Maddened by Mystery and Other Stories

Stephen Leacock

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Maddened by Mystery: or, The Defective Detective

THE great detective sat in his office. He wore a long green gown and half a dozen secret badges pinned to the outside of it.

Three or four pairs of false whiskers hung on a whisker−stand beside him.

Goggles, blue spectacles, and motor glasses lay within easy reach.

He could completely disguise himself at a second's notice.

Half a bucket of cocaine and a dipper stood on a chair at his elbow. His face was absolutely impenetrable.

A pile of cryptograms lay on the desk. The Great Detective hastily tore them open one after the other, solved them, and threw them down the cryptogram−chute at his side.

There was a rap at the door.

The Great Detective hurriedly wrapped himself in a pink domino, adjusted a pair of false black whiskers and cried,

"Come in."

His secretary entered. "Ha," said the detective, "it is you."

He laid aside his disguise.

"Sir," said the young man in intense excitement, "a mystery has been committed!"

"Ha!" said the Great Detective, his eye kindling, "is it such as to completely baffle the police of the entire continent?"

"They are so completely baffled with it," said the secretary, "that they are lying collapsed in heaps; many of them have committed suicide."

"So," said the detective, "and is the mystery one that is absolutely unparalleled in the whole recorded annals of the London police?"

"It is."

"And I suppose," said the detective, "that it involves names which you would scarcely dare to breathe, at least without first using some kind of atomizer or throat−gargle."

"Exactly."

"And it is connected, I presume, with the highest diplomatic consequences, so that if we fail to solve it England will be at war with the whole world in sixteen minutes?"

His secretary, still quivering with excitement, again answered yes.

"And finally," said the Great Detective, "I presume that it was committed in broad daylight, in some such place as the entrance of the Bank of England, or in the cloak−room of the House of Commons, and under the very eyes of the police?"

"Those," said the secretary, "are the very conditions of the mystery."

"Good," said the Great Detective, "now wrap yourself in this disguise, put on these brown whiskers and tell me what it is."

The secretary wrapped himself in a blue domino with lace insertions, then, bending over, he whispered in the ear of the Great Detective:

"The Prince of Wurttemberg has been kidnapped."

The Great Detective bounded from his chair as if he had been kicked from below.

A prince stolen! Evidently a Bourbon! The scion of one of the oldest families in Europe kidnapped. Here was a mystery indeed worthy of his analytical brain.

His mind began to move like lightning.

"Stop!" he said, "how do you know this?"

The secretary handed him a telegram. It was from the Prefect of Police of Paris. It read: "The Prince of Wurttemberg stolen. Probably forwarded to London. Must have him here for the opening day of the Exhibition. £1,000 reward."

So! The Prince had been kidnapped out of Paris at the very time when his appearance at the International Exposition would have ben a political event of the first magnitude.

With the Great Detective, to think was to act, and to act was to think. Frequently he could do both together.

"Wire to Paris for a description of the Prince."

The secretary bowed and left.

At the same moment there was a slight scratching at the door.

A visitor entered. He crawled stealthily on his hands and knees. A hearth−rug thrown over his head and shoulders disguised his identity.

He crawled to the middle of the room.

Then he rose.

Great Heaven!

It was the Prime Minster of England.

"You!" said the detective.

"Me," said the Prime Minister.

"You have come in regard the kidnapping of the Prince of Wurttemberg?"

The Prime Minister started.

"How do you know?" he said.

The Great Detective smiled his inscrutable smile.

"Yes," said the Prime Minister. "I will use no concealment. I am interested, deeply interested. Find the Prince of Wurttemberg, get him safe back to Paris and I will add £500 to the reward already offered. But listen," he said impressively as he left the room, "see to it that no attempt is made to alter the marking of the prince, or to clip his tail."

So! To clip the Prince's tail! The brain of the Great Detective reeled. So! a gang of miscreants had conspired to−−but no! the thing was not possible.

There was another rap at the door.

A second visitor was seen. He wormed his way in, lying almost prone upon his stomach, and wriggling across the floor. He was enveloped in a long purple cloak. He stood up and peeped over the top of it.

Great Heaven!

It was the Archbishop of Canterbury!

"Your Grace!" exclaimed the detective in amazement−−"pray do not stand, I beg you. Sit down, lie down, anything rather than stand."

The Archbishop took off his mitre and laid it wearily on the whisker−stand.

"You are here in regard to the Prince of Wurttemberg."

The Archbishop started and crossed himself. Was the man a magician?

"Yes," he said, "much depends on getting him back. But I have only come to say this: my sister is desirous of seeing you. She is coming here. She has been extremely indiscreet and her fortune hangs upon the Prince. Get him back to Paris or I fear she will be ruined."

The Archbishop regained his mitre, uncrossed himself, wrapped his cloak about him, and crawled stealthily out on his hands and knees, purring like a cat.

The face of the Great Detective showed the most profound sympathy. It ran up and down in furrows. "So," he muttered, "the sister of the Archbishop, the Countess of Dashleigh!" Accustomed as he was to the life of the aristocracy, even the Great Detective felt that there was here intrigue of more than customary complexity.

There was a loud rapping at the door.

There entered the Countess of Dashleigh. She was all in furs.

She was the most beautiful woman in England. She strode imperiously into the room. She seized a chair imperiously and seated herself on it, imperial side up.

She took off her tiara of diamonds and put it on the tiara−holder beside her and uncoiled her boa of pearls and put it on the pearl−stand.

"You have come," said the Great Detective, "about the Prince of Wurttemberg."

"Wretched little pup!" said the Countess of Dashleigh in disgust.

So! A further complication! Far from being in love with the Prince, the Countess denounced the Bourbon as a pup!

"You are interested in him, I believe."

"Interested!" said the Countess. "I should rather say so. Why, I bred him!"

"You which?" gasped the Great Detective, his usually impassive features suffused with a carmine blush.

