains. The Modern State had been conceived. It was germinating. One system, the Soviet system in Russia, was already claiming to be a world system. To most of the generation which suffered it, the Great War seemed to be purely catastrophe and loss; to us who see those hideous years in perspective and in proportion to the general dulness and baseness of apprehension out of which that conflict arose, the destruction of life and substance, unprecedented as they were, has none of that overwhelming quality. We see it as a clumsy, involuntary release from outworn assumptions by their reduction to tragic absurdity, and as a practically unavoidable step therefore in the dialectic of human destiny.
2. How the Idea and Hope of the Modern World State First Appeared

The essential difference between the world before the Great War and the world after it lay in this, that before that storm of distress and disillusionment the clear recognition that a worldwide order and happiness, in spite of contemporary distresses, was within the reach of mankind was confined to a few exceptional persons, while after the catastrophe it had spread to an increasing multitude, it had become a desperate hope and desire, and at last a working conviction that made organized mass action possible.

Even those who apprehended this idea before the epoch of the Great War seem to have propounded it with what impresses us today as an almost inexplicable timidity and feebleness. Apart from the great star of Shelley, which shines the brighter as his successors dwindle in perspective, there is a flavour of unreality about all these pre-war assertions of a possible world order. In most of them the Victorian terror of “extravagance” is dominant, and the writer simpers and laughs at his own suggestions in what was evidently supposed to be a very disarming manner. Hardly any of these prophets dared believe in their own reasoning. Maxwell Brown has recently disinterred a pamphlet, The Great Analysis,* dated 1912, in which a shrewd and reasoned forecast of the primary structure of the Modern State, quite amazingly prescient for the time, was broached with the utmost timidity, without even an author’s name. It was a scheme to revolutionize the world, and the writer would not put his name to it, he confesses, because it might make him ridiculous.

* (Here for once the editor knows better than the writer of the history. This pamphlet was written by William Archer, the dramatic critic, and reprinted under its author’s name with a preface by Gilbert Murray in 1931. Apparently the book collectors of the years ahead are going to miss this book. — ED.)

Maxwell Brown’s entertaining Modern State Prophets Before the Great War is an exhaustive study of the psychological processes by which this idea, which is now the foundation of our contemporary life, gradually ousted its opposite of combative patriotism and established itself as a practicable and necessary form of action for men of good-will a century and a half ago. He traces the idea almost to its germ; he shows that its early manifestations, so far from being pacific, were dreams of universal conquest. He tells of its age-long struggle with everyday usage and practical commonsense. In the first of his huge supplementary volumes he gives thousands of quotations going back far beyond the beginnings of the Christian Era. All the monotheistic religions were, in spirit, world-state religions. He examines the Tower of Babel myth as the attempt of some primordial cosmopolitan, some seer before the dawn, to account for the
divisions of mankind. (There is strong reason now for ascribing this story to Emesal Gudeka of Nippur, the early Sumerian fabulist.)

Maxwell Brown shows how the syncretic religious developments, due to the growth of the early empires and the official pooling of gods, led necessarily to monotheism. From at least the time of Buddha onward, the sentiment, if not the living faith, in human brotherhood, always existed somewhere in the world. But its extension from a mere sentiment and a fluctuating sympathy for the stranger to the quality of a practicable enterprise was a very recent process indeed. The necessary conditions were not satisfied.

In the briefer studies of human innovations that preceded his more important contributions to human history, Maxwell Brown has shown how for the past ten thousand years at least, since the Cro-Magnards stamped their leather robes and tents, the art of printing reappeared and disappeared again and again, never culminating in the printed book and all its consequences, never obtaining a primary importance in human doings, until the fifteenth century (C.E.); he has assembled the evidence for man’s repeated abortive essays in flying, from the fourth dynasty gliders recently found at Bedrashen, the shattered Yu-chow machine and the interesting wreckage, ornaments and human remains found last year in Mirabella Bay. (These last were first remarked in 2104 C.E. after an earthquake in the deep sea photographs of the survey aeroplane Crawford, and they were subsequently sought and recovered by the divers of the submarine Salvemini belonging to the Naples Biological Station. They have now been identified by Professor Giulio Marinetti as the remains of the legendary glider of Dædalus and Icarus.) Maxwell Brown has also traced the perpetual discovery and rediscovery of America from the days of the Aalesund tablets and the early Chinese inscriptions in the caves near Bahia Coqui to the final establishment of uninterrupted communications across the Atlantic by the Western Europeans in the fifteenth century C.E. In all there are sixteen separate ineffectual discoveries of America either from the east or from the west now on record, and there may have been many others that left no trace behind them.

These earlier cases of human enterprise and inadequacy help us to understand the long struggle of the Age of Frustration and the difficulty our ancestors found in achieving what is now so obviously the only sane arrangement of human affairs upon this planet.

The fruitlessness of all these premature inventions is very easily explained. First in the case of the Transatlantic passage; either the earlier navigators who got to America never got back, or, if they did get back, they were unable to find the necessary support and means to go again before they died, or they had had enough of hardship, or they perished in a second attempt. Their stories were distorted into fantastic legends and substantially disbelieved. It was, indeed, a quite futile adventure to get to
America until the keeled sailing ship, the science of navigation, and the mariner's compass had been added to human resources.

Then again, in the matter of printing, it was only when the Chinese had developed the systematic manufacture of abundant cheap paper sheets in standard sizes that the printed book — and its consequent release of knowledge — became practically possible. Finally the delay in the attainment of flying was inevitable because before men could progress beyond precarious gliding it was necessary for metallurgy to reach a point at which the internal combustion engine could be made. Until then they could build nothing strong enough and light enough to battle with the eddies of the air.

In an exactly parallel manner, the conception of one single human community organized for collective service to the common weal had to wait until the rapid evolution of the means of communication could arrest and promise to defeat the disintegrative influence of geographical separation. That rapid evolution came at last in the nineteenth century, and it has been described already in a preceding chapter of this world history.* Steam power, oil power, electric power, the railway, the steamship, the aeroplane, transmission by wire and aerial transmission followed each other very rapidly. They knit together the human species as it had never been knit before. Insensibly, in less than a century, the utterly impracticable became not merely a possible adjustment but an urgently necessary adjustment if civilization was to continue.

* [Not Recorded by Raven. — ED.]

Now the cardinal prominence of the Great War in history lies in this, that it demonstrated the necessity of that adjustment. It was never considered to be necessary before. Recognition lagged behind accomplishment. None of the pre-war World-State Prophets betrays any sense of necessity. They make their polite and timid gestures towards human unity as something nice and desirable indeed but anything but imperative. The clearest demand for world-wide cooperation before the war, came from the Second International. And even after the war, and after the vague and vacillating adumbration of a federal super-state by the League of Nations at Geneva, most of even the most advanced writers seem to have been still under the impression that the utmost adjustment needed was some patching up of the current system so as to prevent or mitigate war and restrain the insurrectionary urge of the unprosperous.

Even the Communist movement which, as we had told already, had been able by a conspiracy of accidents to seize upon Russia and demonstrate the value of its theories there, lapsed from, rather than advanced towards, cosmopolitan socialism. Its theories, as we have shown, were hopelessly inadequate for its practical needs. The development of its ideology was greatly hampered by the conservative dogmatism imposed upon it by the
incurable egotism of Marx. His intolerance, his innate bad manners, his vain insistence that he had produced a final doctrine to put beside Darwinism, cast a long shadow of impatience and obduracy upon the subsequent development of Communism. He was bitterly jealous of the Utopian school of socialism, and so, until Lenin faced the urgencies of power, the “orthodox” Marxist took a quite idiotic pride in a planless outlook. “Overthrow capitalism”, he said, and what could happen but millennial bliss? Communism insisted indeed upon the necessity of economic socialization but — until it attained power in Russia — without a glance at its technical difficulties. It produced its belated and ill-proportioned Five Year Plan only in 1928 C.E., eleven years after its accession to power. Until then it had no comprehensive working scheme whatever for the realization of socialism. Thrown back on experiment, it was forced to such desperately urgent manoeuvres, improvisations and changes of front, and defended by such tawdry and transparent apologetics, that the general world movement passed out of its ken.

The reader of this world history knows already how the moral and intellectual force of the Communist Party proved unequal, after the death of Lenin, to control or resist the dictatorship of that forcible, worthy, devoted and limited man, the Georgian, Stalin. The premature death of the creative and adaptable Lenin and the impatient suppression by Stalin of such intelligent, troublesome, but necessary types as Trotsky — a man who, but for lack of tact and essential dignity, might well have been Lenin’s successor — crippled whatever hope there may have been that the Modern State would first emerge in Russia. Terrible are the faithful disciples of creative men. Lenin relaxed and reversed the dogmatism of Marx, Stalin made what he imagined to be Leninism into a new and stiffer dogmatism. Thereafter the political doctrinaire dominated and crippled the technician in a struggle that cried aloud for technical competence. Just as theological disputes impoverished and devastated Europe through the long centuries of Christendom, and reduced the benefits of its unifying influence to zero, so in Russia efficiency of organization was prevented by the pedantries of political theorists. The young were trained to a conceit and a xenophobia, indistinguishable in its practical effects from the gross patriotism of such countries as France, Germany, Italy or Scotland.

Because of this subordination of its mental development to Politics, Russia passed into a political and social phase comparable, as Rostovtzeff pointed out at the time in his Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, in its universal impoverishment and its lack of any critical vigour, to the well-meaning but devitalizing autocracy of the Emperor Diocletian. From its very start the Russian revolution failed in its ambition to lead mankind. Its cosmopolitanism lasted hardly longer than the cosmopolitanism of the great French revolution a dozen decades earlier.

This almost inevitable lag of the constructive movement in Russia behind
Western developments was foreseen by the shrewd and penetrating brain of Lenin even in the phase of its apparent leadership (see No. 3090 in the thirteenth series of the Historical Documents Collection, Left Wing Communism). But his observation found little or no echo in the incurably illiberal thought of the Marxian tradition.

It was in Western Europe especially that the conception of the organized and disciplined World-State as a revolutionary objective, ultimately grew to its full proportions. At first it grew obscurely. In 1933, any observer might have been misled by the fact of the Fascist régime in Italy, by the tumult of the Nazi party in Germany, by similar national-socialist movements in other countries, and by the increase in tariff barriers and other restraints upon trade everywhere, to conclude that the cosmopolitan idea was everywhere in retreat before the obsessions of race, creed and nationalism. Yet all the while the germs of the Modern State were growing, everywhere its votaries were learning and assembling force.

It needed the financial storm of the years 1928 and 1929 C.E. and the steadily progressive collapse of the whole world’s economic life, of which this storm was the prelude, to give the World-State prophets the courage of their convictions. Then indeed they began to speak out. Instead of the restrained, partial and inconclusive criticism of public affairs which had hitherto contented them, they now insisted plainly upon the need of a world-wide reconstruction, that is to say of a world revolution — though “revolution” was still a word they shirked. The way in which this increased definition of aim and will came about is characteristic of the changing quality of social life. It was not that one or two outstanding men suddenly became audible and conspicuous as leaders in this awakening. There were no leaders. It was a widespread movement in human thought.

The conclusions upon which intelligent people were converging may be briefly stated. They had arrived at the realization that human society had become one indivisible economic system with novel and enormous potentialities of well-being. By 1931 C.E. this conception becomes visible even in the obstinately intellectualist mind of France — for example, in the parting speech to America of an obscure and transitory French Prime Minister, Laval, who crossed the Atlantic on some new undiscoverable mission in that year; and we find it promptly echoed by such prominent loud speakers as President Hoover of America and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald the British Prime Minister.

That idea at any rate had already become sufficiently popular for the politicians to render it lip service. But it was still only the intelligent minority who went on to the logical consequences of its realization; that is to say, the necessity of disavowing the sovereignty of contemporary governments, of setting up authoritative central controls to supplement or supersede them, and of putting the production of armaments, the production of the main economic staples and the protection of workers...
from destructive under-payment, beyond the reach of profit-seeking manipulation.

Yet by 1932-33 this understanding minority was speaking very plainly. These immense changes were no longer being presented as merely desirable things; they were presented as urgently necessary things if civilization was to be saved from an immense catastrophe. And not merely saved. The alternative to disaster, they saw even then, was not just a bleak and terrified security. That was the last thing possible. There was no alternative to disorder and wretchedness, but “such an abundance, such a prosperity and richness of opportunity”, as man had never known before. (These words are quoted from a Scottish newspaper of the year 1929.) Enlightened people in 1932 C.E. were as assured of the possibility of world order, universal sufficiency and ever increasing human vitality as are we who live to-day in ample possession of our lives amidst the practical realization of that possibility.

Clearness of vision did not make for the happiness of the enlightened. Their minds were tormented not simply by contemporary fears and miseries, but by the sure knowledge of a possible world of free activity within the reach of man and, as it were, magically withheld. They saw hundreds of millions of lives cramped and crippled, meagrely lived, sacrificed untimely, and they could not see any primary necessity for this blighting and starvation of human life. They saw youthful millions drifting to lives of violence, mutilation and premature and hideous deaths. And beyond was our security, our eventfulness and our freedom.

Maxwell Brown, in a chapter called “Tantalus 1932”, cites forty instances of these realizations. But the legendary Tantalus was put within apparent reach of the unattainable by the inexorable decrees of the gods. Mankind was under no such pitiless destiny. The world-wide Modern State shone bright upon the living imaginations of our race within a decade of the Great War, absurdly near, fantasticaly out of reach. For a century of passionate confusion and disorder, that modern state was not to be released from potentiality into actuality.

It is to the story of these battling, lost and suffering generations, the “generations of the half light”, that we must now proceed.

When now we look back to the scattered and diverse individuals who first give expression to this idea of the modern World-State which was dawning upon the human intelligence, when we appraise their first general efforts towards its realization, we need, before we can do them anything like justice, to attempt some measure of the ignorances, prejudices and other inertias, the habits of concession and association, the herd love and the herd fear, with which they had to struggle not only in the society in which they found themselves, but within themselves. It is not a conflict of light and darkness we have to describe; it is the struggle of the purblind among
the blind. We have to realize that for all that they were haunted by a vision of the civilized world of to-day, they still belonged not to our age but to their own. The thing imagined in their minds was something quite distinct from their present reality. Maxwell Brown has devoted several chapters, and a third great supplementary volume, to a special selection of early Modern State Prophets who followed public careers. He showed conclusively that in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century (C.E.) there was a rapidly increasing number of men and women with a clear general conception of the possibilities of the modern world. He gives their written and spoken words, often astoundingly prescient and explicit. And then he traces out the tenor of their lives subsequent to these utterances. The discrepancy of belief and effort is a useful and indeed a startling reminder of the conditional nature of the individual life.

As he writes: “In the security and serenity of the study, these men and women could see plainly. In those hours of withdrawal, the fragile delicate brain matter could escape from immediacy, apprehended causation in four dimensions, reach forward to the permanent values of social events in the space-time framework. But even to the study there penetrated the rumble of the outer disorder. And directly the door was opened, forthwith the uproar of contemporary existence, the carnival, the riot, the war and the market, beat in triumphantly. The raging question of what had to be done that day, scattered the fine thought of our common destiny to the four winds of heaven.”

Maxwell Brown adds a vivid illustration to this passage. It is the facsimile of the first draft by Peter Raut, the American progressive leader, of the Revolutionary Manifesto of 1937. It was indisputably a very inspiring document in its time and Raut gave the last proof of loyalty to the best in his mind, by a courageous martyrdom. But in the margin of this draft one’s attention is caught by a maze of little figures; little sums in multiplication and addition. By his almost inspired gift for evidence and through the industry of his group of research assistants, Maxwell Brown has been able to demonstrate exactly what these sums were. They show that even while Raut, so far as his foresight permitted, was planning our new world, his thoughts were not wholly fixed on that end. They wandered. For a time the manifesto was neglected while he did these sums. He was gambling in industrial equities, and a large and active portion of his brain was considering whether the time had arrived to sell.
3. The Accumulating Disproportions of the Old Order

Let us consider some of the main appearances that disposed many minds to expect a world community in the early twentieth century. In the first place a very considerable financial unity had been achieved. The credit of the City of London ran to the ends of the earth and the gold sovereign was for all practical purposes a world coin, exchangeable locally for local expenditure within relatively slight fluctuations. Economic life was becoming very generalized. Over great areas trade moved with but small impediments, and the British still hoped to see their cosmopolitan conception of Free Trade accepted by the whole world. The International Institute of Agriculture in Rome was developing an annual census of staple production and reaching out towards a world control of commodity transport. Considerable movements and readjustments of population were going on, unimpeded by any government interference. Swarms of Russian Poles, for instance, drifted into Eastern Germany for the harvest work and returned; hundreds of thousands of Italians went to work in the United States for a few years and then came back with their earnings to their native villages. An ordinary traveller might go all over the more settled parts of the earth and never be asked for a passport unless he wanted to obtain a registered letter at a post office or otherwise prove his identity.

A number of minor but significant federal services had also come into existence and had a sound legal standing throughout the world, the Postal Union for example. Before 1914 C.E. a written document was delivered into the hands of the addressee at almost every point upon the planet, almost as surely as, if less swiftly than, it is to-day. (The Historical Documents Board has recently reprinted a small book, International Government, prepared for the little old Fabian Society during the Great War period by L. S. Woolf, which gives a summary of such arrangements. He lists twenty-three important world unions dealing at that time with trade, industry, finance, communications, health, science, art, literature, drugs, brothels, criminals, emigration and immigration and minor political affairs.) These world-wide cooperations seemed — more particularly to the English-speaking peoples — to presage a direct and comparatively smooth transition from the political patchwork of the nineteenth century, as the divisions of the patchwork grew insensibly fainter, to a stable confederation of mankind. The idea of a coming World-State was quite familiar at the time — one finds it, for instance, as early as Lord Tennyson’s Locksley Hall (published in 1842); but there was no effort whatever to achieve it, and indeed no sense of the need of such effort. The World-State was expected to come about automatically by the inherent forces in things.

That belief in some underlying benevolence in uncontrolled events was a common error, one might almost say THE common error, of the time. It affected every school of thought. In exactly the same fashion the followers of Marx (before the invigorating advent of Lenin and the Bolshevist
reconstruction of Communism) regarded their dream of world communism as inevitable, and the disciples of Herbert Spencer found a benevolent Providence in "free competition". "Trust Evolution", said the extreme Socialist and the extreme Individualist, as piously as the Christians put their trust in God. It was the Bolshevik movement in the twentieth century which put will into Communism. The thought of the nineteenth century revolutionary and reactionary alike was saturated with that confident irresponsible laziness. As Professor K. Chandra Sen has remarked, hope in the Victorian period was not a stimulant but an opiate.

We who live in a disciplined order, the chastened victors of a hard-fought battle, understand how superficial and unsubstantial were all those hopeful appearances. The great processes of mechanical invention, which have been described in our general account of the release of experimental science from deductive intellectualism, were increasing the power and range of every operating material force quite irrespective of its fitness or unfitness for the new occasions of mankind. With an equal impartiality they were bringing world-wide understanding and world-wide massacre into the range of human possibility.

It was through no fault of these inventors and investigators that the new opportunities they created were misused. That was outside their range. They had as yet no common culture of their own. Nor, since each worked in his own field, were they responsible for the fragmentary irregularity of their discoveries. Biological and especially social invention were lagging far behind the practical advances of the exacter, simpler sciences. Their application was more difficult; the matters they affected were so much more deeply embedded in ordinary use and wont, variation was more intimate, novelties could not be inserted with the same freedom. It was easy to supplant the coach and horses on the macadamized road by the steam-engine or the railway, because it was not necessary to do anything to the road or the coach and horses to bring about the change. They were just left alone to run themselves out as the railroad (and later the automobile on the rubber-glass track) superseded them. But men cannot set up new social institutions, new social and political and industrial relationships, side by side with the old in that fashion. It must be an altogether tougher and slower job. It is a question not of ousting but of reconstruction. The old must be converted into the new without ceasing for a moment to be a going concern. The over-running of the biologically old by the mechanically new, due to these differences in timing, was inevitable, and it reached its maximum in the twentieth century.

A pathological analogy may be useful here. In the past, before the correlation of development in living organisms began to be studied, people used to suffer helplessly and often very dreadfully from all sorts of irregularities of growth in their bodies. The medical services of the time, such as they were, were quite unable to control them. One of these, due to
what is called the Nurmi ratios in the blood, was a great overproduction of bone, either locally or generally. The suffered gradually underwent distortion into a clumsy caricature of his former self; his features became coarse and massive, his skull bones underwent a monstrous expansion; the proportions of his limbs altered, and the leverage of his muscles went askew. He was made to look grotesque; he was crippled and at last killed. Something strictly parallel happened to human society in the hundred years before the Great War. Under the stimulus of mechanical invention and experimental physics it achieved, to pursue our metaphor, a hypertrophy of bone, muscle and stomach, without any corresponding enlargement of its nervous controls.

Long before the Great War this progressive disproportion had been dimly recognized by many observers. The favourite formula was to declare that “spiritual” — for the naïve primordial opposition of spirit and matter was still accepted in those days — had not kept pace with “material” advance. This was usually said with an air of moral superiority to the world at large. Mostly there was a vague implication that if these other people would only refrain from using modern inventions so briskly, or go to church more, or marry earlier and artlessly, or read a more “spiritual” type of literature, or refrain from mixed bathing, or work harder and accept lower wages, or be more respectful and obedient to constituted authority, all might yet be well. Beyond this sort of thing there was little recognition of the great and increasing disharmonies of the social corpus until after the Great War.

The young reader will ask, “But where was the Central Observation Bureau? Where was the professorial and student body which should have been recording these irregularities and producing plans for adjustment?”

There was no Central Observation Bureau. That did not exist for another century. That complex organization of discussion, calculation, criticism and forecast was undreamt of. Those cities of thought, full of serene activities, came into existence only after the organization of the Record and Library Network under the Air Dictatorship between 2010 and 2030. Even the mother thought-city, the World Encyclopædia Establishment, was not founded until 2012. In the early twentieth century there was still no adequate estimate of economic forces and their social reactions. There were only a few score professors and amateurs of these fundamentally important studies scattered throughout the earth. They were scattered in every sense; even their communications were unsystematic. They had no powers of enquiry, no adequate statistics, little prestige; few people heeded what they thought or said.

Maybe they deserved nothing better. They bickered stupidly with and discredited each other. They ignored or wilfully misunderstood each other. It is impossible to read such social and economic literature as the period produced without realizing the extraordinary backwardness of that side of the world’s intellectual life. It is difficult to believe nowadays that the
writers of these publications, at once tediously copious and incredibly jejune, were living at the same time as the lively multitude of workers in the experimental sciences which were daily adding to and reshaping knowledge to achieve fresh practical triumphs. From 1812 C.E., when public gas-lighting was first organized, to the outbreak of the Great War, while the world was being made over anew by gas, by steam, by oil, and then by the swift headlong development of electrical science, while the last terræ incognitæ were being explored and mapped, while a multitude of hitherto unthought-of elements and compounds and hundreds of thousands of new substances were coming into use, while epidemic diseases were being restrained and driven back, while the death rate was being halved, and the average duration of life increased by a score of years, the social and political sciences remained practically stagnant and unserviceable. Throughout that century of material achievement there is no single instance of the successful application of a social, economic or educational generalization.

Because of this belatedness of the social sciences, the progressive dislocation of the refined if socially limited and precarious civilization of the more advanced of the eighteenth and nineteenth century sovereign states went on without any effectual contemporary understanding of what was straining it to pieces. The Europeans and the Americans of the early twentieth century apprehended the social and political forces that ravaged their lives hardly more clearly than the citizens of the Roman Empire during its collapse. Plenty and the appearance of security HAPPENED; then débâcle HAPPENED. There was no analysis of operating causes. For years even quite bold and advanced thinkers were chased by events. They did not grasp what was occurring at the time. They only realized what had really occurred long afterwards. And so they never foresaw. There was no foresight, and therefore still less could there be any understanding control.
There are, however, one or two exceptions to this general absence of diagnosis in the affairs of the nineteenth and twentieth century of the Christian Era, which even the student of general history cannot ignore. Prominent among them is the analysis and forecasts of economic development made by Karl Marx and his associates.

In any case Marxism would have demanded our attention as a curious contemporary realization of the self-destroying elements in the business methods of the nineteenth century; but its accidental selection as the ostensible creed of revolutionary Russia after the Tzarist collapse gives it an almost primary importance in the history of kinetic ideas.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was the son of a Christianized Jewish lawyer of Treves, of considerable social pretensions; he had an excellent university career at Bonn and Berlin, assimilated the radical thought of his time and became the lifelong friend of the far more modest and gifted Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), a Lancashire calico dealer. Under the inspiration of Engels and the English socialist movement of Robert Owen, Marx elaborated the theory of economic development which is the substance of Marxism. It is embodied in a huge unfinished work, Das Kapital, and summarized in a Communist Manifesto (1848) drawn up by Engels and himself. (These, and indeed all his writings, together with an able digest and summary, are to be found in the Library of Historical Thought, vols. 17252-9.) His chief merit lies in his clear recognition of the ultimate dependence of social and political forms and reactions upon physical necessity. (“The Materialist Conception of History.”) His chief fault was his insane hatred of the middle classes (bourgeoisie), due mainly to his pose as a needy aristocrat and embittered, it may be, by his material and intellectual dependence on the trader Engels. His own attempts to apply his theories by conspiracy and political action were inept and futile. He died in London a disappointed and resentful man, quite unaware of the posthumous fame that awaited his doctrines. It was the organization of his followers into the disciplined Communist Party and the modernization of his doctrines by the genius of Lenin that made his name a cardinal one in history.

It is interesting to consider his general propositions now in the light of accomplished events and note the hits and misses of those heroic speculations — heroic, that is to say, measured by the mental courage of the time.

Nowadays every schoolboy knows that the essential and permanent conflict in life is a conflict between the past and the future, between the accomplished past and the forward effort. He is made to realize this
conflict in his primary biological course. Therein he comes to see and in part to understand the continual automatic struggle of the thing achieved, to hold the new, the new-born individual, the new-born idea, the widening needs of the species, in thrall. This conflict he is shown runs through all history. In the old classical mythology Saturn, the Conservative head-god, devoured all his children until at last one escaped to become Jove. And of how Jove bound Prometheus in his turn every lover of Shelley can tell. We need only refer the student to the recorded struggles in the histories of Republican Rome and Judæa between debtor and creditor; to the plebeian Secessions of the former and the year of Jubilee of the latter; to the legend of Joseph in Egypt (so richly interpreted now through the minute study of contemporary Egyptian documents by the students of the Breasted Commemoration Fund); to the English Statute of Mortmain; to Austen Livewright’s lucid study of Bankruptcy Through the Ages (1979), to remind him of this perennial struggle of life against the creditor and the dead hand. But Marx, like most of his contemporaries, was profoundly ignorant of historical science, and addicted to a queer “dialectic” devised by the pseudo-philosopher Hegel; his ill-equipped mind apprehended this perennial antagonism only in terms of the finance of the industrial production about him; the entrepreneur, the capitalist, became the villain of his piece, using the prior advantage of his capital to appropriate the “surplus value” of production, so that his share of purchasing power became more and more disproportionately great.

Marx seems never to have distinguished clearly between restrictive and productive possessions, which nowadays we recognize as a difference of fundamental importance. Exploitation for profit and strangulation for dominance, the radical son and the conservative father, were all one to him. And his proposals for expropriating the profit-seeking “Capitalist” were of the vaguest; he betrayed no conception whatever of the real psychology of economic activities, and he had no sense of the intricate organization of motives needed if the coarse incentive of profit was to be superseded. Indeed, he had no practical capacity at all, and one is not surprised to learn that for his own part he never earned a living. He claimed all the privileges of a prophet and all the laxity and indolence of a genius, and he never even completed his great book.

It was the far abler and finer-minded Lenin (1870-1924, in power in Russia after 1917), rather than Marx, who gave a practical organization to the revolutionary forces of Communism and made the Communist Party for a time, until Stalin overtook it, the most vital creative force in the world. The essential intellectual difference between these two men is explained very clearly by Max Eastman (1895-1980), whose compact and scholarly Marx and Lenin is still quite readable by the contemporary student. In his time Lenin had to pose as the disciple and exponent of Marx; it was only later that criticism revealed the subtle brilliance of his effort to wrest a practical commonsense out of the time-worn doctrines of the older prophet.
Another nineteenth-century writer, with perhaps a clearer realization of the strangulating effect of restrictive property as distinguished from the stimulating effect of exploitation, was Henry George (1839-1897), an American printer who rose to great popularity as a writer upon economic questions. He saw the life of mankind limited and dwarfed by the continual rise in rents. His naïve remedy was to tax the landowner, as Marx’s naïve remedy was to expropriate the capitalist, and just as Marx never gave his disciples the ghost of an idea for a competent administration of the expropriated economic plant and resources of the world, so Henry George never indicated how, in the world of implacable individualism he advocated, the taxing authority was to find a use for its ever-increasing tax receipts.

We can smile to-day at the limitations of these early pioneers. But we smile only because we live later than they did, and are two centuries and more to the good in our experience. We owe them enormous gratitude for the valiant disinterestedness of their life work.

Our debt is on the whole rather for what they got rid of than for what they did. The broad outlines of the world’s economic life are fairly simple as we see them frankly exposed to-day, but these men were born into an atmosphere of uncriticized usage, secrecy, time-honoured misconceptions, fetishisms, working fictions — which often worked very badly — and almost insane suppressions of thought and statement. The very terms they were obliged to use were question-begging terms; the habitual assumptions of the world they addressed were crooked and only to be apprehended with obliquity and inconsistency. They were forcing their minds towards the expression of reality through an intricate mental and moral tangle. They destroyed the current assumption of permanence in established institutions and usages, and though that seems a small thing to us now, it was a profoundly important release at the time. The infantile habit of assuming the fixity of the Thing that Is was almost universal in their day.

The Marxist doctrines did at least indicate that a term was necessarily set to economic development through profit-seeking, by the concentration of controlling ownership, by the progressive relative impoverishment of larger and larger sections of the world population and by the consequent final dwindling of markets. The rapid coagulation of human activities after 1928 C.E. was widely recognized as a confirmation of the Marxian forecast, and by one of those rapid mental leaps characteristic of the time, as a complete endorsement of the Communist pretension to have solved the social problem.

Unembarrassed as we are now by the mental clutter of our forefathers, the fundamental processes at work during the distressful years of the third and fourth decade of the century appear fairly simple. We know that it is a permanent condition of human well-being that the general level of prices
should never fall, and we have in the Currency Council a fairly efficient and steadily improving world-organ to ensure that end. A dollar, as we know it to-day, means practically the same thing in goods, necessities and satisfactions from one year's end to another. Its diminution in value is infinitesimal. No increase is ever allowed to occur. For the owner of an unspent dollar there is neither un-earnt increment nor unmerited loss. As the productive energy of our species rises, the dollar value of the total wealth is arranged to increase steadily in proportion, and neither is the creditor enriched nor robbed of his substantial expectation nor the debtor confronted with payments beyond his powers.

There remains no way now of becoming passively wealthy. Gambling was ruthlessly eradicated under the Air Dictatorship and has never returned. Usury ranks with forgery as a monetary offence. Money is given to people to get what they want and not as a basis for further acquisition, and we realize that the gambling spirit is a problem for the educationist and mental expert. It implies a fundamental misunderstanding of life. We have neither speculators, shareholders, private usurers or rent lords. All these “independent” types have vanished from the earth. Land and its natural resources are now owned and administered either directly or by delegation, by a hierarchy of administrative boards representing our whole species; there are lease-holding cultivators and exploiting corporations with no right to sublet, but there is no such thing as a permanent private ownership of natural resources making an automatic profit by the increment of rent. And since there is, and probably always will be now, a continual advance in our average individual productive efficiency by which the whole community profits, there follows a continual extension of our collective enterprises, a progressive release of leisure and a secular raising of the standard of individual life, to compensate for what would otherwise be a progressive diminution in the number of brains and hands needed to carry on the work of the world. Human society, so long as productive efficiency increases, is OBLIGED to raise its standards of consumption and extend its activities year by year, or collapse. And if its advance does not go on it will drop into routine, boredom, viciousness and decay. Steadfastly the quantity and variety of things MUST increase.

These imperative conditions, which constitute the A B C of the existing order, seem so obvious to-day, that it is with difficulty we put ourselves in the place of these twentieth century folk to whom they were strange and novel. They were not yet humanized en masse; they still had the mentality of the “struggle for existence”. It is only by a considerable mental effort, and after a careful study of the gradual evolution of the civilized mentality out of the chaotic impulses and competition of an originally very unsocial animal, that we can even begin to see matters with the eyes of our predecessors of a century and a half ago.
5. The Way in Which Competition and Monetary Inefficiency Strained the Old Order

In the twentieth century of the Christian era there was still no common currency by which to measure and carry on the world's economic exchanges. Those transactions were not merely apprehended inexactely because of this; they were falsified, and it did not seem possible that there would ever be an effective simplification. It is true that during what is known as the First Period of General Prosperity, from 1850 C.E. until 1914, there was a kind of working world system of currency and credit, centring upon the City of London and based on the gold pound; but this was a purely accidental growth, made workable by successive gold discoveries which prevented too disastrous a fall in prices as productive efficiency increased, and by the circumstances that gave the insular English a lead in the development of steam transport on land and sea and real incentives towards a practical propaganda of world free trade.

That first gleam of cosmopolitan sunlight waned as it had waxed, without any contemporary apprehension of the real forces at work, much less any attempt to seize upon them and organize them in permanence. The financial ascendency and initiative of the City of London crumbled away after the war and nothing appeared to take its place. In any case, this quasi-cosmopolitan system based on the gold sovereign, and owing its modicum of success to continual increments in the available gold, would have wilted as the world's gold supplies gave out, but the strangulation of the world's industry after the war was greatly accelerated by the gold hoarding of the Americans and French.

And during all that phase of opportunity there was no substantial effort to take hold of the land, sea and natural resources of the planet and bring them from a state of fragmentary, chaotic and wasteful exploitation into a general scheme. There remained sixty-odd “sovereign” governments, each claiming a supreme control of all the natural wealth of the areas within its frontiers, and under these governments, under conditions that varied with each, there were private corporations and individuals with a right to deal more or less freely with the fragment upon which they had established a grip. Everywhere the guiding principle in the exploitation of the minerals, sunshine and power resources of the globe was the profit of single or associated private individuals, and the patchwork governments of the time interfered in the profit scramble only in favour of their nationals against their foreign rivals. Yet for nearly a hundred years, because of the fortunate influx of gold and inventions, this profit-seeking system, linked to the metallic monetary system, sufficed to sustain a very great expansion and enlargement of human life, and it was hard to convince the mass of men, and still harder to convince the prosperous manufacturers, traders, miners, cultivators and financiers who dominated public affairs, that this was not a permanent system and that the world already needed very
essential modifications of its economic methods. A considerable measure of breakdown, a phase of display, fear and distress, was necessary before they could be disillusioned.

The nineteenth century had for its watchwords “individual enterprise and free competition”. But the natural end of all competition is the triumph of one competitor. It was in America that the phenomena of Big Business first appeared and demonstrated the force of this truism; at a score of points triumphant organizations capable of crushing out new competitors and crippling and restraining new initiatives that threatened their predominance appeared. In Europe there was little governmental resistance to industrial alliances and concentrations in restraint of competition, and they speedily developed upon a scale that transcended political frontiers, but in the United States of America there was a genuine effort to prevent enterprises developing on a monopolistic scale. The conspicuous leader of this preventive effort was the first President Roosevelt (1858-1919) and its chief fruit the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890), which proved a rich mine for lawyers in the subsequent decades.

These great consolidations, which closed the phase of free competition, were so far effective in controlling trade and arresting new developments that Hilary Hooker, in his Studies in Business Coagulation During the First Period of General Prosperity, is able to cite rather more than two thousand instances, ranging from radium and new fruits and foodstuffs to gramophones, automobiles, reconstructed households, artificial moonlight for the roadways by the countryside, and comfortable and economical railway plant, in which ample supplies or beneficial improvements were successfully kept off the market in the interests of established profit-making systems. After 1900 C.E. again there was a world-wide cessation of daily newspaper initiative and a consequent systole of free speech. Distribution, paper supply and news services had fallen into the hands of powerful groups able and willing to crush out any new types of periodical, or any inimical schools of public suggestion. They set about stereotyping the public mind.

These same profit-making systems in possession also played a large part in arresting competition from countries in which they were less completely in control, by subsidized political action for the maintenance of protective tariffs. Long before the world break-down became manifest, the experience of the ordinary consumer so far belied the sanguine theory that free competition was a mode of endless progress, that he was still living in a house, wearing clothes, using appliances, travelling about in conveyances, and being fed with phrases and ideas that by the standard of the known and worked-out inventions of the time should have been discarded on an average, Hooker computes, from a quarter to half a century before. There was labour unemployed and abundant material available to remedy all this, but its utilization was held up by the rent-exacting and profit-earning
systems already in possession.

This lag in modernization added greatly to the effects of increased productive efficiency in the disengagement of those vast masses of destitute unemployed and unemploying people which began to appear almost everywhere, like the morbid secretion of a diseased body, as the twentieth century passed on into its third decade.
6. The Paradox of Over-Production and Its Relation to War

This so-called “paradox of over-production” which figures so largely in the loose discussions of the “post-war” period was in its essence a very simple affair indeed. Just as the inevitable end of a process of free competition was a consolidation of successful competitors and an arrest of enterprise, so the inevitable end of a search for profit in production was a steady reduction of costs through increased efficiency — that is to say, a steady decrease of the ratio of employment to output. These things lie so much on the surface of the process that it is almost incredible to us that, wilfully or not, our ancestors disregarded them. Equally inevitable was it that these necessary contractions of enterprise and employment should lead to an increase in the proportion of unemployable people. Geographical expansion and a rising standard of life among both the employed and possessing classes, together with the stimulating effect of a steady influx of gold, masked and tempered for half a century this squeezing-out of an increasing fraction of the species from its general economic life. There were nevertheless fluctuations, “cycles of trade” as they were called, when the clogging machinery threatened to stall and was then relieved and went on again. But by the opening of the twentieth century, the fact that the method of running human affairs as an open competition for profit, was in its nature a terminating method, was forcing itself upon the attention even of those who profited most by it and had the most excuse for disregarding it, and who, as a class, knew nothing of the Marxian analysis.

We know now that the primary task of world administration is to arrest this squeezing out of human beings from active economic life, by the continual extension of new collective enterprises, but such ideas had still to be broached at that time. The common folk, wiser in their instincts than the political economists in their intellectualism, were disposed to approve of waste and extravagance because money was “circulated” and workers “found employment”. And the reader will not be able to understand the world-wide tolerance of growing armaments and war preparations during this period unless he realizes the immediate need inherent in the system for unremunerative public expenditure. Somewhere the energy economized had to come out. The world of private finance would not tolerate great rehousing, great educational and socially constructive enterprises, on the part of the relatively feeble governments of the time. All that had to be reserved for the profit accumulator. And so the ever-increasing productivity of the race found its vent in its ancient traditions of warfare, which admitted the withdrawal of a large proportion of the male population from employment for a year or so and secreted that vast accumulation of forts, battleships, guns, submarines, explosives, barracks and the like, which still amazes us. Without this cancer growth of armies and navies, the paradox of over-production latent in competitive private enterprise would probably have revealed itself in an overwhelming
mass of unemployment before even the end of the nineteenth century. A social revolution might have occurred then.

Militarism, however, alleviated these revolutionary stresses, by providing vast profit-yielding channels of waste. And it also strengthened the forces of social repression. The means of destruction accumulated on a scale that well-nigh kept pace with the increase in the potential wealth of mankind. The progressive enslavement of the race to military tyranny was an inseparable aspect, therefore, of free competition for profits. The latter system conditioned and produced the former. It needed the former so as to have ballast to throw out to destruction and death whenever it began to sink. The militarist phase of the early twentieth century and the paradox of over-production are correlated facets of the same reality, the reality of the planless hypertrophy of the social body.

It is interesting to note how this morbid accumulation of energy in belligerence and its failure to find vent in other directions became more and more evident in the physiognomy of the world as the twentieth century progressed. The gatherings of mankind became blotched with uniforms. Those admirable albums of coloured pictures, Historical Scenes in a Hundred Volumes, which are now placed in all our schools and show-places and supplied freely to any home in which there are children, display very interestingly the advent, predominance and disappearance of military preoccupations in the everyday life of our ancestors. These pictures are all either reproductions of actual paintings, engravings or photographs, or, in the case of the earlier volumes, they are elaborate reconditionings to the more realistic methods of our time of such illustrations as were available. Military operations have always attracted the picture-maker at all times, and there are plentiful pictures of battles from every age, from the little cricket-field battle of the Middle Ages to the hundred mile fights of the last Great War, but our interest here is not with battles but with the general facies of social life. Even in the war-torn seventeenth century the general stream of life went on without any manifest soldiering. War was a special occupation. While the battles of the English Civil War, which set up the first English Republic (1649-1660), were in progress, we have evidence that hunting and hawking parties were busy almost within sound of the guns. The novels of Jane Austen (England, 1775-1817) pursue their even way without the faintest echo of the land and sea campaigns in progress. Goethe in Weimar (the German literary “Great Man” during the “Great Man” period of literary thought in Europe, 1749-1832) could not be bothered by requests for supplies of wood and food for the German troops before the battle of Jena, and was very pleased to meet his “enemy alien” Napoleon socially during that campaign.

We rarely see the monarchs of the eighteenth century depicted in military guise; the fashion was for robes and majesty rather than for the spurs and feathers of the Bantam warrior-king. It was the unprecedented vehemence
of the Napoleonic adventure that splashed the social life of Europe with uniforms, infected feminine fashions, and even set plump princess colonels, frogged with gold lace and clutching bare sabres, jogging unsteadily at the heads of regiments. There was a brief return towards civilian attire with the accession of the “domesticated monarchs”, Louis Philippe in France and Victoria in Great Britain; they marked a transient reaction from Napoleonic fashions; but from the middle of the nineteenth century onward the prestige of the soldier resumed its advance and the military uniform became increasingly pervasive. Flags became more abundant in the towns and “flag-days” dotted the calendar. There was never a crowd pictured in Europe after 1870 without a soldier or so.

The Great War greatly intensified the military element in the street population, not only in Europe but America. Various corps of feminine auxiliaries were enrolled during that time and paraded the world thereafter in appetising soldierly outfits. In the United States, except at Washington, or when there was a parade of civil war veterans, a soldier in uniform had been hitherto the rarest of birds. He would have felt strange and uncomfortable. He would have offended the susceptibilities of a consciously liberated people. The Great War changed all that. When Germany was disarmed after the war, a Nazi movement and a Reichsbanner movement supplied the needed colour until a German’s freedom to get into properly recognized livery was restored. The pattern of half-military, half-civilian organizations in uniform had already been spread about the world between the South African War (1899-1901) and the Great War, by the Boy Scout movement.

Of the Nazi movement, the Italian Fascisti and the Polish Brotherhood at least there will be more to tell later. The black and brown shirts may be cited here as instances of the visible breaking-down of the boundaries between military and civil life that went on during and after the World War.

Hitherto war had been a marginal business, fought upon “fronts”, and the ordinary citizen had lived in comparative security behind the front, but the bombing, gas-diffusing aeroplane, and later the long-range air torpedo, changed all that. The extended use of propaganda as a weapon, and the increasing danger of social mutiny under war stress, had also its share in making the entire surface of a belligerent country a war area and abolishing any vestiges of civil liberty, first during actual warfare and then in view of warfare. The desirability of getting everyone under orders, under oath, and subject to prompt disciplinary measures, became more and more manifest to governments.

So within a century the appearance of the human crowd changed over from a varied assembly of incoordinated free individuals to a medley of uniforms. Everybody’s dress at last indicated function, obligation and preparedness. The militarization of the European multitude reached a
maximum during the Polish wars. About 1942 gas masks, either actually worn or hanging from the neck, were common for a time, and so, too, were the small sheath-knives which were to be used in disposing of fallen aviators who might still be alive. Patella metal hats and metal epaulettes to protect the head and body against a rain of poisoned needles also appeared. Some civilians became far more formidable-looking than any soldiers.

The military authorities of those days were much perplexed by the problem of giving the general population protective apparatus and light weapons that would be effective against the military enemy and yet useless for the purposes of insurrection. For in spite of the most strenuous suppression of agitation in those troubled decades, the possible revolt of humanity against warfare, the possibility of complete “loss of morale”, however illogical and incoherent, was felt by the professional soldiers as an increasing menace.

Along the streets of most of the old-world cities there presently appeared the characteristic yellow (or in France blue, and in America red-and-white-striped) air-raid pillars with their glass faces, only to be broken into and used after an official alarm, which contained respirators and first-aid sets for possible gas victims. It is also to the same period we have to ascribe the multiplication of vivid and abundant direction signs at every street corner, set so as to throw a minimum of light upward and pointing the way to gas chambers and hospitals. It was a “gas-minded” world in the ‘forties. The practical suppression of other vivid and illuminated street signs was a natural corollary to this preoccupation.

In the first half of the twentieth century the cities blazed with advertisement. It was the period of maximum advertisement. The pictures of the Great White Way of New York, Piccadilly Circus, the Grands Boulevards of Paris and so forth, with their polychromatic visual clamour, still strike us as distractingly picturesque. There was much flood-lighting after 1928. Then progressively the lights were turned down again and that visual clamour died away. As the air threat returned, “lights out” became at last imperative, except for the vivid furtive indications of refuge and first aid we have just mentioned.

War fear spread very rapidly after 1930. Darkness recaptured the nocturnal town. “Night-life” became stealthy and obscure, with an increasing taint of criminality. All civil hospitals and all private doctors had disappeared from the world by 1945 and the health services were only legally demilitarized again after 2010. The amalgamation of the military and civil hospital and medical services began in France as early as 1933. By 1945 every doctor in the Old World was, in theory at least, on a quasi-military footing; he wore a distinctive uniform, was subject to stringent discipline, and his premises, as well as the hospitals, bore the characteristic black-and-yellow chequerwork. All nurses were similarly enrolled. Finally the general public was enrolled for health treatment as
common patients under oath. By 1948 in such towns as had sufficiently survived the general social demoralization to enforce such regulations, it was impossible to take a chill or break an ankle without at once falling into the category of patients and being numbered, put into a black-and-yellow uniform and marched or carried off for treatment. Theoretically this system of treatment was universal. In practice neither the uniforms nor the doctors were available. For regulation and militarization were going on in that period against an immense counter-drive towards social disintegration. The more humanity got into uniform, the shabbier the uniforms became.

Before the Polish struggle, general architecture was very little affected by military needs. The militarization of costume preceded the militarization of scenery. Even barracks and such-like army buildings were erected by army architects as a simple vulgarization of ordinary housing patterns, a mere stiffening up, so to speak, of the common “jerry-built” house. There still survive for our astonishment pictures of Victorian Military Gothic and Victorian Military Tudor, produced under the British War Office. They display homes fit for drill-sergeants. The military mind had to be roused by the experiences of the Polish conflict to the profound reconstruction of the ordinary town that had become necessary if it was still to be taken seriously. Before then, fortification scarcely affected the urban scene at all, even in the case of a fortified town. Previously a fortress had been just an ordinary civil town surrounded at distances of from three to fifty miles by forts, strong points, trench systems and the like. Now it was realized, first in Berlin, and then in Danzig, Warsaw, Paris and Turin, and after that by the whole world, that air warfare demanded not merely fortification round a town, but much more imperatively, fortification OVER a town. The world, which had been far too stupid to realize in 1930 that the direct way out of its economic difficulties lay in the modernization and rebuilding of its houses, set itself, in a state of war panic after 1942, to as complete a revision of its architecture in the face of bombs and gas as its deepening impoverishment permitted. What it would not do for prosperity, it attempted belatedly out of fear.

The first most obvious undertaking was the construction of those immense usually ill-built concrete cavern systems for refuge, whose vestiges are still to be visited by the curious tourist at Paris and Berlin (the London ones have all fallen in, the collapse beginning after the great landslip and fire), and close upon this came the cessation of tall building and the concentration of design upon the vast (and often dangerous) carapace roof and its gigantic supporting pillars and foundation rafts. Only the ever-deepening poverty, the increasing industrial disorganization and the transitoriness of that last war-phase saved all the towns in the world from being thrust completely under such squat massive coverings.

So strong were the influences of that time that even up to 2020 the
tendency of architectural design was to crouch. Hardly any mass of buildings erected between 1945 and the end of the century lifts up its head and looks the world in the face. That period has been called, not unjustly, Second Egyptian. And this was so in spite of the multiplying opportunities for grace and lightness afforded by the supersession of steel frame buildings by the strong and flexible neo-concrete materials that were already available. How timidly they were used! We grovel no longer because we are ceasing to fear each other. The soaring, ever improving homes in which we live to-day would have sent our great-grandfathers scurrying to their cellars in an ecstasy of terror.
7. The Great War of 1914-1918

There is a monstrous tedious accumulation of records concerned with the World War. The Catalogue of Historical Material stored at Atacama gives a list of 2,362,705 books and gross files, up to date, and of these over 182,000 deal exclusively or largely with the causation of the war. Nothing could bring home to the student the profound difference in mental equipment between ourselves and the men and women of that period than a visit to the long silent galleries of that great library of dead disputes and almost completely forgotten records. He will see hardly a visitor along the vistas of that shining framework of shelves; a quiet cleaner or duster perhaps will be visible, scrutinizing the condition of the material, or a young revisionist student patiently checking some current summary — or a black cat. For the rest, above, below, to right and left is a clean and luminous stillness; papers at rest.

In one large section of this sere honeycomb the student will find the records of the “war guilt controversy” that agitated the world for decades after the Peace of Versailles. Let him draw out a seat anywhere and take down a file or so at hazard and turn over its pages. He will be able to read almost all of it nowadays, whatever the original language, because practically all the collection has now been interleaved with translations into Basic English. And it will seem to him that he is reading the outpourings of lunatics, so completely have the universal obsessions of that time been exorcized since.

Had “Germany” planned the war? Was “France” the guilty party? Had “Britain” much to answer for? With difficulty will the student let down his mind into the fantastic world of extinct imaginations in which these strange personifications, as monstrous and incredible as the ancient gods of India, were treated as real and morally responsible individuals, hated, trusted, feared and loved. The war was, in immediate fact, an aimless and fruitless slaughter upon the altars of these stupendous deities, the wounding and mutilation of perhaps twenty million human beings, and a vast burning-up of material wealth. In the crazy fancy of our ancestors it was a noble and significant struggle. Happily we need not revive their craziness here. The question of “war guilt” was never settled. It ceased to be pursued, it was neglected, it floated away into the absurd, and little but those three hundred feet or so of forgotten books and gross files remain to testify to its vanished importance.

The causation of the struggle was, indeed, perfectly simple. It arose naturally and necessarily from that irregular and disproportionate growth of human appliances as compared with the extension of political and social intelligence we have already described.

The new means of communication and transport, and the new economic life which demanded the products of every zone and soil for its purposes,
were necessitating the reorganization of human affairs as a World-State, and since the world was already parcelled up among sixty-odd competing sovereign governments there were only two possible courses open to mankind, either to arrange the coalescence of these governments by treaty and rational arrangements to meet the new need, or to allow a steadily intensified mutual pressure to develop into more or less thinly disguised attempts at world conquest. In the decades before the war the British, French, German, Russian, Japanese and American systems were all, as the word went then, “imperialist” — all, that is, attempting to become World-States on a planet on which obviously there was room only for one single World-State. Nothing of the sort had been apparent when the methods of European statescraft had been devised. These vaster possibilities had yawned open afterwards. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were centuries of small restricted wars for limited advantages. In the twentieth century the scale of war expanded beyond any limit and the advantages to be won by it disappeared. But the politicians and diplomats played their time-honoured game against each other with a sort of terrified inevitability. They were driven; they had no control, or at least none of them seemed to have had the vigour and imagination to attempt a control. They were driven by the economic necessity we have explained in the previous section. They had to arm preposterously. They had to threaten. They had to go through with the business.

These forces account for the outbreak and universality of the Great War, but they do not account for its peculiar frightfulness. For that it is necessary to realize that though governments expanded only against an enormous pressure of mutual restraint, no limitations had been set to the hypertrophy of financial and industrial enterprises. These last were under the sway of a relentless and unrestrained progress; they expanded, invented, urged and sold; they brought weapons of a strange and terrible effectiveness to the settlement of what were in comparison small and antiquated disputes. To that hypertrophy of the armourer we will return presently, because the Great War was really only a first revelation of this particular disproportion between economics and politics, and the evil still went on in an exaggerated form after the formal conclusion of the struggle at the Peace of Versailles (1919). But let us first tell what needs to be known of the details of the Great War.

How little that is now! There is a vast literature both of fiction based on experience and of personal reminiscence about it, and some of it is admirably written; almost any of it may be read for interest and edification and hardly any of it need be read with scholarly precision. The picture of the outbreak of the war still touches us. There was a curious unconsciousness of the grossness of the menace in events, even on the part of myriads doomed to suffer and die in a few months’ time. Many of the stories told begin with a holiday party or a country-house gathering or some such bright setting. The weather that August (1914) was
exceptionally fine.

The details of the struggle itself were as horrible and distressing as they were inconsequent, and there is no need whatever for anyone but the specialist to master their sequence in detail. The old-fashioned history, with its lists of names, dates, battles and so on, was designed rather to supply easily marked material for examinations than to give any sense of the historical process. Examinations have long passed out of educational practice; they have gone to join the “globs” and the abacus, the slate and the cane in the scholastic limbo, but their memory is preserved in the popular game of “examination papers”, when people write down as fast as they can and as much as they can about some suddenly selected subject.

Few of us could write even a brief account now of the World War. The names of such generals as Haig, Kitchener, French, Joffre, Foch and Ludendorff, to take names at random, and such battles as Tannenberg, the Marne, the Somme, Paschendaele, the Falkland Isles, Jutland and so forth, mean nothing and need mean nothing to the ordinary citizen to-day. He does not know whether French was really French or not, nor whether Foch was a Frenchman or a German. He inclines to the latter view. He does not know who won or lost these conflicts and he does not care. He has not even a sporting interest in it. They were not lively fights. Nearly all the commanders concerned had dull and unattractive personalities and the business was altogether too unwieldy for them. Most of their operations were densely stupid, muddled both in conception and execution. One would as soon listen to a child reciting not very accurately and at endless length the deals and tricks of some game of cards it has played, or imagines it has played, as read their memoirs — packed as they too often are with self-exculpation, personal resentments and malice. Faint, faded, immense and far-off tragedies, these struggles that were to have astounded posterity have already gone far towards complete effacement in any but a few specializing minds, are hardly more vivid now in our collective consciousness than the battles of the Peloponnesian War — or the campaigns and conquests of Tamerlane. They had nothing of the primary historical importance and strategic splendour which have restored the gigantic military conceptions of Genghis Khan to an integral place in our ordinary educational curriculum.

For the rodomontade of the conflict the curious cannot do better than glance through the eager narrative of Winston Churchill’s World Crisis. There one finds all the stereotyped flourishes and heroisms of nineteenth-century history from the British point of view; the “drama of history” in rich profusion, centred upon one of the most alert personalities in the conflict. He displays a vigorous naïve puerility that still gives his story an atoning charm. He has the insensitiveness of a child of thirteen. His soldiers are toy soldiers and he loves to knock over a whole row of them. He enjoyed the war. He takes himself and all the now forgotten
generals and statesmen of the war with a boyish seriousness. He passes grave judgments on their tragic fooleries and distributes compliments and blame, often in the most gracious manner, convinced that he is writing for a meticulously admiring and envious posterity. They would read, they would marvel. He was the sort of man who believed that when he begot children he created an audience. He was misled by the excitement of his own reading of history. He not only measures for us the enormous gulf between the mentality of his times and our own, but he enables us to bridge that gulf with an amused and forgiving sympathy.

A less attractive spirit displays itself in the memoirs of such figures as Ludendorff, Bülow, Clemenceau, Fisher, Foch, and so through the whole category of war leaders. The war was the supreme event in the lives of most of these men and apparently they were never able to think of anything else afterwards. They had none of the recuperative innocence of Churchill, his terrier-like interest in everything. They all took to writing furiously in their declining years and no other pens could have damned them so completely. They are grown-up and yet under-developed persons; as adult as old chimpanzees; they cannot claim Churchill's benefit of schoolboy, and there is a real horror in their wrinkled meannesses and envies, their gross enthusiasms and their sincere bloodthirstiness and hate. Most of their mutual recriminations are too incomprehensible to be of the slightest interest now; spite and twaddle are still spite and twaddle even if drenched with blood. The most accessible sample for the contemporary reader is The Life and Diaries of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Bart., G.C.B., D.S.O., a lean, unsightly man of infinite energy, gusto and vanity, who played a very prominent rôle in bringing about and carrying out the catastrophe. It is the latest reprint in the Historical Documents Series; it is richly illustrated and abundantly annotated, and with it are bound up the brilliantly scornful criticisms of Wilson’s contemporary, Sir Andrew Macphail, and Stephen Freudheim’s more scientific analysis of him as the supreme type of the “soldierly mind”.

For the grimmer actualities of the struggle there is a vast and sombre literature. It has been summarized in the last fifteen years by the Historical Bureau in its War Pictures for Posterity by Pen, Pencil and Camera. Everyone should turn over those strange incredible records of endurance, callousness, devotion and insane courage, to learn something of the extremes to which men and women like ourselves can be pushed by the grim forces of social compulsion.

The earlier volumes deal chiefly with the psychology of the more than half civilized citizens of the Atlantic and North European states suddenly precipitated into a maelstrom of destruction. We see the urban crowds demonstrating and cheering in the streets of the capital cities, the floods of youths coming from their work to “join up”, the wonder and unimaginative fierceness and heroism of the opening stage. Then come the first contacts,
villages in flames, the wild shooting of curious bystanders as spies and guerillas, realizations of horror and a wave of fear, the invaded populations in flight, black crowds with their pitiful impedimenta streaming along darkling roads, going they know not whither. The rifles and machine-guns rattle, the guns thud, and the cheering adventurousness of the advancing armies as they blunder heavily into contact passes into a phase of astounded violence and hardship. The new war was like no war that had ever been before. The French upon their eastern front went forward to the attack with immense élan, in bright uniforms and to the historical inspiration of the “Marseillaise”. They were massacred. They lost a third of a million men in three weeks. The Germans poured through Belgium, more than a million strong, to be stopped and stunned with Paris almost within their grasp. The pictures show the smiling landscape of eastern Belgium, France and east Prussia in July 1914, and the same countryside a couple of months later — torn, scored and trenched, defiled with bloody heaps of litter that were once clothed bodies, an anguish of countless thousands of unclean, hungry, exhausted, cruelty-wrung human beings.

These bands of contact, these regions of filthy pain and tumult, spread. Presently there were “war zones” reaching from the North Sea to the Alps and across Eastern Europe, strange regions in which every house was a ruin, every tree a splintered trunk, where millions of crouching men went to and fro in trenches and ditches furtively like rats, and the ragged dead lay unburied. There day and night the superfluous energy of a profiteering economic system, denied all other outlet by its own preconceptions and the rigid historical traditions in which it was blinkered, blew itself away in the incessant concussions of mines, bombs and guns and a continued destruction of human life.

Presently newly invented weapons, hitherto untried, came to extend and intensify the struggle. The aeroplane, and that primitive “navigable” the Zeppelin, carried the war behind the fronts and attacked the civilian population in the cities. We see the explosive and incendiary bombs bursting into the dirty little urban homes of the time, blowing to rags the bed-rid grandmother and the baby in the cradle; we see the panic-stricken crowds seeking the shelter of cellars and excavations and the drainlike railway “tubes” of the time. In the early stages of the air-war only explosives and inflammatory substances were used, but as the struggle progressed the art of using gas bombs developed, and an agonizing suffocation was added to the nocturnal chances of flame and explosion and death among fallen ruins for the non-combatant at home. The submarine, also, was a novelty of the Great War, and a very searching novelty. It was used first to sink fighting ships and then it was turned against all sea-going craft. We have vivid descriptions of the sinking of the Lusitania without warning and the drowning of 1,198 men, women and children. She was, by the standards of the time, a great and luxurious ship, and a sort of symbolism was found by the writers of this period in this sudden descent
from light, comfort and confidence into a desperate and hopeless struggle
in the waters of the night. All the achievements of nineteenth-century
civilization seemed to many to be following in the downward wake of the
Lusitania.

Service in these early submarines strained men to the breaking point. They
were essentially engines of war, they had all the defects of inventions at an
early stage, and none of the security and comfort of the great submarine
barges that are used to-day for the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ridge
mines and for general deep sea exploration. These, with their beautifully
adjusted pressure systems and their limitless vertical range, are calculated
rather to mislead than enlighten us as to the capabilities of the primitive
submarines of the Great War. The latter were able to descend safely only to
a depth of a hundred metres; below that the pressure became too much for
them and their plates gave and leaked. When they leaked the salt water
was apt to affect the accumulators and chlorine gas was released to
torment and suffocate the crews. Below a hundred and fifty metres these
fragile contrivances crumpled up altogether and were destroyed. The air in
them became foul when they submerged, in spite of the compressed
oxygen they carried, and the continual condensation of exhaled moisture
gave them a peculiar clammy discomfort. They could move about under
water for a couple of days by means of their electric batteries, but then it
was necessary to come to the surface and run their oil combustion engines
for some hours to recharge. Armed with guns and packed with mines,
bombs, torpedoes and other explosives, they set out to harass and destroy
the surface shipping of the enemy.

It was a difficult and almost fantastically dangerous task. Submerged, they
were invisible, but also they were blind. Near the surface they could get a
limited view of what was going on by means of a periscope. On the surface
they had the range of outlook of any other surface boat, but at all the risks
a surface boat must take. So under conditions of extreme discomfort and
partial asphyxiation the crews of these strangely formidable and strangely
fragile contrivances groped their way towards their victims. To see the
quarry fairly they had to come to the surface, and that exposed them to
gunfire. If their thin steel skins were pierced by a single shot they could no
longer go under. Often when submerged they betrayed their whereabouts
unwittingly by bubbles of gas and escapes of oil.

At first, in spite of their limitations, the submarines proved a very deadly
weapon, more particularly in the hands of the Central European Powers.
They destroyed a great multitude of ships and drowned many score
thousands of men. Then slowly the methods used against them improved.
They were hunted by a special flotilla, and among other ships by the “Q”
boats, armed vessels disguised as harmless merchantmen. These lured
them to the surface and then let down sham bulwarks and opened fire
upon them, so that after a time they no longer dared emerge to challenge
even the most harmless-looking craft. Explosive mines were moored in their possible tracks and mine-armed nets set across harbours and channels. They were also watched for by aeroplanes and special airships whose signals guided the destroyers to their quarry. Ingenious listening contrivances were invented to locate them. They were shot at on the surface, rammed, and pursued by “depth charges” which could strain their plates and disable them even when exploded scores of metres away.

Such, briefly, were the conditions of submarine warfare in the years 1917-18. And yet to the very end of the war men could be found to carry it on, to destroy and drown and be in their turn hunted and destroyed. The building and launching of submersibles never ceased. Men went down in them to chilly confinement, to the perpetual anxiety of mine or ram, to the quivering menace of the distant depth charge, to the reasonable probability of a frightful death beyond all human aid. Few submarines returned to harbour ten times; many went out new upon their first voyage never to return. Two hundred of them were lost by the Germans alone; each loss a tragedy of anguish and dismay in the deeps. Towards the end it was claimed by their antagonists that the crews were losing morale. Once or twice an undamaged submarine that had been cornered surrendered, and the new commanders showed a growing tendency to return to port for minor repairs or other slight pretexts. But on the whole, such is the unimaginative heroic submissiveness of our species, the service was sustained. The Germans supplied most of the flesh for this particular altar; willing and disciplined, their youngsters saluted and carried their kit down the ladder into this gently swaying clumsy murder mechanism which was destined to become their coffin.

Their obedience brings us to one of the most fundamental lessons that the Great War has for us: the extreme slowness with which the realization of even the most obvious new conditions pierces through the swathings of habitual acceptance. Millions of human beings went open-eyed to servitude, bullying, hardship, suffering and slaughter, without a murmur, with a sort of fatalistic pride. In obedience to the dictates of the blindest prejudices and the most fatuous loyalties they did their utmost to kill men against whom they had no conceivable grievance, and they were in their turn butchered gallantly, fighting to the last. The War Pictures volumes dismay our imaginations by portraying a series of wholesale butcheries, many of them on a stupendous scale, of men who died facing their enemies. After the great slaughter of the French at the outset of the war, and a mighty killing of Russians at the Battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes, there was during what was called the deadlock period, the period of trench warfare, a diminution of the losses upon the West. Hostilities sank down to a gusty conflict of shell-fire, rifle assassinations, and raids with bombs and bludgeons. In the East, however, the Russians ran out of ammunition, and held their trenches only by a great martyrdom of men; they lost well over a million before the end of 1914, and yet they
continued to obey orders. A series of minor campaigns broke out in regions remote from the main centres of contact. There is a horrible account in the Pictures of the sufferings of some thousands of British common soldiers taken prisoners at Kut, in Mesopotamia. (Their generals and other officers, however, who had arranged that particular capitulation, were honourably and comfortably entertained by their captors the Turks.) There is no effective expression of resentment by the British troops on record.

In 1916 and 1917 there were spasmodic renewals of hostilities on a large scale by the British and French in France. Newly trained British armies were made to advance in close formation by generals who, unless they were imbeciles, could have had no doubts of the fate to which they were sending their men. If they were not imbeciles then they were criminally unwilling to learn and soul-blind to suffering and waste. The mentality of these men is still a matter for discussion. The poor boys they commanded were marched forward shoulder to shoulder in successive waves of attack, and so advancing they were shot to pieces by the enemy machine-guns. Out of battalions of six or seven hundred, perhaps a hundred would struggle through the defensive fire and come to bomb-throwing, bayonet-thrusts and surrender in the German trenches. Small isolated groups of them in shell-holes and captured positions fought on for days. So perished the flower of an entire school generation, collected from hundreds of thousands of homes, more or less loved, more or less cared for and more or less educated; it had been enlisted, trained, sent out to the battlefields at enormous cost, to be left at last in the desolated spaces between the armies, lying in heaps and swathes to rot and be rat-eaten. For months afterwards, as the photographs show, thousands of them were to be seen sprawling in formation as they fell, just as if their ranks were still waiting to leap again to the attack. But as the observer drew nearer he realized their corruption. He discovered bony hands, eyeless sockets, faces far gone in decay.

The British commander-in-chief in his despatches did not fail to extol the courage of his lost battalions and to represent this monstrous exploit as a victory. Some mile or so of ground had been gained in that July offensive and less than 12,000 prisoners had been taken. Twice as many British were left prisoners in German hands, but this the despatches ignored. The appalling nature of this particular disaster leaked out only very slowly. The British censorship at least was efficient and the generals, however incapable in other respects, lied magnificently. The Channel crossing made it particularly easy to hide events from the British public. And it had a peculiar effect on the British troops; it gave them a feeling of being in another and a different world from “home”, a war-world in which such cruel and fantastic things could be natural. This monstrous massacre was, indeed, contrived and carried through, not simply without a revolt, but with scarcely an audible protest on the part of either the parents, relations,
friends or surviving comrades of those hosts of wasted victims.

The commanders of the Russian armies in Austria, Armenia and elsewhere were announcing equally costly and heroic triumphs and the Germans and Austrians were issuing the most valiant and excessive contradictions of their claims. They, too, were losing hideously enough, though in a lesser proportion than their opponents. The next year (1917), the British, gallant and docile as ever, with only very slightly improved tactics, were going again into great offensives.

But now the French troops began to manifest a livelier intelligence. They were amidst familiar things, nearer their homes and less cut off from subversive influences than the British. A certain General Nivelle, at that time French Commander-in-Chief, made what Churchill calls an “experiment”, which resulted altogether in the loss of nearly a couple of hundred thousand men. It involved the advance of masses of infantry into intense fields of fire. In an hour, said Lieutenant Ybarnegearay (in a debate in the French Chamber, June 1917), they were reduced to a crowd “running like madmen”, all formations and distinctions lost. Provision had been made for less than 15,000 wounded. There were seven times as many. Most of the casualties never received the most elementary attention for three days. The result was gangrene, amputation and death for thousands. Then came the first intimation that there were limits to human obedience. A French division ordered into action to continue this futile holocaust refused to march. Churchill says this was “deeply disquieting” to the authorities, and no doubt it pained and distressed every intelligent amateur of war. This particular division was cajoled into a change of mind. It took part in the fighting, says Churchill, “without discredit”, but the spirit of its resistance spread.

The next sign of sanity in this world torture was the collapse of the grotesque Russian autocracy. We have already told of the mental and moral decay of the Tzardom in our general study of the degeneration of monarchy. [Non inventus. — ED.] Abruptly this profoundly rotten government collapsed into nothing; its vast domains became a various disorder, and for some months phantom imitations of Western revolutionaries, inspired by memories of the first French revolution or by legends of British parliamentary wisdom, occupied the capital. The one certain fact in the situation was the accumulated disinclination of the Russian people for any further warfare. But this first republican government under an eloquent lawyer politician, of no great directive force, Alexandre Kerensky, was unable either to carry on the war or to end it. A subdued but spreading clamour for “peace by negotiation” in all the combatant countries ensued, a clamour that active repression and the most rigorous concealment in the Press failed to silence. There was an attempt to call a sort of peace conference of Radicals at Stockholm, and then a second revolution in Russia which carried a small and resolute Communist
organization to power — carried it to power simply and solely because there was no other organized alternative, and because it promised peace plainly and surely — peace on any terms. The Russian armies melted away at its signal; the men streamed home. The German military authorities in the East found the trenches before them undefended, and with every courtesy of war, as one soldier to another, welcomed the Russian officers of the old régime, taking refuge from the belated resentment of their own men.

In 1917 mankind seemed already to be awakening from the war-nightmare. Mutinies broke out in sixteen separate French army corps, 115 regiments were involved, divisions elected soldiers’ councils and whole regiments set out for Paris to demand a reasonable wind-up of the struggle. The one last hope of the despairing soldiers, said Pierre Laval, had been Stockholm. That disappointment had made life unbearable. But the storm abated with the entry of the United States of America into the war, and the powers in control of the Western World were still able to pursue their dreadful obsessions for another year.

War Pictures for Posterity by Pen, Pencil and Camera devotes a whole volume (xxi) to the tragedy of a special Russian infantry corps in France. Fifteen thousand Russians had been sent thither in 1916 to be equipped and armed and put into the line with the French armies. Many of these poor lads scarcely knew the difference between a Frenchman and a German, and the ostensible objects of the war were quite beyond their understanding. But they heard of the revolution in their own country and they resolved to consider their attitude with regard to it. They elected representatives and put it to the vote whether they should continue to fight, which meant for them to take part in that “experiment” of Nivelle’s known to be in preparation at the time. They chose what seemed to them the generous part and went into the battle. The French command used them ruthlessly, and nearly 6,000 were killed or wounded. The rest came out of the line and mutinied. They would fight no more. Thereupon these defenceless men were surrounded by trustworthy French troops, a great concentration of guns was assembled, fire was opened upon them suddenly and they were massacred. Horrible photographs of the details of this — photographs hidden away at the time from the authorities and brought to light later — are given in the summary already cited.

For nearly a year the French lost confidence in the morale of their own men and dared make no more great attacks, but their allies offered up another 400,000 men in the battle of Paschendaele and accounted for 300,000 Germans, and in the spring the Germans made a vast multitudinous attack in the West which succeeded at first and then collapsed, whereupon their antagonists, reinforced by new armies from America, waded back through blood to a dreadful final victory. The last nine months of the conflict saw more slaughter than any preceding year.
From March 21st, 1918, to November 11th in the same year the British suffered 830,000 casualties, the French and Belgians 964,000 and the Germans 1,470,000. There were also 2,000,000 American troops brought to Europe before the end, and of these more than half were actually engaged in the fighting. Their casualties were certainly not less than 350,000. Portuguese and other contingents from the most unexpected quarters also contributed to that culminating death-roll, but it is impossible for us now to give exact numbers for these minor forces.

These are the gross figures of warfare. But War Pictures devotes three volumes, perhaps the most horrible of all, to the presentation of various details of the fighting in which these vast multitudes suffered and perished. These three volumes are like the microscopic slides in a specimen book of anatomy, which show us from a selected scrap of tissue the texture of the whole. Little figures stand out enlarged, chosen by the hazard that they wrote or talked or carried a camera, to represent the nameless millions who have left no record. We have accounts of men who were left to lie out for days between the lines, tortured by thirst and stifled by the stench of their own corruption, and yet who survived to tell the tale. We have the stories of men who fell into heaps of rotting dead, and lay there choking, and of men who were gassed. The tortures of gas were already many and various, and most of the mixtures then used left tormenting weaknesses in the system for the rest of life. We have descriptions of the rude surgery of the time and abstracts of the mental disorders through which minds fled from reality. There are also some dreadful pictures of mutilated men, faceless, crippled, grotesquely distorted, and an autobiography of one of the blinded (Outstaying My Welcome, by Fritz Schiff, 1923). Scores of thousands of unhappy fragments of humanity had to be hidden away in special institutions until they died, they were at once so terrifying and so pitiful and hopeless. The world forgot them even while they lived.

The distortion of souls was even more dreadful than the distortion of bodies. One of the most lurid items in that dreadful assemblage of realities is a lecture on the use of the bayonet, which chanced to be printed, reprinted later by anti-war propagandists and so preserved for us, delivered by a certain Sergeant-Major Franklin to some English cadets in London. To us he is incredible in his ferocity; we are almost forced to believe he was drunk or mad, until we realize from the “laughter” that punctuated his utterances, from the hearty thanks of his commanding officer, and the “three cheers” which rewarded him at the conclusion of his discourse, that he was merely expressing the spirit of war service as it was then understood.

“If you see a wounded German,” he said, “shove him out and have no nonsense about it.”

He was all against taking prisoners — and for murdering them after
surrender. He told with sympathy and approval of how a corporal under him butchered a group of German boys. “Can I do these blokes in, sir?” asked the corporal, pointing to a bunch of disarmed enemies.

“Please yourself,” said the sergeant-major.

When they had been “done in”, the honest corporal, a released convict from Dartmoor prison, came back to the sergeant-major very gratified and honoured, and, still in favour, discussed the technical difficulties of withdrawing a bayonet quickly in order to be ready for the “next fellow”.

That was, that is, the spirit to which war brings a human being. Sergeant-Major Franklin had his abundant equivalents in every army engaged. We are able to quote an English document, freely published. Participants in many other countries had less freedom. On the whole the English were as gentle as any other soldiers. But fear and bloodlust, it is plain, wipe out all the slowly acquired restraints and tolerance of social order very quickly and completely from any breed of men. History must not be written in pink and gilt. Prisoners and wounded were not simply neglected and ill-treated and “shoved out”. Many were actually tortured to death — either by way of reprisals or in sheer wanton cruelty. There is also a series of photographs of foully mutilated bodies, mutilated and indecently displayed while they were dying or immediately after they were dead. Those millions marched indeed right out of civilization, right out of any sort of human life as we know it to-day, marched down to something viler than mere bestiality, when they marched into the war zone.

After the summer of 1918, which brought with it the certainty of ultimate defeat, the combatant energy of Germany evaporated. Everywhere there was distress and hunger due to a rigorous blockade. The discipline of the land relaxed; the country behind the front was infested by stragglers; the Higher German Command found itself now, like its antagonists, unable to rely upon the men to advance, found itself unable to rely upon their resistance to an enemy attack. They became eager to surrender — taking the off-chance of meeting experimental corporals from Dartmoor on the way.

Wherever there was still loyalty and obedience, however, men were still callously sacrificed by the Higher Command. War Pictures (vol. xxvii, 23842 et seq.) show the German machine-gunners in their pits, on the defensive against advancing British and American troops. These men allowed themselves to be drugged and chained to their weapons, and so continued to fire and kill until the attack came up to them. Then they found small mercy. They were bayoneted or their brains were beaten out. They paid for the inventions of their masters. They paid for the hatred of Germany the introduction of poison gas had evoked in every attacking army. Such residues of senseless devotion availed nothing against the massive pressures that were at last exhausting Germany. In November the
Kaiser, the War Lord, was in flight; a humiliating Armistice had been concluded and the German armies were streaming home in disorder, incoherently revolutionary.

Upon that phrase, “incoherently revolutionary”, our account of the main war may very well end. Here we will only allude to the defeat and demoralization of the Italian armies after the battle of Caporetto, when 800,000 were either killed, wounded, taken prisoner, or (sensible fellows) “went home”. Nor will we describe the naval battles, of which the chief and last was Jutland. It was the last, because afterwards the German admirals were faced by the threat of mutiny if they essayed another fight. Whether it was or was not a victory for the British was never exactly determined. The controversy died out during the Polish wars.

The War Pictures volumes give many photographs and accounts of these naval encounters. We have, for example, a whole series of snapshots of a British cruiser in the Battle of Jutland, the Defence steaming at full-speed-ahead to attack and finish up a smashed and sinking German battleship, the Wiesbaden. The onrush of that fierce mechanism is terrific. It seems invincible and overpowering. It has an undeniable splendour. Then suddenly a series of blinding flashes show the Defence has been hit by the fire of some other German battleship coming to the help of her sister ship, and in a moment she has blown up and gone; she is no more than a mounting unfolding column of smoke and flying fragments, including, we realize with an effort, the torn and scalded bodies of eight hundred men. Then a welter of littered tumbled water. . . .

There is no end to the multitude of such pictures.

But let us return to our phrase “incoherently revolutionary”. That is the key to the whole human situation at that time. The distaste for the war throughout the world was enormous, if not in its opening phases, then certainly before the second year was reached. It bored; it disgusted. Its events had none of the smashing decisiveness that seizes the imagination. Even the great naval battle of Jutland was, from the point of view of spectacle, a complete failure. None the less, for a very simple reason a comparatively small minority of resolutely belligerent persons was able to keep this vast misery going. On the one hand the war was in accordance with the ruling ideas of the time, while on the other the hundreds of millions whose astonishment and dismay deepened daily, as horror unfolded beyond horror, had no conception of any alternative pattern of life to which they could turn as a refuge from its relentless sequences.

To cry “End the war” ended nothing, because it gave no intimations of what had to replace belligerent governments in the control of human affairs. The peace the masses craved for was as yet only a featureless negative. But peace must be a positive thing, designed and sustained, for peace is less natural than warfare. We who have at last won through to the
Pax Mundi know how strong and resolute, how powerfully equipped and how vigilant, the keepers of the peace must be.
8. The Impulse to Abolish War; The Episode of the Ford Peace Ship

One quaint expedition, grotesque and childish and yet an augury of greater things to come, flits very illuminatingly across the dreadful record of these war years. It is the voyage of a passenger steamship from New York to Norway. The dark curtains of oblivion fall in heavier and heavier folds before the thundering battleships of the twilit Battle of Jutland; their forgotten names sink back into a vague general impression of huge flame-spouting masses that rush through smoke and mist to their fate; only a specialist can tell us now whether the Lützow or the Friedrich der Grosse, the Lion, or the Iron Duke, the Vanguard or the Colossus perished with its complement of men or staggered out of that battle. They have become monstrous irrelevances. There is nothing but their size, and the smashing and drowning of hundreds of men in them, to make them more significant to us now than an exploding casket of fireworks. But steaming its way across the Atlantic a few months before Jutland was fought came this other ship, a passenger boat of the Scandinavian-American line, the Oscar II, whose voyage remains to this day important and interesting, because in the most simple and artless fashion it mingled the new conceptions of life that were coming into being, with all the prevalent weaknesses of the time. The Oscar II is better known in history as the Peace Ship of Henry Ford. It is a gleam of tragic comedy amidst the universal horror.

This Henry Ford was a very natural-minded mechanical genius, without much education or social sophistication, a great friend of, and kindred spirit with, that Edison whose career has been traced in the chapter of human history dealing with the development and exploitations of inventions at the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Born and brought up in a period of economic expansion, Ford took economic expansion as if it were a necessity inherent in things, and never began to doubt continual progress until he was a man of over seventy. That was his good fortune. That gave him the confidence to design an automobile as sound and good and cheap as could be done at that time, and to organize the mass production of his pattern with extraordinary energy and skill, because his mind was untroubled by the thought that there could be a limit to the number of possible purchasers. He marketed his “flivver”, or “tin lizzie”, as it was affectionately called, in enormous quantities, and in consequence he revolutionized the road transport and town planning of America. He changed the shape of every growing town by enabling the small householder to live further from the work and business centre than had ever been possible before. He did more than any other single man to drive the horse not only from the road but, by making farm tractors, from the fields. He created factories at Dearborn that even to-day seem vast. He became enormously rich and an outstanding “character” in the world, and particularly in America. And he remained curiously simple
and direct in his outlook upon life.

The first effect of the Great War upon him, as on a vast proportion of the English-speaking peoples, was incredulous amazement. He had known there were armies and sovereign nations in the world, but apparently he had never supposed they would fight. He felt there must be some mistake. He exchanged views with other Americans in a similar phase of astonishment. By the beginning of 1915 they had accumulated a sufficient mass of evidence from the belligerent countries to convince them that great masses of people in these countries were as amazed and as anxious to end the widening bloodshed and brutalization as the neutral onlookers. There had been deputations to the President (President Wilson), who was at that time, in harmony with his country, highly pacifist, and there was a widespread ambition that the United States should evoke some sort of permanent arbitration council alone, or in concert with the other Powers still neutral, which should stand, so to speak, on the edge of the battlefield and continue to offer its mediatory services to the warring governments until they were accepted. There was the suggestion of a deputation to Europe to further this idea, and the question arose how should it go across the Atlantic. Ford offered to charter a ship to take it.

Then his peculiar imagination seized upon his own offer. He would make this ship a spectacular ship; it should be the “Peace Ship”. It should take a complement of chosen delegates to Europe in such a blaze of publicity that at its coming the war would be, as it were, arrested, to look at it. Its mere appearance would recall infuriated Europe to its senses. “I want to get those boys out of the trenches,” said Ford. “They don’t want to fight, and would be only too glad to shake hands with each other.” At the back of his mind there seems to have been an idea of calling a general strike at the fronts. “Out of the trenches by Christmas, never to return again,” was his brief speech at a public meeting in Washington in November. All sorts of eminent and energetic people were invited to join the mission. He sought the overt approval of the President, but the President was far too seasoned a politician to squander his publicity upon this “gesture” of Henry Ford’s. He was meditating a gesture of his own later on.

American life at that time had its conspicuous popular stars, who embodied its ideals of greatness and goodness. Some of them are still for various reasons remembered by the historian, Jane Addams and Thomas Edison, for example, William Jennings Bryan (the “Last Creationist”) and Luther Burbank. These names are still to be found even in the Lower School Encyclopædia. Ford tried to include them all in one meteoric shipload. The governors of all the states in the Union were also invited, groups of representative university students, and so on. The Historical Collection at Atacama has gathered all the surviving originals or replicas of Ford’s invitations, and the replies in which these outstanding individuals hesitated over or evaded his proposals. Several were only prevented by
sudden attacks of ill-health at the very last moment from joining him. And there was a number of newspaper reporters, cinema operators and other photographers, stenographers, typists, translators, interpreters, baggage masters and publicity agents who made no trouble about coming. A certain Madame Rosika Schwimmer, an Hungarian lady, gleams forth and vanishes again from history as the organizing spirit of this selection. A vast multitude of adventurers and crazy people offered to assist when Ford's project was made public, and many were only prevented with the utmost difficulty from coming aboard the Oscar II.

There is still material for a great writer in the details of that expedition, but our interest here is neither with the expedition as a whole nor with Ford or the other persons concerned in it as personalities, but with this idea that flamed and faded, this idea of 'an appeal against war to human sanity'. And with the vicissitudes of that idea.

The first thing to note is that it evoked response, and a very wide response. Eminent people, both in America and Europe, with their popularity to consider, found it advisable to be sympathetic, even if unhelpful. President Wilson, for example, was sympathetic but unhelpful. All the pretentious weathercocks of the Western World swung round towards it. We have every indication indeed of a very considerable drive towards a world pax in these years. But presently the weathercocks began to waver and swing away.

Why did they waver? From the first there was a sustained, malignant antagonism to the project. This grew in force and vigour. The American Press, and in its wake the European Press, set itself to magnify and distort every weakness, every slight absurdity, in the expedition and to invent further weaknesses and absurdities. A campaign of ridicule began, so skilful and persistent that it stripped away one blushing celebrity after another from the constellation, and smothered the essential sanity of the project in their wilting apologies. While Ford and his surviving missioners discussed and discoursed on their liner, the newspaper men they had brought with them concocted lies and absurd stories about their host — as though they were under instructions.

We know now they were under instructions. The Historical Documents Series makes this perfectly plain.

As our students disentangle strand after strand of that long hidden story, we realize more and more clearly the tortuous dishonesty, the confused double-mindedness, of the times. The export trade of the United States was flourishing under war conditions as it had never flourished before. Munitions of every sort were being sold at enormously enhanced prices to the belligerents. Such great banking houses as Morgan and Co. were facilitating the financial subjugation of Europe to America, through debts for these supplies. It is clear that American finance and American Big
Business had not foreseen this. They had no exceptional foresight. But suddenly they found themselves in a position of great advantage, and by all their traditions they were bound to make use of that advantage. And Ford in his infinite artlessness, “butting in”, as they said, “on things that were not his business”, was setting out to destroy this favourable state of affairs.

There was just enough plausibility in this endeavour to make it seem dangerous. Ford could not be ignored; his available publicity was too great for that. He was by no means beneath contempt; so he had to be made contemptible. With an earnestness worthy of a better cause, the American Press was launched against him. And it was one of the strange traditions of the American Press that a newsman should have no scruples. The ordinary reporter was a moral invert taking a real pride in his degradation. No expedient was too mean, no lie, no trick too contemptible if only it helped thwart and disillusion Ford.

And they did thwart and disillusion him. They got him wrong with himself. This half-baked man of genius, deserted by his friends, lost confidence in his project. He began to suspect his allies and believe his enemies.

We have to accept the evidence preserved for us, but even with that evidence before us, some of the details of that Press campaign appear incredible. There are a hundred gross files of newspaper cuttings at Atacama, and some of the most amazing are reproduced in the selected Historical Documents. The reporters and writers, who were abroad as Ford’s guests, invented and sent home by wireless fantastic reports of free fights among the members of the mission, of disputes among the leaders, of Ford being chained to his bed by his secretary, of mutinies and grotesque happenings. Ford was told of and could have prevented these radio messages being sent — it was his ship for the time being — but a kind of fanaticism for free opinion — even if in practice that meant free lying — restrained him. “Let them do their darnedest,” he said, still valiant. “Our work will speak for itself.”

But presently he caught the influenza, a lowering disease long since extinct but very rife in that period and, under clumsy medical attention of the day, he arrived in Europe deflated and tired, physically and morally, prepared now to believe that there was something essentially foolish in the whole affair. He had been drenched in ridicule beyond his powers of resistance, and he was giving way. He gave way.

“Guess I had better go home to mother,” said Mr. Ford, sick in bed in Christiania, and kept to his room, though all Norway was agog to greet and cheer him.

But his movement went on by the inertia it had gained. His delegation was received with great enthusiasm in Norway and subsequently in Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark and Holland, those small sovereign European states
which contrived so dexterously to keep out of the conflict to the end. People in those countries were evidently only too eager to believe that this novel intervention might help to end the war. If Ford was discouraged, some of his associates were of more persistent material. They held great public meetings in Sweden, Holland and Switzerland, and the repercussion of their activities certainly had a heartening effect on the peace movement in Germany and Britain. They contrived to get speech with a number of politicians and statesmen, and they roused the watchful hostility of the German and British War authorities — for the military chiefs of both sides regarded this mission very properly as an attack on war morale. A Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation came into being — very precarious being — in Stockholm. It is claimed that it checked a movement to bring Sweden into the war on the side of the Germans.