"I bred him," said the Countess, "and I've got £10,000 pounds upon his chances, so no wonder I want him back in Paris. Only listen," she said, "if they've got hold of the Prince and cut his tail or spoiled the markings of his stomach it would be far better to have quietly put out of the way here."

The Great Detective reeled and leaned up against the side of the room. So! The cold−blooded admission of the beautiful woman for the moment took away his breath! Herself the mother of the young Bourbon, misallied with one of the greatest families of Europe, staking her fortune on a Royalist plot, and yet with so instinctive a knowledge of European politics as to know that any removal of the hereditary birth−marks of the Prince would forfeit for him the sympathy of the French populace.

The Countess resumed her tiara.

She left.

The secretary re−entered.

"I have three telegrams from Paris," he said. "They are completely baffling."

He handed over the first telegram.

It read:

"The Prince of Wurttemberg has a long, wet snout, broad ears, very long body, and short hind legs."

The Great Detective looked puzzled.

He read the second telegram.

"The Prince of Wurttemberg is easily recognized by his deep bark."

And then the third.

"The Prince of Wurttemberg can be recognized by a patch of white hair across the centre of his back."

The two men looked at one another. The mystery was maddening, impenetrable.

The Great Detective spoke.

"Give me my domino," he said. "These clues must be followed up," the pausing, while his quick brain analysed and summed up the evidence before him−−"a young man," he muttered, "evidently young since described as a 'pup,' with a long, wet snout (ha! addicted obviously to drinking), a streak of white hair across his back (a first sign of the results of his abandoned life)−−yes, yes," he continued, "with this clue I shall find him easily."

The Great Detective rose.

He wrapped himself in a long black cloak with white whiskers and blue spectacles attached.

Completely disfigured, he issued forth.

He began the search.

For four days he visited every corner of London.

He entered every saloon in the city. In each of them he drank a glass of rum. In some of them he assumed the disguise of a sailor. In others he entered as a solider. Into others he penetrated as a clergyman. His disguise was perfect. Nobody paid any attention to him as long as he had the price of a drink.

The search proved fruitless.

Two young men were arrested under suspicion of being the Prince, only to be released.

The identification was incomplete in each case.

One had a long wet nose but no hair on his back.

The other had hair on his back but couldn't bark.

Neither of them was the young Bourbon.

The Great Detective continued his search.

He stopped at nothing.

Secretly, after nightfall, he visited the home of the Prime Minister. He examined it from top to bottom. He measured all the doors and windows. He took up the flooring. He inspected the plumbing. He examined the furniture. He found nothing.

With equal secrecy he penetrated into the palace of the Archbishop. He examined it from top to bottom. Disguised as a choir−boy he took part in the offices of the church. He found nothing.

Still undismayed, the Great Detective made his way into the home of the Countess of Dashleigh. Disguised as

a housemaid, he entered the service of the Countess.

Then at last a clue came which gave him a solution of the mystery.

On the wall of the Countess's boudoir was a large framed engraving.

It was a portrait.

Under it was a printed legend:

THE PRINCE OF WURTTEMBERG

The portrait was that of a Dachshund.

The long body, the broad ears, the unclipped tail, the short hind legs−−all was there.

In a fraction of a second the lightning mind of the Great Detective had penetrated the whole mystery.

THE PRINCE WAS A DOG ! ! ! !

Hastily throwing a domino over his housemaid's dress, he rushed to the street. He summoned a passing hansom, and in a few moments was at his house.

"I have it," he gasped to his secretary. "The mystery is solved. I have pieced it together. By sheer analysis I have reasoned it out. Listen−−hind legs, hair on back, wet snout, pup−−eh, what? does that suggest nothing to you?"

"Nothing," said the secretary; "it seems perfectly hopeless."

The Great Detective, now recovered from his excitement, smiled faintly.

"It means simply this, my dear fellow. The Prince of Wurttemberg is a dog, a prize Dachshund. The Countess of Dashleigh bred him, and he is worth some £25,000 in addition to the prize of £10,000 offered at the Paris dog show. Can you wonder that−−−−"

At that moment the Great Detective was interrupted by the scream of a woman.

"Great Heaven!"

The Countess of Dashleigh rushed into the room.

Her face was wild.

Her tiara was in disorder.

Her pearls were dripping all over the place.

She wrung her hands and moaned.

"They have cut his tail," she gasped, "and taken all the hair off his back. What can I do? I am undone! !"

"Madam," said the Great Detective, calm as bronze, "do yourself up. I can save you yet."

"You!"

"Me!"

"How?"

"Listen. This is how. The Prince was to have been shown at Paris."

The Countess nodded.

"Your fortune was staked on him."

The Countess nodded again.

"The dog was stolen, carried to London, his tail cut and his marks disfigured."

Amazed at the quiet penetration of the Great Detective, the Countess kept on nodding and nodding.

"And you are ruined?"

"I am," she gasped, and sank to the floor in a heap of pearls.

"Madame," said the Great Detective, "all is not lost."

He straightened himself up to his full height. A look of inflinchable unflexibility flickered over his features.

The honour of England, the fortune of the most beautiful woman in England was at stake.

"I will do it," he murmured.

"Rise dear lady," he continued. "Fear nothing. I WILL IMPERSONATE THE DOG! ! !"

That night the Great Detective might have been seen on the deck of the Calais packet boat with his secretary. He was on his hands and knees in a long black cloak, and his secretary had him on a short chain.

He barked at the waves exultingly and licked the secretary's hand.

"What a beautiful dog," said the passengers.

The disguise was absolutely complete.

The Great Detective had been coated over with mucilage to which dog hairs had been applied. The markings

on his back were perfect. His tail, adjusted with an automatic coupler, moved up and down responsive to every thought. His deep eyes were full of intelligence.

Next day he was exhibited in the Dachshund class at the International show.

He won all hearts.

"Quel beau chien!" cried the French people.

"Ach! was ein Dog!" cried the Spanish.

The Great Detective took the first prize.

The fortune of the Countess was saved.