Then gradually the Ford Organization for Peace lost prominence. It was overshadowed by greater movements towards negotiation, and more particularly by the large uncertain gestures of President Wilson, who, re-elected as “the man who kept the United States out of the war,” brought his people from a phase of hypocritical pacificism and energetic armament into the war in 1917. Before that culmination the Peace Ship bladder had collapsed altogether. Its last typist and photographer and clerk had been paid off, and Ford himself was already doing all that was humanly possible to draw a blanket of oblivion over that unforgettable Peace Ship. But the records have been too much for him.

He had not led his expeditionary force in Europe, even nominally, for more than five weeks. He had kept to his Norwegian hotel, avoided his more enthusiastic associates, started a vigorous reduction of his financial commitments, and finally bolted home. He deserted. He left his hotel at Christiania, stealthily, at five o’clock in the morning, and, in spite of the pleadings of those of his party who, warned at the last minute, tumbled out of bed to protest, he got away. Before the year was out he had ceased even financial support, and the various men and women who had abandoned careers and positions and faced ridicule and odium in complete faith in his simplicity were left to find their way back to their former niches or discover fresh ones.

Now what had happened to his great idea? What strange reversal of motive had occurred in the brain and heart of this Peace Crusader? There the curious historian must needs speculate, for that brain and heart have gone now beyond all closer scrutiny.

It has to be noted first that while the Peace Ship was on the Atlantic something very significant was going on at Washington. The swiftly growing munition industries of America had discovered that a home market for their products, a home market of superior solvency, might be added to the vast demands of the fighting nations overseas. America, it was argued, might keep out of the war — well and good — but nevertheless
America must be “prepared.” The United States must arm. The President had weighed this proposal with a due regard for the votes and Press support that would come to him at the next election; he had weighed it very carefully as became a politician, and after some resistance he consented that America should be “prepared”. Munitions should be assembled, troops should be drilled. Flags began to wave — and the United States flag was a very intoxicating one — and drums and trumpets to sound. Military excitement stirred through that vast pacific population and rose.

And Ford had a mighty industrial plant hitherto engaged in pouring out motor-cars and agricultural material, but capable of rapid adaptation to the production of war material. It was his creation; it was his embodiment. It was all that made him visibly different from any other fellow in the street. His friends and family had certainly watched his abandonment of business for world affairs with profound misgiving. It may have been plain to them before it was plain to him, that if he stood out of this “preparedness” movement as he threatened to do, other great plants would arise beside his own, to produce war material indeed at first, but capable when the war was over of a reverse transformation into great factories for the mass production of motorcars and the like. In France this transference from munitions to automobiles was actually foreseen and carried out by the Citröen organization. It is impossible that this prospect could have escaped Ford.

But in his haste he had declared himself against preparedness. He had threatened to hoist an “international flag” over his works in the place of the Stars and Stripes. . . .

It is clear that in that one lively brain all the main forces of the time were at work. It had responded vividly and generously to the new drive towards a worldpax. Lochner (America’s Don Quixote, 1924) reports him thus on his sailing from New York:

“Have you any last word to say?” a journalist enquired.

“Yes,” he replied. “Tell the people to cry peace and fight preparedness.”

“What if this expedition fails?” ventured another.

“If this expedition fails I’ll start another,” he flashed without a moment’s hesitation.

“People say you are not sincere,” commented a third. . . .

“We’ve got peace-talk going now, and I’ll pound it to the end.”

And afterwards came those second thoughts. When, in 1917, the United States entered the war, the Peace Ship was a stale old joke and the vast
Ford establishments were prepared and ready for the production of munitions.

Ford was a compendium of his age. That is why we give him this prominence in our history. The common man of the twentieth century was neither a pacifist nor a war-monger. He was both — and Ford was just a common man made big by accident and exceptional energy.

The main thread in the history of the twentieth century is essentially the drama of the indecisions manifested in their elementary plainness by Ford on board his Peace Ship. That voyage comes therefore like a tin-whistle solo by way of overture, to the complex orchestration of human motive in the great struggle for human unity that lay ahead.
9. The Direct Action of the Armament Industries in Maintaining War Stresses

We must now say something about the direct activities of the hypertrophied “armament firms” in bringing about and sustaining the massacres of the Great War. A proper understanding of that influence is essential if the stresses and martyrdoms of the middle years of the twentieth century are to be understood.

These “armament firms” were an outcome of the iron and steel industry, which in a few score years between 1700 and 1850 grew up — no man objecting — from a modest activity of artisans to relatively gigantic possibilities of production. This industry covered the world with a network of railways, and produced iron and then steel steamships to drive the wooden sailing ships off the seas. And at an early stage (all this is traced in full detail in Luke Zimmern’s Entwickelung und Geschichte von Kruppismus, 1913; Hist. Doc. 394112) it turned its attention to the weapons in the world.

In a perpetual progress in the size and range of great guns, in a vast expansion of battleships that were continually scrapped in favour of larger or more elaborate models, it found a most important and inexhaustible field of profit. The governments of the world were taken unawares, and in a little while the industry, by sound and accepted methods of salesmanship, was able to impose its novelties upon these ancient institutions with their tradition of implacable mutual antagonism. It was realized very soon that any decay of patriotism and loyalty would be inimical to this great system of profits, and the selling branch of the industry either bought directly or contrived to control most of the great newspapers of the time, and exercised a watchful vigilance on the teaching of belligerence in schools. Following the established rules and usages for a marketing industrialism, and with little thought of any consequences but profits, the directors of these huge concerns built up the new warfare that found its first exposition in the Great War of 1914-18, and gave its last desperate and frightful convulsions in the Polish wars of 1940 and the subsequent decades.

Even at its outset in 1914-18 this new warfare was extraordinarily uncongenial to humanity. It did not even satisfy man’s normal combative instincts. What an angry man wants to do is to beat and bash another living being, not to be shot at from ten miles distance or poisoned in a hole. Instead of drinking delight of battle with their peers, men tasted all the indiscriminating terror of an earthquake. The war literature stored at Atacama, to which we have already referred, is full of futile protest against the horror, the unsportsmanlike quality, the casual filthiness and indecency, the mechanical disregard of human dignity of the new tactics. But such protest itself was necessarily futile, because it did not go on to a
clear indictment of the forces that were making, sustaining and distorting war. The child howled and wept and they did not even attempt to see what it was had tormented it.

To us nowadays it seems insane that profit-making individuals and companies should have been allowed to manufacture weapons and sell the apparatus of murder to all comers. But to the man of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it seemed the most natural thing in the world. It had grown up in an entirely logical and necessary way, without any restraint upon the normal marketing methods of peace-time commerce, from the continually more extensive application of new industrial products to warfare. Even after the World War catastrophe, after that complete demonstration of the futility of war, men still allowed themselves to be herded like sheep into the barracks, to be trained to consume, and be consumed, by new lines of slaughter goods produced and marketed by the still active armament traders. And the accumulation of a still greater and still more dangerous mass of war material continued.

There is a queer little pseudo-scientific essay by a Bengali satirist (Professor K. Chondra Sen, 1897-1942) among the India series of reprints, professing to be a study of the relative stupidity of the more intelligent animals up to and including man. He is concerned by the fatuity with which the mass of humanity watched the preparation of its own destruction during this period. He considers the fate of various species of penguins which were then being swept out of the world — the twentieth century was an age of extermination for hundreds of species — and infers a similar destiny for mankind. He begins with the slaughter of the penguins; he gives photographs of these extraordinary creatures in their multitudes, gathered on the beaches of Oceanic islands and watching the advance of their slayers. One sees them scattered over a long sloping shore, standing still, or waddling about or flapping their stumpy wings while the massacre goes on. They seem to be vaguely interested in the killing of their fellows, but in no way stirred either to flight or resistance. (No thorough scientific observations, we may note, were ever made of penguin mentality, the revival of experimental psychology comes too late for that, and we are left now to guess at what went on in these queer brains of theirs during these raids. There is evidence to show that these creatures had curiosity, kindliness, sympathy and humour; and they were eminently teachable. They stood quite high in the scale of bird intelligence. And yet they permitted their own extinction.) They were not so much a-mental, Professor Sen insists, half seriously, half mockingly, as defective and wrong. They were capable of many idea systems but not of the idea of social preservation. He suggests, too, that the same was true of the sea elephants which were also very rapidly destroyed. (The last of these were murdered later “to make a record” by a Japanese lunatic with a craving for an “immortal Name” when the protective patrol was withdrawn during the “revolt of the sea pirates” in C.E. 1985.) But after Professor Sen has
weighed every possible case, he still awards the palm for complaisant social stupidity to man.

With a fine parody of the social research methods of that time, he gives various photographs of what he calls the “human penguins” of that early Twentieth Century, waddling in their sleek thousands to see battleships launched, to rejoice over reviews and parades, to watch their army aeroplanes stunting in the sky. Side by side he gives photographs of penguin assemblies that, either by happy accident or skilful rearrangement, are absurdly parallel. He gives lists of shareholders in the armament firms, including the current Bishop of Hereford, the current President of the Free Church Council, a great multitude of clergymen, artists, judges and every sort of gentlefolk. He quotes extensively from the Hansard records of various debates in the British House of Commons (in a debate on the Naval Estimates early in 1914, Philip Snowden, the radical socialist who afterwards became Viscount Snowden, was particularly explicit), showing that the nature of the danger was clearly seen and clearly and publicly stated. Only it was not FELT. It is upon that little difference between factual apprehension and the kind of apprehension that leads to effective action that our interest concentrates here.

Why did humanity gape at the guns and do nothing? And why, after the Great War, after that generation had seen over twenty million human beings perish painfully and untimely did it still go on, doing nothing adequate to the occasion? With the preparations still mounting up and the horrible possibilities of war increasing under its eyes? The great Cradle of Bethlehem Steel Corporation of America in 1929 was revealed as actively opposing naval disarmament at the Geneva Conference of 1927. At any rate it was associated with three shipbuilding companies who were sued by a Mr. Shearer, who claimed to have been given that task, for fees alleged to be due to him. There seems to have been little dispute that he had been so employed; the case turned upon the extent of his services and the amount of his fees. Nothing was done by the penguins either to the companies concerned or to Mr. Shearer. A few expressed indignation; that was all. Just as now and then no doubt a bird or so squawked at the oil hunters. For a detailed account and references see The Navy: Defence or Portent by C. A. Beard, 1930, reprinted Hist. Doc. Series 4,270,112.

The clue lies in the fact that there was practically no philosophical education at all in the world, no intelligent criticism of generalizations and general ideas. There was no science of social processes at all. People were not trained to remark the correlations of things; for the most part they were not aware that there was any correlation between things; they imagined this side of life might change and that remain unaltered. The industrialists and financiers built up these monstrous armaments and imposed them on the governments of the time, with a disregard of consequences that seems now absolutely imbecile. Most of these
armament propagandists were admirable in their private lives: gentle lovers, excellent husbands, fond of children and animals, good fellows, courteous to inferiors, and so on. Sir Basil Zaharoff, the greatest of munition salesmen, as one sees him in the painting (ascribed to Orpen) recently discovered in Paris, with his three-cornered hat, his neat little moustaches and beardlet, and the ribbon of some Order of Chivalry about his neck, looks quite a nice, if faintly absurd, little gentleman. Those shareholding bishops and clergy may, for anything we know to the contrary, have had charming personalities. But they wanted their dividends. And in order to pay them those dividends, the dread of war and the need of war had to be kept alive in the public mind.

That was done most conveniently through the Press. You could buy a big newspaper in those days, lock, stock and barrel, for five or ten million dollars, and the profits made on one single battleship came to more than that. Naturally, and according to the best business traditions, the newspapers hired or sold themselves to the war salesmen. What was wrong in that? Telling the news in those days was a trade, not a public duty. A daily paper that had dealt faithfully with this accumulating danger would quite as naturally and necessarily have found its distribution impeded, have found itself vigorously outdone by more richly endowed competitors, able because of their wealth to buy up all the most attractive features, able to outdo it in every way with the common reader.

It wasn’t that the newspaper owners and the munition dealers wanted anyone hurt. They only wanted to sell equipment and see it used up. Nor was it that the newspapers desired the wholesale mangling and butchering of human beings. They wanted sales and advertisements. The butchery was quite by the way, an unfortunate side issue to legitimate business. Shortsightedness is not diabolical, even if it produces diabolical results.

And even those soldiers? Freudheim, in his analysis of the soldierly mind, shows a picture of that Sir Henry Wilson we have already mentioned, arrayed in shirt-sleeves and digging modestly in the garden of his villa during a phase of retirement, and the same individual smirking in all his glory, buttons, straps and “decorations”, as a director of military operations. It is an amazing leap from the suburban insignificance of a retired clerk to godlike importance. In peace time, on the evidence of his own diaries, this Wilson was a tiresome nobody, an opinionated bore; in war he passed beyond criticism and became a god. One understands at once what a vital matter employment and promotion must have been to him. But so far as we can tell he desired no killing AS killing. If he had been given blood to drink he would probably have been sick. Yet he lived upon tanks of blood.

These professional soldiers thought of slaughter as little as possible. It is preposterous to say they desired it, much less that they gloated over it. It might have fared better with their men if they had thought of it more. They
had an age-old sentimental devotion to their country, a solemn sense of great personal worth in their services, an orgiastic delight of battle. And they did not see, nor want to see, what was beyond their occupation. Their religious teachers were quite ready to assure them they were correct in all they did and were.

The senescent Christian Churches of that age had indeed a very direct interest in war. A marked tendency to ignore or ridicule the current religious observances had become manifest, but under the stresses of loss and death people turned again to the altar. It is easily traceable in the fiction of the time. The despised curate of the tea-cups and croquet lawn became the implicitly heroic “padre” of the sentimental war stories.

The problem that confronted the growing minority that was waking up to the perils and possibilities of our species in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century was this: How in the first place to concentrate the minds of people onto this state of distraction and diffusion, how to bring them to bear upon the crude realities before them, and then how to organize the gigantic effort needed to shake off that intermittent and ever more dangerous fever of war and that chronic onset of pauperization which threatened the whole world with social dissolution.

There was no central antagonist, no ruling devil, for those anxious spirits to fight. That would have made it a straight, understandable campaign. But the Press with a certain flavouring of pious intentions was practically against them. Old social and political traditions, whatever the poses they assumed, were tacitly against them. History was against them, for it could but witness that war had always gone on since its records began. Not only the current Bishop of Hereford, and the current President of the Free Church Council, caught with their dividends upon them, but their Churches and the Catholic Church, and indeed all the Christian Churches, in spite of their allegiance to the Prince of Peace, were quietly competitive with, or antagonistic to, the secular world controls that alone could make a healthy world peace possible. The admission of the insufficiency of their own creeds to comfort or direct would have been the necessary prelude to a new moral effort.

And the idea of the naturalness and inevitability of war was not only everywhere in the world around those few forward-looking men who knew better, it was in their blood and habits. They were seeking how to attack not a fortress, but what seemed a perpetually recuperative jungle of mixed motives, tangled interests and cross-purposes, within themselves as without.
10. Versailles: Seed Bed of Disasters

The formal war, against the Central Powers, the “World War”, ended on November 11, 1918, C.E. in the defeat and submission of the Central Powers. There was a conference at Versailles, in the same palace in which triumphant Germans had dictated peace to France after a previous war in 1870-71. There was a needlessly dramatic flavour in this reversal of the rôles of the two countries. It was now France and her allies who dictated, and naturally the ideas of a romantic restoration and a stern and righteous judgment dominated the situation. The assembled Powers sat down to right the wrongs and punish the misdeeds of their grandparents. Even at the time it seemed a little belated. But threading their proceedings we do find quite plainly evident the developing conflict between historical tradition and the quickening sense of human unity in the world. If the World-State was not present at the conference, its voice was at any rate “heard without”.

By this time (1919 C.E.) there was indeed quite a considerable number of intelligent people in the world who had realized the accumulating necessity of a world government, and a still larger multitude, like that Henry Ford we have described, who had apprehended it instinctively and sentimentally, but there was no one yet who had had the intellectual vigour to attack in earnest the problem of substituting a world system for the existing governments. Men’s minds and hearts quailed before that undertaking. And yet, as we now know so clearly, it was the only thing for them to do. It was the sole alternative to an ever-broadening and deepening series of disasters. But its novelty and vastness held them back. Irrational habit kept them in the ancient currents of history.

To us they seem like drowning men who were willing to attempt to save themselves by rallies of swimming, floating, holding on to straws and bubbles, but who refused steadfastly, in spite of the proximity of a ladder, to clamber out of the water for good and all.

Hardly any of them in their ideas of a world system dared go beyond a purely political agreement for the avoidance of war. Five decades of human distress were still needed before there was to be any extensive realization that belligerence was only one symptom, and by no means the gravest symptom, of human disunion.

The American President Woodrow Wilson, of all the delegates to the Peace Conference, was the most susceptible to the intimations of the future. The defects and limitations of his contributions to that settlement give us a measure of the political imagination of those days. He brought what was left of the individualistic liberalism that had created the American Republics to the solution of the world problem. None of the other participants in these remarkable discussions – Clemenceau (France), Lloyd George (Britain), Sonnino (Italy), Saionji (Japan), Hymans
(Belgium), Paderewski (Poland), Bratianu (Roumania), Benes (Bohemia), Vennezlos (Greece), Feisal (Hedjaz), and so on through a long list of now fading names — seemed aware that, apart from any consideration of national advantage, humanity as a whole might claim an interest in the settlement. They were hard-shell “representatives”, national advocates. For a brief interval Wilson stood alone for mankind. Or at least he seemed to stand for mankind. And in that brief interval there was a very extraordinary and significant wave of response to him throughout the earth. So eager was the situation that all humanity leapt to accept and glorify Wilson — for a phrase, for a gesture. It seized upon him as its symbol. He was transfigured in the eyes of men. He ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah. Millions believed him as the bringer of untold blessings; thousands would gladly have died for him. That response was one of the most illuminating events in the early twentieth century. Manifestly the World-State had been conceived then, and now it stirred in the womb. It was alive.

And then for some anxious decades it ceased to stir.

Amidst different scenery and in different costumes, the story of Wilson repeats the story of Ford, the story of a man lifted by an idea too great for him, thrown up into conspicuousness for a little while and then dropped, as a stray leaf may be spun up and dropped by a gust of wind before a gale. The essential Wilson, the world was soon to learn, was vain and theatrical, with no depth of thought and no wide generosity. So far from standing for all mankind, he stood indeed only for the Democratic Party in the United States — and for himself. He sacrificed the general support of his people in America to party considerations and his prestige in Europe to a craving for social applause. For a brief season he was the greatest man alive. Then for a little while he remained the most conspicuous. He visited all the surviving courts of Europe and was fêted and undone in every European capital. That triumphal procession to futility need not occupy us further here. Our concern is with his idea.

Manifestly he wanted some sort of a world pax. But it is doubtful if at any time he realized that a world pax means a world control of all the vital common interests of mankind. He seems never to have thought out this job to which he set his hand so confidently. He did not want, or, if he did, he did not dare to ask for, any such centralized world controls as we now possess. They were probably beyond the range of his reading and understanding. His project from first to last was purely a politician’s project.

The pattern conceived by him was a naïve adaptation of the parliamentary governments of Europe and America to a wider union. His League, as it emerged from the Versailles Conference, was a typical nineteenth-century government enlarged to planetary dimensions and greatly faded in the process; it had an upper chamber, the Council, and a lower chamber, the
Assembly, but, in ready deference to national susceptibilities, it had no executive powers, no certain revenues, no army, no police, and practically no authority to do anything at all. And even as a political body it was remote and ineffective; it was not in any way representative of the peoples of the earth as distinguished from the governments of the earth. Practically nothing was done to make the common people of the world feel that the League was theirs. Its delegates were appointed by the Foreign Offices of the very governments its only conceivable rôle was to supersede. They were national politicians and they were expected to go to Geneva to liquidate national politics. The League came into being at last, a solemn simulacrum to mock, cheat and dispel the first desire for unity that mankind had ever betrayed.

Yet what else was possible then? If Wilson seemed to embody the formless aspirations of mankind, there can be no dispute that he impressed the politicians with whom he had to deal as a profoundly insincere visionary. They dealt with him as that and they beat him as that. The only way to have got anything more real than this futile League would have been a revolutionary appeal to the war-weary peoples of the earth against their governments, to have said, as indeed he could have said in 1918, to the whole world that the day of the World-State had come. That would have reverberated to the ends of the earth.

He was not the man to do that. He had not that power of imagination. He had not that boldness with governments. He had the common politician’s way of regarding great propositions as a means to small ends. If he had been bolder and greater, he might have failed, he might have perished; but he failed and perished anyhow; and a bolder bid for world unity might have put the real issue before mankind for ever and shortened the Age of Frustration by many decades.

What he did do was to reap an immediate harvest of popular applause, to present to human hope a white face rigid with self-approval, bowing from processional carriages and decorated balconies, retiring gravely into secret conference with the diplomatists and politicians of the old order and emerging at last with this League of Nations, that began nothing and ended nothing and passed in a couple of decades out of history.

It was a League not to end sovereignties but preserve them. It stipulated that the extraordinarily ill-contrived boundaries established by the Treaty in which it was incorporated should be guaranteed by the League for EVERMORE. Included among other amiable arrangements were clauses penalizing Germany and her allies as completely as Carthage was penalized by Rome after the disaster of Zamia — penalizing her in so overwhelming a way as to make default inevitable and afford a perennial excuse for her continued abasement. It was not a settlement, it was a permanent punishment. The Germans were to become the penitent helots of the conquerors; a generation, whole generations, were to be born and die in
debt, and to ensure the security of this arrangement Germany was to be effectually disarmed and kept disarmed.

Delenda est Germanic was the sole idea of the French (see Morris Henbane’s Study of Pertinax, 1939) and the representatives of the other Allies who were gathered together in the Paris atmosphere, and, working amidst the vindictive memories of Versailles, were only too ready to fall in with this punitive conception of their task. It was the easiest conception; it put a hundred difficult issues into a subordinate place. It always looks so much easier to men of poor imagination to put things back than to carry them on. If the French dreaded a resurrection of the German armies, the British feared a resurrection of the German fleet and of German industrial competition. Japan and Italy, seeking their own compensations elsewhere, were content to see the German-speaking peoples, who constituted the backbone of the continent, divided and reduced to vassalage.

The antiquated form of Wilson’s ideas produced still more mischievous consequences in the multiplication of sovereign governments in the already congested European area. Deluded by the vague intimations of unity embodied in the League, Wilson lent himself readily to a reconstruction of the map of Europe upon strictly nationalist lines. The Polish nation was restored. Our history has already studied the successive divisions of this country in the eighteenth century. It is a great region of the Central Plain, whose independent existence became more and more inconvenient as the trade and commerce of Europe developed. Geography fought against it. It was a loose-knit union of individualistic equestrian aristocrats dominating a peasantry. But its partition between Russia, Prussia and Austria was achieved with the utmost amount of brutality, and after the Napoleonic wars a romantic legend about this lost kingdom of Poland seized upon the sentiment of France, Britain and America. These rude nobles and their serfs, so roughly incorporated by the adjacent states, were transfigured into a delicate, brave and altogether wonderful people, a people with a soul torn asunder and trampled underfoot by excessively booted oppressors. The restoration of Poland — the excessive restoration of Poland — was one of the brightest ambitions of President Wilson.

Poland was restored. But instead of a fine-spirited and generous people emerging from those hundred and twenty years of subjugation, and justifying the sympathy and hopes of liberalism throughout the world, there appeared a narrowly patriotic government, which presently developed into an aggressive, vindictive and pitiless dictatorship, and set itself at once to the zestful persecution of the unfortunate ethnic minorities (about a third of the entire population) caught in the net of its all too ample boundaries. The real Poland of the past had been a raiding and aggressive nation which had ridden and harried to the very walls of Moscow. It had not changed its nature. The Lithuanian city of Vilna was now grabbed by a coup de main and the southeastern boundary pushed
forward in Galicia. In the treatment of the Ukrainians and Ruthenians involved in liberation, Poland equalled any of the atrocities which had been the burden of her song during her years of martyrdom. In 1932 one-third of the budget of this new militant Power was for armament.

Not only was Poland thus put back upon the map. As a result of a sedulous study of historical sentimentalities, traditions, dialects and local feelings, a whole cluster of new sovereign Powers, Czechoslovakia, Jugoslavia, Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, an attenuated Hungary and an enlarged Roumania, was evoked to crowd and complicate the affairs of mankind by their sovereign liberties, their ambitions, hostilities, alliances, understandings, misunderstandings, open and secret treaties, tariffs, trade wars and the like. Russia was excluded from the first attempt at a World Parliament because she had repudiated her vast war debts — always a matter of grave solicitude to the Western creditor, and — strangest fact of all in this strange story — the United States, the Arbitrator and Restorer of Nations, stood out from the League, because President Wilson’s obstinate resolve to monopolize the immortal glory of World Salvation for himself and his party had estranged a majority of his senators.

The Senate, after some attempts at compromise, rejected the Covenant of the League altogether, washed its hands of world affairs, and the President, instead of remaining for ever Prince of Everlasting Peace and Wonder of the Ages, shrank again very rapidly to human proportions and died a broken and disappointed man. Like Ford, the United States returned to normal business and the Profit and Loss Account, and the Europeans were left with the name of Wilson written all over their towns, upon streets, avenues, esplanades, railway stations, parks and squares, to make what they could of this emasculated League he had left about among their affairs.

If Russia and Germany in their character of Bad Peoples were excluded from the League, such remote peoples as the Chinese and the Japanese were included as a matter of course. It was assumed, apparently, that they were “just fellows” of the universal Treaty-of-Westphalia pattern. The European world knew practically nothing of the mental processes of these remote and ancient communities, and it seems hardly to have dawned upon the conferring statesmen that political processes rest entirely upon mental facts. The League, after much difficulty, and after some years’ delay, did indeed evolve a Committee of Intellectual Cooperation, but so far as its activities can now be traced, this was concerned with dilettante intellectualism only; there is no indication that it ever interested itself in the League as an idea.

Considering all things in the light of subsequent events, it would have been well if the League of Nations had committed hara-kiri directly the United States Senate refused participation, and if the European Powers, realizing their failure to stabilize the planet at one blow, had set themselves at once
to the organization of a League of Conciliation and Cooperation within the European area. The League’s complete inability to control or even modify the foreign policy of Japan (modelled on the best nineteenth-century European patterns) was the decisive factor in its declension to a mere organization of commentary upon current affairs.

As its authority declined the courage and pungency of its reports increased. Some of the later ones are quite admirable historical documents. Gradually the member governments discontinued their subsidies and the secretariat dwindled to nothing. Like the Hague Tribunal, the League faded out of existence before or during the Famished Fifties. It does not figure in history after the first Polish war, but its official buildings were intact in 1965, and in 1968, and for some years later, they were used as auxiliary offices by the Western branch of the Transport Union.

The imposition of vast monetary payments upon Germany was the only part of the settlement of Versailles that dealt with the financial and economic life of our race. Astounding as this seems to us to-day, it was the most natural oversight possible to the Versailles politicians. Political life was still deep in the old purely combatant tradition, still concentrated upon boundaries and strategic advantages; and it was extraordinarily innocent in the face of economic realities. The mighty forces demanding economic unification, albeit they were, as we have shown, the real causes of the Great War, were ignored at Versailles as completely as if they had never existed.

Only one outstanding voice, that of the British economist J. M. Keynes (Economic Consequences of the Peace, 1919), was audible at the time in protest and warning against the preposterous dislocation of credit and trade involved in the reparation payments. There was no arrangement whatever for the liquidation of the debts piled up by the Allies AGAINST EACH OTHER (!), and no economic parallel to the political League of Nations. No control of economic warfare was even suggested. The Americans, Wilson included, were still in a stage of financial individualism; they thought money-getting was an affair of individual smartness within the limits of the law, and the American conception of law was of something that presented interesting obstacles rather than effectual barriers to enlightened self-seeking. The contemporary American form of mutual entertainment was a poker party, and that great people therefore found nothing inimical in sitting down after the war to play poker, with France and Great Britain as its chief opponents, for the gold and credit of the world.

It was only slowly during the decade following after the war that the human intelligence began to realize that the Treaty of Versailles had not ended the war at all. It had set a truce to the bloodshed, but it had done so only to open a more subtle and ultimately more destructive phase in the
traditional struggle of the sovereign states. The existence of independent
sovereign states is war, white or red, and only an elaborate mis-education
blinded the world to this elementary fact. The peoples of the defeated
nations suffered from a real if not very easily defined sense of injustice in
this Treaty, which was framed only for them to sign, and sign in the rôle of
wrongdoers brought to book. Very naturally they were inspired by an
ill-concealed resolve to revise, circumvent or disregard its provisions at the
earliest possible opportunity. The conquering Powers, on the other hand,
were conscious of having not only humiliated their defeated enemies but
thrust them into a state of exasperated disadvantage. The thought of a
revanche was equally present therefore to the victors, and instead of
disarming as the Germans were compelled to do, they broke the
obligations of the Treaty and retained and increased their military
establishments.

The armament firms and their newspapers naturally did all they could to
intensify this persistence in an armed "security". Any disposition on the
part of the French public, for instance, to lay aside its weapons was
promptly checked by tales of secret arsenals and furtive drilling in
Germany. And the narrow patriotic forces that guided France not only kept
her extravagantly armed against her fallen foe, but carried on a subtle but
ruthless financial warfare that, side by side with the American game,
overcame every effort of Germany to recover socially or economically.

Moreover, the conquering Powers, so soon as they considered their former
antagonists conclusively disposed of, turned themselves frankly, in full
accordance with the traditions of the sovereign state system, to the task of
getting the better of each other in the division of the spoils. Their
"Alliances" had brought about no sense of community. Already within a
year of the signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles heavy fighting was
going on in Asia Minor between the Greeks and the Turks. The Greeks had
British encouragement; the French and Italians had supported the Turks.
It was a war of catspaws. This war culminated in a disastrous rout of the
Greeks and the burning of the town of Smyrna. This last was a quite
terrible massacre; multitudes of women and children were outraged, men
and boys gouged, emasculated or killed; all but the Turkish quarter was
looted and burnt. The quays in front of the flaming town were dense with
terror-stricken crowds, hoping against hope to get away upon some ship
before they were fallen upon, robbed, butchered, or thrust into the water.

A little before this the Turks had driven the French out of the ancient
province of Cilicia, and had completed the extermination of that ancient
people the Hittites or Armenians. During the war or after the war mattered
little to the Armenians, for fire and sword pursued them still. Over two
million died — for the most part violent deaths.

Fighting still went on after the Great Peace in the north and south of
Russia and in eastern Siberia; and China became a prey to armies of
marauders. Poland seized Vilna, invaded eastern Galicia and fought Russia in the Ukraine, and a raid of patriotic Italians expelled a mixed Allied garrison from Fiume.

Presently there was a dreadful famine in south-east Russia which neither America nor Europe was able to alleviate. Always before the war a famine in any part of the world had exercised the philanthropic element in the Anglo-Saxon community. But philanthropy had lost heart. There was a faint but insufficient flutter of the old habits in America but none in Britain.

Such was the peace and union of the world immediately achieved by the Conference of Versailles.

A number of unsatisfactory appendices and patches had presently to be made to correct the most glaring defects and omissions of the Treaty. Constantinople, which had been taken from the Turks and held by a mixed force of the Allies, was restored to them in 1923 after the Smyrna massacre and some warlike gesticulation between them and the British.

In drawing the boundaries of the new and revised states of the European patchwork there was the utmost disregard of economic commonsense; peasants would find themselves cut off from winter or summer pasture or from market towns which had been developed by their needs. Great foundries and chemical and metallurgical works were separated from the ores and deposits on which they relied. Vienna, once the financial and business centre of all south-east Central Europe, was decapitated. Most fantastic and, as it proved, most disastrous of all the follies of Versailles, was the creation of the free city of Danzig and what was called the Polish Corridor.

Let us note a point or so about this latter tangle to illustrate the mental quality of the Conference at its worst. Here more than anywhere else did the simple romantic idea that the Germans were Bad, and that anyone opposed to the Germans was without qualification Good, rule the situation. The Poles were Good, and they were the chosen of the Allies, the particular protégés of the sentimental historian from America. He had come to put down the mighty from their seats and to exalt the humble and the meek. The hungry and eager were to be filled with good things and the rich, the erstwhile rich, were to be sent empty away. Germany, like Dives in hell, was to look up and see Poland like Lazarus in Woodrow Wilson’s bosom. Not only were the Good Poles to be given dominion over Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Jews (whom particularly they detested), Lithuanians, White Russians and Germans, they were to have also something of profound economic importance — “access to the sea”.

On that President Wilson had been very insistent. Switzerland had done very well in pre-war Europe without access to the sea, but that was another
story. The difficulty was that by no stretch of ethnic map-colouring could Poland be shown to border on the sea. A belt of Pomeranians and Germans stretched across the mouth of the Vistula, and the only possibility of a reasonable trading outlet to the sea, so far as Poland needed such an outlet — for most of its trade was with its immediate neighbours — was through an understanding with that belt of people. That would have been easy enough to arrange. At the mouth of the Vistula stood the entirely German city of Danzig. It lived mainly as an outlet for Polish trade, and it could prosper in no other way. There was no reason to suppose it would put any difficulties in the way of Polish imports and exports. It was an ancient, honest, clean and prosperous German city. Ninety-six per cent of its inhabitants were German.

This was the situation to which the Conference of Versailles, under the inspiration of that magic phrase “access to the sea”, turned its attention. Even the profound belief of the Conquerors that there were no Germans but bad Germans could not justify their turning over Danzig itself to Polish rule. But they separated it from Germany and made it into a “free city”, and to the west of it they achieved that “access to the sea” of Wilson’s, by annexing a broad band of Pomeranian territory to Poland. (This was the actual “Corridor” of the controversies.) It had no port to compare with Danzig, but the Poles set themselves to create a rival in Gdynia, which should be purely Polish, and which should ultimately starve the trading Germans out of Danzig.

And to keep the waters of the Vistula as pure and sweet for Poland as the existence of Danzig at the estuary allowed, the peace-makers ran the Vistula boundary between Poland and east Prussia, not in the usual fashion midway along the stream, but at a little distance on the east Prussian side. (Jacques Kayser, La Paix en Péril, 1931; Hist. Doc., 711711.) So that the east German population, the peasant cultivator, the erstwhile fisherman, the shepherd with his flocks to water, was pulled up by a line of frontier posts and a Polish rifle within sight of the stream. Moreover, that eastward country was flat and low-lying and had hitherto been protected from floods and a relapse to marsh conditions by a line of dykes. The frontier cut that line five times, and since the Poles had no interest whatever in these defences, they fell rapidly out of repair. Further along the boundary cut off the great towns of Garnsee and Bischofswerder from their railway station.

But we must not lose ourselves in the details of this exasperating settlement. The maximum of irritation developed in the absurd Corridor itself. The current of traffic had hitherto run to and fro between east and west, the trend of the railways was in that direction; the traffic in the north and south direction had come to Danzig along the great river. Now the Poles set themselves to obstruct both these currents and to wrench round all the communications into a north and south direction avoiding Danzig.
Every German going east or west found himself subjected to a series of frontier examinations, to tariff payments, to elaborate delays, to such petty but memorable vexations as that all the windows of an express train passing across the Corridor should be closed, and so forth, and the city of Danzig, cut off from German trade, found its Polish business being steadily diverted to Gdynia. French capital was poured into Gdynia and into its new railway to the south, so that French financial interests were speedily entangled in the dispute.

The indignity and menace of Danzig burnt into the German imagination. That Corridor fretted it as nothing else in the peace settlement had fretted it. It became a dominant political issue. There was an open sore of a similar character in Upper Silesia; there was a sore in the Saar Valley; there was the sore of an enforced detachment from Austria; there were many other bitter memories and grievances, but this was so intimate, so close to Berlin, that it obsessed all German life.

Within a dozen years of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles the Polish Corridor was plainly the most dangerous factor in the European situation. It mocked every projection of disarmament. It pointed the hypnotized and impotent statescraft of Europe straight towards a resumption of war. A fatalistic attitude towards war as something terrible indeed but inevitable, which had already been evident among the politicians of Europe before 1914, reappeared and spread.

History had an air of repeating itself. Nobody made any definite suggestions about any of these open sores, but there was scarcely a politician of the period who could not claim to have been very eloquent on various occasions against war — with, of course, a skilful avoidance of anything that could be considered specific, controversial, unpatriotic or likely to wound the susceptibilities of the Powers immediately concerned.
11. The Impulse to Abolish War: Why the League of Nations Failed

to Pacify the World

Before we leave that bleak and futile idealist, Woodrow Wilson, altogether, we will draw the attention of the student to the essential factors of his failure. The defects of his personality must not blind us to the impossibility of his ambition. His narrow egotism, the punitive treatment of the Central Powers and so forth, merely emphasized a disadvantage that would have been fatal to the launching of any League of Nations at that time. There had been an insufficient mental preparation for a world system to operate. No ideology existed to sustain it. The World-State, the Modern State, was still only a vaguely apprehended suggestion; it had not been worked out with any thoroughness and the League was the most hasty of improvisations.

It needed the life scheming of de Windt and his associates, which we shall presently describe; it needed a huge development and application of the science of social psychology, before the supersession of the chaos of sovereign states by a central control was even a remote possibility. Wilson thought he could get together with a few congenial spirits and write a recipe for human unity. He had not the slightest inkling of the gigantic proportions, the intricacy, intimacy and profundity, of the task that was opening before him. He attempted to patch up the outworn system of his time and pass it off as a new one. He did not dream of the monetary reconstruction, the need for a thorough-going socialism throughout the world, and for a complete revolution in education, before the peace and security of mankind could be established. Yet, narrow and blind as he was, he seems to have been in advance of the general thought of his age.

This premature and ineffectual League was a hindrance rather than a help to the achievement of world peace. It got in the way. It prevented people from thinking freely about the essentials of the problem. Organizations of well-meaning folk, the British League of Nations Union, for example, came into existence to support it, and resisted rather than helped any effectual criticism of its constitution and working. They would say that it was “better than nothing”, whereas a false start is very much worse than nothing. In the post-war decade, the amount of vigorous constructive thought in the general mind about world politics was extraordinarily small. It was only when the insufficiency of the League had passed beyond any possibility of dispute that men began to take up the abandoned search for world unification again.

A dozen years later the Modern State movement was still only foreshadowed in sketchy attempts to find a comprehensive set of general formulæ for liberal progressive effort. The pacifists, communists, socialists and every other sort of “ists” who gave a partial and confused
expression to human discontent had still to be drawn together into understanding and cooperation. Most of their energy was wasted in obscure bickerings, mutual suspicion and petty and partial tentatives. The middle of the century had been passed before there was any considerable body of Modern State propaganda and education on earth.
12. The Breakdown of “Finance” and Social Morale after Versailles

The unprecedented range and destruction of the World War were, we have pointed out, largely ascribable to the hypertrophy of the world’s iron and steel industry relatively to the political and social concepts of the race. But in the first “post-war” decade the stresses of other disproportionate developments began to make themselves manifest at various other weak points in the loosely linked association of our species. The war from the economic point of view had been the convulsive using up of an excess of production that the race had no other method of distributing and consuming. But the necessities of the struggle, and particularly its interference with international trading, which had evoked factories and finishing processes in many undeveloped regions hitherto yielding only raw or unfinished materials, had added greatly to the gross bulk of productive plant throughout the world, and so soon as the open war-furnaces ceased to burn up the surplus and hold millions of men out of the labour market, this fact became more and more oppressively apparent. The postwar increase in war preparation, which went on in spite of endless palavering about disarmament, did not destroy men, nor scrap and destroy material, in sufficient quantity to relieve the situation.

Moreover, the expansion of productive energy was being accompanied by a positive contraction of the distributive arrangements which determined consumption. The more efficient the output, the fewer were the wages-earners. The more stuff there was, the fewer consumers there were. The fewer the consumers, the smaller the trading profits, and the less the gross spending power of the shareholders and individual entrepreneurs. So buying dwindled at both ends of the process and the common investor suffered with the wages-earner. This was the “Paradox of Overproduction” which so troubled the writers and journalists of the third decade of the twentieth century.

It is easy for the young student to-day to ask “Why did they not adjust?” But let him ask himself who there was to adjust. Our modern superstructure of applied economic science, the David Lubin Bureau and the General Directors’ Board, with its vast recording organization, its hundreds of thousands of stations and observers, directing, adjusting, apportioning and distributing, had not even begun to exist. Adjustment was left to blind and ill-estimated forces. It was the general interest of mankind to be prosperous, but it was nobody’s particular interest to keep affairs in a frame of prosperity. Manifestly a dramatic revision of the liberties of enterprise was necessary, but the enterprising people who controlled politics, so far as political life was controlled, were the very last people to undertake such a revision.

With the hypertrophy of productive activities there had been a concurrent
hypertrophy of banking and financial organization generally, but it had been a flabby hypertrophy, a result of the expansion of material production rather than a compensatory and controlling development.

It is so plain to us to-day that the apportionment of the general product of the world for enterprise or consumption is a department of social justice and policy, and can be dealt with only in the full light of public criticism and upon grounds of claim and need, that it is difficult for us to understand the twentieth century attitude to these things. We should no more dream of leaving the effectual control in these matters in private profit-seeking hands than we should leave our law courts or our schools to the private bidder. But nothing of the sort was plain in 1935 C.E. That lesson had still to be learnt.

The story of banking and money in the early twentieth century has so much in it verging upon the incredible, that it has become one of the most attractive and fruitful fields for the student of historical psychology. The system had grown up as a tangle of practice. It was evolved, not designed. There was never any attempt to gauge the justice or the ultimate consequences of any practice, so long as it worked at the time. Men tried this and that, did this and that, and concealed their opinions of what the results might be. Reserve was essential in the system. So little was the need for publicity in this universal interest understood, that the most fundamental decisions affecting the common man’s purchasing power and the credit of industrial undertakings were made in secret, and the restriction and stimulation of trade and work went on in the profoundest obscurity. Neither in the ordinary courses of the schools and universities was there any instruction in these essential facts. The right of private enterprise to privacy was respected in the Churches, the law courts and private practice alike. Men found themselves employed or unemployed, cheated of their savings or better off, they knew not why. Instead of the clear knowledge of economic pressures and movements that we have to-day, strange Mystery Men were dimly visible through a fog of baffling evasions and mis-statements, manipulating prices and exchanges.

Prominent among these Mystery Men was a certain Mr. Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England from 1920 to 1935. He is among the least credible figures in all history, and a great incrustation of legends has accumulated about him. In truth the only mystery about him was that he was mysterious. His portrait shows a slender, bearded man, dressed more like a successful artist or musician than the conventional banker of the time. He was reputed to be shy and, in the phraseology of the time, “charming”, and he excited the popular imagination by a habit of travelling about under assumed names and turning up in unexpected places. Why he did so, nobody now knows. Perhaps he did it for the fun of doing it. He gave evidence before an enquiry into finance in 1930 (the Macmillan Committee), and from that and from one or two of his public speeches that
have been preserved, it is plain that he had what we should now consider an entirely inadequate education for the veiled activities in which he was engaged. Of human ecology he betrays no knowledge, and his ideas of social and economic processes are not what we should now recognize as adequate general ideas even for an ordinary citizen. Indeed his chief qualification for his darkly responsible post was some practical experience acquired in association with various private banking firms before he entered the service of the Bank of England. This experience was acquired during what we know now to have been a period of quite accidental and transitory expansion of human wealth. Plainly he did not even bring a blank mind to his task. He had a mind warped and prejudiced by gainful banking under abnormal conditions. Yet for a time he was regarded as an “expert” of almost magical quality, and during the convulsions of the post-war period he was able to dictate or defeat arrangements that enriched or impoverished millions of people in every country in Europe.

Another big obscure financial force in the war and post-war periods was the complex of great private banking ganglia, of which Morgan and Co., with its associated firms, was the most central and most typical. This particular firm carried on its business upon a scale that completely overshadowed many minor governments. The loans it made or refused, confirmed or shattered régimes. Its founder, J. P. Morgan, a queer combination of Yankee “gentleman” and German junker, whose innate acquisitiveness overflowed in great collections of pictures and “art” objects generally, had died before the outbreak of the war, but a phrase he used in a dispute with President Roosevelt the First was taken up later and made into a deadly critical weapon against the whole private banking world. “Roosevelt”, he protested, “wants all of us to have glass pockets!”

A second President Roosevelt was presently to revive that demand.

Nothing could better betray the habit of deep gainful manoeuvrings than that phrase. Morgan was never dishonest and always disingenuous. That was the rule of his game. Opaque pockets he insisted upon, and hidden motives, but also the punctual performance of a bargain. His tradition lived after him. His firm became an octopus of credit. The interweaving bargains it made hung like a shadowy group of spiders’ webs about European life. It did its work of strangulation by its nature and without malice, as a spider spins. No contemporary could apprehend it. The particulars of any particular situation could only be unravelled vaguely by a normal enquirer after many months of study.

Interacting with such mystery systems as these of the banking world were other dark figures and groups, controlling vast industrial activities, obsessing and perverting spending power. There was, for example, that Mystery Man of Mystery Men, Sir Basil Zaharoff, the armaments salesman, still the delight of our schoolboy novelists, and Ivar Kreuger, who created an almost world-wide system of lucifer match monopolies, lent great sums
to governments and was finally caught forging big parcels of bonds. He then staged a suicide in Paris to escape the penalty of fraud. (We have to remember that in those days the lucifer matches we now see in museums were consumed by the billion. There was no other handy source of fire, and their manufacture and distribution was on the scale of a primary industry.) Kreuger, unlike Morgan, was not a man of the acquisitive type; he neither hoarded nor collected; he kept nothing, not even the law, but he built lavishly and gave away money for scientific research. (The discovery of Pekin Man, a memorable incident in early archaeology, was, for instance, made possible by his gifts.) Morgan forestalled and accumulated; Kreuger robbed and gave. When Morgan spent his gains he bought “Old Masters”, manuscripts and suchlike indisputably genuine and valuable junk; when Kreuger dispersed the moneys that had been entrusted to him he made the most extraordinary experiments in decorative art, in electric lighting and fantastic building. But each operated unchecked. So obscure was the financial machinery of the time that for some months Kreuger was able to pass off as genuine a package of forged Italian bonds amounting to about half a million dollars, and to obtain advances upon them from reputable lenders. To-day a trick of such a character would be detected, were it possible, in the course of a single day by the ordinary checking of the Transactions Bureau. But nowadays no one would have any reason for attempting anything of the sort. The lives of these Mystery Men and of the various groups of speculators (the Balkan Gang, e.g.) who manipulated the exchanges of the various national currencies of Eastern Europe, and of a great number of other profit-seeking groups and individuals who were thrusting about amidst the machinery of exchange, are to be found in the Lives of Mischief (Financial Volumes) taken out of the Dictionary of Biography. The very best of them were men who waylaid gain or sought adventures in a fog. Most of them were as active and as blind to the consequences of their activities as moles who perforate a dyke.

In the files of the financial papers of this period, when the movements of gold were of vital significance to the prices of commodities and the credit of everyone in the world, one sees such headings as “Unknown Buyer Takes Two Millions in Gold” or, less exactly, “Gold Bought by Unknown Buyer”. Then all the little manipulators of money would be set peering and spying and guessing and rigging their business to the possible shift of equilibrium this dark intimation might portend.

Other Mystery Men, Mystery Men ex officio, were the various Ministers of Finance, of whom perhaps the British Chancellor of the Exchequer was most typical. Every year there was a vast amount of whispering and hinting, peeping and calculating and going to and fro, about the National Budget and the readjustment of taxation for another twelvemonth. An arithmetical mystery called “balancing the Budget” had to be performed. Business would be held up as the great revelation drew near; gambling operations, insurance operations, would multiply. The wife, the family, the
intimates and secretaries of the Man of Destiny, went about the world sealed, enigmatical, oracular, profoundly important with his reflected importance. At last the great day dawned. The legislature would assemble in unusual force, excited and curious. The Witch Doctor, with his portfolios of Obi, would take his place in the House of Commons, rise portentously, begin the “Budget Speech”.

No Budget Speech was complete without its “surprises”. Could anything witness more vividly to the chaotic casualness of the twentieth century? Anything might be taxed; anything might be relieved; anyone might shift the weights about. In the economic darkness of the time it did not seem to matter. The marvel is that the system staggered on for so long.

How amazing, how fantastic, was that condition of affairs! It is as if one of the great transatlantic liners of the period had careered across the ocean with its passenger decks and cabins brightly lit, its saloons and bars in full swing, while down below, its essential machinery, manifestly with something going wrong with it, had no arrangements for illumination at all and was served by men (some of them masked), working without a foreman or any general directions, by the light of an occasional match or a treasured but rather worn-out electric torch, or altogether in the dark, upon the great cranks and swiftly sliding shafts that beat and circled about them.

From the very cessation of the fighting in 1918 and onward it was manifest that this machinery was seriously out of gear. The economic history of the time is a story of swerves and fluctuations of the most alarming kind, each one more disconcerting and disastrous than its predecessor. In the decades before the war, though there were certainly variations in the real value of the different currencies, they were variations within moderate limits, and the rise or fall went on through comparatively long periods, but after the war there commenced a series of movements in exchange and prices unprecedented throughout the whole period of prosperity. Currencies rose and towered above others and broke like Atlantic waves, and people found the good money in their banks changed to useless paper in a period of a few months. It became more and more difficult to carry on foreign trade because of the increasing uncertainty of payment, and since there was scarcely a manufacturing industry that had not to obtain some material from abroad, the entanglement of foreign trade often involved a strangulation of production at home. Trade and industry sickened and lost heart more and more in this disastrous uncertainty; it was like being in an earthquake, when it seems equally unsafe to stand still or run away; and the multitudes of unemployed increased continually. The economically combatant nations entrenched themselves behind tariffs, played each other tricks with loans, repudiations, sudden inflations and deflations, and no power in the world seemed able to bring them into any concerted action to arrest and stop their common dégringolade.
The opening years of the second third of the twentieth century saw Homo sapiens in the strangest plight. The planet had a healthier and more abundant human population than it had ever carried before, and it lacked nothing in its available resources to give the whole of this population full and happy lives. That was already the material reality of the position. But through nothing in the world but a universal, various muddle-headedness, our species seemed unable to put out its hand and take the abundance within its reach. As we turn over the periodicals and literature of the time the notes of apprehension and distress increase and deepen. The war period of 1914-1918 was full of suffering, but also it was full of excitement; even the dying on the battlefields believed that a compensatory peace and happiness lay close ahead. The survivors were promised "homes fit for heroes." But the Depression of 1930 and onward was characterized by its inelasticity; it was a phase of unqualified disappointment and hopelessly baffled protest. One lived, as one contemporary writer put it, "in a world bewitched".

The economic consequences of this monetary disorganization followed hard upon it, but the deeper-lying destruction of social morale and its effects were manifested less immediately. The whole world system heretofore had been sustained by the general good behavior of common men, by the honesty and punctuality of clerks, workers of every sort, traders, professional men. General security depended upon habitual decent behaviour in the street and on the countryside. But the common man behaved well because he had faith that his pay was a safe, if sometimes a scanty, assurance of a certain comfort and dignity in his life. He imagined an implicit bargain between himself and society that he should be given employment and security in exchange for his law-abiding subordination, and that society would keep faith with his savings. He assumed that the governments would stand by the money they issued and see that it gave him the satisfactions it promised him. He was not a good boy for nothing. Nobody is. But now in various terms and phrases all over the world millions of men and women were asking themselves whether it "paid" to be industrious, skilful and law-abiding. The cement of confidence in the social fabric from 1918 onward was more and more plainly decaying and changing to dust. The percentage of criminal offences, which had been falling through all the period of prosperity, rose again.
13. 1933: “Progress” Comes to a Halt

So we bring the history of mankind to that great pause in social expansion which concluded the first third of the twentieth century. The year 1933 closed in a phase of dismayed apprehension. It was like that chilly stillness, that wordless interval of suspense, that comes at times before the breaking of a storm. The wheels of economic life were turning only reluctantly and uncertainly; the millions of unemployed accumulated and became more and more plainly a challenge and a menace. All over the world the masses were sinking down through distress and insufficiency to actual famine. And collectively they were doing nothing effectual in protest or struggle. Insurrectionary socialism lurked and muttered in every great agglomeration. But insurrection alone could remedy nothing without constructive ideas, and there was no power and energy yet behind any such constructive ideas as had appeared. The merely repressive forces, whatever their feebleness in the face of criminality, were still fully capable of restraining popular insurrection. They could keep misery stagnant and inoperative.

Everywhere, in everything, there was an ebb of vitality. A decline in the public health was becoming perceptible. A diminishing resistance to infections and a rise in the infantile death-rate was already very evident in the vital statistics after 1933.

War was manifestly drawing nearer, in Eastern Asia, in Eastern Europe; it loitered, it advanced, it halted, and no one displayed the vigour or capacity needed to avert its intermittent, unhurrying approach.

Still the immense inertias of the old order carried things on. Under a darkling sky, the majority of people were going about their business according to use and wont. The unprofitable industries still carried on with reduced staffs; the shopkeepers opened their shops to a dwindling tale of customers; the unemployed queued up at the Labour Exchanges by force of habit, and some at least got a job; the landlord’s agent no longer collected the rent that was due but called for an instalment of his arrears; the unfed or ill-fed children went sniffing to chilly schools to be taught by dispirited teachers on reduced salaries, but still the schools were not closed; the bankrupt railways and steamship lines ran diminished but punctual services; hotels stayed open not to make profits but to mitigate losses; the road traffic lost something of its newness and smartness and swiftness, but still it flowed; the crowds in the streets moved less briskly, but, if anything, these sluggish crowds were more numerous, and the police, if less alertly vigilant, maintained order.

There had been a considerable if inadequate building boom after the Peace of Versailles, but after 1930 new construction fell off more and more. Yet some builders found work, necessary repairs were attended to, burnt-out houses were reconditioned, for example. In 1935 and 1937 the world was
swept by influenza epidemics of unusual virulence. The lowered resistance, already noted by the statisticians, was now made conspicuous by this return towards mediaeval conditions; but the doctors and nurses stuck to their duties stoutly and the druggists and undertakers, whose affairs had long since been reorganized on Big Business lines, profited.

Pictures of life in the shadows during this phase of devitalization are not very abundant, nor do they convey the essential misery into which a whole generation was born, in which it lived and died. One sees the rows of dilapidated houses, the wretched interiors and shabbily clad men and women standing about. In these pictures they seem always to be just standing about. Descriptive journalism brings the student nearer to the realities of a life without space, colour, movement, hope or opportunity. There were a number of "enquiries" made, more particularly by the British, American and French newspapers, and the tale they tell is always a tale of wheels slowing down to a stoppage, of factory gates being closed, of smokeless chimneys and rusting rails. Here is a vivid contemporary vignette, to show how things were with millions of human beings during this strange phase of human experience. It is from the pen of H. M. Tomlinson (1873-1969) one of the best of English descriptive writers.

“I chanced upon a little town above Cardiff last week. It was by pure chance; I had never before heard of the place. It is typical of these valleys, so never mind its name. It could have many names. Its population is, or was, about 6,000. Its people have faced trouble before — less than twenty years ago over 300 of its men perished in a mine explosion. We won’t say the town got over that, for I spoke to those for whom the calamity is an abiding horror. It was a terrific defeat for them in the war upon Nature, but survivors returned to the struggle and said no more about it.

“When first I saw the town from a distance, with the bleak, bare uplands about it, I was reminded of the towns, once familiar, that were too near the battleline in France. It was midday, and sunny, yet this colliery town was silent and so still that it seemed under a spell.

“As a fact it IS under a spell. It is, in a way, dead. But its people cling to the empty shell of it. Where else can they go?

“At first sight no people could have been there. Buildings in the foreground were in ruins. The gaunt pit-head gearing evidently had not moved for an age. The gaps in the blackened walls of the power-house suggested a home of bats and owls.

“The first man I met when I reached the end of its main street and saw then that the shops were not only closed, but abandoned, was standing on the kerb, a man in the middle years, shrewd, but haggard, his clothes brushed till they were threadbare.
“What’s the matter with this town?’ I asked.

‘On the dole.’

‘Are you out too?’

‘Of course I’m out.’

‘How long?’

He was silent. He held up five fingers.

‘Months?’

‘Years.’

‘Are all the men here the same?’

‘Most of them. And won’t go back.’

He led me up a mound of refuse, where a goat was eating paper, and we had a near view of the colliery itself. ‘That’s the reason we won’t go down again,’ he said. ‘How would you work it?’

Whether by design or rust a steel footbridge had fallen across the wide railway track which went to the pit-head. A deflected stream guttered down between the metals, which were overgrown with grass and stagnant marsh stuff. The outbuildings were a huddle of dilapidations. It looked haunted. ‘Some men I knew,’ muttered my guide, ‘are still down there. There they’ll stop. They’ve been there nineteen years now. Would you call them lucky?’

Two thousand five hundred men came out of the principal colliery five years ago. That is why the shops are shut, long rows of them with whitewashed windows and doorways filled with dust and straws. The woodwork of many houses has been taken for firewood. Even the Cooperative store is shut, as well as the pawnshop. Thrift and thriftlessness mean the same thing in this town, where I noticed that even Nonconformist chapels, with broken windows, had been left to the rats and birds.

Worse than the dismal shops and broken buildings are the groups of shabby men, all neat and tidy, standing listless and silent at the street corners, waiting.

‘Waiting for what? Nothing. There is nothing to come. . . .

They are doomed, these parents, to watch a generation grow up with thin bones and a shadow on its mind. Their children learn the signs of the slow death about them when they should be at play; children that have no childhood.
“Their homes are in a graveyard of human aspiration. . . .”

The Press and literature of that period make curious reading. It varied between a bleak insincere optimism and hopeless desperation. An undignified viciousness and a jeering humour invaded popular art and literature; “strong” in manner and in flavour rather than in any grasp upon the realities of contemporary life. There was also an abundant production and consumption of reassuring and deliberately “cheerful” books, a movement towards religious mysticism and other-worldliness and a marked tendency towards repressive puritanism. Excesses of libertinism provoke censorious and superstitious suppression; the two things are correlated aspects of a decline in human dignity. In the face of its financial and political perplexities mankind was becoming neurasthenic.

All neurasthenia has apparently unaccountable elements. To us to-day, it seems incredible that the way out of all these distresses was not plainly seen and boldly taken. There was a blindness and an effortlessness that still exercise the mind of the social psychologist. The way was so plain that it was visible, it was indicated by hundreds of intelligent and detached observers as early as the thirties of the twentieth century. Maxwell Brown, in his study of the Modern State idea, has two supplementary volumes of citations to this effect. Such phrases, for example, as “Cosmopolis, Inflation and Public Employment” (from a British provincial newspaper article in 1932) do state, in general terms at any rate, the line of escape for the race. These are crude, ill-defined terms, but manifestly they have in them the shape of the ultimate reconstruction. “Cosmopolis” foreshadows our rational world controls, “Inflation” was a plain indication of our present complete restraint upon the aggravation of debts and fluctuations of price level; “Public Employment” was our ancestors’ conception of socialist enterprise.

But before the exodus to peace and freedom could be achieved, such scattered flashes of understanding had to ignite a steadier illumination. The conception of revolutionary world reconstruction had to spread from the few to the many, spread to them not merely as an idea and as a suggestion, but in such force as to saturate their minds and determine their lives. Then, and then only, could the necessary will-power be marshalled and directed to the effective reorganization of earthly affairs.

A struggle for sanity had to take place in the racial brain, a great casting-out of false assumptions, conventional distortions, hitherto uncriticized maxims and impossible “rights,” a great clearing-up of ideas about moral, material and biological relationships; it was a struggle that, as we shall see, involved the passing of three generations. To an analysis of the factors and decisive forces in this struggle our history must next address itself.

Something between eight and ten thousand million human lives in all were
lived out during the Age of Frustration. Compared with the average lives of
to-day, they were shorter and far less healthy; nearly all of them had long
phases of such infection, maladjustment and enfeeblement as are now
almost outside man’s experience. The great majority of them were passed
laboriously in squalid or dingy surroundings, in huts, hovels, cottages,
tenements and cellars almost as dismal as the ancestral cave and nearly as
insanitary. A minority who could command the services of “domestics”
lived in relative comfort and even with a certain freedom and luxury, at an
enormous cost to the rest. This prosperous minority dwindled after 1931. It
had vanished in Russia after 1917.

There was a diminishing sense of personal security in the world, an
enervating fear and uncertainty about the morrow, through the ensuing
years. There was what we find now an almost incredible amount of mutual
distrust, suspicion, irritation and quarrelling. Only a small proportion of
the world’s population lived to be peacefully and gracefully old in this
phase of deterioration. Disease or a violent death became the common end
again. One of the first general histories that was ever written was called
The Martyrdom of Man (Winwood Reade, 1871). In the Age of Frustration
it seemed to many that that martyrdom was mounting to a final hopeless
agony.

Yet in the welter there were also laughter, sympathy, helpfulness and
courage. Those fretted and painful lives interwove with threads of great
brightness. Out of that medley of human distresses, out of the brains of
men stressed out of indolence and complacency by the gathering darkness
and suffering about them, there came first the hope, then the broad plan
and the effort, and at last the achievement of that fruitful order, gathering
beauty and happy assurance, in which we live to-day.
Book the Second

The Days After Tomorrow: The Age of Frustration
1. The London Conference: the Crowning Failure of the Old Governments; The Spread of Dictatorships and Fascisms

In the preceding chapters we have explained how the old order of the nineteenth century, the Capitalist System as it was called, came to disaster in the second and third decades of the twentieth century because of the disproportionate development of its industrial production, the unsoundness and vulnerability of its monetary nexus, and its political inadaptability. It had no inherent power of recovery, and there was no idea of a new order, sufficiently developed, to replace it. Necessarily therefore the tale of disaster went on.

The only mechanisms in existence for collective action, and that only in disconnected spurts, were the various sovereign governments. Most of these at the outset of the war were either parliamentary monarchies or parliamentary republics. The parliaments were elected upon a very preposterous system by the bulk or all of the population. The age was called the Age of Democracy. Democracy did not mean then what it means now, an equal opportunity for every human being according to his ability and the faculty to which he belongs, to serve and have a voice in collective affairs. Nor did it mean the fraternal equality of a small community. It expressed a political fiction of a very extraordinary kind: that every subject of the contemporary state was equally capable of making whatever collective decisions had to be made.

The great republics of a remoter antiquity, the Carthaginian, the Athenian, the Roman, for example, were all essentially aristocratic. Democratic republics, that is to say republics in which every man was supposed to share equally in the government, in the rare instances when they occurred at all before the end of the eighteenth century, were, like, Uri, Unterwalden or Andorra, small and poor and perched in inaccessible places. The world at large knew nothing of them. Their affairs were equally small and well within the scope of a common citizen’s understanding.

Then with the Era of European Predominance came a turning-point in human affairs, that outbreak of books and discussion in the fifteenth century, a period of great animation and confusion when the destructive criticism of faiths and loyalties got loose. The release of new economic forces strained the old feudal order to breaking. Exploration and merchandising, new financial conditions, industrial development, created new types of men, uncertain of their powers, needing and demanding free play. They did not know clearly what they wanted; they did not know clearly how they differed from the men of the old order, nor had they any conception that such a structural reform of human relations as Plato had already pictured nearly two thousand years before them. His plan for a devoted and trained order of rulers was unknown to them, though More
had tried to revive it. They were simply responding to the facts about them. They chafed under an hereditary aristocracy, and they distrusted an absolute king.

Essentially the movement that evolved the phraseology of nineteenth-century democracy was a revolt against “birth” and “privilege”, against the monopolization of direction and advantages by restricted and generally hereditary classes in accordance with definitely established dogmas. Because this revolt was the revolt of a very miscellaneous number of energetic and resentful individuals not definitely organized, mentally or socially, it came about that at a quite early stage of the new movement it took the form of an assertion of the equal political rights of all men.

It was not that these sixteenth and seventeenth-century Radicals were for government by the general mass; it was that they were antagonistic to established classes and rulers. They constituted a vigorous insurgent minority rousing, so far as it could, and trailing after it the apathetic majority of submissive mankind. That was always the character of these democratic movements of the Age of European Predominance. The multitude was supposed to be demanding and deciding — and all the time it was being pushed or led. The individuality of the popular “leaders” of those centuries stands out far more vividly than the kings and ecclesiastics of the period. Only one or two such hereditary monarchs as William Prince of Orange, or Frederick the Great of Prussia, figure as conspicuously on the record as — to cite a miscellany of new types — Cromwell, Voltaire, Mirabeau, Washington, Gladstone, Robespierre, Bonaparte or Marx.

Later on (in England, America, Scandinavia, Germany, Finland, e.g.) in just the same way a minority of dissatisfied and aggressive women struggling for a rôle in affairs inflicted the vote upon the indifferent majority of women. But their achievement ended with that. Outside that sexual vindication, women at that time had little to contribute to the solution of the world’s problems, and as a matter of fact they contributed nothing.

Research in social psychology is still only beginning to unravel the obscure processes by which faith in “democracy” became for the better part of a century the ruling cant of practically all America and the greater part of Europe. There was often a profound internal disingenuousness even in those who were known as “Thinkers” in that age. They were afraid in their hearts of stark realities; they tried instinctively to adapt even their heresies to what seemed to them invincibly established prejudices. Their primary conception of democracy was of some far-away simple little republic of stout upstanding men, all similar, all practically equal in fortune and power, managing the affairs of the canton in a folk-meeting, by frank speech and acclamation. All the old-world democracies, up to and including the Republic of Rome, were ruled, in theory at least, by such meetings of all the citizens. The people, it was imagined, watched, listened,
spoke, and wisdom ensued.

The extension of this ideal to the large communities of the new world that was replacing the feudal order, involved such manifest difficulties and even such absurdities that mysticism was inevitable if the people was still to be supposed the sovereign of the community. But there was so strong and widespread a dread that if this supposition was not maintained privilege, restriction, tyranny would come back that the mystical interpretation was boldly adopted. At any cost those old inequalities must not return, said the adventurers of the dawning capitalist age, and, flying from one subjugation, they hurried on to another.

They found the doctrine of man’s natural virtue as expounded by Rousseau extraordinarily helpful and effective. The common man, when he is not beguiled by Priest or King, is always right. The Common People became therefore a mystical sympathetic being, essentially a God, whose altar was the hustings and whose oracle the ballot box. A little slow and lumpish was this God of the Age of European Predominance, but, though his mills ground slowly, men were assured that they ground with ultimate exactitude. And meanwhile business could be carried on. You could fool some of the people all the time and all the people some of the time, said Abraham Lincoln, but you could not fool all the people all the time. Yet for such crucial purposes as bringing about a war or exploiting an economic situation, this was manifestly a quite disastrous degree of foolability.

And the situation naturally evolved a Press of the very highest fooling capacity.

This belatedly inevitable Divinity proved now to be altogether too slow-witted for the urgent political and economic riddles, with ruin and death at hand, which pressed upon our race as the twentieth century unfolded. The experience of the futile Disarmament and Economic Conferences of 1932 and 1933, the massive resistance in every national legislature to any but the most narrow egotism in foreign policy, the inability of the world as a whole to establish any unanimity of action in face of swift economic collapse, revealed the final bankruptcy of Parliamentary Democracy.

The inability of the world’s nominal rulers to shake off their lifelong habit of speaking to, or at, a vaguely conceived crowd of prejudiced voters, and their invincible repugnance from clear statement, frustrated every effort towards realism. They recoiled from any suggestion of definitive or novel action on the plea that their function was purely representative. Behind them all the reader feels the sprawling uneasy presence of that poor invertebrate mass deity of theirs, the Voter, easily roused to panic and frantic action against novel, bold or radical measures, very amenable to patriotic claptrap, very easily scared and maddened into war, and just as easily baffled to distrust and impotence by delays, side issues, and attacks.
on the personalities of decisive people he might otherwise have trusted. An entirely irresponsible Press, mercenary or partisan, played upon his baser emotions, which were so easy to play upon, and made no appeal whatever to his intelligence or his conscience.

The Voter, the Mass, which was neither educated nor led, the Voter without any sincere organizations of leadership anywhere, is the basal explanation of the impotence of those culminating conferences. The World Economic Conference in London was by far the more significant of the two. Armament and disarmament are symptoms and superficial, but economic life is fundamental. This London gathering has been made the subject of a thousand studies by our social psychologists. Many of its contradictions still perplex us profoundly. The men who assembled had just as good brains as anyone to-day, and, as an exhaustive analysis by Moreton Canby of the various projects advanced at the Conference proves, they had a substantial understanding of the needs of the world situation, yet collectively, and because of their haunting paralysing sense of the Mass and Press behind them and of their incalculable impulses and resentments, they achieved an effect of fatuity far beyond the pompous blunderings of Versailles.

Primarily the London Conference was a belated effort to repair the vast omissions of that earlier gathering, to supplement the well-meaning political patchwork of Wilson by some readjustment of the monetary and economic dislocations he had been too limited to foresee or too weak to avoid. Wraithlike conceptions of some vague monetary League of Nations at Bâle, and some Tariff Council and Assembly, drifted through the mists of the opening meeting. And History, with its disposition to inexact repetition made one of the principal figures of this second world assembly also a President of the United States, belonging also to the Democratic Party and according to the ritual of that Party invoking the name of Jefferson as the Communists invoked the name of Marx or the Moslim, Mahomet. This was Roosevelt II. He leaves a less vivid impression than his predecessor because he did not impend for so long upon the European scene. But for some months at least before and after his election as American President and the holding of the London Conference there was again a whispering hope in the world that a real “Man” had arisen, who would see simply and clearly, who would speak plainly to all mankind and liberate the world from the dire obsessions and ineptitudes under which it suffered and to which it seemed magically enslaved. But the one thing he failed to do was to speak plainly.

Drawing wisdom from Wilson’s personal failure, he did not come to London and expose himself and his conversation to too close a scrutiny. He preferred to deal with the fluctuating crises in London from his yacht, Amberjack II, in Nantucket Harbour, through intermittent messages and through more or less completely authorized intermediaries. Amberjack II
has become almost as significant a ship in the history of human affairs as the Ford Peace Ship. Significant equally in its intentions and in its inadequacies.

Everywhere as the Conference drew near men were enquiring about this possible new leader for them. “Is this at last the Messiah we seek, or shall we look for another?” Every bookshop in Europe proffered his newly published book of utterances, Looking Forward, to gauge what manner of mind they had to deal with. It proved rather disconcerting reading for their anxious minds. Plainly the man was firm, honest and amiable, as the frontispiece portrait with its clear frank eyes and large resolute face showed, but the text of the book was a politician’s text, saturated indeed with good will, seasoned with much vague modernity, but vague and wanting in intellectual grip. “He’s good,” they said, “but is this good enough?”

Nevertheless hope fought a stout fight. There was no other personality visible who even promised to exorcize the spell that lay upon the economic life of the race. It was Roosevelt’s Conference or nothing. And in spite of that disappointing book there remained some sound reasons for hope. In particular the President, it was asserted, had a “Brain Trust”. A number of indisputably able and modern-minded men were his associates, such men as Professors Tugwell, Moley and Dickinson, men whose later work played a significant part in that reconstruction of legal and political method which was America’s particular contribution to Modern State ideas. This “last hope of mankind”, it was credibly reported, called these intimates by their Christian names and they called him “Guv’nor.” He was said to have the modesty and greatness to defer to their studied and matured opinions. Observers, still hopeful, felt that if he listened to these advisors things might not go so badly after all. He was at any rate one point better than the European politicians and heads of States who listened only to bankers and big-business men.

But was he listening? Did he grasp the threefold nature of the problem in hand? He understood, it seemed, the need for monetary inflation to reduce the burden of debt and over-capitalization; he was apparently alive to the need for a progressive expansion of public employment; and so far he was sound. Unless, which is not quite clear, he wavered between “public” and “publicly assisted”, which was quite another matter. But was he sound upon the necessity that these measures should be world-wide or practically world-wide? He made some unexpected changes of attitude in these respects. Were these changes inconstancies or were they tactical manoeuvres veiling a profoundly consistent and resolute purpose? Was it wise to be tactical when all the world was in need of plain speech and simple directive ideas? His treatment took on a disconcertingly various quality. He listened, it seemed, to his advisors; but was he not also listening to everybody? He was flirting with bimetallism. No medicine,
seemed, was to be spared.

The Conference opened with a stout determination to be brilliant and eventful; the hotels were full, the streets beflagged, the programme of entertainments was admirable, and even the English weather seemed to make an effort. The opening addresses by the King of England and his Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald make very curious reading to-day. They express an acute recognition of the crucial condition of human affairs. They state in so many words that the failure of the Conference will precipitate world disaster. They insist upon the necessity for world cooperation, for monetary simplification and a resumption of employment; and in all that we admit they had the truth of the matter. But they make not the faintest intimation of how these desirable ends are to be obtained. They made gestures that are incomprehensible to us unless they had an inkling of the primary elements of the situation. And then immediately they turned away to other things. That mixture of resolve and failure to attack is what perplexes us most. If they saw the main essentials of the situation they certainly did not see them as a connected whole; they did not see any line of world action before them.

Cordell Hull, the chief of the United States delegation, was equally large and fine. The grave and splendid words — shot with piety in the best American tradition — that he inscribed upon the roll of history were as follows: “Selfishness must be banished. If — which God forbid! — any nation should wreck this Conference, with the notion that its local interests might profit, that nation would merit the execration of mankind.”

Again Daladier, the French Prime Minister, opened with extremely broad and sane admissions. He insisted strongly on a necessity which the two opening English speeches had minimized, the necessity, the urgent necessity, for a progressive development of great public works throughout the world to absorb the unemployed and restore consumption. The Americans in the second week seemed to be coming in line with that. But after this much of lucidity the Conference fell away to minor issues. Apparently it could not keep at so high a level of reality. The pressure of the Mass and the Press behind each delegate began to tell upon him. The national representatives began to insist with increasing explicitness that national interests must not be sacrificed to the general good, and in a little time it became doubtful if there could be such a thing as the general good. The World Economic Conference became by imperceptible transitions a World Economic Conflict just as the League of Nations had become a diplomatic bargain mart. All the fine preluding of the first séances withered to fruitlessness because the mind of the world had still to realize the immense moral and educational effort demanded by those triple conditions that were dawning upon its apprehension, and because it was still unwilling to accept the immense political pooling they indicated. The amount of self-abnegation involved was an insurmountable psychological
barrier in the way of the representatives present. It would have meant a sacrifice of the very conditions that had made them. How could men appointed as national representatives accept a pooling of national interests? They were indeed fully prepared to revolutionize the world situation and change gathering misery to hope, plenty and order, but only on the impossible condition that they were not to change themselves and that nothing essential to their importance changed. The leading ideas of the Conference were cloudily true, but the disintegrative forces of personal, party and national egotism were too strong for them.

It is a very curious thing that the representatives of Soviet Russia did nothing to enlighten the obscurity of the world riddle. It is still argued by many writers that the Bolshevik régime was the direct precursor of our Modern World-State as it exists to-day. But there was no direct continuity. The Modern State arose indeed out of the same social imperatives and the same constructive impulses that begot Marxism and Leninism, but as an independent, maturer, and sounder revolutionary conception. The Soviet system certainly anticipated many of the features of our present order in its profession of internationalism, in its very real socialism, and particularly in the presence of a devoted controlling organization, the Communist Party, which foreshadowed our Modern State Fellowship. But there was always a wide divergence in Russia between theory and practice, and Litvinoff, who spoke on behalf of that first great experiment in planning, was too preoccupied with various particular points at issue between his country and the western world, trading embargoes and difficulties of credit, for example, to use the occasion as he might have done, for a world-wide appeal. He did nothing to apply the guiding principles of Communism to the world situation. Here was a supreme need for planning, but he said nothing for a Five Year or Ten Year Plan for all the world. Here was a situation asking plainly for collective employment, and he did not even press the inevitability of world-socialism. Apparently he had forgotten the world considered as a whole as completely as any of the capitalist delegates. He was thinking of Russia versus the other States of the world as simply as if he were an ordinary capitalist patriot.

The claims of the other delegations were even more shortsighted and uninspired. Since there was a time-limit set to their speeches, they compressed their assertions of general humanitarian benevolence to a phrase or so and then came to business. Only Senator Connolly, from the Irish Free State, protested against the blinkered outlooks of his fellow speakers and pleaded for a consideration of "every possible theory, however unorthodox." But his own speech propounded no substantial constructive ideas. He was too obsessed by an embargo that England had put upon Irish exports, and to that he settled down. . . .

The whole idea of the Modern World-State, Moreton Canby insists, is to be traced, albeit in a warped and sterilized form, alike in the expressed
idea-systems of the Americans, the British, the French and the Russians at the Conference. In the American statements it is wrapped about and hidden by individualist phrases and precautions, in the British it is overlaid by imperialist assumptions, in the Russian it is made unpalatable by the false psychology and harsh jargon of Marxism. In the first the business man refuses to change and get out of the way, in the second the imperialist administrator, and in the third the doctrinaire party man. Athwart every assertion of general principles drive the misty emotions of patriotism, party and personal association. Yet for all that it is indisputable that the Modern World-State was definitely adumbrated at London in 1933. Like a ghost out of the future its presence was felt by nearly everyone, though the worst phases of the Age of Frustration had still to come, though generations of suffering had still to lapse, before it could appear as the living reality of human political life.

The ghost, says Canby, did not materialise because there was no material. Every large country in the world was feeling its way towards the essentials of a permanently progressive world-state but none was yet within reach even of its partial and local realisation. Roosevelt II and his eleventh hour effort to reconstruct America, he finds particularly interesting. The President was clearly aware of the need to relieve debt by inflation, but he was unable to check the dissipation of the liberated energy in speculation. He was dealing with men, trained and saturated in the tradition of poker, to whom a solemn cunning had become a second nature, and he was asking them (with occasional fierce threats) to display an open-faced helpfulness. He had no proper civil service available to control large public works; it was impossible to change the American technicians at one blow from quasi-financial operators to a candid, devoted public salariat. So he tried to induce profiteers to forego profits and organise their industries on altruistic lines by dire threats of socialisation which he had no managing class to enforce. And he was as ignorant of British or European mentality and as little able to get to an understanding with it as Wilson had been before him. It was a mutual misunderstanding, but his manners were self-righteous and provocative. He began to scold long before the Conference was over. By 1935 everyone was pointing to a sort of contrasted parallelism between America and Russia. Each was manifestly struggling towards a more scientifically organised state, and each was finding the same difficulty in reconciling productive efficiency in the general interest with primarily political control. Technician and politician had still to be assimilated one to the other. Each great dictatorship was at war with the speculator and the profiteer. Each professed a faint hope of cosmopolitan cooperation and then concentrated practically and urgently upon the establishment of an internal prosperity. But they started towards that common objective from opposite poles of productive efficiency and social assumption. Roosevelt started from the standpoint of democratic individualism and Stalin from that of Marxist communism. The British system and the other intermediate countries of the world struggled to be
conservative in the chaos of financial collapse. No solvent had yet been devised to synthesise the good will in the world.

The London Conference rose to no such dramatic climax as the signing of the Peace Treaty at Versailles. It rose to nothing. It began at its highest point and steadily declined. If Versailles produced a monster, London produced nothing at all. Never did so valiant a beginning peter out so completely.

There are abundant intimations in the Press of the time (see Habwright’s The Sense of Catastrophe in the Nineteen Thirties, a summary of quotations in the Historical Documents Series 173, 192) of a realization that the political and economic morale of that age was played out, and that almost any casual selection of men would have been at least as adequate as this gathering of old-world political personages to face the vast impending disasters before our race. For at any rate these men had already been tried and tested and found wanting. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald indeed, the British premier, the fine flower and summary of professional politics, rolled his r’s and his eyes over the Conference and seemed still to be hoping that some favourable accident out of the void might save him and his like from the damning dissection of history. For a time, in the opening glow of the assembly, with the clicking photographers recording every studied gesture, with the attentive microphones spreading out and pickling for ever his fine voice and his rich accent, with bustling secretaries in sedulous attendance, with the well-trained gravity of the delegates and particularly the well-matured high seriousness of those adepts in public appearance, the Americans, to sustain him, this last sublimation of democratic statesmanship may really have believed that some kind of favourable incantation was in progress under his direction. He must have felt that or he could not have remained there talking. Incantations had made him. By the sheer use of voice and gesture he had clambered from extreme obscurity to world prominence. If he did not believe in incantation there was nothing left for him to believe in. He must have clung to that persuasion to the end. But if that was his state of mind at the time, it could hardly have survived the comments and criticisms of the next few months. Surely then he had some sleepless nights in which even his private incantations failed.

The World Economic Conference lost its brilliance in a week or so. The City, which had been so flushed with hope that for a time its price lists, all pluses, looked like war-time cemeteries, relapsed into depression. The World Slump did not wait for the Conference to disperse before it resumed. At the outset London had been all blown up and distended by bright anticipations, so that it was like one of those little squeaking bladders children play with, and like one of those bladders, so soon as the blowing ceased, it shrank and shrivelled and ended in a dying wail of despair.
As Habwright puts it, by July 1933 intelligent men and women everywhere were saying two things. Of the assembled rulers and delegates they were saying: “These people can do nothing for us. They do worse than nothing. They intensify the disaster.” And in the second place it was demanded with a sort of astonishment: “Why have historians, sociologists and economists nothing to tell us now? There may indeed be some excuse for the failure of politicians under democratic conditions. But have our universities been doing nothing about it? Is there indeed no science of these things? Is there no knowledge? Has history learnt nothing of causes, and is there no analysis of the social processes that are destroying us?”

To which the professors, greatly preoccupied at that particular date in marking honours papers in history and social and political science, made no audible reply.

Before the end of the thirties it was plain to all the world that a world-wide social catastrophe was now inevitably in progress, that the sanest thing left for intelligent men to do was to set about upon some sort of Noah’s Ark to salvage whatever was salvageable of civilization, so that there should be a new beginning after the rising deluge of misfortune had spent itself. A few prescient spirits had been saying as much for some years, but now this idea of salvage spread like an epidemic. It prepared the way for the Modern State Movement on which our present order rests. At the time, however, the general pessimism was little mitigated by any real hope of recovery. One writer, quoted by Habwright, compared man to a domesticated ape, “which has had the intelligence and ability to drag its straw mattress up to the fire when it is cold, but has had neither the wit nor the foresight to escape the consequent blaze”. Habwright’s brief summary of the financial operations that went on as the sense of catastrophe grew justifies that grim image very completely.

The conviction that Parliamentary Democracy had come to an end spread everywhere in that decade. Already in the period between the vacillation in international affairs after Versailles and the warfare of the Forties, men had been going about discussing and scheming and plotting for some form of government that should be at least decisive. And now their efforts took on a new urgency. There was a world-wide hysteria to change governments and officials.

At its first onset this craving for decisiveness had produced some extremely crude results. An epidemic of tawdry “dictatorships” had run over Europe from Poland to Spain immediately after the war. For the most part these adventures followed the pattern of the pronunciamientos of the small South American republics, and were too incidental and inconsequent for the student of general history to be troubled about them now. But there followed a world-wide development of directive or would-be directive political associations which foreshadowed very plainly the organization of the Modern State Fellowship upon which our present world order rests.
The Fascist dictatorship of Mussolini in Italy had something in it of a more enduring type than most of the other supersessions of parliamentary methods. It rose not as a personal usurpation but as the expression of an organization with a purpose and a sort of doctrine of its own. The intellectual content of Fascism was limited, nationalist and romantic; its methods, especially in its opening phase, were violent and dreadful; but at least it insisted upon discipline and public service for its members. It appeared as a counter movement to a chaotic labour communism, but its support of the still-surviving monarchy and the Church was qualified by a considerable boldness in handling education and private property for the public benefit. Fascism indeed was not an altogether bad thing; it was a bad good thing; and Mussolini has left his mark on history.

In Russia something still more thorough and broader came into operation after 1917. This was the Communist Party. It was the invention of Lenin; he continued to modify and adapt its organization and doctrine until his untimely death in 1924. While he lived Russia’s experiment really seemed to be leading the world in its flight towards a new order from the futile negations and paralysis of Parliamentary government. It is still profoundly interesting to note the modernity of many aspects of the early Bolshevik régime.

This modernity achieved under the stress of urgent necessities and Lenin’s guidance was attained in spite of many grave difficulties created by the Marxist tradition. Marx, who was a man of what the psychologists of the middle twenty-first century used to call “blinkered originality”, never saw through the democratic sentimentalities of the period in which he lived. There had been a tendency to exclude the privileged classes from the True Democracy of Common Men even at the dawn of the modern democratic idea, and he and his followers intensified and stereotyped this tendency in their own particular version of deified democracy, the Proletariat. The Proletariat was just Pure Masses, and mystical beyond measure.

But at the outset the actual Russian revolution was under the control of the intensely practical and intensely middle-class Lenin, and he took care that the great social reconstruction he had in mind was equally secured against the risk of paralysis through mass inertia and the risk of overthrow through mass panic. His ostensibly “democratic” government of Soviets, the Soviet pyramid, was built up on a hierarchic scheme that brought the administration face to face only with seasoned representatives who had been filtered through an ascendant series of bodies. Moreover, he established a very complete control of education and the Press, to keep the thought of the nominally sovereign masses upon the right lines. And to animate and control the whole machine he had his invention of the Communist Party.

This Communist Party, like the Italian Fascisti, owes its general conception to that germinal idea of the Modern State, the Guardians in Plato’s
Republic. For if anyone is to be called the Father of the Modern State it is Plato. The Members of the Communist Party were extremely like those Guardians. As early as 1900 critics of democratic institutions were discussing the possibility of creating a cult primarily devoted to social and political service, self-appointed, self-trained and self-disciplined. The English-speaking Socialist movement was debating projects of that kind in 1909-10 (see Fabian News in Historical Documents for those years), but it needed the dangers and stresses of the postwar European situation to produce types of workers and young people sufficiently detached, desperate and numerous, to unite effectively into a permanent revolutionary control.

From its beginnings the Communist Party, though it was not divided into “faculties” and remained political rather than technical in spirit, resembled our own Modern State Fellowship in its insistence upon continuous learning and training throughout life, upon free criticism within the limits of the party, upon accessibility (under due limitations) to all who wished to serve in it, and upon the right to resignation from its privileges and severities of all who wished to return to comparative irresponsibility. But the conditions which created the Russian Communist Party made it inevitably Marxist, and even after a thorough Leninization, Communism, that characteristic final product of middle-nineteenth-century radicalism, still retained many of its old sentimentalities, reverting indeed more and more towards them after Lenin’s death and the rule of the devoted but unoriginal, suspicious and overbearing Stalin.

There was a heavy load of democratic and equalitarian cant upon the back of the Russian system, just as there was a burden of patriotic and religious cant upon the Italian Fascist. Even the United States Constitution did not profess democratic equality and insist upon the inspired wisdom of the untutored more obstinately than the new Russian régime. Although hardly any of the ruling group of Russians were of peasant or working-class origin — there were far more politicians from that social level in the public life of Western Europe and America — there was a universal pretence of commonness about them all. They spat, they went unshaved and collarless. They pretended to be indifferent to bourgeois comfort. It was ordained that at the phrase “Class-War” every knee should bow. When the Communist leaders quarrelled among themselves, “bourgeois” or “petty bourgeois” was the favourite term of abuse, none the less deadly because it was almost invariably true. Long years were to pass before any movement whatever in the direction of the Modern State System was quite free from this heritage of cant.

One unfortunate aspect of this entanglement of the new experiment in Russia with the social envies and hatreds of the old order was its inability to assimilate competent technicians, organizers and educators into its direction. In its attempt to modernize, it refused the assistance of just the
most characteristically modern types in the community. But since these types had a special education and knew things not generally known, it was difficult to accord them proletarian standing. In Russia therefore, as in America, the politician with his eloquence and his necessary and habitual disingenuousness still intervened and obstructed, if he did not actually bar, the way to a scientific development of a new economic and social order.

Manifestly Stalin learnt much from his difficulties with the Five Year Plan of the evil of subordinating technical to political ability, and a speech of his upon the Old and New Technical Intelligentsia made in June 1931 (Historical Documents Series, Stalinism, XM 327,705) is a very frank admission of the primary necessity in the modern community of the “non-party” man of science and of special knowledge. Unhappily the hand of the party politician in Russia was strengthened by the untrammelled activities of those strange protectors of Marxist authority the Checka, which became later the G.P.U. So from 1928, the date of the First Five Year Plan, in spite of a great driving-force of enthusiastic devotion, Russia went clumsily, heavily and pretentiously — a politician’s dictatorship, propagandising rather than performing, disappointing her well-wishers abroad and thwarting the best intelligences she produced. When her plans went wrong through her lack of precise material foresight, she accused, and imprisoned or shot, engineers and suchlike technical workers.