Unfortunately, as the Great Detective had neglected to pay the dog tax, he was caught and destroyed by the dog−catchers. But that is, of course, quite outside of the present narrative, and is only mentioned as an odd fact of conclusion.

"Q." A Psychic Pstory of the Psupernatural

I cannot expect that any of my readers will believe the story which I am about to narrate. Looking back upon it, I scarcely believe it myself. Yet my narrative is so extraordinary and throws such light upon the nature of our communications with beings of another world, that I feel I am not entitled to withhold it from the public.

I had gone over to visit Annerly at his rooms. It was Saturday, October 31. I remember the date so precisely because it was my pay day, and I had received six sovereigns and ten shillings. I remembered the sum so exactly because I had put the money into my pocket, and I remember into which pocket I had put it because I had no money in any other pocket. My mind is perfectly clear on all these points.

Annerly and I sat smoking for some time.

Then quite suddenly−−

"Do you believe in the supernatural?" he asked.

I started as if I had been struck.

At the moment when Annerly spoke of the supernatural I had been thinking of something entirely different. The fact that he should speak of it at the very instant when I was thinking of something else, struck me as at least a very singular coincidence.

For a moment I could only stare.

"What I mean is," said Annerly, "do you believe in phantasms of the dead?"

"Phantasms?" I repeated.

"Yes, phantasms, or if you prefer the word, phanograms, or say if you will phanogrammatical manifestations, or more simply psychophantasmal phenomena?"

I looked at Annerly with a keener sense of interest than I had ever felt in him before. I felt that he was about to deal with events and experiences of which in the two or three months that I had known him he had never seen fit to speak.

I wondered now that it had never occurred to me that a man whose hair at fifty−five was already streaked with grey, must have passed through some terrible ordeal.

Presently Annerly spoke again.

"Last night I saw Q," he said.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated. I did not in the least know who Q was, but it struck me with a thrill of indescribable terror that Annerly had seen Q. In my own quiet and measured existence such a thing had never happened.

"Yes," said Annerly, "I saw Q as plainly as if he were standing here. But perhaps I had better tell you something of my past relationship with Q, and you will understand exactly what the present situation is."

Annerly seated himself in a chair on the other side of the fire from me, lighted a pipe and continued.

"When first I knew Q he lived not very far from a small town in the south of England, which I will call X, and was betrothed to a beautiful and accomplished girl whom I will name M."

Annerly had hardly begun to speak before I found myself listening with riveted attention. I realized that it was no ordinary experience that he was about to narrate. I more than suspected that Q and M were not the real names of his unfortunate acquaintances, but were in reality two letters of the alphabet selected almost at random to disguise the names of his friends. I was still pondering over the ingenuity of the thing when Annerly went on:

"When Q and I first became friends, he had a favourite dog which, if necessary, I might name Z, and which

followed him in and out of X on his daily walk."

"In and out of X," I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes," said Annerly, "in and out."

My senses were now fully alert. That Z should have followed Q out of X, I could readily understand, but that he should first have followed him in seemed to pass the bounds of comprehension.

"Well," said Annerly, "Q and Miss M were to be married. Everything was arranged. The wedding was to take place on the last day of the year. Exactly six months and four days before the appointed day (I remember the date because the coincidence struck me as peculiar at the time) Q came to me late in the evening in great distress. He had just had, he said, a premonition of his own death. That evening, while sitting with Miss M on the verandah of her house, he had distinctly seen a projection of the dog R pass along the road."

"Stop a moment," I said. "Did you not say that the dog's name was Z?"

Annerly frowned slightly.

"Quite so," he replied. "Z, or more correctly Z R, since Q was in the habit, perhaps from motives of affection, of calling him R as well as Z. Well, then, the projection, or phanogram, of the dog passed in front of them so plainly that Miss M swore that she could have believed that it was the dog himself. Opposite the house the phantasm stopped for a moment and wagged its tail. Then it passed on, and quite suddenly disappeared around the corner of a stone wall, as if hidden by the bricks. What made the thing still more mysterious was that Miss M's mother, who is partially blind, had only partially seen the dog."

Annerly paused a moment. Then he went on:

"This singular occurrence was interpreted by Q, no doubt correctly, to indicate his own approaching death. I did what I could to remove this feeling, but it was impossible to do so, and he presently wrung my hand and left me, firmly convinced that he would not live till morning."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "and he died that night?"

"No, he did not," said Annerly quietly, "that is the inexplicable part of it."

"Tell me about it," I said.

"He rose that morning as usual, dressed himself with his customary care, omitting none of his clothes, and walked down to his office at the usual hour. He told me afterwards that he remembered the circumstances so clearly from the fact that he had gone to the office by the usual route instead of taking any other direction."

"Stop a moment," I said. "Did anything unusual happen to mark that particular day?"

"I anticipated that you would ask that question," said Annerly, "but as far as I can gather, absolutely nothing happened. Q returned from his work, and ate his dinner apparently much as usual, and presently went to bed complaining of a slight feeling of drowsiness, but nothing more. His stepmother, with whom he lived, said afterwards that she could hear the sound of his breathing quite distinctly during the night."

"And did he die that night?" I asked, breathless with excitement.

"No," said Annerly, "he did not. He rose next morning feeling about as before except that the sense of drowsiness had apparently passed, and that the sound of his breathing was no longer audible."

Annerly again fell into silence. Anxious as I was to hear the rest of his astounding narrative, I did not like to press him with questions. The fact that our relations had hitherto been only of a formal character, and that this was the first occasion on which he had invited me to visit him at his rooms, prevented me from assuming too great an intimacy.

"Well," he continued, "Q went to his office each day after that with absolute regularity. As far as I can gather there was nothing either in his surroundings or his conduct to indicate that any peculiar fate was impending over him. He saw Miss M regularly, and the time fixed for their marriage drew nearer each day."