A further bad result of this ineradicable democratic taint of the Soviet system was the widening estrangement of the Russian process from Western creative effort. Instead of being allies they became opponents. As the challenge of social disintegration became more urgent in the Atlantic countries, it became plainer and plainer that such hope as there was for the salvaging of a reconstructed civilization from a welter of disaster lay in the coordinate effort of intelligent, able and energetic individuals of every nation, race, type and class. A revolution was certainly needed, but not a revolution according to the time-worn formula of street battles and barricades, not a class war. A revolution in the very character of revolutions had to occur. There was no need for insurrectionary revolution any longer, since now the system was destroying itself. The phase for boldly constructive revolution had arrived, and at every point where constructive effort was made the nagging antagonism of the Class War fanatic appeared, to impede and divide. (See, for example, Upton Sinclair on this conflict, in The Way Out, 1933, in the series of reprints under his name, Historical Documents Series, History of Opinion.)

The waste of creative energy was enormous, not only in Russia but all over the world. Multitudes of young men and women in every civilized community, the living hope of the race, dissipated their generous youth and vigour in bitter conflicts upon a purely doctrinaire issue. The poison of nationalism was abroad to complicate their reactions. Many turned against progress altogether and sought to thrust the world back to some imaginary
lost age of virtue. So they became Ku Klux Klansmen, Nationalists, Nazis. All felt the natural youthful impulse towards large, effective, vehement action. All meant well. They were one in spirit though they suffered from a confusion of tongues. The idea of the Modern State could not for a long time make itself clear to their imaginations largely because the conspicuous self-contradictions of Russia stood in the way.

Russia seemed to lead, it sought to lead in its acts and deeds, and it lied. Meanwhile, surviving very largely because of this distraction of creative forces, the elderly methods of Parliamentary Democracy and the elderly Nationalist Diplomacy remained in possession of the greater part of the Western World, and the social collapse it was powerless to arrest continued.
2. The Sloughing of the Old Educational Tradition

Faber in his interesting and suggestive Historical Analyses (2103) discusses how far the wars, depressions, pestilences, phases of semi-famine and periods of actual starvation, in the hundred years before 2014, were necessary, and how far, with the resources then available, they might have been avoided by mankind. He takes the view that the encumbrance of tradition was so great that for all that period this martyrdom of our kind was inevitable. He argues that without the sufferings of these generations men's minds could never have been sufficiently purged of their obstinate loyalties, jealousies, fears and superstitions; men's wills never roused to the efforts, disciplines and sacrifices that were demanded for the establishment of the Modern State.

Faber applies his criticism more particularly to this so-called decadence of education after (circa) 1930. It has hitherto been usual to treat the ebb of school-building and schooling that took place then as a real retrogression, to rank it with the fall in the general standard of life and the deterioration of public health. But he advanced some excellent reasons for supposing that, so far from being an evil, the starvation and obliteration of the old-world teaching machinery was a necessary preliminary to social recovery.

The common school, he insists, had to be born again, had to be remade fundamentally. And before that could happen it had to be broken up and wellnigh destroyed. He sweeps aside almost contemptuously the claim that the nineteenth century was an educational century. We are misled, he argues, by a mere resemblance between the schools and universities of the past and the schools and post-school education of the modern period. Both occupy the time of the young, and we do not sufficiently appreciate the fact that what they are doing with the young is something entirely different. Our education is an introduction to the continual revolutionary advance of life. But education before the twenty-first century was essentially a conservative process. It was so rigorously and completely traditional that its extensive disorganization was an inevitable preliminary to the foundation of a new world.

The word education has come now to cover almost all intellectual activities throughout life except research and artistic creation. That was not its original meaning. It meant originally the preparation of the young for life. It did not go on even in extreme cases beyond three or four and twenty, and usually it was over by fourteen! But we draw no line at any age, as our ancestors did, when learning ceases. The general information of the public, public discussion and collective decisions, all fall within the scope of our educational directorate. All that was outside what passed for education in the early Twentieth Century.

What people knew in those days they knew in the most haphazard way.
The privately owned newspapers of the period told the public what their readers or their proprietors desired; the diffusion of facts and ideas by the early cinema, the sound radio and so on was entirely commercialized for the advertisement of goods in America, and controlled and directed in the interests of influential politicians in Great Britain; book-publishing, even the publication of scientific works, was mainly speculative and competitive, and there was no such thing as a Centre of Knowledge in the world.

It is remarkable to note how long mankind was able to carry on without any knowledge organization whatever. No encyclopædia, not even a bookseller's encyclopædia, had existed before the seventeenth century, for the so-called Chinese Encyclopædia was a literary miscellany, and there was no permanent organization of record even on the part of such mercenary encyclopædias as came into existence after that date. Nor was there any conception of the need of a permanent system of ordered knowledge, continually revised until the twentieth century was nearing its end. To the people of the Age of Frustration our interlocking research, digest, discussion, verification, notification and informative organizations, our Fundamental Knowledge System, that is, with its special stations everywhere, its regional bureaus, its central city at Barcelona, its seventeen million active workers and its five million correspondents and reserve enquirers, would have seemed incredibly vast. It would have seemed incredibly vast to them in spite of the fact that the entirely unproductive armies and military establishments they sustained in those days of universal poverty were practically as huge.

We are still enlarging this Brain of Mankind, still increasing its cells, extending its records and making its interactions more rapid and effective. A vast independent literature flourishes beside it. Compared with today our species in the Age of Frustration was as a whole brainless: it was collectively invertebrate with a few scattered ill-connected ganglia; it was lethargically ignorant; it had still to develop beyond the crude rudiments of any coordinated knowledge at all.

But not only was general knowledge rudimentary, casual, erroneous and bad. Faber’s case against the old education is worse than that. Knowledge was explicitly outside education, outside formal schooling altogether. The need for a sound common ideology is a Modern State idea. The old, so called “Elementary” schools, Faber shows, did not pretend to give knowledge. So far as directive ideas were concerned, they disavowed this intention. He quotes a very revealing contemporary survey of the situation in America by Dr. G. S. Counts (The American Road to Culture, 1930) in which the complete ideological sterilization of the common schools of the Republic is demonstrated beyond question. The sterilization was deliberate. So far as the giving of comprehensive information about life went, says Faber, there was absolutely nothing valuable destroyed during
this period of educational collapse because nothing valuable had as yet got into the curricula. The history taught in these popular schools was pernicious patriotic twaddle; the biology, non-existent or prudish and childish — the “facts of sex”, as they were called, were for example TAUGHT by dissecting flowers — and there was no economic instruction whatever. The nineteenth-century “education” was not enlightenment; it was anti-enlightenment. Parents, political and religious organizations watched jealously that this should be so. He quotes school time-tables and public discussions and gives samples of the textbooks in use.

The decline in scientific research, moreover, during this age of systole, Faber insists, has been greatly exaggerated. Although there was certainly a considerable diminution in the number of actual workers through the destruction of private endowments and what was called “economy”, and although there was also a considerable interference with the international exchange of ideas and a slacking down in pace at which ideas grew, there was no absolute interruption in the advance of ordered science even through the worst phases of the social breakdown. Research displayed a protean adaptability and indestructibility. It shifted from the patronage of the millionaire to the patronage of the war lord; it took refuge in Russia, Spain and South America; it betook itself to the aeroplane hangars, to rise again in due time to its present world-predominance. It had never been pampered under the régime of private capitalism. All through that First Age of Prosperity pure research had lived from hand to mouth. As soon as it paid, says Sinclair Lewis in Martin Arrowsmith, it was commercialized and it degenerated. When the bad times came the parasites of science fell away, but the genuine scientific worker, accustomed to scanty supplies, tightened his belt a little more and in all sorts of out-of-the-way places stuck to his job.

What really did break up in this period between 1930 and 1950 was a systematic schooling of the masses which had developed steadily during the nineteenth century. Beyond the elements of reading, speech and counting, this was no more and no less than a drilling in tradition. There had been some reforms, more particularly in method, some advance in the teaching of infants (though this was sacrificed early in the economy flurry), and a few exceptional schools emerged, but this was the character of the typical school of the time. A progressive multiplication of this kind of school had indeed gone on in nearly every country in the world even up to the outbreak of the Great War. The proportion of “literates” who could at least read increased steadily. After that the rate of advance (except in Russia after 1917, where popular teaching was only beginning) fell stage by stage to zero. But what was ebbing was not really knowledge or instruction at all, but a training in the binding traditions of the old society.

The story of what used to be called “the conflict between religion and science” belongs mainly to the history of the nineteenth century, and we
will not tell again here how the fairly stable structure of Christian belief and disciplines was weakened by the changes in values that ensued from the revelation of geological and biological horizons in that period. Before 1850 more than ninety-nine per cent of the population of Europe and America believed unquestioningly that the universe had been created in the year 4004 B.C. Their intellectual lives were all cramped to the dimensions of that petty cellule of time. It was rather frightening for them to break out. They succumbed to mental agoraphobia. The student knows already of the difficulties experienced by the Christian ministry during those years of mental release and expansion in “symbolizing” the Fall and Atonement, which had hitherto been taught as historical facts, and of the loss of confidence and authority that came through this unavoidable ambiguity. The ensuing controversies thundered and died away into mutterings and ironies, but the consequences of these disputes became more and more evident in the succeeding generations. They evinced themselves in a universal moral indefiniteness. The new and old cancelled out.

The accepted Christian world outlook, both that prescribed by the Catholic Church and that of the various dissentient Protestant sects, had carried with it a coarse but fairly effective moral imperative. Hell was the ultima ratio of good behaviour. The Churches, although badly damaged in argument, were well endowed and powerfully entrenched in the educational organization. Their practical resistance to the new views proved to be more effective than their controversial efforts. People had the social habit of belonging to them and entrusting their children to them. There were no other teachers ready; no other schools. So the traditional orthodoxies were able to obstruct the development of a modern ethic in harmony with the new realizations of man’s place in space and time, in spite of the loss of much of their former power of unquestionable conviction.

Gradually throughout the First Age of General Prosperity the relative value of their endowments diminished, and they lost intellectual and moral prestige. But it was only with the economic landslides of the post-war period that their material foundations gave way completely. For a time these great organizations share in the common disaster, and when at last under new auspices a restoration of production occurred they recovered nothing of their proportional importance. Their old investments had vanished. They suffered with other landlords in the general resumption of estates by the community. By 1965 C.E. it was no longer possible for an ordinary young man to get a living as a minister of any Church. Holy orders, since they implied an old-world outlook, were also a grave encumbrance for an ambitious teacher. It was extraordinary with what facility the priests and parsons changed their collars and vanished into the crowd with the progressive disappearance of their endowments. The organized Christian Churches pass out of history at last almost as quickly
as the priesthood of Baal vanished after the Persian conquest. There is considerable plausibility in Faber's contention that they could have disappeared in no other way.

It had been usual to treat the extensive destruction of social morale which characterized this period as due to the interregnum between the fading out of the Christian ethic and the moral and intellectual establishment of modern conduct. Faber questions that boldly. He admits that the morale of Western civilization was built up very largely by Christian agencies, but he denies that they were sustaining it. He ascribes its evaporation almost entirely to the destruction of social confidence which we have noted already as a natural consequence of the wild fluctuations of economic security and monetary values at that time. Men ceased to respect society because they felt they were being cheated and betrayed by society.
3. Disintegration and Crystallization in the Social Magma. The Gangster and Militant Political Organizations

The dissolutions and regroupings of people that were going on through this period have always attracted the attention of the social philosopher. The common man had lost his faith in a friendly God, his confidence in social justice and his educational and social services. He was out of employment and stirred by unsatisfied appetites. The time-honoured life of work and family interests had become impossible for a growing majority.

What we now call social nucleation was failing; the grouping of human beings in families and working communities was not going on. They became restive and troublesome. The social confidence and discipline that had prevailed throughout the nineteenth century deteriorated very rapidly. There was a swift fall in social security.

Phases of fever have occurred time without number in human history, phases of unsettlement and confused motivation, clottings and drives and migrations of population. Periods of tranquil assurance are the exception throughout the ages. But in the past it has usually been the exhaustion of food supplies, pestilence or some cruel invasion that has broken up the social texture and made humanity lawless again. This new disintegration was of a different character. It was due in the first place to an increase rather than a diminution of material and energy in the social scheme. It was a process of expansion which went wrong through the inadequacy of traditional law and government.

The disintegrative forces were already evident in the eighteenth century; they became very conspicuous in the French Revolution and the subsequent social and political disturbances but they only rose to a plain domination of the controlling forces after the World War.

In the seventeenth century, when population was thin and hardly anyone moved about, it had been possible to keep order by means of a village constable, to try the malefactor by a local magistrate and jury which knew him thoroughly and understood his position and motives. Dogberry and Shallow sufficed. But the economic growth of the eighteenth century increased the size of towns and the traffic on the newly made roads between them without any corresponding increase in the forces of order. It produced, therefore, the urban mob, the footpad, the highwayman and the brigand. The local constable was unequal to these new demands; the local magistrate as inadequate. There was a phase of increasing crime.

After the failure of a régime of savage punishment uncertainly inflicted, after the excesses of the first French Revolution, after phases of mob violence in every European capital, and endless other manifestations of
this outpacing of social control, the machinery of government did by an
effort adjust itself to the new conditions. More or less modernized police
forces appeared throughout the world and inaugurated a new phase of
order and security, a phase which reached its maximum in the years before
the Great War. For a time then the world, or at any rate very considerable
areas of it, was almost as safe as it is today. An unarmed man could go
about in reasonable security in most of Europe, India, China, America.
Nobody offered him violence or attempted open robbery. Even the
policeman in the English-speaking and Western European communities
carried no weapon but a truncheon.

But the World War broke down many of the inhibitions of violence and
bloodshed that had been built up during the progressive years of the
nineteenth century and an accumulating number of intelligent, restless
unemployed men, in a new world of motor-cars, telephones, plate-glass
shop windows, unbarred country houses and trustful social habits, found
themselves faced with illegal opportunities far more attractive than any
legal behaviour-system now afforded them. And now after the world slump
that insanity of public economy which runs like a disease through the story
of the age prevented any prompt enlargement and modernization of the
existing educational, legal or police organizations. The scale and prestige of
the law-court and police-court dwindled as the problems presented to
them by the vast irregular developments of that period of stress and
perplexity increased.

So the stage was set for a lawless phase. The criminal was liberated from
parochialism and reactionary economies long before his antagonist the
policeman, and he experienced all the invigoration and enlargement of
that release. The criminal grew big while the law, pot-bound in its
traditional swathings, was unable to keep pace with him.

The criminal records of this disorderly interlude make strange reading
today. Things that were terrible enough at the time appear to us now as
they recede into the past through a thickening, highly retractile veil of
grotesqueness and picturesque absurdity. We read about them, as we read
about mediæval tortures or cannibal feasts or war atrocities or human
sacrifice, with a startled incredulity. We laugh now; it is all so
IMPOSSIBLE. Few of us actually realize these were flesh-and-blood
sufferings that living men and women went through only a century and a
half ago.

The criminals of the more fortunate countries of the European system,
during that First Age of General Prosperity before the World War, like the
few cases of intolerable behaviour with which society deals today, had
constituted a small abnormal and diminishing minority for the most part
mental defectives or at best very inferior types. The majority of their
offences were emotional or brutish offences. There was some stealing and
a steady proportion of swindling in business, not sufficient to disturb the
social order at all seriously. But as the morale of the old order dissolved, 
this ceased to be the case. Increasing numbers of intelligent and 
enterprising people found themselves in conflict with society because, as 
they argued very reasonably, society had cheated them. Patriotism too, 
they felt, had cheated them and given them nothing but poverty and war. 
They had never had a fair chance. They looked after themselves and left the 
community to look after itself. They fell back on the nearer loyalties of 
their immediate associates.

Your “pal” at any rate was close at hand. If he “let you down”, you had a 
fair chance to “get at” him. Little gang-nuclei came into existence, 
therefore, wherever unassimilated elements of the population were 
congested and humiliated or wherever intelligent men festered in 
unemployment and need.

In 1900 European society in particular was still nucleated about the family 
group in relation to a generally understood code of lawful behaviour. In 
1950 its individuals were either nucleated into gangs, groups or societies or 
dissolved into crowds, and the influence and pretence of any universally 
valid standard of good conduct had disappeared.

Robbery is the first great division in the catalogue of anti-social offences. 
Every efficient government in the past reserved to itself the sole right of 
dispossession, and every intelligent government exercised the right with 
extreme discretion. In the past of unregulated private ownership the 
filching of portable objects and raids upon unguarded possessions were 
always going on. In Great Britain, in which country the highest levels of 
social order were attained during the First Age of General Prosperity, 
stealing (with which we may include various forms of embezzlement and 
fraud) remained the chief offence upon the list. Almost all the others had 
become exceptional. But whenever there was a dip in the common 
prosperity, more active methods of robbery appeared to supplement the 
ordinary theft. The snatcher began to take his chance with bags and 
watch. The enterprise of the burglar increased. Then came the simple 
hold-up under threats, or robbery with assault. In a world of general 
confidence, unarmed and unaccompanied people were going about 
everywhere wearing valuable jewellery and carrying considerable sums of 
money. But that atmosphere of confidence could be rapidly chilled. Even in 
later-nineteenth-century Britain there were epidemics of robbery by single 
men or by men in couples, the “garrotters” of the sixties, for example, who 
asaulted suddenly from behind and seized the watch and pocket-book. 
They would clap a pitch plaster over their victim’s mouth. There were brief 
phases when the suburban regions even of London and Paris became 
unsafe, and at no time were any but the more central regions of some of 
the great American cities secure. This kind of thing increased notably 
everywhere after the World War.

There were manifest limits to this hold-up business. It was something that
extinguished itself. There had to be a general feeling of practical security for that type of robbery to prosper. There had to be people to rob. Robbery from the person is an acute and not a chronic disease of communities. So soon as the footpad became too prevalent people ceased to carry so many valuables, they shunned lonely or dark streets and roads, they went about in company and began to bear arms. The epidemic of hold-ups passed its maximum and declined.

The criminally disposed soon learnt the importance of association for the exploitation of new lines of effort. With a more alert and defensive and less solitary type of victim, the casual criminal developed into the planning criminal. In every country multiplying nuclei of crime began to work out the problems of that terroristic gang discipline which is imperative upon those who combine to defy the law. In Europe the intensifying tariff wars put an increasing premium upon the enterprise of the smuggler, and in smuggling enterprises men readily developed those furtive secret loyalties, those sub-laws of the underworld, which proved so readily applicable to more aggressive efforts. In America the repressive laws against alcohol had already created the necessary conditions for a similar morbid organization of gang systems, which had become readily confluent with the older associations for political corruption and terrorism. As the economic breakdown proceeded throughout the thirties and forties of the twentieth century, ordinary social security diminished even more rapidly in America than in Europe. But everywhere a parallel dégringolade was going on. Now it would be the criminal forces in one country and now those in another which were leading in novel attacks upon the law-abiding citizen of the decaying order.

The hold-up in force became bolder and more frequent. History repeated itself with variations. In the place of the highwayman of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came the motor-car bandit and the train-robber. Trains-de-luxe were successfully held up by armed bands, first of all in Eastern Europe and America and then very generally. These were operations involving the concerted action of a dozen men or more, who had to be sure of their “get away” and with a market for their loot. Country houses and country clubs full of wealthy guests presently began to be attacked — the telephones cut and the whole place systematically looted. Restaurants, gambling-clubs and other resorts of people with full pocket-books were also raided with increasing efficiency. Local banks and bank branches became insecure. Until the nineteen-thirties a town bank had a large open handsome office with swinging doors, low counters and glass partitions. Ten years later the face of the bank had changed: the clerks were protected by steel defences, they were armed with revolvers, and they parleyed with the customer through small pigeonholes that could be promptly closed.

This change in the scale and quality of aggressive crime was reflected in
public manners and display. The wearing of jewellery, gold watch-chains, expensive studs and suchlike challenges to poverty declined, costume became more “buttoned up” and restrained. Hip-pocket weapons spread from America to Europe. Women’s dress and ornaments, though if anything they improved in their artistic quality, diminished in intrinsic value. Everywhere there was a diminution of social ostentation. Houses with narrow exterior windows and well equipped with steel doors, locks, bolts and bars, were preferred to those candidly exposed to sunlight and exterior observation. The window displays of the town shops became more guarded.

The need for protection and the dread of conspicuousness affected automobile design. The common automobile of the middle twentieth century was a sullen-looking pugnacious beast. And its occupants were in harmony with it. Before the World War the spectacle of a broken-down vehicle or any such trouble by the wayside would induce almost any passing car to stop and offer assistance. Under the new conditions people feared a decoy. They would refuse to stop after twilight, and even in the daytime they sometimes hurried on, though injured or apparently injured people might be lying by the roadside.

Travel diminished very rapidly under such conditions. There is some difficulty about the statistics, but between 1928 and 1938 the number of pleasure travellers upon the roads and railways of continental Europe fell by something over, rather than under, eighty per cent. There were, of course, other causes at work besides the general insecurity of movement in producing this decline; there was a general impoverishment also which disposed people to stay at home. But the major factor was insecurity.

The roads were less and less frequented as they became unsafe. Many fell out of repair, and the old road-signs and petrol pumps, now dear to our school-museum collectors, vanished one by one from the landscape.

Improvements in robbery were only one group of the criminal developments in progress. A much more distressful aspect was the organization of terroristic blackmail, at first directed against individuals and then against whole classes in the community. As people ceased to travel to be robbed, the robber had to pursue them to their homes. Here again American inventiveness and enterprise led the world. By imperceptible degrees the ordinary prosperous citizen found his life enmeshed in a tangle of threats and vague anxieties. Even during the prosperous period there had been an element of menace in the lives of the American well-to-do; their securities had never been quite secure and their positions never perfectly stable. But now over and above the ever increasing instability of possessions and income came the increasing need to buy off molestation. Breaking through the now inadequate protection of the police appeared silently and grimly and more and more openly the blackmailer, the kidnapper and the gang terrorist.
A particularly cruel form of attack upon unprotected private people was the threatening and kidnapping of young children. It had a minor grotesque side in the stealing and ransoming of pet animals. Many hundreds of children had been stolen, hidden away, and brought back for reward before the abduction and murder of the child of Colonel Lindbergh, a long-distance aviator very popular in America, called general attention to this increasing nuisance. Nothing effective, however, was done to control these practices, and in the bad years that followed 1930 kidnapping and the threat of kidnapping increased very greatly, and spread to the old world. It was organised. Men and women were spirited away, intimidated by threats of torture, held captive. If the pursuit was pressed too hard they disappeared and were heard of no more. Assassinations multiplied. Bodies of men set themselves up almost without concealment under such names as Citizens’ Protection Societies, or Civil Order Associations. The man who wanted to be left alone in peace, he and his household, was pressed to pay his tribute to the gang. Or he would not be left in peace. And even if his particular “protectors” left him in peace, there might still be other gangs about for whom they disavowed responsibility and with whom he had to make a separate deal.

It was not merely the well-to-do who were worried and levied upon in this fashion. An increasing proportion of minor workers and traders found it necessary to pay a percentage of their gains or earnings to escape systematic persecution. “Trouble” was the characteristic American word. “You don’t want to have trouble,” said the blackmailer, gently but insistently.

The new generation grew up into a world of secret compromises and underhand surrenders. The common man picked his way discreetly through a world of possible trouble. No one dared live who was not a member (and servant) of a Union of some kind. It was a return to very ancient conditions, conditions that had prevailed for ages in China, for instance, and in Sicily and Southern Italy. But it was a relapse from the freedom and confidence of the better days at the close of the nineteenth century. It was a contraction of everyday human happiness.

Kidnapping was not confined to kidnapping for ransom. There had always been a certain irrepressible trade in the beguiling and stealing of young persons for sexual prostitution, and this also increased again. Workers were kidnapped, and the intimidation of workers in factories became bolder and less formally legal. There was a great release of violence in personal quarrels, and in particular crimes of revenge multiplied. In a phase of dwindling confidence and happiness, people of spirit no longer recoiled from the tragic ending of oppressive situations. They took the law into their own hands. They began to fight and kill, and they were no longer inevitably overtaken by the law.

The remaining rich, the financial adventurers who still appeared, the
prominent political leaders, the transitory “kings” of the underworld, all surrounded themselves with bodyguards. Types recalling the hired “bravos” of the Italian cities of the later Middle Ages and the Samurai of the Japanese noblemen reappeared as the hefty private attendants of the wealthier Americans. After the economic slump had fairly set in the posse of needy retainers became a universal practice with all who could afford it. They protected the person and the home. They supplemented the police.

The transition from a protective to an aggressive bodyguard was inevitable. Leading American bootleggers were the chief offenders, but the example was contagious. “Brawling” of retainers reappeared first in America, Germany and Ireland. These brawls were usually small street battles, or conflicts at race meetings and suchlike gatherings, or side issues to political meetings and processions. It was a courageous politician who would face an audience after 1938 unless he knew that his men were about him and posted at strategically important points in the meeting. And he would be wearing a mail undervest or suchlike protection of his more vital parts. There are hundreds of such garments in our museums.

No man, woman or child that “mattered” went about “unshadowed” after 1940. After the middle nineteenth century women had made great advances toward personal freedom. About 1912 a pretty girl in her teens might have taken a knapsack and marched off alone through the northern states of Europe or America in perfect safety, unmolested. All this freedom vanished during the age of insecurity. Women ceased to go about without an escort even in the towns. It was not until 2014 that there was any real return towards the former common liberties of the young and weak and gentle. There was on the part of women, as the novels of the time reveal, a survival of social fear in human life, the fear of going alone, until the middle of the twenty-first century.

After 1945 a fresh aspect of insecurity appears in the records. There is mention of unsafe roadside hotels, and a great increase not simply of streets, but of whole districts and villages where “things happened”, people disappeared, and it was inadvisable for strangers to go. Some of these criminally infected areas did not recover their reputations for three quarters of a century. The DANGEROUS big hotel with its secret lifts, passages, ambushes and sinister private rooms is still the delight of our popular romancers; it loses nothing in elaboration as it recedes into the past.

The psychology of the twentieth-century policeman has been made the subject of a whole group of historical studies. There was no connection in those days between the policeman and either the educational or medical services. This association which appears so inevitable to us today would have seemed insane to the organizers of the first police forces in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The policeman, for them, was to be an animated barrier and signpost, capable of leaping into action at the
sight of assault, petty larceny or unseemly behaviour. Beyond that very little initiative was expected from him. He took into custody people who were “given in charge”. Above him were officers, usually of a different class, and associated with the force was a group of criminal enquiry experts, who were quite capable of handling most of the offences against the law that prevailed in the era before the extensive introduction of rapid transit, power machinery and mass production. This pattern of police force worked fairly well up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Except in districts where sexual prostitution was rife it remained fairly honest. It maintained a fairly high level of liberty, security of property and social order for a century. Only when the control of morals or political intervention was thrust upon it did it prove unequal to the strain.

And then, as the greater community of the World State began to struggle clumsily and painfully out of traditional forms, we see police control again outpaced by its task. It gives way. “Why,” the student asks, “was this police organization unable to keep pace with the new stresses? Why were the ruling people of that time so incapable of fitting it to the new demands upon it?” We have already indicated the main lines of the answer. Just when the need for a fundamental refashioning of the police of the world was becoming urgent, came also, first that exacerbation of international hostilities, of “secret service” and espionage to render any broad international handling of the problem impossible, and secondly that desperately foolish sacrifice of life to the creditor which seems to be the inevitable conclusion of any social system based on acquisition.

The Profit-Capitalist System was absolutely incapable of controlling the unemployment it had evoked and the belligerence it stimulated. It stagnated on its hoards. It fought against inflation and it fought against taxation. It died frothing economies at the mouth. It killed the schools on which public acquiescence rested. Impartially it restricted employment and the relief of the unemployed. Even on this plain issue of its police protection it economized. Impossible, it said, to plan a new police when we cannot even pay for the police we have.

And so the desperate fight of an essentially nineteenth-century pattern of police organization, under-financed, inadequately equipped, divided up, controlled by small-scale, antiquated national or parochial authorities, in many cases rotten with corruption, against the monstrous forces of disorganization released by the irregular hypertrophies to social development was added to the other conflicts of that distressful age.

In spite of a notable amount of corruption and actual descents into criminality, the general will of most of the police forces seems to have remained sound. Most but not all. Most of these organizations did keep up a fight for order even when they were in a process of dissolution. They did keep up their traditional war against crime. But their methods underwent a considerable degeneration, which was shared, and shared for the same
reason, by the criminal law of the period. Police and prosecutor both felt that the dice were loaded against them, that they were battling against unfair odds. Their war against crime became a feud. It grew less and less like a serene control, and more and more like a gang conflict. They were working in an atmosphere in which witnesses were easily intimidated and local sympathy more often than not against the law. This led to an increasing unscrupulousness on their part in the tendering and treatment of evidence. In many cases (see Aubrey Wilkinson’s The Natural History of the Police Frame-up, 1991) the police deliberately manufactured evidence against criminals they had good reason to believe guilty, and perjured themselves unhesitatingly. Wilkinson declares that in the early twentieth century hundreds of thousands of wrongdoers were “justly condemned on false evidence”, and that they could have been condemned in no other way.

But the apologetics of Wilkinson for the police break down when he comes to the next aspect of their degeneration under stress. We have all read with horror of the use of torture in mediaeval practice and shuddered at the fact that there were even special machines and instruments in those days, the rack, the thumbscrew, the boot and so forth, for the infliction of pain. But there remains little doubt now that the police of the twentieth century, fighting with their backs to the wall against enormous odds, did go very far towards a revival of torture against those they believed to be social dangers. It is a difficult as well as an ugly task to disentangle this story now, but sufficient fact emerges to show us that in the general decay of behaviour that was going on, not merely casual blows and roughness of handling, but the systematic exhaustion, pestering, ill-treatment and actual torment of persons under arrest in order to extort confessions and incriminating statements, became prevalent.

There is no real distinction in nature between the processes that led up to this chaotic nucleation of human beings about gangs and organizations for frankly criminal purposes and those which led to protective associations for the illegal maintenance of security and order and again to those much wider allegiances within the state such as the nationalist Sokols in the Austrian provinces that became Szecho Slovakia, the Irish Republican organizations, the Ku Klux Klan in America, the multitudinous secret societies of India, China, and Japan, the Communist Party which captured Russia, the Fascist who captured Italy, the Nazis who captured Germany, all of which pursued on bolder and bolder scales large intimidatory and revolutionary economic and political ends. All these were structurally great gangster systems. Instead of specific immediate blackmail they sought larger satisfactions; that is all the difference. Even when the organisation as a whole had large conceptions of its function, it was apt to degenerate locally into a mere boss or bully rule. All these forms of recrystallization within the community, large and small, arose because of the inadaptability and want of vigour and cooperation in the formal governing, economically directive and educational systems. Because there was no foresight to
ensure continuity in the growth of institutions, there were these unpremeditated and often morbid growths, expressive of the accumulating discomfort and discontent and of the need for a more intimate, energetic and fruitful form of human association.

It is paradoxical but true that the civilized human society of the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries broke up because of the imperative need of human beings to live in active combination. It was pulled to pieces by its own new cohesions. Until there was a complete, satisfactory and vigorous World-State organization potentially in being, the continuation of this breaking up and reassembling of social energy was inevitable. It was like the break-up of caterpillar organs in the cocoon to form the new structures of the imago.

Even the Modern State Fellowship itself, so far as many of its nuclei were concerned, was at first of this nature, a coalescence of all these varied technicians who realized that employment would vanish, that everything they valued in life would vanish, with the spread of social disorder. They constituted protective and aggressive gangs with an unexampled power of world-wide cooperation. Their confluence became the new world.

The demoralization of the world's sea life, thanks to the surviving vestiges of naval power, was far less rapid and complete than the spread of disorder on the land. It was only after the series of naval mutinies towards the end of the last European war that the ancient practice of piracy was resumed. Even then ships could still be policed and a recalcitrant ship brought to book much more easily than the black streets of a town. One or two pleasure liners were boarded and held up in out-of-the-way ports in the thirties, but in no case did the assailants get away with their plunder. In 1933 the Chinese fleet had disintegrated into shipfuls of adventurers offering their services by wireless to the various governments who divided the country. But these stray warships did little mischief before they were bought, captured or sunk by the Japanese.

A Canadian pleasure liner, The King of the Atlantic, on one of the last holiday voyages to be made, was seized on the high seas by an armed gang in 1939, and an attempt was made to hold its passengers to ransom. They were all to be killed if the pursuit was pressed home. In the face, however, of a combined attack by American sea and air forces, at that time still efficient though greatly in arrears with their pay, the hearts of the gangsters failed them and they surrendered ignominiously.

No ship of over 9,000 tons was ever captured by pirates. This relative maintenance of orderliness at sea was due to special conditions — the then recent discovery of radio communications, for example. It outlasted the practical cessation of shipbuilding in the forties and an immense shrinkage in the world’s shipping.
Nor did new types of criminal appear in the air until after the third European conflict, and then not overwhelmingly. Here again was a field of human activity, essentially simple and controllable. For a time indeed the aeroplane was the safest as well as the swiftest method of getting about the world. For some years after the practical cessation of general land travel the infrequent aviator still hummed across the sky, over dangerous city and deserted highroad, over ruined country houses and abandoned cultivations, recalling the memory of former disciplines and the promise of an orderly future.

There were fewer aeroplanes just as there were fewer ships, and, because of the general discouragement of enterprise, there was little change of type, yet the skies, like the high seas, remained practically outside the range of the general social debacle until well past the middle of the century. The need for aerodromes, for repairing and fuelling, held the dwindling body of aviators together. Air outrages at the worst phase were still scattered and disconnected events. And it was in the air at last and along the air routes that the sword of a new order reappeared.
4. Changes in War Practice after the World War

The science and practice of warfare during this Age of Frustration, having now no adequate directing and controlling forces over it, pursued, in its development, a preposterous and dreadful logic of its own.

In 1914, at the outbreak of the World War, military science had been a pretentious and backward lore. The War Offices, as we have told, had allowed the armament industry to put enormously outsize weapons into their hands, but they had made none of the necessary mental adjustments needed to meet this change of scale. All the land commanders engaged in that struggle with scarcely an exception were still fighting clumsily according to the obsolete tradition of nineteenth-century warfare. They were still thinking in terms of frontal attack, outflanking, the break-through and so-forth. We have told as briefly as we could the horrors of the ensuing harvest. The Admiralties, forewarned perhaps by their engineers, showed a livelier discretion and for the most part hid away their costly fleets from the disasters of combat in strongly defended harbours, and allowed them to emerge only on one or two wild occasions for battle so inconclusive that they were prolonged as controversies for years afterwards and remain undecided to this day. The submarine, the minefield, the aeroplane, the primitive “tank”, organized propaganda to weaken war will, a tentative use of gas, and the replacement of many of the elder commanders as the war proceeded did something to modify land fighting, but to the very last, when the general collapse of “morale” led to the armistice, the professional soldiers were clinging to the idea that nothing fundamental had happened to the methods of their ancient and honoured profession.

All this changed after the Peace of Versailles. A spirit of unrest entered into both the War Offices and Foreign Offices of the world. They were invaded by a consciousness of great changes none the less potent because it was belated and had accumulated. The younger generals who had been through the war could not put out of their minds memories of attacks from overhead, gas attacks, tank actions, and, above all, the loose ungentlemanly comments of temporary officers of practical ability and unmilitary habits of mind. These younger generals aged in their turn, and as they aged they succeeded to positions of authority. They came into power repeating perpetually: “We must keep pace with the times.”

A phase of extreme innovation succeeded the conservatism of the older generation. Everywhere the War Offices stirred with novel conceptions of strange inventions, secret novelties and furtive systematic research. Everywhere the obscure reports of spies and informants, carefully fostered by the armament dealers affected, stimulated this forced inventiveness.

It was realized that the old warfare had in fact perished in a state of lumpish hypertrophy in the trenches. It had indeed been a “war to end
war” — and the old war was done for. The new warfare had to replace it — and quickly. The Foreign Offices demanded it. They could not do without war of some sort. Sovereignty was war. The traditional state was an organization against foreigners resting on the ultimate sanction of belligerence. They could imagine no other state of affairs, for to begin with that would have involved imagining themselves non-existent. The thirties and forties of the century teemed with furtive and grotesquely hideous researches to discover and develop the methods of the New Warfare. For the only alternative to further war was the abandonment of state sovereignty, and for that men’s minds were altogether unprepared.

The changes in war method that went on between 1900 and 1950 C.E., with the possible exception of the introduction of firearms between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, were far greater than anything that had ever happened since the earliest men hit and scuffled in their first rude group encounters. For endless ages the main conflict had been the “battle”, the encounter of bodies of men on foot or on horseback. The infantry had been the traditional backbone of the army, and (except when the Huns and the Mongols refused to play according to the rules) the cavalry was secondary. Artillery was used only for “preparation” before the attack. So fought Rameses, so Alexander, so Caesar, so Napoleon. The glorious victories during the romantic ages of human warfare all amounted to battles of practically the same pattern, to a great central battering with pikes, swords, bayonets, maces or suchlike implements, a swiping, pushing, punching, pelting, stabbing, poking and general clapperclawing amidst a shower of comparatively light missiles, that went on at longest for a few hours, and ended in a break, a flight, a cavalry pursuit and a massacre. This “open warfare” alternated, it is true, with long sieges, less sportsmanlike phases, in which the contending hosts refused battle and squatted unwholesomely in excavations and behind walls, annoying each other by raids and attempts to storm and break through, until hunger, pestilence, the decay of discipline under boredom, or the exasperation of the surrounding population broke up the party. Non-combatants suffered considerable temporary and incidental molestation during warfare, there was a certain amount of raping and looting, devastation to destroy supplies, pressed labour and spy-hunting on a scale which amounted in most cases to little more than an exacerbation of normal criminality. Wholesale devastation, such as the break-up of the irrigation of Mesopotamia by the Mongols, or the laying waste of Northumbria by William the Conqueror of England, was, when it occurred, a measure of policy rather than a war measure. War had to go on for many decades before it could produce such disorganisation as that of Asia Minor in the wars between Byzantium and Persia. The Islamic invasions were at first made additionally disagreeable by religious propaganda, but this was speedily replaced by discriminatory taxation. The long distance campaigns of Roman, Hunnish and Mongol armies again spread various once localized infectious and contagious diseases very widely; but the total
influence of the old warfare upon human destiny was enormously exaggerated by the nationalist historians of the old régime. It was of infinitely less importance than migration. The peasant life went on unchangingly, squalid and laborious, as it had been going on for the majority of human beings since agriculture began. The various “Decisive Battles of the World” were high points in that fantasy of the pedants, the great “drama of the empires”, with which they befogged the human mind for so long during its gropings from the peasant state of life towards a sane and orderly way of living.

But with the Napoleonic wars, the soldier began to invade and modify the texture of normal life as he had never done before, by conscription, by unprecedented monetary levies, indemnities and taxes that dislocated economic processes; and conversely, quite uninvited by the soldier, as we have shown, the expanding forces of power industrialism and of mass manipulation through journalistic and other sorts of propaganda, invaded both the military field and the common life. War, which had been like the superficial ploughing of our ancestors, became a subsoil plough, an excavator that went deeper and deeper, that began presently to deflect underground springs and prepare extensive landslides.

The Generals of the World War were all in the position of inexperienced amateurs in charge of vast mechanisms beyond their power of control. War, which formerly had been fought on the flat along a “front”, suddenly reached through and over the contending armies, and allowed no one to stand out of it any more. The New Warfare, it was already being remarked by 1918, was a war of whole populations, from which all respect for the non-combatant was vanishing. People said this, and some few even tried to understand in detail what it meant. And now all over the world military gentlemen, many of them still adorned with the spurs, epaulettes, froggings, buttons, stripes, ribbons, medals, residual scraps of armour and suchlike pretty glories of the good old times, set themselves most valiantly to work out the possibilities and methods of the New Warfare.

Courage was always the better part of the military tradition, and nothing could exceed the courage with which these men set themselves throughout this period to overtake the march of invention, to master engineering and engineers, chemistry and chemists, war correspondents and newspaper editors, biology, medicine, and even finance, in their efforts to keep that ancient war idea, the idea of the battling sovereign state, alive. As we have seen, the schools stood loyally by them; they had the support of the armament industries, and, less wholeheartedly perhaps, the approval of the old religions and of the old royalties and loyalties. Their activities were profoundly stupid, but the grotesque horror of their achievements, the distress and unhappiness of three generations of our race, are still recent enough to mask their ludicrous quality.

The literature of the military science of this period is a copious one, and
perhaps the best survey of it all is Fuller-Metsch’s The Ideas of the New Warfare in the Middle Twentieth Century (2001). Therein the writer sets himself to three enquiries: “For what did they suppose they were going to fight?” “How were they going to fight?” And “What did they consider would constitute a definitive end and winding-up of their fighting?”

The answer he gives is a composite one. No single individual seems to have grasped the New Warfare in its entirety. With a solemn pedantry, a pretentious modesty, each “expert” dealt with his own department and left it to Fate to put the assembled parts together into a whole. But what the composite soldier of 1935 was contemplating rather foggily seems to have been very much as follows. He conceived the world as divided up among a number of governments or Powers. These were the sovereign states as the Treaty of Westphalia (1642) presented them. All these powers were competitive and passively or actively hostile. The intervals when the hostility was active were wars. The intervals of recuperation and preparation were peace. War was a cessation of a truce between the belligerents, a cessation arising out of an irreconcilable dispute or clash of interests, and the objective then of each Power was to impose its Will upon its enemy. In the days before the twentieth century this imposition of Will was done more or less professionally by the governments and armies. One or other Power took the offensive, crossed its borders and marched on the enemy seat of government. After various operations and battles the capital would be captured or the invader driven back to his own, and a peace made and a treaty signed more or less in accordance with the Will of the victor. Boundaries would be adjusted in accordance with that Will, colonies transferred, indemnities arranged for; the victorious Power expanded and the defeated shrivelled. The people of the unsuccessful Power would be very much ashamed of themselves. To the end of the nineteenth century this formula was observed.

But by the time of the World War much more than the disappearance of the “front” and the increasing entanglement of the erstwhile non-combatants was happening to this procedure. The Powers were losing their definite identities. The fine question of what constituted a responsible government capable of imposing a Will, or giving in to it, arose. In Russia, for example, was the new Communist régime responsible for the obligations of the Autocracy? Was Germany, were all the Germans, to be held responsible for Krupp-Kaiser militarism? Was a dummy Sultan in Constantinople, or Kemal Pasha in Angora, the proper authority to consent to the dismemberment of Turkey? Again, the United States of America had come gaily into the war and then declined effective participation in President Wilson’s settlement. He had not, it seemed, been a plenipotentiary. Was that behaving as a Power should behave?

Still further perplexities arose about the laws of war. If the front was abolished, if civilians were to be bombed from the air, what became of the
right of professional soldiers to shoot franc-tireurs and destroy their homes? It was as if the arena of a football match were invaded by the spectators, who began kicking the ball about, chasing the referee, and declining to keep any score as between the original sides in the game.

The military authority recoiled from these devastating riddles of the new age. Such issues, he decided, were not for him. There had always been sides in a war, and there must still be sides. It was for the politicians to define them. He fell back on his fundamental conception of a Power “imposing its Will” upon another Power, but using now, in addition to the old invasion and march on the capital, the new methods of propaganda, blockades and attacks behind the front, and all the latest chemical and aerial devices to “undermine the morale” of the enemy population and dispose its government to yield. In the end there must be a march, if only a concluding professional march, through the goal or capital of the losing side. He refused to entertain the inevitable problem of an enemy government not yielding but collapsing, and leaving no responsible successor. That was not his affair. Presumably in that case the war would continue indefinitely.

Nor was it his business to enter into the financial aspects of the matter, to estimate any ratio whatever between the costs of the New Warfare and the material advantages to be exacted when the Will of the conqueror was imposed. In that regard he was excessively modest. He could not be expected to think of everything. His business was to prepare the best and most thorough war possible, with all the latest improvements, and quite regardless of cost, for his Power. It was for his government to find out how to pay for and use the war he had prepared for it. Or to use it partially. War, just war itself, was the limit of his task.

Research for the latest improvements soon led the now almost morbidly progressive military mind to some horrifying discoveries. Some of the soldiers concerned were certainly badly scared by the realization of what evils it was now possible to inflict in warfare. It leaked out in their speeches and books. But they kept on. They kept on partly because they had a stout-hearted tradition and refused to be dismayed, but mainly no doubt for the same reason that the Christian priests and bishops who had lost their faith still stuck to their Churches — because it was the only job they could do. Throughout the three decades that followed the Congress of Versailles, thousands of highly intelligent men, specialist soldiers, air soldiers, engineering soldiers, chemical, medical soldiers and the like, a far ampler and more energetic personnel than that devoted to the solution of the much more urgent and important financial riddles of the time, were working out, with unstinted endowments and the acquiescence and approval of their prospective victims, patiently, skilfully, thoroughly, almost inconceivably, abominable novelties for the surprise and torture of human beings.
None of these experts seems to have been more than mediocre; it was an age of mental and moral mediocrities; and even within the accepted limitation we have already noted, none of them seems to have worked out the New Warfare as a whole complete process. Groups of men working in secrecy, immune from outer criticism, naturally conspire not only against the foreigner but against each other, and most of the men in decisive positions were rather men skilled in securing appointments and promotion than inspired specialists. A certain lumbering quality in their devices ensued.

In Great Britain a group of these experts became exceedingly busy in what was called mechanical warfare. The British had first invented, and then made a great mess of, the tank in the World War, and they were a tenacious people. The authorities stuck to it belatedly but doggedly. In a time of deepening and ever bitterer parsimony their War Office spared no expense in this department. It was the last of all to feel the pinch. The funny land ironclads of all sizes these military “inventors” produced, from a sort of armoured machine-gunner on caterpillar wheels up to very considerable mobile forts, are still among the queerest objects in the sheds of the vast war dumps which constitute the Aldershot Museum. They are fit peers for Admiral Fisher’s equally belated oil Dreadnoughts.

The British dream of the next definitive war seems to have involved a torrent of this ironmongery tearing triumphantly across Europe. In some magic way (too laborious to think out) these armoured Wurms were to escape traps, gas poison belts, mines and gunfire. There were even “tanks” that were intended to go under water, and some that could float. Hansen even declared (see The Last War Preparations, xxiv, 1076) that he had found (rejected) plans of tanks to fly and burrow. Most of these contrivances never went into action. That throws a flavour of genial absurdity over this particular collection that is sadly lacking from most war museums.

The British and the French experts, and presently the Germans, also worked very hard at the fighting aeroplane — the British and Germans with the greatest success; the aerial torpedo, controllable at immense distances, was perfected almost simultaneously by the Italians and the Japanese. The French mind, for all its native brilliance, was hampered by its characteristic reluctance to scrap old plant for new. It was the German, American and Russian experts who went furthest with the possibilities of chemical attack. The disarmament of Germany necessarily forced its military authorities to concentrate on an arm that could be studied, experimented upon and prepared unknown to the outer world, and the Russians were forced to take up parallel enquiries because of their relative industrial poverty. The Germans had been first to use gas in the Great War, and they remained for a long time the war gas pioneers. But after the Great War much attention was given to this arm in America through the
influence of the chemical industry. Biological warfare, that is to say the distribution of infectious diseases, was also extensively studied, America and the Central Europeans in this case leading the way.

Even before the Central European fighting in 1940 and the subsequent years, the distribution of various disease germs was no longer a merely theoretical possibility. Little containers, made to look like fountain pens, were already being manufactured. The caps could be removed to expose soluble ends, and then they could be dropped into reservoirs or running streams. Glass bombs also existed for use from aeroplanes, railway-train windows and so forth, which would break on hitting water. There are specimens in the Aldershot Museum. The enrolment and territorial organization of medical men and trained assistants to inoculate threatened populations went on with increasing vigour after 1932.

But there was a certain hesitation about the use of disease germs. It is easy to distribute them but hard to limit their field of action, and if prisoners (military or civilian) were still to be taken and towns and territory occupied, a well launched pestilence might conceivably recoil with deadly effect upon its users. Bacterial warfare seemed, even to the specialists who studied it, a very improbable method for any but an heroically vindictive population in the hour of defeat. Nevertheless it was thought best to have it worked out. Except for the distribution of malignant influenza in Kan-su and Shensi by the Japanese during their efforts to tranquillize North China in 1936, “without proceeding to extremities”, its use was never officially admitted. Other alleged instances of its deliberate employment by responsible Powers have been shown by the researches of the Historical Bureau to have been due either to the unauthorized zeal of subordinates or to the activities of those religious fanatics who became so prevalent during the period of confusion after 1945. The acclimatization of the mosquito transmitting yellow fever in India in 1950, which did so much to diminish the population of that peninsula, has never been explained. It is generally supposed to have been accidental.

So far as method and invention went, what was called “Gas Warfare” ran very parallel to bacterial warfare. Its beginning and end is now a closed chapter in the history of the human intelligence and will. It is surely one of the strangest. It set its stamp upon the clothing and urban architecture of the age. It ranks in horror with the story of judicial torture or the story of ritual cannibalism, but its inhumanity is more striking because of its nearness to our own times. Like those older instances, it brings home to us the supreme need for sound common general ideas to hold together human activities. It tells how thousands of clear and active minds, each indisputably sane, could, in an atmosphere obsessed by plausible false assumptions about patriotic duty and honour, cooperate to produce a combined result fantastically futile and cruel.

The people engaged in this business were, on the whole, exceptionally
grave, industrious and alert-minded. Could they revisit the world to-day individually we should probably find them all respectable, companionable, intelligible persons. Yet in the aggregate they amounted to an organization of dangerous lunatics. They inflicted dreadful deaths, hideous sufferings or tormented lives upon, it is estimated, about a million of their fellow creatures.

Most of the lethal substances prepared for gas warfare purposes have passed altogether out of general knowledge. They are either never manufactured now or they are produced upon rare occasions and under proper control for the purposes of physiological research. The old devices and appliances for their distribution seem, nowadays, like grotesque anticipations of many of the features of the large scale agricultural and hygienic operations that are carried out to-day. The treatment of locust swarms by air attack, the spraying of the reafforested regions against various tree diseases, the regular cleansing and stimulation of our grain and root crops are all subsequent rationalizations of these practices of the Age of Frustration.

Faber, that Calvinistic optimist, with his doctrine that the bad is all to the good in this maddest of all conceivable worlds, thinks that all these big scale methods were “enormously stimulated” by the crazy inventiveness of the war period. But then he has also suggested that the aeroplane would not have come into general use for many years without war stimulation. We venture to think he carries his doctrine of the attainment of wisdom through imbecility too far. It is really only a modernization of Charles Lamb's story of the invention of the roast pig. It had the touch of Rasputinism, this revival of the ancient heresy that one must sin THOROUGHLY before one can be saved.

Much more after the gas-war pattern were the campaigns (2033 and 2035) against rats and mice, that finally cleansed the world of the lurking poison of that medieval terror, bubonic plague, and the distributions of “festivity gas”, that were permitted in various regions in 2060. The countervailing use of benign-gases as a subsidiary to the suppression of the depressing cometary toxins of 2080 will also occur to the reader. The oxygenation of council chambers, factories, playing-fields and similar loci demanding special brightness and activity, and the use of Padanath Tagore’s Lotus Gas in the Himalayan rest valleys, we may note, are also claimed by Faber as part of the legacy of gas warfare.

One or two of the offensive substances actually manufactured for war purposes are now utilized in relation to very special and specially protected processes in our industrial plants. The preparation of some of them is a major felony. They were a very various miscellany, for every chemical possibility was ransacked to find them. Very few of them were actually gases. Many were volatile liquids or even finely divided solids, which were to be sprayed or dusted over positions in enemy occupation. Dr. Gertrud
Woker, in a paper on this subject contributed to an enquiry by the Interparliamentary Union in 1931, gave a useful summary of the existing state of knowledge at that time. In conjunction with various colleagues (What Would Be the Character of a New War? Historical Documents 937,205), she allows us to form an estimate of what was actually being contemplated by contemporary military experts. Except for one important exception, her list covers all the main types of poison gas substances that were actually prepared. This spate of investigation culminated about 1938. By that time the entire field had been explored. After that there were improvements but no major innovations.

After 1940 even military research was restricted by the increasing financial paralysis. In 1960 no plants capable of producing material for gas warfare on a sufficiently abundant scale were operating.

Of gases actually tried out in the World War itself, the chief seem to have been chlorine and various chlorine compounds (phosgene, Green Cross gas, chloropicrin and so forth). These attacked and destroyed the lung tissue. Chlorine was used by the Germans as early as April 1915 at Ypres when 6,000 men were killed by it; it was soon abandoned, because it was so immediately irritating that its presence was detected at once, and precautionary measures could be taken. The other gases in this class got to work less frankly. Presently the victim began to cough. Then as the destruction of the bronchioles and alveoli of the lungs went on he retched and suffocated and coughed up blood and tissue. He died amidst his expectorations with a visage blue and bloated and bloodstained froth on his lips. If by good luck he survived, he survived with his lungs so injured that he easily fell a victim to tuberculosis or suchlike disease. Most of this group of gases had their own characteristic complications. One series, for instance, would attack the nervous system, causing wild excitement, terror, convulsions, screams and paralysis. Thousands of men had already died in agony from Green Cross gas during the World War, and the plans of some of these experts involved the massacre of whole populations in the same atrocious fashion. Green Cross gas was used, but not in sufficient strength to be very deadly, in the Polish bombing of Berlin in May 1940, and in a more concentrated form in the aerial torpedoes that were sent from Germany to Warsaw. It had been used also at Nankin in 1935 and in the Chinese reprisal at Osaka.

Yellow Cross gas, or mustard gas, was much more insidious and also more cruel and murderous. It was not really a gas; it was a volatile liquid. When cold, it spread unsuspected in a thin film over the ground, getting on to boots and clothing, being carried hither and thither. Slowly, as it vaporized, its presence was revealed. Discomfort came, a horrible suspicion, fear and then coughing and retching. It involved quite frightful and hopeless suffering. Steadily but surely it killed every living substance with which it came into contact; it burnt it, blistered it, rotted it away. One
part of mustard gas in five million of air was sufficient to affect the lungs. It ate into the skin, inflamed the eyes; it turned the muscles into decaying tissue. It became a creeping disease of the body, enfeebling every function, choking, suffocating. It is doubtful if any of those affected by it were ever completely cured. Its maximum effect was rapid torture and death; its minimum prolonged misery and an abbreviated life. The gases used in the fighting in North China in 1934-37 and in the Chinese raids upon Japan were mostly of this group. And an evacuation of Berlin in 1946 was brought about by the threat of Yellow Cross bombs.

[They were actually dropped, but either through accident or by the insubordination of the chemists employed by the Poles, they smashed ineffectively. It was one of the most striking instances of what appears to have been the pacifist sabotage that helped to end the formal warfare in Central Europe. Five of the chemical workers concerned were shot and seventeen given long sentences of imprisonment, but none of the records of their trial has survived.]

Allied rather than competing with these gases of the Green and Yellow Cross categories, Dr. Woker cites the Blue Cross group. These substances were essentially direct nervous irritants in the form of an almost impalpable dust. They could penetrate most of the gas masks then in use, and produced such pain, so violent a sneezing and nausea, and such a loss of self-control that the victim would tear off his mask, so exposing himself to the Green or Yellow vapours with which Blue Cross was usually associated.

All these torments had been extensively inflicted already during the World War, but after its conclusion the secret activities of the various poison gas departments were sustained with great energy. It took them nearly twenty years even to open up the main possibilities of their speciality. One substance, which played a large part in the discussions of the time, was “Lewisite”, the discovery of a Professor Lewis of Chicago, which came too late for actual use before the end of 1918. This was one of a group or arsenical compounds. One part of it in ten millions of air was sufficient to put a man out of action. It was inodorous, tasteless; you only knew you had it when it began to work upon you. It blistered as much as mustard gas and produced a violent sickness.

Other war poisons followed upon this invention, still more deadly: merciful poisons that killed instantly and cruel and creeping poisons that implacably rotted the brain. Some produced convulsions and a knotting up of the muscles a hundred times more violent than the once dreaded tetanus. There is a horrible suggestiveness in the description of the killing of a flock of goats for experimental purposes in these researches: “All succumbed to the effect of the gas except three, which dashed their brains out against the enclosure.” And to assist these chemicals in their task of what Dr. Woker calls “mass murder” there was a collateral research into
incendiary substances and high explosives, to shatter and burn any gas attack shelter to which a frightened crowd might resort.

Dr. Woker’s summary does not include Kovoet’s invention of the permanent Death Gas in 1934. Its composition is still a secret and its very complicated preparation a felony. This compound, although not absolutely permanent, decomposed with extreme slowness. It was in itself neither a gas nor a poison. It was a heavy, rather coarse-grained powder. It evaporated as camphor does, and as it evaporated it combined with oxygen to form a poison effective when diluted with fifty million times its volume of air. Its action was essentially of the Lewisite type. This was actually used in the first Polish War to cut off East Prussia. A zone of territory from a mile to three miles wide along the whole frontier was evacuated and dusted with Permanent Death Gas. East Prussia became a peninsula accessible only from Lithuania or by sea. In spite of the heavity of the grains, the winds finally widened this band of death to about fifteen miles in width and carried its lethal influence into the suburbs of Danzig.

This murdered region was not re-entered, except by a few specially masked explorers, until after 1960, and then it was found to be littered with the remains not only of the human beings, cattle and dogs who had strayed into it, but with the skeletons and scraps of skin and feathers of millions of mice, rats, birds and suchlike small creatures. In some places they lay nearly a metre deep. War Pictures has two photographs of this strange deposit. Vegetation was not so completely destroyed; trees died and remained bare and pickled; some grasses suffered, but others of the ranker sort flourished, and great areas were covered by a carpet of dwarfed and stunted corn-cockles and elecampane set in grey fluff.

A curious by-product of Permanent Death Gas is what is now known as the Sterilizing Inhalation. This was first made by accident. A Chinese Vindication Society organized an air raid on Osaka and Tokio in 1935 after the great Green Cross raid on Nankin in that year. It was intended to strike terror into the Japanese mind. Permanent Death Powder was to have been used, but because of the haste and danger of the preparations the Chinese had not tested it out, and here again, either by accident or design, things went wrong; the formula, it seems, had been falsified. Consequently, when the raid was made — all the machines employed were brought down on their way home — nothing ensued but a temporary fever accompanied by retching and purging.

There was much derision of the unfortunate aviators in Japan. It was only some months after that the Western World learnt that the medical services of both towns were reporting a complete cessation of early pregnancies. Not a litter of kittens or puppies had appeared for weeks, mares were no longer foaling nor cows in calf. Mice and rats vanished. The sterilization in all cases was permanent. But birds were not affected for reasons that Crayford-Huxley has since made clear. The sparrows multiplied
enormously and the hens still clucked triumphantly in these childless cities.

In some way the Chinese chemists had blundered upon one of those rare sub-radiant gases known as Pabst's Kinetogens, which affect the genes. A whole series of these are now known to biologists, chiefly through the work of Pabst and his assistants, and most of the more extraordinary flower sports and new aberrant animal types in our experimental gardens are due to their employment; but for a long time, until indeed Pabst took up the subject with an insight all his own, only the Sterilization Inhalation was known. Most of the campaigns in the Forties of the twenty-first century against contagious rodents made an extensive use of this gas wherever regions could be isolated from human intrusion, and the day may not be distant when it will have important eugenic applications.

But the Japanese experience produced even a greater sensation throughout the world than the actual slaughter of the victims would have occasioned. The militarist class in Japan was as deeply sentimental as the Western equivalent in Europe, and as resolute that the common people should not only die but breed fresh battle fodder for their country. Until the patriots realized that the Chinese supply of this stuff was limited, they lived in horror. They saw themselves stripped bare of subject lives. They saw themselves extinct in the hour of victory. There was a great clamour about the world for the extensive application of this new find during the fiercer war years; there are proposals on record (Hate Eugenics, Historical Documents 5752890 and seq.) to apply it from the air to Palestine, Arabia, Ireland, the whole of China and the African Continent in part or as a whole. But mankind was saved from any such catastrophe by the fact that the first production of Sterilizing Inhalation was essentially accidental. It had been prepared furtively, its makers were untraceable, and the proper formula was not worked out and made controllable until our insane world was well in the grip of the harsh humanity of the Air Dictatorship.

How all these hideous devices of the New Warfare were to be brought together to effect the definitive subjugation of the Will of a belligerent Power was apparently never thought out, or, if it was, the plans were kept so secret that now they have perished with their makers. After the millions had choked, after the cities were a stench of dead bodies — what then?

Perhaps the artistic interest of the business precluded such remote considerations. All we can disentangle now of this gas warfare, as its experts contemplated it, consists of projects of mere mischief and torture. They seem imbued with much the same wanton destructiveness as that displayed by some of the younger specimens among the Loando-Mobi chimpanzee hybrids.

Yet some of these plans are amazingly thorough up to a certain point — up to the point when one asks, “But WHY?” For instance, in the Marine War
Museum in the Torcello Lagoon there are no fewer than half a dozen raider submarines built for four different great Powers, and all specially designed as long-distance bases for gas warfare. They carried no guns nor ordinary fighting equipment. They had practically unlimited cruising range, and within them from five to nine aeroplanes were packed with a formidable supply of gas bombs. One of them carried thirty long-range air torpedoes with all the necessary directional apparatus. There were four different types of gas mixture in the bombs, but they differed little in character and efficiency. The smallest of these raiders carried enough of such stuff to “prepare” about eight hundred square miles of territory. Completely successful, it could have turned most of the London or New York of that time, after some clamour and running and writhing and choking, into a cityful of distorted corpses. These vessels made London vulnerable from Japan, Tokio vulnerable from Dublin; they abolished the last corners of safety in the world.

These six sinister monsters gleam now in the great gallery side by side, their poison fangs drawn, their mission abandoned, the grim vestiges, the uncontroversial evidence of one nightmare among the many nightmares of hate and evil that afflicted the human brain during the Age of Frustration. There they are. Men made them — as men made the instruments of torture during the previous dark ages. Even amidst the happy confidence of our present life it is well that we should remember that, given different conditions, men technically as sane as ourselves could design and make these things.

There is something revolting in these details. We have given enough for our purpose. History must not be made a feast of horror. From first to last gas warfare destroyed very painfully between one and one and a quarter million lives that might have been fruitful and happy. That much mischief was done. They suffered and they have gone. The gist of our story is that, after the humiliation and quickening of the military mind by the ineptitudes of the World War, belligerent science did not so much progress as lose itself in the multiplicity of its own inventions. It developed one frightful and monstrous contrivance after another, to dismay and torment mankind, to spread ill health and hate, to demoralize and destroy industrial life, to make whole countries uninhabitable and loosen every band that held men together in orderly societies, but it made no steps at all to any comprehensive and decisive conduct of war. With no plan for the future, with no vision of the world as a whole at all, these thousands of furtive specialists, these “damned ingenious patriots”, as Isaac Burtonshaw (1913-2003) called them, went on accumulating, here frightful explosives, there stores of disgusting disease germs, and there again stores of this or that fantastically murderous gas.

No comprehensive plan held any of these centres of evil together into one premeditated whole, as, for instance, the military preparations of the
Hohenzollern Empire were held together by a clear and deliberate scheme of conclusive warfare. Beneath the vulgar monarchist claptrap of the German effort of 1914 there was indeed a real scheme for the reorganization and modernization of civilization about a Teutonic nucleus according to Teutonic ideals. It may have had its fatuous elements, but it was logical and complete. But war planning never recovered that completeness after 1914; never got back to the same logical foundations. After that belligerence lost its head. It still went on as everything else went on in those days — by inertia. But it had no longer any idea of what it was up to.

Yet over all the world these incoherent mines were prepared, and they might well have exploded, had their release been simultaneous, into such an outbreak of disorderly evil as staggers the contemporary imagination. It is conceivable that they might have destroyed mankind. It would have needed no change in the essential conditions but only a rearrangement of the determining accidents to have brought about that final catastrophe.

This menace of a chaos of disasters and aimless cruelties hung over a disorganized and unprotected world for three-quarters of a century. It is what some historians call the Period of Maximum Insecurity, from 1935 to 1965. Here and there quite monstrous things occurred — at Nankin, Pekin, Osaka, Berlin, Warsaw, for instance; things terrible enough to hearten and steel the better elements in humanity for the achievement of that world peace towards which all these forces were urging it. Fortunately for mankind the two fundamental evils of traditionalism were just sufficient to neutralize each other during this long period of the incubation of the Modern State. The greed of the creditor balanced the greed of the armament dealer. As armaments grew more and more costly, the possible purchasers grew poorer and poorer. If Economy starved and hampered many good things in human life, it did at least finally take all vigour and confidence out of the development of the New Warfare. The Chemical Armament industry followed the other typical institutions of the old order into the general social liquidation which wound up the bankruptcy of Private Profit Capitalism.
5. The Fading Vision of a World Pax: Japan Reverts to Warfare

We have shown already how Parliamentary Democracy necessarily abolished real leaders in public affairs and substituted a strange type of pseudo-leader, men who were essentially RESULTANTS, who made nothing, created no forces, met no emergencies, but simply manoeuvred for position, prestige and the pettier rewards of power. They followed the collapse of the decaying order without an effort to arrest its decay. Why indeed should they have made an effort? They were representatives of the popular will, and if there was no popular will . . .

We have already considered the behaviour of this amazingly ineffective collection of men in face of the financial dislocation that was choking the economic life of the race. It is doubtful if a single one of them ever gave a month’s continuous study to the plain realities of that situation. And in the face of the accumulating stresses created by the maladjustments of Versailles, this galaxy of humbugs to whom democracy had entrusted the direction of human beings — humbugs unavoidably, for the system insisted upon it regardless of the best intentions — was equally enigmatical and impotent. Along the eastern frontiers of Italy and Germany the open sores festered. No one sought to heal them. In the Far East the conflict between Japan and China, failing a European protest, became frankly a formal war. Every world event cried louder than the last for collective action, and there was no collective action. The League of Nations appointed commissions of enquiry and produced often quite admirable analyses of hopeless situations.

No one knew how to arrest the grim development of the situation. The chief of states repeated the traditional gestures, as though these were all that could be expected of them. But the patterns of history served them no more. They found themselves like men who attempt to gesticulate and find their limbs have changed to cloud and rock.

Of all the “Powers” of that time the behaviour of Japan was the most decisive. In 1931 an internal revolution in that country had put political power into the hands of a patriotic military group, diplomatically unscrupulous and grossly sentimental according to the distinctive Japanese tradition, and this coterie set itself now with extraordinary energy and an equally extraordinary lack of authentic vision to caricature the aggressive imperialisms of the nineteenth-century Europeans. The mind of this ruling group was still intensely romantic, still obsessed by those ideas of national dominance and glory which had passed already so fatally over the intelligence of Christendom. Their military initiatives were quasi-Napoleonic, their diplomatic pretences and evasions modelled on the best European precedents. It was “Japan’s turn” now.

The investigation of just what these Japanese Imperialists imagined they
were doing has greatly exercised our historical research department. But it is indeed only a special instance of the general riddle of what any “Power”, regarded as a mentality in itself, imagined it was doing in that age. Only a century and a half has passed since those Japanese columns were marching into one Chinese town after another, and today our psychologists confess themselves baffled by an enterprise that was manifestly undertaken by men like ourselves and yet had already assumed a quality of absolute insanity. Why did these very intelligent people behave in that fashion?

The clue lies in the extraordinary ease with which distasteful reality can be repressed by the human mind, and in the atmosphere of grotesque but flattering illusions in which these people were living. Just as in the West the bankers, economic experts, responsible statesmen would not realize the complete smash to which their fiscal and financial methods were plainly heading until the smash had actually come, so these Japanese militarists could not see the inevitable consequences of their continental adventures. They could not see behind them a miserable peasantry breeding itself down to the basest subsistence; a miserable urban proletariat deteriorating physically and morally; they could not estimate the mutterings of revolt in all their sweated and driven industrial centres; they could not understand the protests of their own fine and growing intelligentzia.

Even the steady fall of the national credit abroad and the increasing economic stresses of the land aroused no misgivings of hallucination. Japan in her headlong pursuit of Western precedents was rapidly reproducing all the revolutionary conditions of the West. All that was lost upon her leaders. The one thing they could see clearly was that China was disorganized, that she was struggling with great difficulty to discover a new method of collective living to replace her ancient slack imperialism, and that by all the rules of the international game this was Japan’s opportunity. They thought that, in very much the same way that the disorganization of the Empire of the Great Mogul had laid India bare to the piratical enterprise of the Europeans and permitted the establishment of the unstable aimless Indian Empire of the British, so now Fate had invited them to an equally glorious opportunity, to a parallel Japanese domination of the most or all of Asia. Who could tell where their imperial adventure would end — or whether it would have an end? The mirage of limitless power and glory opened out before them, as it has opened out to all empire builders since the world began.

They were reckoning without the New Warfare, reckoning without modern industrialism, without the paradoxical self-destructiveness of Private Capitalist enterprise, without Russia, without America, without the superior mass, the traditional unity and mental obduracy of the Chinese population. They were thinking as a Pomeranian Junker or a British
general from that “hot-bed of Imperialists”, Ulster, might have thought before 1914. It was an archaic megalomania — that led to the killing of about three million combatants, an extreme social disintegration in China, and the final collapse of the Japanese monarchy.

In the special histories of this struggle, the student who needs or desires the knowledge may find the detailed particulars of the Japanese aggressions from 1931 onward which grew at last into the formal invasion of China proper; the tentative of Shanghai, the invasion of Manchuria and the establishment of the puppet kingdom of Manchukuo (1932), the attack on Shanhaikwan which led to the penetration of the Great Wall, the invasion of China Proper from the north and the march on Pekin. The operations up to that point were largely on the pattern of the old warfare as it had been practised up to 1914. The Chinese were poorly equipped and had little modern material; the Japanese found it unnecessary to make any excessively expensive efforts to attain their objectives.

All this earlier fighting went on to an accompaniment of protests from the quite powerless League of Nations at Geneva. A “Lytton Report” prepared by a commission of enquiry is to be found in the Historical Documents Series (2067111). But counterbalancing these remonstrances were the ambiguous utterances of the British Foreign Office, the support of the French armament industry and its Press, the overt support of a great group of American banks and their newspapers. In view of these divisions, the Japanese militarists had every reason to disregard Western criticism altogether.

In 1935 the Japanese occupied Pekin and Tientsin. They set up a second puppet monarchy in Pekin. But they found very great difficulty in holding the country, particularly to the south and west of these centres. Manchuria, Inner Mongolia and Shansi remained seething with bandits and rebel bands, and the still unoccupied valley of the Yang-tsze-kiang remained fighting with an increasing unity under the leadership of the reorganized Kuomintang. In no part of China or Manchuria was it safe for a Japanese to go about alone, and a rigorous economic boycott, sustained by an omnipresent terrorism, continued. The Kuomintang was a directive association created by the great Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat Sen, and it had gone through various vicissitudes; it had a rough general resemblance to the Communist Party and the various European fascisms, and, like them, it sustained a core of conscious purpose throughout its community. It had no vital centre, no formal head; it was a thing of the mind, unquenchable by military operations. And under the stress of this resistance it had become violently patriotic and xenophobic.

In 1936 Japan already had more than a million and a half men scattered between the Manchurian frontier and Canton, where a third landing had been made and still her hold upon China hardly extended beyond the range of her guns and the glitter of her bayonets. She had bombed Nankin
twice on an extensive scale, Pekin before its surrender, and Wuchang and Hankow, with Yellow Cross bombs. Hundreds of thousands of people had been slaughtered, but the great invertebrate body of China seemed able to endure such losses with a stoicism impossible in a more highly organized state. In return the "Vindication of China" Society astonished the world by suddenly bombing and, through an error in the gas mixture, STERILIZING Osaka and Tokio.

No one knew of these Chinese air forces until they appeared in action. The machines had come from Sweden by way of Russia. But nearly every Western country was supplying contraband of war to the Chinese. Unaccountable hostile aeroplanes with untraceable bombs appeared in the sky and came humming over the sea to Japan. Then in 1935 a Japanese transport blew up and sank in the Gulf of Pe-chih-li. In 1936, three Japanese liners were destroyed by mines of unknown origin within fifty miles of port. War supplies of all sorts got into China from Soviet Russia in the north and from the French and British possessions in the south, and the help and sympathy of America became more and more manifest as the vast imperial ambitions of the Japanese leaders became unmistakable.

Western feeling had at first been acutely divided between distrust of Japan and the desire to see China restored to order on capitalist lines and saved from Communism. But with every Japanese advance European and American feeling veered back towards China. Australia and New Zealand appealed to the Washington Government for a joint guarantee to supplement the Imperial tie in 1937. They were advocating a mutual guarantee of all the Europeanized regions of the Pacific. For a time it seemed as though the Western world might be guided to a sort of unity by the flares of Japan. But the unforgettable humiliations inflicted upon Central Europe after the war still rankled sufficiently to prevent that.

Even before the launching of the definitive conquest of China there had been considerable economic and social stress in Japan. The earlier successes, the easy capture of Pekin and the failure of an adequate Chinese army to materialize, had filled the island empire with patriotic enthusiasm and hope; the war was brought to a victorious conclusion three times, and each time it broke out again. No invader ever conquered Russia to the end, and no one ever completed the conquest of China. Always beyond the subjugated provinces appeared other provinces swarming with hostility. Szechwan and the south supplied inexhaustible support and supplies for the Kuomintang resistance. It seemed at last as though there could be no peace any more in China until the invaders fought their way through to Tibet.

War weariness descended upon Nippon. The peasants saw their sons marching off, never to return, and shortages of ordinary commodities deepened to famine. There was already vigorous "Stop the War" agitation in Japan in 1935; there were continual strikes in Nagoya and hundreds of
casualties, and afterwards there began a frantic dumping of accumulated goods abroad, to pay not merely for munitions but for such now vitally essential imports as Australian meat and Canadian and American corn. The war was starving the home fields of men and it was destroying the productivity of large areas of China. The social structure of Japan proved to be far too primitive to emulate the miracles of economy performed by the Germans during the World War. The confidence and credit of Japan sank steadily. Foreign loans became no longer possible even at such exorbitant rates as 14 or 15 per cent. And still there was no end in sight.

The Japanese militarists had gone too far to recede. Behind them they had a suffering population that might rapidly become vindictive, and about the arena of the struggle watched Russia, America and Europe. According to the best traditions of their culture, these national leaders resolved on a supreme military effort, a march in overwhelming force into the central province of Hupeh. Colossal preparations were made, and every able-bodied Japanese who was not already enrolled was called up. This was to be “a blow at the heart”.

A convergent march from Nankin, Shantung and Canton was planned. This dispersal of the bases was justified by the necessity for living on the country as far as that remained possible. There were railways in existence from Canton and Shantung, but they were difficult to protect, and, apart from them, there was such an utter want of practicable roads that by the time the Japanese were in Hupeh a third of their forces were trailed out upon their lines of communication making roads, and the equipment of heavy guns and munitions they had been able to bring up was very little superior to that of the Chinese, who were still fighting with all the wealth of Szechwan at their backs and the almost overt sympathy of the West. The three great Japanese armies effected their junction in a loose ring round Wuchang — a ring that was for a time slowly drawn tighter and then ceased to contract. A deadlock ensued, a deadlock of mutual exhaustion. Neither up nor down the river was the closure of the ring complete. Throughout 1938, Japan waited for good news from the long crescents of trenches about Wuchang, and waited in vain. Pestilence broke out in July and defeated the utmost sanitary and medical efforts of the invaders. Then early in 1939 they began their retreat to Nankin, with transport disorganized, with mutiny growing, with all the country rising about them. The horrors of that retreat have never been fully told. The three Japanese armies at their maximum strength had numbered well over two million of men; but probably about a million or less remained fit enough for the retreat. Famine was far more deadly with them than the Chinese guerillas; the exhausted wretches fell out along the line of march and waited stoically for the end; few prisoners were taken; the Chinese had no food even if they had had mercy to give quarter, and the fallen were left to perish in their own time. The broken remnant that assembled at Nankin did not greatly
exceed a hundred thousand, and still smaller bodies from the lines of communication fought their way homeward to the north and south. The rest of these two million lay in the vast cemeteries of Puki and Ki-chow, or they had been drowned in the floods, or their bodies were littered as they had dropped and crawled over the sad monotonous landscape of the Chinese hills. At Nankin the weary and dispirited survivors realized that Japan was now also at war with the United States and that Osaka and Nagoya were in the hands of Communist Committees.

For some weeks the Japanese army sprawled inactive in its former cantonments to the west of Nankin. Then it revolted, shot many of its officers, declared for the social revolution and fraternized with the Chinese Red Army which had marched in under its nose from Hangchow and taken control of the city proper.

The entry of the United States into the Eastern War, which did so much to complete the demoralization of militarist Japan, was the climax of a prolonged wrangle about the supply of mines and submarines to the Chinese, that became more and more acute after the sinking of a Japanese transport in the gulf of Pe-chih-li.

It is only recently that the full history — which is also a very tedious and disputatious history — of the sea war against Japan has been worked out. Every contemporary record was falsified at the time; every event hidden completely or elaborately camouflaged. It is now fairly evident that not merely did private firms manufacture mines and build submarine mine-layers but that the various European navies under the plea of economy sold out a large proportion of quite modern and valid under-sea craft for “breaking up” to agents and dealers acting for South American intermediaries. The submarines, either intact or so “broken up” that they could easily be reconstructed, went to various Peruvian and Chilian ports and thence found their way across the Pacific to the Philippines. The Philippine Islands were quasi-independent, but the Manila declaration of President Roosevelt II in 1937 had practically extended to them the protection of the Monroe Doctrine, and the Japanese had never had the surplus energy necessary to challenge this informal protectorate. Now these islands became the base for vexatious attacks upon their overseas trade and sea communications.

The naval situation in the Pacific was a complicated one. To the east of the Philippines lie the Ladrones, a scattered group of volcanic islands, of which the largest, Guam, had been assigned to the United States of America by the Treaty of Versailles and was administered as a part of the American navy, while the rest were held by Japan under a mandate. (The Powers previously in possession had been first Spain and, after 1899, Germany.) The Japanese were bound by treaty not to fortify their holdings, but as the situation grew tense they seem to have ignored this restriction, at least to the extent of establishing submarine bases. Now that the situation was
growing tenser the state of affairs above and under water between the
Ladrones, the Philippines and the Asiatic mainland became darker and
more dangerous. There was a threatening concentration of the American
Fleet between Guam and the Philippines to ensure the neutrality of the
latter, a patrolling concentration of the Japanese along the Chinese coast,
and an obscure activity of privateering submarines and ambiguous
shipping, which smuggled munitions and supplies and raided weak points
of the Japanese communications.

Above water a submarine, like any other ship, can fly a flag and claim the
respect due to its nationality, but mines fly no flags, and under water a
submarine may be able to recognize the coded signals of a co-national but
has no means at all of distinguishing a neutral from an enemy. Mistakes
and pseudo-mistakes were inevitable. Two American submarines
disappeared in 1936. Then several Japanese submarines vanished from the
Ladrone archipelago. Disputes that broke out in neutral cafés came to a
murderous end in the depths. The American navy took matters into its
own hands. By 1937 an informal naval war had developed in the Western
Pacific.

Neither Power hurried on to an actual declaration of war. America, in spite
of, or perhaps because of, the bold experimenting of Roosevelt II, was in a
state of deepening economic and political disorder, and Japan was putting
forth her utmost strength for that disastrous “blow at the heart” in China.
But many of the more conservative influences in the United States saw in a
Pacific war a saving distraction of public attention and public energy.
There was an agitation to re-annex the Philippines, and after the Japanese
failure to hold Wuchang the drive towards open war became
uncontrollable.

The particulars of the brief, destructive and indecisive naval war that
followed need not occupy us here. The battle fleets met in the Western
Pacific and separated after two days of gunfire and heavy losses.
Ammunition gave out, it seems, on the Japanese side. At any rate they
drew off in the twilight under a smokescreen. The Americans claimed the
victory because they were able to go on to Manila, while the Japanese
withdrew to the protection of their minefields and submarines and were
never able to emerge again for lack of material. Both Powers were now in a
state of deepening domestic stress, and their war, in a technical sense,
never ended. That is to say, there was no final treaty as between two
Powers, because both had in effect collapsed. They fell apart. Social
revolution swept the conflict off the stage.

[The student will be reminded, by this inconclusive termination, of the
almost incessant, dreary and futile wars of Byzantine and Sassanid, that
devastated Asia Minor for three centuries and did not so much come to an
end as suffer effacement from history by the sponge of Islam.]
The social disintegration of Japan, once it had begun, was very rapid. The great mass of the population, the peasants, had been scarcely affected by the process of Westernization, and they lapsed very readily into the same unprogressive variant of Communism as their equivalents in Kwantung, Chekiang and Fukien had adopted. A small Westernized intelligentsia with many internal feuds and doctrinal disputes struggled, not very effectively, in the larger towns to turn this merely insurgent Communism into modern and constructive paths after the Moscow pattern. Fragmentation when it came was swift and thorough. Militarism degenerated into brigandage and local feudalism. Here and there some scion of the old nobility reappeared with his attendant Samurai as a gangster boss.

In the space of a few years all Asia from the Pacific to Persia seemed to be sliding back to political and social chaos, to hand-to-mouth cultivation, destitution and endemic pestilence. For the greater part of India and most of Further India were also now drifting back to barbarism. There also the phrases and the insubordination, if not the spirit and methods, of Communism had captured vast multitudes who had remained completely unaffected by other European ideas. It was Communism without any Five Year Plan or indeed any conception of a plan. It was the class-war in its ultimate crudity. It killed money-lenders and tax-collectors with gusto and elaboration. It evolved strange religious fanaticisms, and it abandoned sanitation as “boujawai”, the accursed thing. The imperial power in India was not overthrown; rather it was stripped of effective prestige and receded to an immense distance. The princes remained formally “loyal”, though in some cases they tacitly annexed “disturbed districts” adjacent to their proper dominions. Localities and local adventurers improvised a sort of social order at a low level and with a continually completer disregard of any central authority.
6. The Western Grip on Asia Relaxes

The recession of the directive influence of the half modernized European imperialisms in Asia went on steadily. Even as early as 1929 the spread of a peasant communism similar to that which had obtained so strong a hold upon the popular imagination in China was causing grave alarm to the Indian Government. The seizure and trial of a group of British and Indian agitators at Meerut, and the extravagantly heavy sentences passed upon them in 1933, showed both the gravity of these fears and the unintelligent clumsiness with which the situation was being met.

For the British Empire there was to be no such decline and fall as happened to Rome. Instead it relaxed, as we shall now describe, to nothing.

Unhappily, before it relaxed in India it had, as in Ireland, a brief convulsive phase of “firmness” . . .

[Here several sheets from Raven’s MS. appear to be missing.]
7. The Modern State and Germany

A question of primary importance in human history is this: Why were the lessons of the Great War, and the subsequent economic and social disorders, lessons which seem to us to-day to be as starkly plain as lessons could be — why were these lessons lost upon every one of the great communities of thought into which the world was divided? British thought, French thought, American thought, German, Russian, Italian thought, seem in our retrospect to ring the changes upon every conceivable sequence of prejudice and stupidity. Why was Wilson’s start towards world unification not followed up? Why after 1932 was there no vigour to reconstruct the League of Nations, when all the world was crying for some central authority to unify money and economic life? Why did the Age of Frustration last so long? We have already noted some of the controlling causes, the mercenary Press, the vast anti-social private interests, the heavy weight of tradition, the reactionary quality of schoolmasters, the social disintegration due to economic demoralization. But even these malignant influences, taken all together, do not seem sufficient for this blindness in the general intelligence of our race towards the obvious elements of its situation.

Behind all these conditions making for failure there was something else: there was an intrinsic weakness in the forces of reconstruction, there was a fundamental lack. It was impossible for the world to get out of its difficulties because it had no definite complete idea of what it wanted to get out to. It had ideas, yes, more than enough, but they were confused and often mutually contradictory ideas. A drowning man cannot save himself by swimming unless he has something solid to which he can swim. The deficiency was not moral nor material, it was intellectual. There was the will for salvation and the material for salvation, but there was no plan of salvation. The world has no definition of an objective. That had still to be made plain to it.

It will make this matter clearer if we consider the mental and emotional phases of one typical culture community of central importance at that time, the German. Stories similar in essence, if widely different in detail, could be given of the French, Anglo-Saxon, Russian and Spanish-speaking communities. The feature they had in common was this, a failure to realize that there could be no salvation now unless it was a comprehensive salvation. They were attempting to do severally and with a jostling competitiveness what could only be done with the utmost difficulty in unison. That meant for every one of them the paralysing influence of a war threat, extreme economic instability, incapacity for dealing with morbid financial conditions, and a consequent state of mental “worry” that made every move inaccurate and untimely.

It is only when we realize the sapping of that aggressive energy that had
well-nigh Europeanized the whole world before the World War that we can understand the length of the Age of Frustration. Certain facts of fundamental importance to the continued health of our world community have to be stressed. Europe could not lead the world to unity when the world seemed dying to be led to unity, because Europe itself was profoundly disunited. The World War was merely the explosion of tensions that had been straining below the surface throughout the whole First Period of World Prosperity. Before the European peoples, who by 1920 amounted to a quarter of the whole human race, could resume the exploring, experimenting and civilizing rôle they had played for two centuries, it was necessary that they should be purged of a chronic mental disease — a disease which had, it seemed, to rise to an acute phase and run its enfeebling and devastating course before it could be treated: the disease of hate.

Although each year in the Thirties saw the international tension in Europe increasing, it was only in 1940 that actual warfare broke out. All Europe was “mined” for ten years before that time, but the very consciousness of that fact, if it did not hold back the drift towards war, increased the gravity of its onset. That ingenious contrivance of President Wilson’s, the Polish Corridor, Poland’s “access to the sea”, was the particular mine that exploded first. But it was only one of a series of accumulating detonations which were destined to blow the still creaking ineffective League of Nations, and indeed nearly every vestige of the unfortunate Treaty of Versailles and its subordinate “settlements”, out of the way of human readjustment.

The mental phases of that great body of Europeans who used the German language summarize the world situation. The history of Europe from 1900 to 1950 could be told in a study of the German brain alone, its torment and the reactions it evoked in the peoples about it. It was a brain of outstanding vigour and crudity. It aroused admiration, envy and fear. Its achievements in material science were magnificent; its energy of industrial organization was unparalleled. Its mathematical and psychological ineptitudes were redeemed by the Jewish intelligences entangled in its meshes. Compared with the Anglo-Saxon brain its political thought was unsupple, and it had neither the extreme lucidity of the French intelligence, the boldness of the Italian, nor the poetic power of Spain and Russia. It had these conspicuous limitations. Its obstinate association with a stupidly arrogant monarchism and a woolly tangle of preposterous racial pretensions stood in the way of sympathetic cooperation with any other cultural system. It had failed conspicuously to assimilate the non-German subject populations involved in its political web. It had intensified the defensive nationalism of the French; its tactless challenge upon the sea had terrified and exasperated the British; it had roused even America to a wary disapproval and a final hostility. Russia it had never won, but then in the huge carcass of pre-revolutionary Russia there was very little to be won
anyhow. (There was indeed no real national self-consciousness in Russia before the Soviet régime; there was only Dostoievsky and the Tsar.) Assertive ungraciousness had been the chief factor in Germany’s isolation and the cause of its defeat in the World War.

Yet after defeat this afflicted German mentality, if only on account of a certain toughness and vigour it possessed, remained still the central reality and the central perplexity of the European system. War and disaster could not alter the fact that the backbone of Europe, the most skilled, industrious, teachable and intelligent block of its population, spoke and thought German. What might happen to it, what would happen to it, should have been the primary preoccupation of every intelligent statesman. For if Germany had gone right everything would have gone right. But there were no statesmen sufficiently intelligent to consider anything of the sort. Germany had had a phase of pride and megalomania. It had been immensely disillusioned, it had thrown off its glittering imperialist headship, it had accepted military defeat. It had even passed through a phase of humility. At first it did not hate conspicuously. Amidst great difficulties the new republic displayed creative courage, moderation, a dawning sense of the significance of world politics.