"Each day?" I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes," said Annerly, "every day. For some time before his marriage I saw but little of him. But two weeks before that event was due to happen, I passed Q one day in the street. He seemed for a moment about to stop, then he raised his hat, smiled and passed on."

"One moment," I said, "if you will allow me a question that seems of importance−−did he pass on and then smile and raise his hat, or did he smile into his hat, raise it, and then pass on afterwards?"

"Your question is quite justified," said Annerly, "though I think I can answer with perfect accuracy that he first smiled, then stopped smiling and raised his hat, and then stopped raising his hat and passed on."

"However," he continued, "the essential fact is this: on the day appointed for the wedding, Q and Miss M were duly married."

"Impossible!" I gasped; "duly married, both of them?"

"Yes," said Annerly, "both at the same time. After the wedding Mr. and Mrs. Q−−−−"

"Mr. and Mrs. Q," I repeated in perplexity.

"Yes," he answered, "Mr. and Mrs. Q−−for after the wedding Miss M. took the name of Q−−left England and went out to Australia, where they were to reside."

"Stop one moment," I said, "and let me be quite clear−−in going out to settle in Australia it was their intention to reside there?"

"Yes," said Annerly, "that at any rate was generally understood. I myself saw them off on the steamer, and shook hands with Q, standing at the same time quite close to him."

"Well," I said, "and since the two Q's, as I suppose one might almost call them, went to Australia, have you heard anything from them?"

"That," replied Annerly, "is a matter that has shown the same singularity as the rest of my experience. It is now four years since Q and his wife went to Australia. At first I heard from him quite regularly, and received two letters each month. Presently I only received one letter every two months, and later two letters every six months, and then only one letter every twelve months. Then until last night I heard nothing whatever of Q for a year and a half."

I was now on the tiptoe of expectancy.

"Last night," said Annerly very quietly, "Q appeared in this room, or rather, a phantasm or psychic manifestation of him. He seemed in great distress, made gestures which I could not understand, and kept turning his trouser pockets inside out. I was too spellbound to question him, and tried in vain to divine his meaning. Presently the phantasm seized a pencil from the table, and wrote the words, 'Two sovereigns, to−morrow night, urgent.'"

Annerly was again silent. I sat in deep thought. "How do you interpret the meaning which Q's phanogram meant to convey?"

"I think," he announced, "it means this. Q, who is evidently dead, meant to visualize that fact, meant, so to speak, to deatomize the idea that he was demonetized, and that he wanted two sovereigns to−night."

"And how," I asked, amazed at Annerly's instinctive penetration into the mysteries of the psychic world, "how do you intend to get it to him?"

"I intend," he announced, "to try a bold, a daring experiment, which, if it succeeds, will bring us into immediate connection with the world of spirits. My plan is to leave two sovereigns here upon the edge of the table during the night. If they are gone in the morning, I shall know that Q has contrived to de−astralize himself, and has taken the sovereigns. The only question is, do you happen to have two sovereigns? I myself, unfortunately, have nothing but small change about me."

Here was a piece of rare good fortune, the coincidence of which seemed to add another link to the chain of circumstance. As it happened I had with me the six sovereigns which I had just drawn as my week's pay.

"Luckily," I said, "I am able to arrange that. I happen to have money with me." And I took two sovereigns from my pocket.

Annerly was delighted at our good luck. Our preparations for the experiment were soon made.

We placed the table in the middle of the room in such a way that there could be no fear of contact or collision with any of the furniture. The chairs were carefully set against the wall, and so placed that no two of them occupied the same place as any other two, while the pictures and ornaments about the room were left entirely undisturbed. We were careful not to remove any of the wall−paper from the wall, nor to detach any of the window−panes from the window. When all was ready the two sovereigns were laid side by side upon the table, with the heads up in such a way that the lower sides or tails were supported by only the table itself. We then extinguished the light. I said "Good night" to Annerly, and groped my way out into the dark, feverish with excitement.

My readers may well imagine my state of eagerness to know the result of the experiment. I could scarcely sleep for anxiety to know the issue. I had, of course, every faith in the completeness of our preparations, but was not without misgivings that the experiment might fail, as my own mental temperament and disposition might not

be of the precise kind needed for the success of these experiments.

On this score, however, I need have had no alarm. The event showed that my mind was a media, or if the word is better, a transparency, of the very first order for psychic work of this character.

In the morning Annerly came rushing over to my lodgings, his face beaming with excitement.

"Glorious, glorious," he almost shouted, "we have succeeded! The sovereigns are gone. We are in direct monetary communication with Q."

I need not dwell on the exquisite thrill of happiness which went through me. All that day and all the following day, the sense that I was in communication with Q was ever present with me.

My only hope was that an opportunity might offer for the renewal of our inter−communication with the spirit world.

The following night my wishes were gratified. Late in the evening Annerly called me up on the telephone.

"Come over at once to my lodgings," he said. "Q's phanogram is communicating with us."

I hastened over, and arrived almost breathless. "Q has been here again," said Annerly, "and appeared in the same distress as before. A projection of him stood in the room, and kept writing with its finger on the table. I could distinguish the word 'sovereigns,' but nothing more."

"Do you not suppose," I said, "that Q for some reason which we cannot fathom, wishes us to again leave two sovereigns for him?"

"By Jove!" said Annerly enthusiastically, "I believe you've hit it. At any rate, let us try; we can but fail."

That night we placed again two of my sovereigns on the table, and arranged the furniture with the same scrupulous care as before.

Still somewhat doubtful of my own psychic fitness for the work in which I was engaged, I endeavoured to keep my mind so poised as to readily offer a mark for any astral disturbance that might be about. The result showed that it had offered just such a mark. Our experiment succeeded completely. The two coins had vanished in the morning.

For nearly two months we continued our experiments on these lines. At times Annerly himself, so he told me, would leave money, often considerable sums, within reach of the phantasm, which never failed to remove them during the night. But Annerly, being a man of strict honour, never carried on these experiments alone except when it proved impossible to communicate with me in time for me to come.