Creative, forward-looking minds turned to Germany with an entirely pathetic hopefulness. “Now we shall see what Germany can do,” they said. “Be patient with Germany.” All the world scolded France for her inveterate distrust. Given courage and generosity abroad and leadership at home this great mass of Teutonic brains might have taken up the task of the Modern State then, and fallen into cooperation with the rest of a disillusioned but renascent world. It might even have led in the work of reconstruction, and 1918 might have been the opening year of a phase of world renewal.

But that was not to be. The world had still to reap a harvest of disunion through sixty tragic years. At home leadership came to Germany too late. Stresemann mastered his lesson too slowly and died too soon. Brüning was betrayed by Hindenburg’s mental decay. And abroad it seemed to the Germans that there was nothing but war-strained and vindictive enemies. They looked for friends and saw only Foreign Offices. We have told already how the rôle of only sinner in a world of outraged saints was thrust upon Germany by the Conference of Versailles. She was to be permanently enfeebled, restrained and humiliated. German babies yet unborn were expected to be born penitent about the war. They were to gasp for their first breath under the smacks of an unforgiving world.

How all the good effort in Germany was thwarted, how the nets of suspicion held her down, would make a long and intricate story. At last these losers of the World War became as violent and frantic as stifled creatures fighting for air. Only by a feat of imagination can we now put ourselves in their places. Everything seemed to be making for the strangulation of Central Europe. The young energetic men in the defeated
countries were to be given no share in the rebuilding of their shattered world. That was to be reserved for the new generation of the conquerors. They were to live in an atmosphere of punishment, toiling, heavily taxed, and outlawed from the advancement of civilization to the very end of their days. That they should recover prosperity or achieve great things would be an offence.

Naturally life so circumscribed was bitter and lapsed very easily towards vice, apathy or blind revolt. There is a remarkable novel in the Historical Documents Series (Fabian, by Erich Kastner, 1932) which renders the individual aspect of this phase of German life very vividly. Another novel almost equally vivid and illuminating is Kleiner Mann, was nun? by Hans Fallada, 1932.

These conditions of mind, this tied and stifled outlook upon life, were, it must be admitted, by no means confined to the German-speaking peoples. The intelligent and ambitious young Indian or Egyptian or negro, the intelligent young man of any subordinated, handicapped and restrained people or class — and this covered perhaps two-thirds of the youth of our race in these days — participated in the same distress of a foreordained inferiority and futility. But the young German had recent memories of hope and pride and a greater fund of resentment and aggressive energy. He had no tradition of inferiority and subservient adjustment.

Unhappily no teachers or leaders arose to point him on to his legitimate rôle in the replacement of the current disorder by the Modern World State. The Hohenzollern régime and the stresses of the war had stood in the way of his attaining anything like the cosmopolitanism of, say, the English and Americans. His new republicanism was superficial and half-hearted, and in the schools and universities the teachers and leaders of the old militarist régime were still living, active and malignant. The Press and all the organizations of instruction and suggestion stood out of the revolution and showed themselves only too eager and skilful in restoring a pre-war fierceness. The futility of the new Germany was their text. “This is not German” they insisted. “Go back to the old Imperialism,” they said, “and try again.” The spirit of the women about the new generation, mothers and sweethearts alike, was for the most part one of passionate indignation.

An acute contemporary observer, L. B. Namier, pointed out that it was almost a law in history that war-strained and defeated countries should relapse towards violent patriotism between twelve and fifteen years after the war in which they suffered concluded. He suggested that this was precisely the time when the children who, without any participation in the realities of warfare, had felt all the strain and bitterness of defeat and all the hatred of the enemy would have grown up to manhood. These children became the energetic stratum in the population by 1933.

It was at this phase in European history that the rise of Hitlerism occurred.
Adolf Hitler, as the decisive product of Germany in labour, is one of the most incredible figures in the whole of history. He must have astonished even the teachers and writers who had evoked him. We can study his personal presence from a hundred different angles in Vol. 30112 of the Historical Portrait Gallery, and it is that of an entirely commonplace man, void of dignity, void of fine quality. We can hear his voice, we can hear him persuading, exhorting and attempting to reason from the numerous steel-tape records that were made of his speeches. It is a raucous, strained voice, talking violently but incoherently. It is the voice of a vulgar, limited, illiterate man, lashing himself to fierceness, shouting, threatening, beating his fists at the window, smashing the furniture about him, to escape from perplexity and despair. He was perfectly simple and honest in his quality. And that was perhaps the secret of his career. He gave vent to the German overstrain. He is the voice of Germany losing control.

He denounced foreigners, Jews, Cosmopolitans, Communists, Republicans, owners of property and leaders in finance with raucous impartiality, and nothing is so pleasing to perplexed unhappy people as the denunciation of others. Not their fault, their troubles. They have been betrayed. To Fallada’s question, “Little Man, what now?” his answer was, “Massacre Jews, expel foreigners, arm and get more arms, be German, utterly German, and increase and multiply.”

One has to remember that he never carried with him even an absolute voting majority of the German public. But the people permitted him to seize power and shatter their republic, stifle public discussion and destroy their liberties. They had no energy to resist him. They had no conception left in their fagged and hope-starved brains of any finer rôle than that which his bawling nationalism, his violent campaign against Communists and imaginary Communist plots, against Jews, speculators and Liberals, presented to them. The treason of the senile Hindenburg to the Republic that had trusted him, conduced inestimably to the adventurer’s success.

Hitler’s exploit in seizing Germany and turning it back towards reaction was modelled on Mussolini’s precedent. But intellectually he was far inferior to that strange figure. He took all that was worst in the Fascist régime and never rose to the real constructive effort or the competent industry of his prototype. One little point that illustrates his general ignorance and essential feeble-mindedness was the adoption of the Swastika, the running cross, as the emblem of his Nazis. This brisk, silly little sign is of very old origin, and, as we have noted in the earlier stages of this summary of history, its ornamental use was one of the associated characteristics of that type of Neolithic culture, that culture of brownish and dark-white warm-water peoples, from which the early civilizations sprang. It is hardly known in connexion with the so-called “Nordics” or with the negro peoples, and it is in no way expressive of an “Aryan” culture. Old writers used to declare it was the “symbol” of the sun, but it
seems to have signified little beyond a certain cheerfulness. It took the place of an idea in the muddled heads of the Nazis and they treated it with immense solemnity and wore it on their banners, clothes, proclamations and wherever else they could. Arden Essenden, when it was revived in Europe during the struggle for the air control, called it the “idiot’s own trade mark”, and it has certainly had a fatal attraction for many second-rate imaginative types.

So for a time, under a hubbub of young blackguards in brown shirts and Swastika badges, Germany, just when her rather heavy but persistent and faithful mind would have been of primary value in mankind’s struggle with the world problem, passed out of the intellectual commonweal of mankind. Her real mind went into exile, in America, in England, in Switzerland, in irony or in hiding. She missed her proper share in the unification of mankind in the twentieth century, just as she missed her share in the Europeanization of the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth. At home this National Socialism sought destructively to construct, sought to restore her former scientific prestige and industrial efficiency by boasting, exhortation, intolerance, outrage and compulsion. It was a pitiful and tragic phase, the dementia of a great nation. The story of German life during this interval is a rowdy and unhappy story — a story of faction fights and street encounters, demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, of a complicating tyranny of blackmailing officials, and at last of an ill managed and unsuccessful war, that belied the innate orderliness of the Teutonic peoples. There was a progressive increase of secret vice and furtive dishonesty, the outcome of hopelessness. The number of people killed or seriously injured in riots and civil conflicts in Germany, or murdered for political reasons, between 1932 and 1936 amounted to something over rather than under thirty thousand.
8. A Note on Hate and Cruelty

[This section was in a detached fascicle, but its place seems to be here. — ED.]

The student of history will find it almost impossible to understand the peculiar difficulties of political life as it was lived until about a hundred years ago, nor will he grasp the essential differences between what was called education in those days and the educational processes we are still developing to-day, unless he masters the broad facts about these systems of hatred that dominated the group relationships of mankind right up to the assertion of the Modern State. We have given the main particulars of the issue between the Germans and the Poles, but that is only one striking and historically important instance of a general condition. We could give fifty such chapters. Nearly everywhere populations were to be found steeped in and moved by mass hatreds of a volume and obduracy outside any contemporary human experience.

All these hatreds arose out of the same essential causes. Two or more population groups, each with its own special narrow and inadaptable culture and usually with a distinctive language or dialect, had been by the change of scale in human affairs jammed together or imposed one upon another. A sort of social dementia ensued. In the absence of a common idea of community, civilized motives gave place to instinctive hostilities and spasmodic impulses.

Wherever there were mingled populations these hates were found and, except in the Basque country, Wales and Lapland, they were intense enough to be of primary political importance. South and east of Bohemia there seemed no boundary to the realms of hate. The Magyar hated the Slav, the Slav the Italian, the Roumanian the Russian. Religious differences, the mischief of priests, cut up even racial solidarities; the Catholic Slav hated the Orthodox Slav and the Orthodox Greeks in Macedonia were hopelessly divided among themselves. Over all the ancient domain of the Sultan, through Persia, through India, hates extended. Islam was rent by two ancient hate systems. These mass hatreds were accepted in a kind of despair by even the wisest. They defied the policies of statesmen absolutely. They were supposed to be beyond human control.

It is extraordinary how recent is the intelligent mitigation and suppression of hatred. Our ancestors did not envisage this as a controllable mental disease. They did not know that it was possible to get through life without hatred, just as they did not know that the coughs and colds that afflicted them and most of the phenomena of senility were avoidable.

But it is amazing to think how submissively human beings allowed their lives to be spoilt by controllable things — until almost within living
memory. It was not only against hate and envy that they made no effort. They left their poor nerves bare and unprotected from an endless persecution by man-made afflications. Up to 2010 they lived in towns that were crazy with noise; there was practically no control of offensive sounds, and the visual clamour of advertisements died out only in the needy decades that preceded the Air Dictatorship. But then it was still hardly more than a century that there had been sufficient light upon the towns and highways to drive away the blackness of night and overcast weather. In northern climates in the winter before the twentieth century people lived between the nocturnal dark and a dismal grey half-light which they called daylight, not seeing the sun often for weeks together.

And before the nineteenth century it is clear to anyone who can read between the lines that mankind STANK. One has only to study the layout and drainage of their houses and towns, their accommodation for washing, their exiguous wardrobes, the absence of proper laundry organization and of destructors for outworn objects, to realize that only usage saved them from a perpetual disgust and nausea. No wonder that, quite apart from their bad food and loathsome cooking, they coughed, spat, ached, went deaf and blind and feeble, in a continual alternation of lassitude and mutual irritation.

These conditions of life have gone one after another and almost imperceptibly. Few of us realize how different it was to be a human being only a few hundred years ago. It is only when we take our imaginations with us back into the past that we realize how恶 vil to nose, eye, ear and soul the congregation of human beings could be. And necessarily, inevitably, because of the ill-interpreted protests of body and mind against this mode of existence, they hated — almost at haphazard. We have in Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726) the cry of one man of exceptional intelligence and sensibility who discovered himself imprisoned as it were in the life of the eighteenth century and could find neither outlet nor opiate. The reek of the kennels of a medieval town was nothing to the stench of hatred in the popular Press of the twentieth century. The ordinary newspaper of that time was not so much a news sheet as a poison rag. Every morning the common man took in fresh suggestions of suspicion and resentment and gratified his spite with bad news and malicious gossip.

Hatred, we know, is a morbid, infectious and preventable relapse to which the mammalian cerebrum, and particularly the cerebrum of the social types, is prone. It is a loss of rational control. It is caused normally by small repeated irritations of the cerebral cortex. The contagion may occur at any phase before or after maturity, and acute attacks predispose the brain for recurrence and may run together at last into a chronic condition of vindictive disapproval.

Once hatred has established itself to that extent it seems to be ineradicable. The patient seeks, often with the greatest ingenuity, occasion
for offence, and finds a profound satisfaction in the nursing of resentment and the search for reprisals and revenges. He has what he calls his “proper pride”. He disapproves of his fellow creatures and grudges them happiness. Our current education is framed very largely to avert and anticipate this facile contagion, but the Press of that time subsisted by its dissemination, in the interests of reactionary forces. We are as sedulous now for cleanliness and ventilation in our mental as in our physical atmosphere. The contrast between a contemporary crowd and the crowds depicted by Hogarth or Raphael is not simply in the well-clad, well-grown, well-nourished and well-exercised bodies, the absence of rags and cripples, but in the candid interested faces that replace the introverted, suspicious and guarded expressions of those unhappy times. It is only in the light of this universal malaria that human history can be made comprehensible.

And now this great German mind stretching across the centre of Europe in seventy million brains was incapable of autotherapy, and let its sickness have its way with it. It would not recognize that it suffered from anything but a noble resentment. Least of all peoples was it able to entertain those ideas of a world-wide cooperation of the World-State, which were still seeking their proper form and instrument. It was a deeper hate altogether than the fear-begotten hate of the French. In both these antagonized countries cosmopolitan sanity went begging, but most so in Germany.

The fluctuations in German hatred during the Thirties were curiously affected by subconscious currents of discretion. Though Germany was fiercely belligerent in spirit, her armament still lagged behind that of her neighbours; her Hitlerites snarled and threatened, but rather against Poland than France, and when the tension became too great it found relief by outrages upon Communists, Pacifists and intellectuals and by an exacerbated persecution of those whipping-boys of the Western civilization, the Jews. From the accession of Hitler to the chancellorship of the Reich in 1933 onward, not only looting and massacre, but legalized outrage, became an ever present menace in the life of the German Jew.

Faber speaks in his studies of political psychology of the “hate map” of the world. The intensity of the colouring of such a map would vary widely. The English-speaking states (except for Ireland, that erstwhile “island of evergreen malice”, which is now the most delightful and welcoming of summer resorts) and the Spanish-speaking communities felt hate far less intensely than the peoples of the continental European patchwork. They were less congested, they were free from acute alien interference, they had more space to move about in, and the infection was not so virulent. For two decades Spain and Spanish South America (after the Peruvian Settlement) sustained indeed a more liberal and creative mentality than any other region of the world. The Spanish contribution, beginning with Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset and going onward through a long list of great names, was of increasing importance in the building up of the
Modern World-State.

Russia, we may note, was never so constructive mentally as Spain. She had not now the same wealth of freely thinking and writing men. She had no surplus of mental energy to philosophize. She ecstasized, prophesied or dogmatized. Such brain discipline as she had was used up in her sprawling technical efforts. But she again was not a malignant country. Young Russia was taught to hate indeed, but to hate a dissolving enemy, the Wicked Imperialist. Even in that hate there was an element of humorous caricature. When in due course the Wicked Imperialist faded away to the quality of a nursery Ogre, he took with him most of the hatred out of Russia. Hate, except in brief vivid spurts, does not seem congenial to the Russian temperament.

Few people in 1940 realized that the essential political trouble in the world, as distinguished from its monetary malaise, was this endemic disease, and still fewer had the boldness of mind even to think of the drastic cleansing and destruction of infected social institutions and economic interests and accumulations that was needed if the disease was ever to be stamped out. Meanwhile along the tangled frontiers of Central and Eastern Europe the sores festered and the inflammation increased.

Among the more frequent methods of releasing hatred in the more troubled communities were aggressive demonstrations inviting or involving violence, attacks on representative buildings, such as embassies and consulates, the defilement of flags, statues and other symbols (in India the slaughter of sacred or forbidden animals such as cows or pigs in holy places), quarrels picked in cafés and restaurants, beatings-up, assassinations, the throwing of bombs and crackers into parties and gatherings of the objectionable nationality, or into law courts, religious buildings and other unsuitable places for an explosion, firing at sentinels and across boundaries. Along the Adriatic coast it would appear there was an exceptionally strong disposition to insult the characteristic Italian respect for statues and pictures.

This was of recent origin. At the Congress of Versailles Italy had been bilked by her French and British Allies of a considerable amount of the Dalmatian coast-line — to which indeed neither she nor they had any right, but which nevertheless had been promised to her in the secret engagements that had brought her into the World War. Her patriots had never ceased to resent this broken promise, nor the Jugo-Slav peoples, who held the coveted districts, to fear a forcible annexation. There had been much propaganda about the dispute. One prominent argument on the Italian side was that the Republic of Venice (of which Rome was the natural heir) had formerly dominated this coast, and, in proof of this, appeal was made to the public buildings in the towns of the disputed regions, which everywhere bore the insignia of their Italian founders and particularly the distinctive lion of Venice. For that was the Fascist fantasy:
wherever the Venetian lion had made its lair or the Roman eagles cast their shadows, from Hadrian’s Wall in England to Mesopotamia, the Fascisti claimed to rule.

This contention, though taken calmly enough by the English, French, Spanish, Turks and other emancipated peoples, was bitterly resented by the populations more immediately threatened, and particularly did it arouse resentment and hatred along the Dalmatian coast. For the young and excitable Slav, those sculptured lions and archaic eagles, those antique vestiges, were robbed of their artistic and historical charm; they took on an arrogant contemporary quality and seemed to demand an answer to their challenge. His response was to deface or mutilate them.

Already in 1932 there were bitter recriminations between Rome and Belgrade on this score, and in 1935 and again in 1937 fresh trouble arose. The later occasions were not simply matters of chipping and breaking. These heraldic and highly symbolic animals were now painted, and painted in such a manner as to bring them into grave contempt. And the outrages were not confined to heraldic animals. Portraits and images of Mussolini were also adorned all too often with pencilled moustaches, formidable whiskers, a red nose and other perversions of his vigorous personality.

Such vexatious modes of expression were in constant evidence in all the inflamed areas. To us they seem trivial, imbecile, preposterous, but then they were steeped in tragic possibility.

The reader must picture for himself, if he can, how things went in the brain of some youngster growing to manhood in one of these hate regions, the constant irritation of restrictions, the constant urge to do some vivid expressive thing, the bitter, unconsoling mockery against the oppressor, and at last the pitiful conspiracy, the still more pitiful insult. He must think of the poor excitement of getting the paint-pot and the ladder, of watching the receding police patrol, the tremulous triumph of smearing the hated object. That perhaps was the poor crown of life for that particular brain. Then the alarm, the conflict, the flight, a shot, a wound, straw and filth in a prison cell, the beatings and the formal punishment, the intensified resolve to carry on the resistance. There was nothing to think of then but the next outrage, the next riot. So very often the story went on to wounds and death, the body crumpled up on a street pavement and trampled under foot or put against a wall to be shot, and then the rotting away and dispersal of that particular human brain with all the gifts and powers it possessed. That was all that life could be for hundreds of thousands of those hate-drenched brains. For that they came into being, like flowers that open in a rain of filth.

A Natural History of Cruelty has recently been published by Otto Jaspers (2085 — ), a lineal descendant of that Professor Jaspers of Heidelberg University under whom De Windt studied and to whose Die geistiger
Situation der Gegenwart De Windt was greatly indebted. Cruelty in the Twentieth Century is treated in considerable detail, and it makes very terrible reading indeed. Happily it is not considered a necessary part of a general education to probe under those dark processes of the human mind which make the infliction of horrible pain and injuries a relief to otherwise intolerable mental distresses. The psychologist, however, must acquaint himself with all those facts; he cannot fully understand our intricate minds without them, and the practical disappearance of deliberate cruelty from our world to-day makes the horror literature of the World War and World Slump periods a mine of essential material for his investigations. One or two glimpses we have given the student. If he has any imagination he will be able to expand those hints for himself into an infinitude of mutilations, tortures and wanton violence.

The older psychologists were disposed to classify cruelty as a form of sexual aberration — in ordinary speech we still use their old word Sadistic — but this attribution is no longer respected by contemporary authorities. Cruelty goes far beyond the sexual field. Just as hate is now understood to be a combative fear compound, the stiffening up of a faltering challenge, which may become infectious, so cruelty is regarded as a natural development of effort against resistance, so soon as the apprehension of frustration exceeds a certain limit. It is a transformation of our attempt to subdue something, usually a living thing, to our will, under the exasperation of actual or anticipated obduracy.

This interpretation makes it plain why the breakdown of the private capital economic and political system and the world-wide uncertainty, dismay and want which ensued was followed by wave after wave of unprecedented cruelty. In 1900, a visitor from another sphere might reasonably have decided that man, as one met him in Europe or America, was a kindly, merciful and generous creature. In 1940 he might have decided, with an equal show of justice, that this creature was diabolically malignant. And yet it was the same creature, under different conditions of stress.

There were many thousands of suicides between 1930 and 1940 — suicides of sensitive men and women, who could endure the dreadful baseness and cruelty of life no longer. Yet in the records of the reviving world of 1980 there is scarcely a mention of atrocious conduct towards human beings or animals. It was not a change of nature; it was a change of phase. Millions of people who had actually killed, massacred, tortured, were still alive — and they were behaving now quite reasonably and well. Most of them had forgotten their own deeds more or less completely. Hope had returned to human life. The frantic years were past.
9. The Last War Cyclone, 1940-50

The drift to war in Europe became more powerful with the elimination of Japan and the United States from the possibility of intervention, and with the deepening preoccupation of Britain with Indian disorder and with the Black Revolt in South Africa. The last restraints upon continental hatreds had gone. The issues simplified.

War came at last in 1940. The particular incident that led to actual warfare in Europe was due to a Polish commercial traveller, a Pole of Jewish origin, who was so ill advised as to have trouble with an ill-fitting dental plate during the halt of his train in Danzig. He seems to have got this plate jammed in such a fashion that he had to open his mouth wide and use both hands to struggle with it, and out of deference to his fellow passengers he turned his face to the window during these efforts at realjustment. He was a black-bearded man with a long and prominent nose, and no doubt the effect of his contortions was unpleasing. Little did he realize that his clumsy hands were to release the dogs of war from the Pyrenees to Siberia.

The primary irritant seems to have been either an orange-pip or a small fragment of walnut.

Unhappily, a young Nazi was standing on the platform outside and construed the unfortunate man's facial disarrangement into a hostile comment upon his uniform. For many of these youths were of an extreme innate sensibility. The flames of patriotic indignation shot up in his heart. He called up three fellow guards and two policemen — for like the Italian Fascisti these young heroes rarely acted alone — and boarded the train in a swift and exemplary mood. There was a furious altercation, rendered more difficult by the facts that the offending Pole knew little or no German and was still in effect gagged. Two fellow travellers, however, came to his help, others became involved, vociferation gave place to pushing and punching, and the Nazis, outnumbered, were put off the train.

Whereupon the young man who had started all the trouble, exasperated, heated and dishevelled, and seeing that now altogether intolerable Jew still making unsatisfactory passes with his hands and face at the window, drew a revolver and shot him dead. Other weapons flashed into action, and the miniature battle was brought to an end only by the engine-driver drawing his train out of the station. The matter was complicated politically by the fact that the exact status of the Danzig police was still in dispute and that the Nazis had no legal authority upon the Danzig platform.

By itself this distressing incident might have been arranged without the outbreak of a European war. The moribund League of Nations might have been invoked or even the mummified Hague Tribunal galvanized into activity; either institution was still fully capable of dealing with, let us say, a Polish dentist who might have been treated as the culpable party, traced,
punished and made the scapegoat of Europe. But that would have needed a
certain goodwill on the part of the Powers directly involved, and at that
time no such goodwill was forthcoming.

For eight years now the German mind had been working up for a fight over
the Corridor, and the rearmament of Germany, overt and secret, had been
going on. Both France and Poland had been watching the military recovery
of Germany with ever-deepening apprehension, and the military
authorities of both countries were urgent that a blow should be struck
while they were still disproportionately stronger. Time after time it seemed
that the crisis had come, and time after time nothing more than a
stock-exchange tornado had occurred. Now the last reasons for patience
had disappeared. The tension had risen to a point at which disaster
seemed like relief and Europe was free to tear itself to fragments.

Such a situation was the inevitable climax to every “armed peace” in the
old belligerent world. At some point there was an irresistible logic in
“Strike now before they get too strong”. That had been an underlying
motive of primary force in the British readiness to fight in 1914. They were
eager to strike before the ever-growing German fleet equalled their own. So
they ended an intolerable tension. The Germans had “asked for it”, they
said. “Better now than to-morrow.”

Now again Germany has “asked for it” and Poland was leaping to the
occasion. The War Offices pressed their bell buttons. The printing
machines of Paris, London and New York were still busy with various
misstatements about the murdered commercial traveller, while the Polish
and German air patrols were in conflict all along the fatal boundary. That
dental plate apparently began to feel uncomfortable about one o’clock in
the afternoon of Friday, January 4th, 1940. On Saturday, about three
o’clock in the afternoon, Michael Korenovsky, the Polish ace, after a
brilliant fight with three antagonists, fell flaming out of the sky into the
crowded Langgasse of Danzig and set fire to the Rathaus.

The first Polish air raid on Berlin and the unresisted “demonstration
flight” of two hundred French air squadrons in formation over Bavaria and
West Prussia followed. The Germans seem to have been taken completely
by surprise by this display of immense and immediate preparedness. They
had not thought it of the French. But they had the quickness of
apprehension to decline an air battle against odds, and the French flew
home again. The fighting on the Polish-German frontier continued.

The authorities in Paris were uncertain whether they were disappointed or
relieved by the non-resistance of their old enemies. A smashing air victory
over Germany would have been very satisfactory and conclusive, but these
aeroplanes were also wanted at home to cow the ever-increasing domestic
discontent. An indecisive battle — and that was always possible in the air
— might have produced serious internal stresses.
For a week of years from the resumption of armament by Germany in 1933, the diplomatic centres of the world had been watching the steady onset of this conflict and had been doing nothing to avert it. Now London, Washington, Madrid and Geneva became hysterically active. There was a mighty running to and fro of ambassadors and foreign ministers. “Delay,” said Geneva; though there had already been twenty years of delay.

“Localize the conflict” was a phrase that leapt into vivid prominence. It found favour not only in the neutral countries, but in Paris and Berlin. In effect “localize the conflict” meant this: it meant that Paris should scrap her engagements to Poland and leave the Poles to make what sort of arrangements they could between Germany and Russia. For Russia now, by an enigmatical silence combined with a prompt mobilization of the Red Army, became almost immediately an important piece in the developing international game.

And Paris had soon very excellent reasons for not pushing a conflict with Berlin to extremities. The first Frenchman to be killed in the New Warfare had been killed already. And he had been killed in the Maritime Alps, shot by the bullet of an Italian patrol.

On Sunday night, January the 6th, while the Polish aeroplanes were dropping gas bombs on Berlin, the Italians were administering the same treatment to Belgrade. At the same time an identical note had been dispatched from Rome to all the Powers giving Italy’s reasons for this decisive blow. It seemed that between Friday evening and Sunday morning there had been a violent recrudescence of Yugo-Slav irreverence. The Fascist agents who had to supply the material for grievance and indignation had in fact overdone their task to the pitch of caricature. On Saturday the entire Italian population found itself roused from its normal preoccupation with its daily budget by the terrible intelligence of Mussolini everywhere made bibulous and ophthalmious with red paint, of Venetian lions coloured as indelicately as baboons and of shamefully overdecorated Roman eagles. Eloquent and dishevelled young Fascists, often in tears, protested at every street corner against these intolerable indignities and called for war. The cup of Yugo-Slav iniquity was full. It was only in later years that astounded students, tracing these outrages to their sources, realized how excessively that cup had been filled to justify the Fascist invasion.

Once the Polish and Italian forces had crossed their boundaries the other states of Eastern Europe did not wait even to produce an insult before launching their offensives. The whole crazy patchwork of Versailles dissolved into fighting — the joyless, frantic fighting of peoples full of hate and fear, led blindly to no ends that anyone could foresee. For two straining years the theory of localizing the conflict held Russia and France out of the fight. A “formula” was found by which France undertook not to intervene on the side of her erstwhile allies, on the understanding that
Russia by way of compensation also refrained from any action against them. Moreover, the trade in munitions was to be carried on “impartially”. It was a flimsy formula to justify a diplomatic default, but it kept warfare away from the Western front of Germany for two distressful years. The persistent shooting by Italians over the French boundary was difficult to explain away, and indeed it was not so much explained away as quietly disregarded. The air fleets of France paraded at intervals, to the increasing irritation of all her immediate neighbours, but on the whole as a restraining influence. The demonstration chilled the foreigner and assuaged the hotheads at home.

From the outset there was far less enthusiasm for this “localized” European war of 1940 than had been displayed by the populations of the belligerent countries in 1914. What enthusiasm was displayed was confined to the inexperienced young of the middle and upper classes, the youth of the Fascisti, Nazi, “public schoolboy” and scoutmaster type. They went about, shouting and urgent, in a heavy, sullen and apprehensive atmosphere. No nation “leapt to arms”. The common soldiers deserted and “fell out” incessantly, and these shirkers were difficult to punish, since the “deserter mentality” was so widespread, more particularly in the peasant armies of Eastern Europe, that it was impossible to shoot offenders. One Posen battalion went into battle near Lodz with thirty-nine officers and fifty-seven men.

From the first “economies” marched with the troops. From the first there was a threadbare needy quality about the struggle. General orders insisted upon “a restrained use of ammunition”.

The actual fighting was, however, on a much higher level, mechanically and scientifically, than the Japanese war in China. The military authorities had good roads, automobiles, camions, railways, rolling stock, electrical material, guns of all sorts, and great air forces available. Behind the fronts were chemical and other munition factories in good working order. If there were no longer infantry battles there were some brilliant conflicts of technicians. The prompt cutting off of East Prussia from any help from main Germany by the Permanent Death Gas was an operation far above the technical level of any Eastern operations. It was strategically silly but technically very successful.

The first offensive against Berlin was also planned with modern equipment and the maximum of contemporary military science. It was to be another “blow at the heart”, and the Polish general staff relied upon it as firmly as the Germans in 1914 had relied upon their march on Paris. Unfortunately for the Poles, it had been necessary to consult a number of “experts” in preparing this advance; there were leakages through France, through the Czech and Swedish munition makers, through Russia, and through domestic treason, and the broad outline of the plan was as well known and understood in Berlin as it was in Warsaw. The great gas raid on Berlin was
indeed terrifying and devastating, but the rush of tanks, great caterpillar
guns and troops in motor transport was held and checked within sixty
miles of the German capital by an ingenious system of poison-gas barriers
— chiefly Lewisite and Blue Cross — wired mines and “slime pits” of a
novel type in the roads and open fields. A cavalry raid to the north between
Berlin and the sea failed disastrously amidst wire, gas and machine-guns;
nearly forty thousand men were killed, wounded or taken prisoner.
Moreover, there had been mistakes in the manufacture of the gas masks
worn by the Polish troops, and several brigades gave way to the persuasion
that they had been sold and betrayed. The main Polish masses never came
into actual contact with the German troops, and only their great numerical
superiority in aeroplanes saved their repulse from becoming a rout.

The Polish armies rallied and, according to the secondary plan prepared
for any such failure, extended themselves and dug themselves in along a
line between Stettin and the Bohemian frontier. Behind the barrier they
began a systematic reduction of Silesia. Every night an air battle raged over
both Berlin and Warsaw. It was often an indecisive battle. The Poles had
the numerical superiority, but the German machines were more efficient
and better handled. But the Poles had far more of the new aerial torpedoes
— which could go to an assigned spot two hundred miles away, drop a
large bomb and return — than their adversaries.

Bohemia, like France, had mobilized but did not immediately enter the
war. The Czecho-Slovak armies remained in their mountain quadrilateral
or lined out along the Hungarian front, awaiting the next turn in the game.
Austria also remained excited but neutral.

The Southern war opened brilliantly for the Italians, and for some weeks it
went on without any formal connexion with the Polish conflict. Bulgaria,
Albania and Hungary also declared war upon Yugo-Slavia, the Italian air
forces “darkened the sky”, and few of the towns in Croatia and Serbia
escaped an aerial bombardment. The Italian fleet set itself to capture the
ports and islands of Dalmatia. But the advance of the Italian troops into
the hills of Slavonia and Croatia was not as rapid as had been expected. Six
weeks passed before they were able to fight their way to Zagreb.

The country was a difficult one, ill adapted to the use of gas or mechanism,
there was no central point at which a decisive blow could be struck, and
the population had a long tradition of mountain warfare. It did not affect
these sturdy peasants whether the townsmen were bombed or not. They
never gave battle; they never exposed themselves in masses, but their
bullets flew by day and night into the Italian encampments. Many of them
went to and fro between their fields and the front. Munitions poured in for
them through Roumania, which, with a big Red Army on its Bessarabian
frontier and its own peasants recalcitrant, remained also ambiguously,
dangerously, and yet for a time profitably, out of the struggle. The
Hungarians crossed the Yugo-Slav frontier and threatened Belgrade, but
the mass of their forces faced towards Czecho-Slovakia and awaited further events.

A curious pause in the fighting occurred at the end of the year. The frantic efforts of Prague, London and Paris to call a halt were temporarily successful. The invaders of Germany and Yugo-Slavia remained upon enemy territory, but neutral zones were improvised and there was a cessation of hostilities. An eleventh-hour attempt was made to stop the war by negotiation and keep the two conflicts from coalescence. There were weeks during which this seemed possible. Both Germany and Poland were of two minds about continuing the war now that the Polish advance was held, and Italy hoped to be left in possession of Dalmatia without an irksome campaign of further conquest. It was as if the spirit of civilization had once more come near to awakening from its hallucinations and had asked, “Why on earth is this happening to us?”

The British Cabinet thought the occasion opportune for a conference at Vevey to revise the Treaty of Versailles “finally”. The pacific speeches of Duff-Cooper, Hore-Belisha, Ellen Wilkinson and Randolph Churchill echoed throughout Europe and were brilliantly supported by Benito Caruso and Corliss Lamont in America. The Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Non-conformist Churches, the President of the Swiss Republic and the able and venerable President Benes swelled the chorus of remonstrance. France, which had been growing steadily more pacifist after her social conflicts in 1934-35, found able spokesmen in Louchère and Chavanne. Once again we are reminded of the impulses of Henry Ford and Wilson. Once again the concept of a World Pax flickered in the human imagination and vanished. This time it was a fuller, more explicit and more unanimous chorus than that which had cried aloud in 1916-17. Yet at the time it was hardly more effective. Vevey prolonged the truce throughout 1941 until June, but it could settle nothing. The military authorities, having had a breathing-time, became impatient. With a mutually destructive malice the fighting was resumed “before the harvest could be gathered”.

Vevey failed because the constructive conception of the Modern State had no representative there. It was just another gathering of national diplomats who professed to seek peace, and yet who set about the business with all those antiquated assumptions of sovereignty that were bound to lead to a revival of the conflict. The fantasy of some “balance of power” was as near as they ever came to a peace idea. Such a balance was bound to sway from year to year and from day to day. Whatever the common people and men of intelligence were thinking, the experts now wanted to see the war fought to a finish. “The Germans hadn’t been beaten enough” was all too acceptable to the munition dealers and the Press in France and Scandinavia. “The Italians have their hands full in Yugo-Slavia.”

The British and Americans, who hoped to keep out of the conflict to the
end, had experienced an exhilarating revival of exports and found their bills against the belligerents mounting very hopefully. Once more Tyneside echoed to hammering; steel, iron and chemical shares boomed and the iron and steel industry, like some mangy, toothless old tiger, roused itself for the only quarry it had now the vigour to pursue — man-eating. It had long ceased to dream of new liners or bridges or railways or steel-framed houses. But it could still make guns and kill. It could not look far enough ahead to reckon whether at last there would be any meat on the man’s bones. The only countries that really wanted peace, enduring peace, were Czecho-Slovakia and Austria, which stretched out between the two combatant systems and had possible enemy frontiers on every hand. The human will for peace as it found expression at Vevey was still a tangled and ineffective will.

The fighting revived almost simultaneously in the Polish Ukraine, where the peasants had revolted and were evidently fighting with Soviet officers and equipment, and in a vigorous surprise attack upon the Polish lines to free the German soil from the invader. The Germans had been working night and day during the truce to equalize conditions in the air; they produced new and swifter aeroplanes and a particularly effective machine-gun, and for some weeks there was such aerial fighting as was never seen before or since.

Gradually the Germans established a sufficient ascendancy to bring their bombers and gas into play. Lodz and Warsaw were terrorized and the civilian population evacuated and the Polish line broken so as to restore communications with Silesia. And then the conflict broadened. Lithuania, evidently with Russian encouragement, seized her old city of Wilna, and Austria linked the Northern and the Southern struggle by entering both wars as the ally of Germany and Italy. Germany declared her final union with Austria. Very swiftly now the remaining European states followed one another into the cauldron. Hungary attacked Eastern Czecho-Slovakia without a declaration of war “to restore her legitimate boundaries”, and brought the army frameworks of Roumania into the field against her. Thereupon Russia announced the impossibility of maintaining her understanding with France in the face of these events, and the Red Army advanced on Lemberg. Macedonia was already a seething mass of fighting, village against village; Bulgaria entered the “South Slav” alliance and assailed Albania, and Greece seized Rhodes, which had been up to that time held by Italy.

So France saw her ancient policy of “security”, of setting state to balance state and allying herself with a countervailing state at the back of every antagonistic neighbour, work out to its necessary conclusion. Gladly would her business men and her peoples now have rested behind her immensely fortified frontiers and shared the profits of neutrality and munition-selling with the British and Americans, but her engagements were too binding.
After one last ambiguous attempt on the part of London, Washington and Geneva to avert the disaster, France declared war against the Central European alliance in 1943.

On the face of it the new war resembled the World War of 1914-18. It seemed to be an attempt to reverse or confirm the Versailles settlement. It had an air of being the same sort of siege of Central Europe. But now Italy was in close alliance with the Teutonic powers; Belgium, in a state of extreme industrial distress, was out of the war; Britain stood aloof; and in the place of her former Allies France had to help — rather than be helped — by the band of states from the Corridor to the Black Sea and the Balkans which the Quai d'Orsay had toiled so painfully to knit into an anti-German alliance.

Russia, however, was a doubtful ally of the Central Powers; she was not operating in concert with them; she was simply supporting the new Soviet republics in Eastern Poland and Bessarabia. There the Red Army halted. The old enthusiasm for a World Revolution had faded out of the Russian imagination. Marxism had become so Russianized that it feared now to take in too large a contingent of Western adherents. The Kremlin was content to consolidate the kindred Slav Soviets and then rest. Japan and China and the American continent remained out of the mêlée, concentrated on their own social difficulties.

It would be possible for a superficial student to regard all this merely as a rearrangement of the familiar counters of sovereign state politics. But, in reality, the forces in collision were profoundly different. France, in spite of her internal social stresses, was still a capitalist community of the Nineteenth Century type, with democratic parliamentary forms and irresponsible finance and industrialism. Save for the teaching of a sentimental patriotism, her young people were mentally unorganized. Her allies were peasant states with governments of the royal or parliamentary form, and, if anything, more old-fashioned. But the Central Powers were all of the new Fascist pattern, more closely knit in its structure and dominated by an organization of the younger spirits, which claimed to be an élite.

Except for the fundamentally important fact that these Fascisti were intensely nationalist, this control by a self-appointed, self-disciplined élite was a distinct step towards our Modern State organization. These various Fascisti were destined to destroy their own states and disappear because of their essentially shallow and sentimental mentality, their inability to get outside nationalist traditions and coalesce; there is no direct continuity between them and our modern educational and administrative system; but there was nothing like them in the World War of 1914-18 anywhere, and they are noteworthy, as the Russian Communist Party (in spite of its proletarian formula) is noteworthy, for their partial but very real advance on democratic institutions. Amidst the chaos, that organized “devotion of
the young” on which our modern community rests was clearly foreshadowed in these Central European states. The idea of disciplined personal participation in human government was being driven into the mentality of the new generation.

Until something more convincing appeared, it had to crystallize, disastrously enough, about such strange nuclei as the theatrical Mussolini and the hysterical Hitler. It had to be patriotic because that was the only form in which the State then presented itself. But after these first crystallizations had been shattered and dissolved in the war disasters that now ensued, the idea was still there, this idea of banded cooperation ready to be directed to greater ends. Youth had ceased to be irresponsible in all the Fascist countries.

Not only were these new wars unlike their predecessors in the fact that they were not, so far as the Central Powers were concerned, wars of the democratic masses, but also they were quite unprecedented in the range and quality of the fighting. We have already indicated some of the main differences between the New Warfare and the Old. These now became accentuated by the extraordinary way in which the boundaries of the battling states interdigitated. In the first spurt of conflict there was indeed a “front” between Poland and Germany; but after 1943 there was no front, no main objective, and no central idea to the storming destruction that spread over Europe.

The Poles tried to draw a line of Permanent Death Gas across East Brandenburg before their withdrawal to Posen, but their collapse came too swiftly, and they were able only to poison three small areas of no strategic importance. After 1943 the war became mainly a war in the air, with an increasing use of gas and landing raids, raids rather than invasions, to seize, organize and hold advantageous positions. A bitter and intense naval struggle went on in the Mediterranean to cut off reinforcements and supplies between North Africa and France, but there was little molestation of the Atlantic traffic of France.

There was never an Aerial Trafalgar, never an Air Economus. War in three dimensions does not afford those channels, straits, narrow seas, passes, main roads, by which an inferior force may be brought to a decisive battle, and indeed to this day it is uncertain which side was absolutely predominant in the air. It was a war of raids and reprisals, and no large decisive operations were attempted. A big German infantry push into Posen was held by gas and slimes, and a French invasion of Italy got no further than Turin.

The complete exhaustion of the adversary, materially and morally, became the only possible road to any sort of victory. Once more the tormented populations were urged to sustain a “war of attrition”. “It is the man who holds out half an hour longer than the other who wins” was translated into
every European language. The attacks on social order increased in malignancy as the impossibility of any military decision became manifest. Crops and forests were deliberately fired, embankments smashed, low-lying regions flooded, gas and water supplies destroyed. The aviators would start off to look for a crowd and bomb it. It became as cruel as the fighting of ferrets.

There was still, in spite of a decade of financial dislocation and industrial depression, a vast amount of mechanical material in Europe; everywhere there were factories strongly protected against air attack and skilfully camouflaged. Moreover, all the chief belligerents had sufficiently open frontiers for the importation of material, so long as anything compact and valuable could be wrung out of their nationals by tax or levy, to pay for such supplies. The goods crossed the frontier at night; the cargoes were piloted into unlit harbours. Every able-bodied adult not actually in the fighting forces was pressed to work at excavations for bomb shelters and the reconstitution of buildings against gas and high explosive. Much of this also was night work. Recalcitrance and shirking were punished by a deprivation of rations. There is a grim picture by Eglon Callet called “Security at Last”, of which the reader may have seen reproductions. A chain gang of emaciated and ragged Frenchmen is working under the lash in a tunnel. In the foreground one who has fainted is being given a stimulant; another, past help, dies untended.

In comparison with the abundant literature of personal experiences in the World War, at least so far as the Western front was concerned, there are remarkably few records either of combatant or non-combatant adventures during the Fighting Forties. The big air raids seem to have been altogether horrible. They were much more dreadful than the air raids of the World War. They began with a nightmare of warning maroons, sirens, hooters and the shrill whistles of cyclist scouts, then swarms of frantic people running to and fro, all pride and dignity gone, seeking the nearest shelter and aid, and they ended for most of their victims in an extremity of physical suffering.

We have already given some intimation of the nature of those torture deaths. In nearly every case the organization of refuges and gas masks broke down. In many cases there had never been a real provision, but only sham visors and sham bomb-proof buildings to allay “premature” panic and “keep up the popular morale”. None of these great raids was ever reported in the newspapers that still struggled on into the war years. Even in America the publication of any detail was treated as “pacificist propaganda against recruiting”.

There is a descriptive letter from Berlin after an air raid, undated and signed “Sinclair”, which is believed by most competent critics to have been written by Sinclair Lewis the novelist (1885-1990). One passage may be quoted:
“We went down Unter den Linden and along the Sieges Allee, and the bodies of people were lying everywhere, men, women and children, not scattered evenly, but bunched together very curiously in heaps, as though their last effort had been to climb on to each other for help. This attempt to get close up to someone seems to be characteristic of death by this particular gas. Something must happen in the mind. Everyone was crumpled up in the same fashion and nearly all had vomited blood. The stench was dreadful, although all this multitude had been alive twenty-four hours ago. The body corrupts at once. The archway into the park was almost impassable. . . .”

So we get one glimpse of how peaceful town-bred people might die a century and a half ago.

The individual stories of the actual fighting in that last warfare are no more ample than the non-combatant descriptions. There was little inducement for anyone to write about it in the subsequent decades; there was not the same high proportion of literate men as there was in the Western armies during the Great War; there was a less artless interest in what was happening and more running away, desertion, apathy, drunkenness, raping, plundering and malignant cruelty, which are not things of which men leave records. The whole world was less sensitive than it had been thirty years before; if it suffered more grossly it suffered less acutely. In 1914-15 many of the British and German rankers kept diaries from day to day. This shows a sense of personality and a receptiveness to events quite outside the sullen fatalism, shot with gleams of primitive exaltation or fury, which seems to have been the prevalent state of mind in the armies of the Forties.

In the Historical Documents Series there is a diary of a Japanese officer who was killed in the retreat from Wuchang. Failing any European material of the same kind, it may perhaps be quoted here to show how it felt to fight in the last wars of all. It is not, however, a very vivid document. He was an intellectual, a socialist and a strong believer in the League of Nations, and his record is mainly a series of hostile criticisms in cypher of the superior command. But in the latter half these dissertations die out. The diary becomes a broken record of what he found to eat and drink and how he fought against influenza and dysentery. He seems to have had a company of men with him; he notes twice when he contrived a haul of food for them, and he jots down names as they are killed or missing. There are also figures that may be a note of his diminishing ammunition. He was already badly starved when he was killed. As he weakened he seems to have found his rather complicated cypher too difficult to use, and he lapsed first into bad English and then into plain Japanese. The very last item is an unfinished poem, a fragment in the old style, which might be rendered as follows:

Almond blossom in the spring sunshine,
Fuji-Yama gracious lady,
Island treasure home of lovely things,
Shall I never see you again? . . .

Something, death perhaps, prevented the completion of his naive verses. He and his detachment were probably overtaken and done to death near Kai-feng.

In none of these later war memoirs is there anything to recall that queer quality of the 1914-18 stories, of men who felt they were going out from absolutely sure and stable homes and cities, to which with reasonable good fortune they would return — and live happily ever afterwards. The mood then was often extraordinarily brave and tender. The men of this later cycle of wars felt that there would be no such home-coming. They knew that they went out to misery and left misery in active possession at home. Their war was not an expedition; it was a change for ever. The memoirs of the airmen who did so much destruction are amazingly empty. They note fights, but quite flatly. “Put down two Polaks”, for example; “a close shave”; but they do not seem to have had an inkling of the effect of the bombs they dropped upon the living flesh below. Many of these young men survived to become Modern State aviators and to serve the Air and Sea Control after 1965. But though some wrote well of their later experiences, none of them has left any useful documents for the history of the war time. The historian turns to his dates, maps and totals again from this meagre salvage of the hopes, fears, dreads, curiosities and agonies of the millions who went through that age of cruel disaster, doubtful whether he is sorry or thankful that most of that welter of feeling and suffering has vanished now as completely as though it had never been.

After 1945 the signs of exhaustion multiplied. Such despair had come to the souls of men that even defensive energy failed. They lay starving in their beds and hovels and let the bombs fall about them. But a whiff of gas could still cause a panic, a headlong rush of tormented people coughing and spitting through the streets to the shelter pits. Influenza with its peculiar intensity of mental depression came again repeatedly after 1942, and in 1945 came cholera. These epidemics, though they seemed grave enough at the time, were the mere first scouts of that great “Raid of the Germs” which was in preparation for disunited humanity. It was as if they were testing the defensive organization of mankind.

Except for air warfare, Britain and the North European neutrals were suffering almost as acutely as if they were actually at war. They had poured munitions into Europe and reaped a harvest of bad debts. After the first economic exhilaration due to this state of employment, the exports from Great Britain, which had once been the pioneer of free world trade and cosmopolitan thought, dwindled to insignificance; the erstwhile creditor of the world could not collect such debts as were still due to her, and could not pay therefore for the food supply of her dwindling but still excessive
population. Her former sanitation had rotted to filthiness under a régime of relentless saving. Housing in that disagreeable climate had passed from congestion to horror. The first cholera epidemic found her in the throes not only of famine but of civil disorder, controlled and suppressed by her highly mechanized army and by the still very powerful habits of orderliness and subordination in her people. Never, since the Black Death of the Fifteenth Century, had the British Isles known such a pestilence. They had believed the days of pestilence were past for ever. And yet that cholera was only the precursor of the still more terrible experiences that were to follow it in the subsequent decade.

Slowly but surely the spirit of protest and mutiny spread through Europe. That growing despairful insubordination that had done so much to bring about the winding up of the World War in 1918 reappeared in new forms. But because now war was no longer primarily an infantryman's business, mass mutiny, such as had crippled the French offensives after 1917, taken Russia out of the war, and led to the final German collapse, had not now the same disabling effect. There were not the same big aggregations of men under exasperating discipline and in touch with “subversive” suggestions. Power had passed over to the specialized forces — to the aviators and war technicians. By the use of small bombs, machine-guns and the milder gases they could “handle” and disperse mass meetings and “tranquillize” insurgent districts in a manner that would have been inconceivable to the street barricade revolutionaries of the later Eighteenth Century.

Even strikes in the munition factories were no longer so effective as they had been, because even there the increased efficiency of power production had ousted the comparatively unskilled worker in his multitudes. For the same reason the propaganda of insurrectionary class-war communism, though it now dominated the thought of nine-tenths of the European peasants and workers, found unexpected obstacles in its attempts to seize control of affairs. It could not repeat the Russian social revolution because the new conditions were entirely different. The Bolshevik success had been possible only through the backwardness of Russia and the absence of a technically educated social stratum. The unrest and insubordination of the common people in Central and Western Europe could and did produce immense passive resistances and local revolutionary movements, but it found opposed to it a whole system of aviators, mechanics, technicians, scientific workers and so forth who had learnt from Red Russia what sort of direction and planning to expect from a proletariat led by party politicians. Whatever they thought about their own governments — and already they were beginning to think in a very fresh and vigorous fashion about them — it was not towards democratic communism that the minds of the scientific and technical workers were turning.

Nevertheless, with the help of organizers from Russia, the protest of humanity against the prolongation of the New Warfare took for a time the
form of communist risings. In 1947, in Marseilles, St. Etienne, Paris, Barcelona, Milan, Naples, Hamburg, Lodz and Glasgow there were mutinies of troops under arms and risings sufficiently formidable to sustain provisional Soviets for periods varying from a week to several months. The Hamburg and Glasgow Soviets were the best organized and held out longest, collapsing only after considerable bloodshed. Almost everywhere there were minor incidents of the same character. And the formal suspension of the war by the responsible governments concerned was certainly due more than anything else to their terror of a general social revolt. As the material organization of the system was shattered, as the behaviour of the technicians became uncertain, the threatening visage of the class-vindictive proletarian drew nearer and nearer to the face of the stockbroker, the war-monger, the banker, the traditional ruler.

It took nearly three years to end the last war. The Conference of London in 1947 did its best to work out a stable settlement of Europe on the lines of the Versailles Treaty, but the politicians and diplomatists were still incapable of the frankness and generosity needed. Face-saving was so much more important than life-saving to these creatures that they actually allowed the now pointless hostilities to be renewed in 1948.

In the spring of 1949, however, at Prague, President Benes achieved what had seemed to be the impossible, and brought the fighting to an end. He did this by inventing a phrase and suggesting, instead of a treaty, a “Suspension of Hostilities”. Each Power was to remain in possession of the territory it occupied, and there was to be no further fighting pending the assembly of an unspecified Conference to be organized later. Influenza, cholera, and at last maculated fever, the progressive enfeeblement of economic life and new developments of human relationship, prevented that Conference from ever meeting. The Benes Suspension of Hostilities became a permanent suspension. It endures to this day.
10. The Raid of the Germs

That same dearth of detailed description which takes the colour out of the history of the last wars becomes even more apparent in the records of the epidemics that made any resumption of that warfare impossible. Diaries, letters and descriptive writing were out of fashion; there were other things to do and no surplus energy in the brain. It is as if the micro-organisms had taken a leaf out of the book of the Foreign Offices and found in mankind’s confusion an opportunity for restoring the long-lost empire of the germs.

The attack began in the best style without a declaration of war. The first line of advance consisted of a variety of influenzas, impoverishing fevers, that were highly infectious and impossible to control under war conditions. The depleted strength of the belligerent populations, a depletion due to their reduced and disorganised nourishment and the collapse of their sanitary services, gave these infections full scope; they killed some millions and diminished the already lowered vitality of the great populations still further. That lowering of the general vitality was far more important than the actual mortality. Cholera and bubonic plague followed, and then, five years and more later, when the worst seemed to have passed, came the culminating attack by maculated fever.

This obscure disease, hitherto known only as a disease of captive baboons, seems to have undergone some abrupt adaptation to the kindred habitat of the human body; possibly there was some intermediate host which prepared the bacilli for their attack on mankind. Or it may be that the preceding epidemics had changed some hitherto defensive element in human blood. We are still quite in the dark upon these points because at that time there were no doctors or biologists with the leisure to record observations, even had they had time to make them, and scientific publications had ceased to appear anywhere.

The disease appeared first in the vicinity of the London Zoological Gardens and spread thence with incredible rapidity. It discoloured the face and skin, produced a violent fever, cutaneous irritation and extreme mental distress, causing an uncontrollable desire to wander. Then the bodily energy vanished in collapse and the victim lay down and died. The fever was not simply infectious through water, but transmitted by the almost impalpable scabs scratched off by the sufferer. Wind, water and the demented sick carried it everywhere. About half humanity was vulnerable, and so far as we know now all who were vulnerable took it, and all who took it died.

So the world’s malaise culminated in the terrible eighteen months between May 1955 and November 1956, at which latter date Nature with a pitiless but antiseptic winter came to the rescue of the human remnant. No effectual cure was ever devised for this fever and no helpful palliative. It
swept the whole world and vanished as enigmatically as it came. It is still a riddle for pathologists. It no longer affects even the surviving baboon population, so that investigators can make no cultures, nor attempt any experiments. There is no material. It came, it destroyed, and it seems to have at last committed suicide with some unknown anti-body of its production. Or the real disease, as Mackensen believes, may have been not the maculated fever at all, but the state of vulnerability to its infection. That vulnerability had spread unsuspected throughout the world, he thinks, in the warring forties. The actual pestilence was not the disease but the harvest of a weakness already prepared.

History is like the individual memory in this, that it tends to obliterate disagreeable experiences. One of the most nonsensical things that was ever said was that a country is happy that has no history. On the contrary, it is only the really secure and prosperous phases that have left anything like sufficient material for historical reconstruction. We know of the pleasant social life of all the centuries of abundance in Egypt; we know the greatness and conquests of Assyria; the court-life of Ajanta and Central Asia is pictured for us to share; but the days of military disaster leave nothing but a band of ashes, and the years of pestilence merely break the continuities of the record. There is a good account of the Plague of London (1665) written by Defoe (1659-1731), and the unwary reader has to be warned that that account was compiled and fabricated many years after the event by an ingenious writer who was not even an eye-witness. There is a painting by Raphael of the plague in Rome which is similarly reminiscent. Most of the great plagues of history took their dead and departed unportrayed. What concerns history is the subsequent social and economic dislocation. On that Clio becomes copious again. What goes on again matters to her, but what is dead is dead.

The flowering prosperity of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has left us an almost uncontrollable mass of record about people who knew nothing except by hearsay of the more frightful experiences of mankind. We have novels, letters, diaries, memoirs, pictures, photographs and so on by the million. But there survives hardly a letter, no pictures, and not a book or newspaper to throw light on those years 1955 and 1956, little more than a century and a third ago, which were certainly the most terrible through which our race ever passed. What was written at the time was destroyed as infectious. Afterwards it was left for a new generation of Defoes and Stephen Cranes to contrive a picture.

The descriptions of Cable, Nath Dass, Bodesco and Martini seem to be fairly justifiable, and to these fictions the reader is referred. They ring the changes upon not only villages but towns and cities with none but dead men and women in them; people lying unburied and gnawed by packs of hungry dogs and solitary cats; in India the tigers and in Africa the lions came into the desolate streets, and in Brazil the dead population of whole
districts was eaten chiefly by wild hog, which multiplied excessively. Rats swarmed, and with an unwonted boldness threatened even the immune.

One terror which is never omitted is the wandering of the infected. Nothing would induce them to remain in bed or hospital; nothing could keep them from entering towns and houses that were as yet immune. Thousands of these dying wanderers were shot by terror-stricken people whom they approached. That dreadful necessity horrifies us to-day as much as that other grim act of self-protection: the survivors in the boats of the big steamship Titanic which struck an iceberg in 1912, beating at the knuckles of the drowning men and women who clung to the sides and threatened to swamp them. For awhile, under such desperate and revealing stresses, man ceased to obey the impulses of a social animal. Those of the population who resisted the infection — and with maculated fever the alternatives were immunity or death — gave way to a sort of despair and hatred against the filthy suffering around them. Only a few men with medical, military, priestly or police training seem to have made head against the disaster and tried to maintain a sort of order. Many plundered. On the whole, so far as the evidence can be sifted, women behaved better than men, but some few women who joined the looters were terrible.

This nightmare came and passed.

In January 1957, people were walking about in the deserted towns, breaking into empty houses, returning to abandoned homes, exploring back streets littered with gnawed bones or fully-clad skeletons, and they were still unable to realize that the wrath of Nature was over and life still before them.

Maculated fever had put gas warfare in its place. It had halved the population of the world.
11. Europe in 1960

The more advanced student of history finds it necessary to work out in detail the local variations of the process by which the great patchwork of empires and nationalist states, set up during the Age of European Predominance, lost its defining lines, lost its contrasted cultures and its elaborated traditions, and ceased to divide the allegiance and devotion of men of goodwill. It was still standing — a hollow shell in 1933; in 1966 it had gone. It crumpled up, it broke down; its forms melted together and disappeared.

For the purposes of general education, the intricate interplay of personalities and accidents in this world débâcle can be passed over, as we pass over the details of the Great War or of Napoleon’s various military campaigns, and as Gibbon, the author of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (published between 1776 and 1788) passed over a thousand years of Byzantine court life. Nowadays that sort of history has become a mine for those admirable biographical studies which are ousting the old romantic novel from the entertainment of our leisure so soon as our imaginations have passed beyond the purely romantic stage. All that is needed for our present purpose is some understanding of the broader forces that were operating through this lush jungle of human reactions.

The tempo of human affairs increases continually, and the main difference between the decline and fall of the Roman system and the decline and fall of the world rule of private-profit capitalism in the Twentieth Century lies in the far more rapid onset and development of the later collapse. A second important difference is the much livelier understanding of what was happening on the part of the masses involved. Each of these two great depressions in the record of human well-being was primarily a monetary breakdown, due to the casual development of financial and proprietary law and practice without any reference to a comprehensive well-being, and to the lag in political and educational adaptation which left the whole system at last completely without guidance. But while the former débâcle went to the pace of the horse on the paved road and of the written and spoken word, the phases of the new downfall flashed about the globe instantaneously and evoked a body of thought and reaction out of all comparison greater than the Roman precedent. So we see only a much compressed and abbreviated parallelism. From the demoralization of the deflated Roman Empire by the great plagues at the end of the second century of the Christian era, to the reappearance of commerce, industry, art and politeness in the cities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was well over a thousand nerveless years; from the invasion of Belgium by the Germans in 1914 to the return of general material prosperity under the Air Dictatorship after 2010 was roughly a century.

The mental process, if for this reason alone, was much more continuous. It
got to its conclusions while still in contact with its premises. The first world collapse was spread over a number of generations, each one oblivious of the experiences of its predecessor, but the larger and swifter part of the second world collapse fell well within the compass of a single long life. People who could remember the plentiful and relatively stable times between 1924 and 1928 as young men and women were still only at the riper end of middle age in 1960. Many who were children at the onset of the Hoover Slump were taking an active part in affairs in the days of the first international police, the Police of the Air and Sea Ways. It was possible to grasp what was happening as one whole. It is doubtful if any Roman citizen under the Empire ever grasped what was happening.

Nevertheless in each case there was a parallel obliteration of old ideas, the same effacement of boundaries, the same destruction of time-honoured traditions, the lapsing of debts and obligations, the disappearance of religious and educational organizations, the impoverishment of favoured and privileged classes, the recrudescence of lawlessness, the cleansing disillusionment. Each was the effectual liquidation of a bankrupt civilization preparatory to a drastic reconstruction.

We will now take a sort of rough cross-section of the world at about the date of 1960 C.E., and consider the condition of the main masses of the world’s population and the great forces at work among them. In the light of subsequent events we can realize that there was already a very considerable convergence of conditions going on throughout the middle decades of the century. But it may be doubted whether that was evident at the time. The goal towards which the fundamental bionomic forces were driving was everywhere the same, but the particulars varied widely with the geographical, ethnic and traditional circumstances, and their immediate interpretations were even more diverse.

We have viewed the events of the Era of European Predominance as the outcome of an uncontrolled irregularity in growth, of economic hypertrophy in a phase of political and cultural atrophy. An immense increase in the energy of human society had occurred which had relieved itself partly in a great multiplication of the human population (Europe from 180 to 420 millions between 1800 and 1914, says Werner Sombart, in spite of a great emigration), partly in a monstrous exaggeration of warfare, and less considerably in an increased fullness and speed of the individual life. But, as we have related, the forces of conservativism and functional resistance embodied in the creditor and legal systems were presently able to give pause to the release of fresh energy. For the second time in human experience the inadaptable quality of the financial and proprietary organization produced a strangulation and an arrest.

The money and credit organization of the prosperity of the nineteenth century differed in many respects from, and was more elaborate than, the Roman, but its life history was essentially the same. It wound itself up in
the same fashion. First came a vast expansion and increase of private fortunes and then destructive taxation. So far history repeated itself. The European system, like the Roman system before it, impoverished itself finally by the violent expenditure of its vast windfall of energy. It repeated the same blind story of wastage, but with the unprecedented headlong facilities science afforded it. It ran through its available fortune and was helplessly in debt in a few decades. The height of its expenditure was between 1914 and 1950. Thereafter the pace was less catastrophic.

Regarded even as destruction the New Warfare proved in the end to be a failure. It went to pieces when it was attempted. It did not kill as it might have killed — which is why the reader is alive to read this history. The actual battles of the European wars in the Forties — the purely military operations, that is to say — in all their ramifications cost mankind hardly a quarter of the battle slaughters of 1914-1918. And yet they mark the highest level of scientific fighting ever attained by mankind. The Asiatic troubles had been more destructive because they were nearer the barbaric level, but even there the actual deaths in warfare are estimated as under nine million. Of these, nearly five million are to be ascribed to the final offensive of Japan in 1938, the deadlock in Central China, the desperate fighting with the Kuomintang levies west of Hankow, and the subsequent retreat.

Man had fallen as short as all that of the magnificent horrors he had anticipated. He had failed to raise war to its ultimate mechanical level. The social and political dislocation following upon these two main struggles was indeed proportionately far greater than the disorder of 1917-1919, but warfare was its prelude rather than its cause. This New Warfare, which the prophets had said would end in a scientific massacre of mankind, passed insensibly into a squalor of political fiascos, unpayable debts, unsubscribed loans, scrapped machinery, insurrection, guerilla and bandit conflicts, universal hunger and the great pestilences. Gas Warfare and Air War faded out of the foreground of human experience, dwarfed and overwhelmed by the more primitive realities of panic, famine and fever. The ultimate victor in the middle twentieth century was the germ of maculated fever. The main causes in the fall of the world's population from about two thousand million in 1930 to a little under half that total in 1960 were diseases or simple starvation, arising directly from the complete economic collapse. Where war slew its millions in a few great massacres, pestilence slew its hundreds of millions in a pitiless pursuit that went on by day and night for two terrific years.

As Imhoff has said, there is no single European history of these Famished and Pestilential Fifties which followed so swiftly on the war years; there are ten million histories. The various governments created by the Treaty of Versailles were for the most part still legally in existence throughout this age, but with the monetary cessation they had become so faded and ineffective that they had ceased to have any great influence on everyday
life. Some, like the British and the French, limited their activities to efforts — generally quite futile efforts, at tax-collecting; they went on finally in a way which will remind the student of the old tribute-levying Empires before the Helleno-Latin period. They interfered spasmodically with local affairs, but for the most part they let them drift. They ignored or compromised with active resistance. The British government was still, it seems, paying arrears upon its various loans, in 1952, to such stockholders as it was able to trace. The records are obscure; the payments seem to have been made in a special paper currency without real purchasing power. Other governments, like the Italian and Spanish, carried on as real administrative bodies within restricted areas. Rome, for instance, remained in fairly effective control of the triangle marked out by Genoa, Florence and the Mediterranean Coast, and Barcelona and Madrid kept order throughout most of the Peninsula except the Sovietized Spanish Riviera, Portugal and Andalusia.

The process in America was roughly parallel. Detachment was easier so soon as the bankrupt railways ceased to operate there, because the distances between population centres were greater and the capacity of the people for local autonomy much greater. They were still not a century from pioneering. The railways never resumed after the pestilence. The authority of the Federal Government of the United States shrank to Washington, very much as the Eastern Empire shrank to Byzantium, but Washington had none of the vitality of Byzantium, and it was already a merely historical capital long before the revival of tourism towards 2000. Germany as a unity did not survive the Polish wars, and Berlin dwindled rapidly to the status of a group of villages amidst the ruins of the Polish aerial bombardments.

The practical effacement of these bankrupt political systems in a few years, the equally rapid drying up of general transport and communications, the crescendo of the monetary breakdown, the speedy degeneration of military organizations, threw back the tasks of social order upon such local and regional leading as still existed. They found themselves astonishingly called upon. In Europe, as all over the world throughout this extraordinary decade, towns, cities, rural districts, discovered themselves obliged to “carry on” by themselves. The plague only drove home that imperative need. The municipal authorities organized such health services as they could against the infection, or gave way to emergency bodies that took things out of their hands. When the plague disappeared, they were like shipwrecked sailors on a strange island; they had to reconstitute their shrunken economic life. They used old authority for new needs and old terms for new things. Here it would be an energetic leader who called himself the Mayor or the Duke, here a resolute little band, self-styled the Town Council or the Citizens’ Union. Here “advanced” terminology prevailed, and it was a “Soviet of Workers” which took control. In effect the latter would be very similar to a Citizens’ Union. Its chief distinction was
its consciousness of being in a new social phase.

There was the most extraordinary variation in the political structure of this phase of dislocation, and a flat contradiction between the actual and the “legal” controls. Across South Germany, Poland and North France, the prevalent impression was one of social revolution, and Soviets were in fashion. But they were very different in character from the original local Russian Soviets. It was possible to find a Communist district referring itself vaguely to Moscow, lying side by side with another that was under the control of its former owners and employers and professed to be, and often was, still in communication with the national government in the capital. An uneasy truce would be maintained between these theoretically antagonistic systems. Deputations would go for authority in various disputes — arrears of taxes in hand — to Westminster, Paris or Rome, very much as the barbarian chiefs of the Early Mediæval period would upon due occasion refer to Byzantium or Rome. Local conflicts and revolutions were constantly occurring. They were recognized at the capitals only as local riots and municipal readjustments.

Scattered through this disarticulating Europe were the vestiges of the old militarism, broken fragments of unpaid armies with irreplaceable weapons and a dwindling supply of ammunition. They consisted of the officers who were soldiers by profession, and the levies who had not been disbanded or who had refused to be disbanded because there was no employment for them outside the ranks. These men had their officers very much under control because of the great facilities for desertion. In some cases these shrivelled military forces were in contact with the capital and the old legal government, and conducted, or attempted to conduct, tax requisitions and suchlike surviving functions of the old order; in other instances they became frankly brigand forces, though often with high-sounding titles, Public Order Guards of the Emergency Army. Most merged with the local police of aggressive Mayors or councils. Small wars of conquest went on in the early Sixties. Old empires and sovereign states reappeared, in duplicate or triplicate, and vanished or became something else. After 1960 there were even quasi-military forces levying contributions, keeping a sort of order, and professing to be Modern State nuclei. They would occupy the old barracks and accommodation of garrison towns.

In the Forties these soldiers had been raw recruits. In the following decades those who remained in their old formations became formidable middle-aged rascals in patched and shabby and supplemented uniforms. Some of the commandants had gained control of local aerodromes and local munition factories, but everywhere the military found themselves more and more out of sympathy with the technical workers they needed to make these acquisitions effective. They degenerated to the level of the nineteenth century infantry and were at last glad to get even a few thousand roughly made cartridges to replenish their supply.
Under the necessity of doing things for themselves, people did things for themselves that they had left to the central government for a century. Even during the World War, and in the year or so of stress that followed it, various French Chambers of Commerce had supplemented the deficiency in small change by local token coinages. Now this practice reappeared widely. Today our museums contain hundreds of thousands of specimens of these improvised European coins of lead, nickel, tin and all sorts of alloys, jetons or checks of wood, and tons of signed, printed paper notes, useful in the local market, acceptable for rents and local taxes, but of no avail at all at a distance of a few score miles. The local bank manager as often as not would improvise a local credit system in cooperation with the local solicitor; the doctors would contrive a way of getting along without the Home Office. There were still printers’ establishments in most centres of population, and for some years local periodicals, often of considerable originality, appearing weekly or monthly and printed on the roughest and most variable paper, supplied all that remained alive of the European Press. But their foreign news amounted to little more than rumour. The great Press agencies were bankrupt and dead; the telegraph organization was out of gear.

Save in a few exceptional centres, the diffusion of news by radio died out completely. The manufacture of receiving sets was entirely disorganized. From 1930 to 1970 the “ether” for all except the special purposes of air transport was still. There is a long and interesting study in the Historical Record Series of the vicissitudes of posts, telegraphs and telephones between 1950 and 1980. There seem to have been extraordinary survivals. Apparently London, Paris and Rome were in telephonic communication almost without a break, and the news of the great London landslide was telephoned to Madrid and thence radioed to Buenos Ayres in 1968. But that may have been a revival connected with the new Sea and Air Control.

The disappearance not only of radio sets but of an enormous variety of small conveniences and appliances was extraordinarily rapid after the collapse of world trade. Photography, for instance, was wiped out almost at once. The bicycle became rare, and the old pneumatic tyre was replaced by a thin solid one of often very badly adulterated “remade” rubber. Electric lighting flickered out and vanished for want of the proper material for filaments. All electrical material deteriorated, and tramway systems either fell into complete disuse or returned to horse traction.

Ordinary life had been lowering its standards bit by bit from the World War onward. First one thing went and then another. Neither in the British nor the French provinces did the housing of the common people recover from the cessation of building during the actual warfare. Except in places like Berlin or Vienna where there had been a vigorous outbreak of post-war building which provided accommodation in excess for the shrunken population, the mass of Europeans were even more congested
and dirty in their domestic accommodation than they had been before the conflict, though indeed they never sank to the immemorial squalor and poverty of the Chinese and Indian towns. Cleanliness diminished at such a pace as to be noted even by the newspapers after 1933. There are constant complaints of the dirtiness of the streets and the bad repair of the roads, and regretful comparisons with the trim orderliness of twenty years before.

Clothing declined with housing. The clothing trade shrank steadily per head of population for nearly forty years. The city crowds, in spite of the more and more abundant uniforms (until 1950), lost nearly all their former brightness and élan. People patched up their old clothing for want of new, and rags became increasingly common. The supply of boots was very restricted. The mass production of boots had been commandeered at the outbreak of the war and was never turned back to commercial use because of the complete financial ruin that ensued. But the old-fashioned shoemakers had been driven off the face of Europe long before by this mass production, and so throughout the Famished Fifties the Europeans were very painfully shod. Spain had the best boots and France and Britain took to sandals — and chilblains. A certain manufacture of footwear went on in some centre in Bohemia, now untraceable, and next to Spain ranked Central Europe in the order of shoe welfare. There was an extreme scarcity of hats everywhere.

There was also a universal decline in the little comforts and accessories of life to which the world had grown accustomed. Except in a few favoured regions where it was actually grown, tobacco disappeared. The mass production of cigarettes died out, and those who smoked, smoked pipes of substitute. Real tea became a great rarity, and sugar was scarce. Dietetic diseases and diseases of under-nutrition increased.

During the strain and effort of the Great War most of the Europeans had already learnt something of contrivance and makeshift. Now they were to have a decade of domestic management under difficulties. The Germans were already familiar with the word Ersatz; there was much technical knowledge and ability diffused among them; and it is indisputable that they contrived to keep much nearer comfort than the rest of the world during these dismal years. They devised substitute leather, substitute cotton, substitute coffee and tea, substitute tobacco, substitute quinine and opium, and a very respectable list of other substitute drugs.

At the other extreme were the shiftless Irish. Until the return of production their physical misery was very great indeed. One observer doubted if there were a million yards of new cloth produced in that country between 1950 and 1960. “They live,” he reported, “on buttermilk, potatoes, whisky and political excitement. They have contrived garments of woven straw, often very picturesquely dyed, which they call Early Erse and of which they boast inordinately, and they warm themselves by means of fires of peat and dung and a great warmth of mutual invective.” This sounds quite barbaric. Yet it
is to this period that we owe the graceful — though, according to a recent Historical Documents report, rather rickety — Church of the Atonement, built on the site of the Dublin Royal College of Science after that had been suppressed by the Censorship of 1939 for “teaching biology in a manner tending to disintegrate the Holy Trinity”.

The student must be more or less familiar with the representations of this period in that useful compilation Historical Scenes in a Hundred Volumes, and he has probably read a number of romances and stories of this time. Actual photographs are least abundant in the later fifties and early sixties. There were still plenty of cameras in the world, but the supply of films seems to have died out after 1955, and there are hardly any but slow wet-plate exposures after that time for nearly ten years. We get only a few score of such animated snapshots as were abundant during the preceding decades, and there are no European cinematograph films at all. Neither was there much sketching except of single figures, and so the editors have had to supplement their material by very carefully studied drawings and photographed restorations made at a later date.

There are six interesting snapshots of scenes in Lyons in 1959. Someone seems to have found a spool of film and been able to develop it. One shows the big central square, the Place Bellecour as it was called, on a market day. Earlier pictures show a big bronze equestrian figure of Louis XIV, but this had already disappeared, probably it had been melted for its metal; and the windows of some of the big buildings, formerly hotels and hospitals, in the background have the empty frameless look of gutted houses. But the scene is quite a busy one. It was probably the monthly market, and there is a considerable amount of cattle, numerous horses being traded, hurdled sheep, many goats and a row of pig-pens. The people are mostly peasants wearing straw hats and either very old coats or in some cases shawls wrapped about them. Townspeople are still wearing the clothing of the ‘thirties, shabby and patched, and there are three market officials or magistrates in the old-world top hat. In the foreground a bearded man leads a couple of oxen harnessed to a small “runabout” car in which a corpulent woman sits in front with a crate of ducklings while behind is a netted calf. The lady smiles broadly at the camera, unaware that she is smiling at posterity.

Another of these snapshots shows a bowls competition in the deserted railway station. It is clearly a festive occasion, and several games are in progress. The rails have disappeared from the tracks, which have been levelled for the game, and the ponies and mules of the players are tethered on the platform in a long line. The doors of the various bureaus have been taken away but the inscriptions Chef de Gare, Salle d’Attente, Restaurant, are still faintly visible. There are two long tables on one of the middle platforms on which simple refreshments are being served. A third picture shows a crowd staring at the ruins of a row of houses which have just
collapsed down a steep slope in what is apparently the district known as Fourvière. Here two bearded men in the unmistakable uniform of the old Alpini are keeping order. We know as a matter of fact that the Lyons municipality at that time had three regiments of these soldiers quartered in barracks. They are wearing sandals supplemented by cloth strips that are twisted round their legs, and their cloaks are in good condition.

Three others of these photographs give us a glimpse of the state of affairs in a disused silk factory. Up to the time of the economic collapse, the silk manufactured at Lyons was still largely that produced by the silkworm, but the supply of raw material seems to have died out more or less completely in the Rhône valley, and the shrinkage of trade and then the war diminished the importation of the reeled-up thread. But silk was needed in the manufacture of shells, and probably there were special efforts to maintain the supply up to the last. This particular establishment seems to have been carrying on a diminished output until the Lyons commune in 1951. Then no doubt it was abruptly abandoned. One photograph shows a great heap of paper litter among weaving-machines and a number of petrol cans. Apparently there was an attempt to fire the place. Another gives a vista of winding-machines shrouded in spiders’ webs and fine dust. In a third a wild cat crouches among the spindles of a spinning-machine and spits at the unwanted intruder. The machinery has all the complicated clumsiness characteristic of twentieth-century mechanism. Apparently a window of some sort was opened or a blind drawn back to make this particular photograph, for the picture is blurred with a multitude of whirling moths, most of them out of focus, evidently just stirred up.

These particular pictures are valuable because of their authenticity. There are also two contemporary dry-plate pictures of the Café Royal, the big restaurant of the Grand Hotel of Stockholm, deserted and still intact. They are oddly suggestive of two pictures of the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome as they appeared a hundred years earlier. And there is also a photograph of the remains of the old dining-room of the Hotel Métropole at Brighton in England before it was undermined and fell into the sea. But all the rest of the pictures given in Historical Scenes between 1955 and 1963 are arranged pictures. The Transport organization was running scores of aeroplanes and radio communications were restored long before the complex manufacture of photographic apparatus and material was set going again.

There are some very interesting restorations of conditions in London showing the empty streets and the vacant tumbledown warehouses of the city after the pestilence. The pictures of the corridors of the hotels in the Strand turned into hospital wards are very impressive. So too is the sketch of a great fight between the cow-keepers and the potato-growers for the possession of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens in which three hundred people were killed. The dreadful pictures of the bodies of plague victims
floating down the Thames and accumulating in the Pool of London, however, are now said to be exaggerated.

We try in the midst of our present securities to imagine the phases of anxiety, loss, incredulity and reluctant acquiescence through which the minds of hundreds of millions of Europeans passed, day by day, from the general comfort of the Twenties, through the shocks, fear, horror, rage and excitement of the war cycle, into this phase of universal impotence and destitution. The poor perhaps had a less vivid apprehension of disaster than the rich. Even in the days of General Prosperity, as it is called, they had at the best what we should consider very dull, drab, irksome lives. Even though they mostly ate sufficiently, they ate badly, and there was never a stage of universal decent housing at any time for them. They went from bad to worse. They passed from toil to unemployment and lethargy. But the middling sort passed from good to bad, from something one might almost consider tolerable living to the hopeless neediness of the masses.

A class that went through great unhappiness everywhere during this period was the class of elderly and “retired” persons and persons of “independent means” (and no responsibilities) which had expanded so enormously during the First Age of General Prosperity. This superfluity of prosperous humanity had spread itself out very pleasantly over the world, oblivious of the exertions that sustained social discipline and ensured its security. Insensibly it had taken the place of the old administrative and directive noblesse and country gentry. The investment system during its period of steady efficiency had relieved this social stratum of every bother. There were great areas of agreeable country, residential districts, given up to this “well-off” society, to its gardens, which were often delightful, its golf-courses, race-courses, mountain sport centres, parks, country clubs, plages, and hotels. It wilted a little during the World War, but revived again very hopefully in the decade of hectic and uncertain expansion that followed. Then, as the Great Slump developed its grim phases, this life of leisure passed away.

The Phase of Economy is really a misnomer. There was really no economy; there was strangulation and inaction through a cessation of expenditure. Nobody — unless it was a dexterous speculator on a falling market — grew richer, or even relatively richer. The only profits appeared in bank balance sheets. As the malady of arrest spread, traffics declined, enterprise died out, borrowing states and corporations suspended payments, and these children of good fortune, these well-off people, found themselves confronted at the same time by a suspension of payments and more and more urgent charitable appeals. Their bankers and solicitors informed them that first this trusted prop and then that was in arrears or in default. The waters of repudiation rose, submerging security after security. If they sold out and hoarded, some fluctuation in exchange might still engulf great fractions of their capital. “Whatever else may be falling off, sleepless nights
are on the increase,” a financial paper remarked in 1933. The head full of self-reproach that tossed on the crumpled pillow in the villa marked time with the fretting of the unemployed who worried in the stuffy cold of the slum.

We have the Diary of Titus Cobbett, who rode on a bicycle from Rome and along the Riviera to Bordeaux in 1958. He had begun life as an art dealer, and had served the British Inland Revenue for some years as a valuer of furniture, pictures and the like. His tour seems to have been a journey of curiosity. He complains bitterly of the difficulty of changing money between Genoa and Bordeaux. He seems to have had some obscure diplomatic or consular function, but of that he is too discreet to speak. Perhaps he was sent to make a report, but if so there is no record of his instructions.

His description of that smitten coast is still very interesting reading. He had, as a young man with good connections, known Monte Carlo well in the twenties, and the places he visited were often those at which he had stayed as a guest. He records the abandonment of hundreds of lovely châteaux, locked-up, unsaleable, abandoned, in the keeping perhaps of some old domestic, or frankly looted by the people of the district, once delightful gardens whose upkeep had become impossible, blind tangles of roses, oleanders, pomegranates, oranges, cypresses, palm trees, agaves, cacti and weeds; unremunerative hotels allowed to fall into ruins, broken-down water-conduits washing away the roads, bungalows taken over by the peasants. Something of the same swift desolation must have come upon the Campagna and the villadom of the Bay of Naples during the ebb of Roman vitality, but this had been a swifter decline. The roads, he says, were very variable, but a great number of the road signs and roadside advertisements were still making their mute appeal to a vanished traffic. As he rode along wondering whether he would find a reasonably clean and hospitable shelter for the night, he read, he says, picked out in metallic knobs that answered brightly to his oil lamp:

HTEL SLENID
CUSINE RENOM
TTLEC NFOR M RNE

Whither had host and guests departed? Where were the owners and tenants of these villas and gardens; the bright clientele of the pleasure resorts? Many of them no doubt were already dead, for the Riviera owners had been mostly middle-aged and oldish people. The rest were back in their own countries leading impoverished lives, full of tiresome reminiscences, lost in the universal indigence.
Cobbett visited the ruins of the old Casino at Monte Carlo, and the younger Sports Club. The ceiling of the American Bar had fallen in a few days before his visit. “They looked small,” he says. “When I was young they had seemed tremendous places.”

The celebrated garden in which suicidal gamblers used to put an end to their troubles was overgrown with mesembryanthemum.

Yet there was one exception to this general decadence, and our observer stresses the significance of that. Air traffic was still going on. Between Rome and Marseilles he notes very precisely that he saw thirteen aeroplanes going east or west, besides two that he heard before he got up in the morning. “I doubt if I should have seen so many twenty-five years ago,” he writes, and goes on to enlarge, very illuminatingly, on the revival of trade and the possible revival of order these throbbing mechanisms portended. At Nice and at Marseilles he noted there was shipping — “not mere fishing boats but ships of a thousand tons or more”; and at Nice they were building a bigger ship — he estimated it as a three-thousand tonner. We have no other records of shipbuilding between 1947 and 1962. Long before 1940 the building of very big ships had ceased to be a “paying proposition” and it is fairly certain that no sea-going ships whatever, big or little, were built anywhere in the world in the early fifties. Year by year the transport system of the bankrupt planet had been sinking into disuse. It is only nowadays that our historical students are attempting to work out statistical charts of that swift decadence.

Cobbett also notes with surprise and hope a stretch of railway (operated by lever trolleys and a petrol engine or so) between the port of Marseilles and some inland quarries. He was clearly under the impression that no railways were operating in the world any longer. So soon as the traffic had sunk to a level below the possibility of paying subsistence wages, maintaining the permanent way and meeting running expenses, it had been impossible even for speculative buyers to handle these once valuable properties. They had become old junk on the landscape, tracks of torn and rusty rails smothered in agaves and wild flowers. He mentions the beauty of the viaducts of the old Sud de France, and tells how he bicycled along the footworn side-path of the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée in preference to the road. The peasants had used the derelict railway as a convenient iron-mine, and few rails remained. Most of the sleepers had been used for fuel.

At Fréjus there was an aerodrome, and here he describes a very illuminating conversation with a Spanish-American aviator who had served first with the Poles, then with the Germans, and finally with the French during the warfare. Cobbett was impressed by the evident revival of trade, and surprised to find rubber, spices, mercury and block-tin among the commodities coming by air from the East, while clocks, watches, compasses, knives, needles, buttons, hardened glass and the like were
going back in exchange. Most of the trade was barter, and the profits were so considerable that there seemed every reason to expect a steady expansion of the service.

He seems to have learnt for the first time of the developing combination of air-merchants who were mostly aviators surviving from the war. They had already organized a loose world union, it seems, and were keeping the airways and air lights in order.

Cobbett remarked on the shipping revival he had noted.

“We shall have to watch that,” said the aviator significantly.

“You take passengers?”

“When they can pay a passage.”

“But this is civilization coming back!” cried Cobbett.

“Don’t believe it! It’s a new civilization beginning.”

And he seems to have opened Cobbett’s eyes for the first time to some of the ideas that were already taking shape in such brains as his. “World Empire?” he said. “That’s an old idea! The men who hold the air and the transport hold the world. What do we want with empires and that stuff any more?”

Cobbett was greatly impressed by this conversation. He went on across France to Bordeaux, where it seems some sort of money awaited him, thinking this over and jotting down his thoughts. He makes one sound and interesting parallel between this new World Transport Organization and those Hansa Merchants who played such an important rôle in the revival of civilization about the Baltic and North Europe generally after the Roman collapse. “After all,” reflects Cobbett, “we have never given organized transport and trading its proper importance in history.”

At Bordeaux he sold his bicycle and was able to get a passage in an aeroplane to Le Bourget (an aerodrome of old origin near the ruins of Paris) and thence to fly to Hendon. His ‘plane landed at Le Mans for an exchange of goods. His delight to escape from the rough roads he had been riding is infectious.

He describes the recovery of the devastated French forests in the form of scrub, and he peered down at the little peasants’ clearings that were appearing in groups and patches round the old towns. He sees the aviators and mechanics at the aerodromes with new eyes, and he learns from them of the way in which World Transport was picking up and reinstating metallurgical and electrical works. He has an eye for the beauty of Le Mans cathedral, which he had seen and admired in his student days, and which he rejoices to find intact, and he describes that early monument to the
pioneers of aviation in the Place below which still survives. Amiens
cathedral also was uninjured at that time.

His diary ends on a melancholy note. Apparently he had not visited
England for some years, and he is shocked by the ruinous desolation of the
outer suburbs of London. Plainly he had lived in and loved London as a
boy. A part of Hyde Park, in spite of the opposition of the squatter
cultivators, had been converted into an aerodrome, but he found the
rebuilding of the central region haphazard and unpleasing. He objects to
the crowding of heavy buildings, with their vast anti-aircraft carapaces of
cement, at the centre, due to the decay of suburban traffic facilities. It
looked, he says, like a cluster of “diseased” mushrooms. “When shall we
English learn to plan?” he asks, and then with an odd prophetic gleam he
doubts whether the northern slope of the Thames depression, so ill
drained and so soft in its subsoil, can carry this lumpish mass of unsound
new buildings to which the life of the old city was shrinking.

Only ten years later his fears were to be justified. The bed of the Thames
buckled up and the whole of the Strand, Fleet Street, Cornhill and, most
regrettable of all, the beautiful St. Paul’s Cathedral of Sir Christopher
Wren, so familiar to us in the pictures and photographs of that age,
collapsed in ruin and perished in flame. The reader who has pored over
Historical Scenes in a Hundred Volumes, — and what child has not? — will
remember the peculiar appearance of the old Waterloo Bridge, crumpled
up to a pent-house shape, and the grotesque obliquity of the Egyptian
obelisk, once known as Cleopatra’s Needle, that venerable slab of
hieroglyphics, cracked and splintered by air-raid shrapnel, which slanted
incredibly for some years before it fell into the banked-up water of the
Lambeth-Chelsea lake.