At other times he would call me up with the simple message, "Q is here," or would send me a telegram, or a written note saying, "Q needs money; bring any that you have, but no more."

On my own part, I was extremely anxious to bring our experiments prominently before the public, or to interest the Society for Psychic Research, and similar bodies, in the daring transit which we had effected between the world of sentience and the psycho−astrict, or pseudo−ethereal existence. It seemed to me that we alone had succeeded in thus conveying money directly and without mediation, from one world to another. Others, indeed, had done so by the interposition of a medium, or by subscription to an occult magazine, but we had performed the feat with such simplicity that I was anxious to make our experience public, for the benefit of others like myself.

Annerly, however, was averse from this course, being fearful that it might break off our relations with Q.

It was some three months after our first inter−astral psycho−monetary experiment, that there came the culmination of my experiences−−so mysterious as to leave me still lost in perplexity.

Annerly had come in to see me one afternoon. He looked nervous and depressed.

"I have just had a psychic communication from Q," he said in answer to my inquiries, "which I can hardly fathom. As far as I can judge, Q has formed some plan for interesting other phantasms in the kind of work that we are doing. He proposes to form, on his side of the gulf, an association that is to work in harmony with us, for monetary dealings on a large scale, between the two worlds."

My reader may well imagine that my eyes almost blazed with excitement at the magnitude of the prospect opened up.

"Q wishes us to gather together all the capital that we can, and to send it across to him, in order that he may be able to organize with him a corporate association of phanograms, or perhaps in this case, one would more correctly call them phantoids."

I had no sooner grasped Annerly's meaning than I became enthusiastic over it.

We decided to try the great experiment that night.

My own worldly capital was, unfortunately, no great amount. I had, however, some £500 in bank stock left to me at my father's decease, which I could, of course, realize within a few hours. I was fearful, however, lest it might prove too small to enable Q to organize his fellow phantoids with it.

I carried the money in notes and sovereigns to Annerly's room, where it was laid on the table. Annerly was fortunately able to contribute a larger sum, which, however, he was not to place beside mine until after I had withdrawn, in order that conjunction of our monetary personalities might not dematerialize the astral phenomenon.

We made our preparations this time with exceptional care, Annerly quietly confident, I, it must be confessed, extremely nervous and fearful of failure. We removed our boots, and walked about on our stockinged feet, and at Annerly's suggestion, not only placed the furniture as before, but turned the coal−scuttle upside down, and laid a wet towel over the top of the wastepaper basket.

All complete, I wrung Annerly's hand, and went out into the darkness.

I waited next morning in vain. Nine o'clock came, ten o'clock, and finally eleven, and still no word of him. Then feverish with anxiety, I sought his lodgings.

Judge of my utter consternation to find that Annerly had disappeared. He had vanished as if off the face of the earth. By what awful error in our preparations, by what neglect of some necessary psychic precautions, he had met his fate, I cannot tell. But the evidence was only too clear, that Annerly had been engulfed into the astral world, carrying with him the money for the transfer of which he had risked his mundane existence.

The proof of his disappearance was easy to find. As soon as I dared do so with discretion I ventured upon a few inquiries. The fact that he had been engulfed while still owing four months' rent for his rooms, and that he had vanished without even having time to pay such bills as he had outstanding with local tradesmen, showed that he must have been devisualized at a moment's notice.

The awful fear that I might be held accountable for his death, prevented me from making the affair public.

Till that moment I had not realized the risks that he had incurred in our reckless dealing with the world of spirits. Annerly fell a victim to the great cause of psychic science, and the record of our experiments remains in the face of prejudice as a witness to its truth.

SOAKED IN SEAWEED: OR, UPSET IN THE OCEAN

It was in August in 1867 that I stepped on board the deck of the Saucy Sally, lying in dock at Gravesend, to fill the berth of second mate.

Let me first say a word about myself.

I was a tall, handsome young fellow, squarely and powerfully built, bronzed by the sun and the moon (and even copper−coloured in spots from the effect of the stars), and with a face in which honesty, intelligence, and exceptional brain power were combined with Christianity, simplicity, and modesty.

As I stepped on the deck I could not help a slight feeling of triumph, as I caught sight of my sailor−like features reflected in a tar−barrel that stood beside the mast, while a little later I could scarcely repress a sense of gratification as I noticed them reflected again in a bucket of bilge water.

"Welcome on board, Mr. Blowhard," called out Captain Bilge, stepping out of the binnacle and shaking hands across the taffrail.

I saw before me a fine sailor−like man of from thirty to sixty, clean−shaven, except for an enormous pair of whiskers, a heavy beard, and a thick moustache, powerful in build, and carrying his beam well aft, in a pair of broad duck trousers across the back of which there would have been room to write a history of the British Navy.

Beside him were the first and third mates, both of them being quiet men of poor stature, who looked at Captain Bilge with what seemed to me an apprehensive expression in their eyes.

The vessel was on the eve of departure. Her deck presented that scene of bustle and alacrity dear to the sailor's heart. Men were busy nailing up the masts, hanging the bowsprit over the side, varnishing the lee−scuppers and pouring hot tar down the companionway.

Captain Bilge, with a megaphone to his lips, kept calling out to the men in his rough sailor fashion:

"Now, then, don't over−exert yourselves, gentlemen. Remember, please, that we have plenty of time. Keep out of the sun as much as you can. Step carefully in the rigging there, Jones; I fear it's just a little high for you Tut, tut, Williams, don't get yourself so dirty with that tar, you won't look fit to be seen."

I stood leaning over the gaff of the mainsail and thinking−−yes, thinking, dear reader, of my mother. I hope

that you will think none the less of me for that. Whenever things look dark, I lean up against something and think of Mother. If they get positively black, I stand on one leg and think of Father. After that I can face anything.

Did I think, too, of another, younger than Mother and fairer than Father? Yes, I did. "Bear up, darling," I had whispered as she nestled her head beneath my oil−skins and kicked out backwards with one heel in the agony of her girlish grief, "in five years the voyage will be over, and after three more like it, I shall come back with money enough to buy a second−hand fishing−net and settle down on shore."

Meantime the ship's preparations were complete. The masts were all in position, the sails nailed up, and men with axes were busily chopping away the gangway.

"All ready?" called the Captain.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Then hoist the anchor in board and send a man down with the key to open the bar."

Opening the bar! the last sad rite of departure.

How often in my voyages have I seen it; the little group of men soon to be exiled from their home, standing about with saddened faces, waiting to see the man with the key open the bar−−held there by some strange fascination.

. . . . . .

Next morning with a fair wind astern we had buzzed around the corner of England and were running down the Channel.

I know no finer sight, for those who have never seen it, than the English Channel. It is the highway of the world. Ships of all nations are passing up and down, Dutch, Scotch, Venezuelan, and even American.

Chinese junks rush to and fro. Warships, motor yachts, icebergs, and lumber rafts are everywhere. If I add to this fact that so thick a fog hangs over it that it is entirely hidden from sight, my readers can form some idea of the majesty of the scene.

. . . . . .

We had now been three days at sea. My first sea−sickness was wearing off, and I thought less of Father.

On the third morning Captain Bilge descended to my cabin.

"Mr. Blowhard," he said, "I must ask you to stand double watches."

"What is the matter?" I inquired.

"The two other mates have fallen overboard," he said uneasily, and avoiding my eye.

I contented myself with saying "Very good, sir," but I could not help thinking it a trifle odd that both the mates should have fallen overboard in the same night.

Surely there was some mystery in this.

Two mornings later the Captain appeared at the breakfast−table with the same shifting and uneasy look in his eye.

"Anything wrong, sir?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, trying to appear at ease and twisting a fried egg to and fro between his fingers with such nervous force as almost to break it in two−−"I regret to say that we have lost the bosun."

"The bosun!" I cried.

"Yes," said Captain Bilge more quietly, "he is overboard. I blame myself for it, partly. It was early this morning. I was holding him up in my arms to look at an iceberg and, quite accidentally I assure you, I dropped him overboard."

"Captain Bilge," I asked, "have you taken any steps to recover him?"

"Not as yet," he replied uneasily.

I looked at him fixedly, but said nothing.

Ten days passed.

The mystery thickened. On Thursday two men of the starboard watch were reported missing. On Friday the carpenter's assistant disappeared. On the night of Saturday a circumstance occurred which, slight as it was, gave me some clue as to what was happening.

As I stood at the wheel about midnight, I saw the Captain approach in the darkness carrying the cabin−boy by the hind leg. The lad was a bright little fellow, whose merry disposition had already endeared him to me, and I watched with some interest to see what the Captain would do to him. Arrived at the stern of the vessel, Captain

Bilge looked cautiously around a moment and then dropped the boy into the sea. For a brief instant the lad's head appeared in the phosphorus of the waves. The Captain threw a boot at him, sighed deeply, and went below.

Here then was the key to the mystery! The Captain was throwing the crew overboard. Next morning we met at breakfast as usual.

"Poor little Williams has fallen overboard," said the Captain, seizing a strip of ship's bacon and tearing at it with his teeth as if he almost meant to eat it.

"Captain," I said, greatly excited, stabbing at a ship's loaf in my agitation with such ferocity as almost to drive my knife into it, "you threw that boy overboard!"

"I did," said Captain Bilge, grown suddenly quiet, "I threw them all over and intend to throw the rest. Listen, Blowhard, you are young, ambitious, and trustworthy. I will confide in you."

Perfectly calm now, he stepped to a locker, rummaged in it a moment, and drew out a faded piece of yellow parchment, which he spread on the table. It was a map or chart. In the centre of it was a circle. In the middle of the circle was a small dot and a letter T, while at one side of the map was a letter N, and against it on the other side a letter S.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Can you not guess?" queried Captain Bilge. "It is a desert island."

"Ah!" I rejoined with a sudden flash of intuition, "and N is for North and S is for South."

"Blowhard," said the Captain, striking the table with such force as to cause a loaf of ship's bread to bounce up and down three or four times, "you've struck it. That part of it had not yet occurred to me."

"And the letter T?" I asked.

"The treasure, the buried treasure," said the Captain, and turning the map over he read from the back of it, "The point T indicates the spot where the treasure is buried under the sand; it consists of half a million Spanish dollars, and is buried in a brown leather dress−suit case."

"And where is the island?" I inquired, mad with excitement.

"That I do not know," said the Captain. "I intend to sail up and down the parallels of latitude until I find it."

"And meantime?"

"Meantime, the first thing to do is to reduce the number of the crew so as to have fewer hands to divide among. Come, come," he added in a burst of frankness which made me love the man in spite of his shortcomings, "will you join me in this? We'll throw them all over, keeping the cook to the last, dig up the treasure, and be rich for the rest of our lives."

Reader, do you blame me if I said yes? I was young, ardent, ambitious, full of bright hopes and boyish enthusiasm.

"Captain Bilge," I said, putting my hand in his, "I am yours."

"Good," he said. "Now go forward to the forecastle and get an idea what the men are thinking."

I went forward to the men's quarters−−a plain room in the front of the ship, with only a rough carpet on the floor, a few simple arm−chairs, writing−desks, spittoons of a plain pattern, and small brass beds with blue−and−green screens. It was Sunday morning, and the men were mostly sitting about in their dressing−gowns.

They rose as I entered and curtseyed.

"Sir," said Tompkins, the bosun's mate, "I think it my duty to tell you that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction among the men."

Several of the men nodded.

"They don't like the way the men keep going overboard," he continued, his voice rising to a tone of uncontrolled passion. "It is positively absurd, sir, and if you will allow me to say so, the men are far from pleased."

"Tompkins," I said sternly, "you must understand that my position will not allow me to listen to mutinous language of this sort."

I returned to the Captain. "I think the men mean mutiny," I said.

"Good," said Captain Bilge, rubbing his hands, "that will get rid of a lot of them, and of course," he added musingly, looking out of the broad old−fashioned port−hole at the stern of the cabin, at the heaving waves of the South Atlantic, "I am expecting pirates at any time, and that will take out quite a few of them. However" −−and here he pressed the bell for a cabin−boy−−"kindly ask Mr Tompkins to step this way."

"Tompkins," said the Captain as the bosun's mate entered, "be good enough to stand on the locker and stick your head through the stern port−hole, and tell me what you think of the weather."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the tar with a simplicity which caused us to exchange a quiet smile.

Tompkins stood on the locker and put his head and shoulders out of the port.

Taking a leg each we pushed him through. We heard him plump into the sea.

"Tompkins was easy," said Captain Bilge. "Excuse me as I enter his death in the log."

"Yes," he continued presently, "it will be a great help if they mutiny. I suppose they will, sooner or later. It's customary to do so. But I shall take no step to precipitate it until we have first fallen in with pirates. I am expecting them in these latitudes at any time. Meantime, Mr. Blowhard," he said, rising, "if you can continue to drop overboard one or two more each week, I shall feel extremely grateful."

Three days later we rounded the Cape of Good Hope and entered upon the inky waters of the Indian Ocean. Our course lay now in zigzags and, the weather being favourable, we sailed up and down at a furious rate over a sea as calm as glass.

On the fourth day a pirate ship appeared. Reader, I do not know if you have ever seen a pirate ship. The sight was one to appal the stoutest heart. The entire ship was painted black, a black flag hung at the masthead, the sails were black, and on the deck people dressed all in black walked up and down arm−in−arm. The words "Pirate Ship" were painted in white letters on the bow. At the sight of it our crew were visibly cowed. It was a spectacle that would have cowed a dog.

The two ships were brought side by side. They were then lashed tightly together with bag string and binder twine, and a gang plank laid between them. In a moment the pirates swarmed upon our deck, rolling their eyes, gnashing their teeth and filing their nails.

Then the fight began. It lasted two hours−−with fifteen minutes off for lunch. It was awful. The men grappled with one another, kicked one another from behind, slapped one another across the face, and in many cases completely lost their temper and tried to bite one another. I noticed one gigantic fellow brandishing a knotted towel, and striking right and left among our men, until Captain Bilge rushed at him and struck him flat across the mouth with a banana skin.

At the end of two hours, by mutual consent, the fight was declared a draw. The points standing at sixty−one and a half against sixty−two.

The ships were unlashed, and with three cheers from each crew, were headed on their way.

"Now, then," said the Captain to me aside, "let us see how many of the crew are sufficiently exhausted to be thrown overboard."

He went below. In a few minutes he re−appeared, his face deadly pale. "Blowhard," he said, "the ship is sinking. One of the pirates (sheer accident, of course, I blame no one) has kicked a hole in the side. Let us sound the well."

We put our ear to the ship's well. It sounded like water.

The men were put to the pumps and worked with the frenzied effort which only those who have been drowned in a sinking ship can understand.

At six p.m. the well marked one half an inch of water, at nightfall three−quarters of an inch, and at daybreak, after a night of unremitting toil, seven−eighths of an inch.

By noon of the next day the water had risen to fifteen−sixteenths of an inch, and on the next night the sounding showed thirty−one thirty−seconds of an inch of water in the hold. The situation was desperate. At this rate of increase few, if any, could tell where it would rise to in a few days.

That night the Captain called me to his cabin. He had a book of mathematical tables in front of him, and great sheets of vulgar fractions littered the floor on all sides.

"The ship is bound to sink," he said, "in fact, Blowhard, she is sinking. I can prove it. It may be six months or it may take years, but if she goes on like this, sink she must. There is nothing for it but to abandon her."

That night, in the dead of darkness, while,the crew were busy at the pumps, the Captain and I built a raft.

Unobserved we cut down the masts, chopped them into suitable lengths, laid them crosswise in a pile and lashed them tightly together with bootlaces.

Hastily we threw on board a couple of boxes of food and bottles of drinking fluid, a sextant, a cronometer, a gas−meter, a bicycle pump and a few other scientific instruments. Then taking advantage of a roll in the motion of

the ship, we launched the raft, lowered ourselves upon a line, and under cover of the heavy dark of a tropical night, we paddled away from the doomed vessel.

The break of day found us a tiny speck on the Indian Ocean. We looked about as big as this (.).

In the morning, after dressing, and shaving as best we could, we opened our box of food and drink.

Then came the awful horror of our situation.

One by one the Captain took from the box the square blue tins of canned beef which it contained. We counted fifty−two in all. Anxiously and with drawn faces we watched until the last can was lifted from the box. A single thought was in our minds. When the end came the Captain stood up on the raft with wild eyes staring at the sky.

"The can−opener!" he shrieked. "Just Heaven, the can−opener."He fell prostrate.

Meantime, with trembling hands, I opened the box of bottles. It contained lager beer bottles, each with a patent tin top. One by one I took them out. There were fifty−two in all. As I withdrew the last one and saw the empty box before me, I shroke out, "The thing! the thing! oh, merciful Heaven! The thing you open them with!"

I fell prostrate upon the Captain.

We awoke to find ourselves still a mere speck upon the ocean. We felt even smaller than before.

Over us was the burnished copper sky of the tropics. The heavy, leaden sea lapped the sides of the raft. All about us was a litter of corn beef cans and lager beer bottles. Our sufferings in the ensuing days were indescribable. We beat and thumped at the cans with our fists. Even at the risk of spoiling the tins for ever we hammered them fiercely against the raft. We stamped on them, bit at them and swore at them. We pulled and clawed at the bottles with our hands, and chipped and knocked them against the cans, regardless even of breaking the glass and ruining the bottles.

It was futile.

Then day after day we sat in moody silence, gnawed with hunger, with nothing to read, nothing to smoke, and practically nothing to talk about.

On the tenth day the Captain broke silence.

"Get ready the lots, Blowhard," he said. "It's got to come to that."

"Yes," I answered drearily, "we're getting thinner every day."

Then, with the awful prospect of cannibalism before us, we drew lots.

I prepared the lots and held them to the Captain. He drew the longer one.

"Which does that mean," he asked, trembling between hope and despair. "Do I win?"

"No, Bilge," I said sadly, "you lose."

. . . . . .

But I mustn't dwell on the days that followed−−the long quiet days of lazy dreaming on the raft, during which I slowly built up my strength, which had been shattered by privation. They were days, dear reader, of deep and quiet peace, and yet I cannot recall them without shedding a tear for the brave man who made them what they were.

It was on the fifth day after that I was awakened from a sound sleep by the bumping of the raft against the shore. I had eaten perhaps overheartily, and had not observed the vicinity of land.

Before me was an island, the circular shape of which, with its low, sandy shore, recalled at once its identity.

"The treasure island!" I cried. "At last I am rewarded for all my heroism."

In a fever of haste I rushed to the centre of the island. What was the sight that confronted me? A great hollow scooped in the sand, an empty dress−suit case lying beside it, and on a ship's plank driven deep into the sand, the legend, "Saucy Sally, October, 1867."So! the miscreants had made good the vessel, headed it for the island of whose existence they must have learned from the chart we so carelessly left upon the cabin table, and had plundered poor Bilge and me of our well−earned treasure!

Sick with the sense of human ingratitude I sank upon the sand.

The island became my home.

There I eked out a miserable existence, feeding on sand and gravel and dressing myself in cactus plants. Years passed. Eating sand and mud slowly undermined my robust constitution. I fell ill. I died. I buried myself.

Would that others who write sea stories would do as much.

The Man in Asbestos: An Allegory of the Future

To begin with let me admit that I did it on purpose. Perhaps it was partly from jealousy.

It seemed unfair that other writers should be able at will to drop into a sleep of four or five hundred years, and to plunge head first into a distant future and be a witness of its marvels.

I wanted to do that too.

I always had been, I still am, a passionate student of social problems. The world of to−day with its roaring machinery, the unceasing toil of its working classes, its strife, its poverty, its war, its cruelty, appals me as I look at it. I love to think of the time that must come some day when man will have conquered nature, and the toil−worn human race enter upon an era of peace.

I loved to think of it, and I longed to see it.

So I set about the thing deliberately.

What I wanted to do was to fall asleep after the customary fashion, for two or three hundred years at least, and wake and find myself in the marvel world of the future.

I made my preparations for the sleep.

I bought all the comic papers that I could find, even the illustrated ones. I carried them up to my room in my hotel: with them I brought up a pork pie and dozens and dozens of doughnuts. I ate the pie and the doughnuts, then sat back in the bed and read the comic papers one after the other. Finally, as I felt the awful lethargy stealing upon me, I reached out my hand for the London Weekly Times, and held up the editorial page before my eye.

It was, in a way, clear, straight suicide, but I did it.

I could feel my senses leaving me. In the room across the hall there was a man singing. His voice, that had been loud, came fainter and fainter through the transom. I fell into a sleep, the deep immeasurable sleep in which the very existence of the outer world was hushed. Dimly I could feel the days go past, then the years, and then the long passage of the centuries.

Then, not as it were gradually, but quite suddenly, I woke up, sat up, and looked about me.

Where was I?

Well might I ask myself.

I found myself lying, or rather sitting up, on a broad couch. I was in a great room, dim, gloomy, and dilapidated in its general appearance, and apparently, from its glass cases and the stuffed figures that they contained, some kind of museum.

Beside me sat a man. His face was hairless, but neither old nor young. He wore clothes that looked like the grey ashes of paper that had burned and kept its shape. He was looking at me quietly, but with no particular surprise or interest.

"Quick," I said, eager to begin; "where am I? Who are you? What year is this; is it the year 3000, or what is it?"

He drew in his breath with a look of annoyance on his face.

"What a queer, excited way you have of speaking," he said.

"Tell me," I said again, "is this the year 3000?"

"I think I know what you mean," he said; "but really I haven't the faintest idea. I should think it must be at least that, within a hundred years or so; but nobody has kept track of them for so long, it's hard to say."

"Don't you keep track of them any more?" I gasped.

"We used to," said the man. "I myself can remember that a century or two ago there were still a number of people who used to try to keep track of the year, but it died out along with so many other faddish things of that kind. Why," he continued, showing for the first time a sort of animation in his talk, "what was the use of it? You see, after we eliminated death−−−−"

"Eliminated death!" I cried, sitting upright. "Good God!"

"What was that expression you used?" queried the man.

"Good God!" I repeated.

"Ah," he said, "never heard it before. But I was saying that after we had eliminated Death, and Food, and Change, we had practically got rid of Events, and−−−−"

"Stop!" I said, my brain reeling. "Tell me one thing at a time."

"Humph!" he ejaculated. "I see, you must have been asleep a long time. Go on then and ask questions. Only, if you don't mind, just as few as possible, and please don't get interested or excited."

Oddly enough the first question that sprang to my lips was−−

"What are those clothes made of?"

"Asbestos," answered the man. "They last hundreds of years. We have one suit each, and there are billions of them piled up, if anybody wants a new one."

"Thank you," I answered. "Now tell me where I am?"

"You are in a museum. The figures in the cases are specimens like yourself. But here," he said, "if you want really to find out about what is evidently a new epoch to you, get off your platform and come out on Broadway and sit on a bench."

I got down.

As we passed through the dim and dust−covered buildings I looked curiously at the figures in the cases.

"By Jove!" I said looking at one figure in blue clothes with a belt and baton, "that's a policeman!"

"Really," said my new acquaintance, "is that what a policeman was? I've often wondered. What used they to be used for?"

"Used for?" I repeated in perplexity. "Why, they stood at the corner of the street."

"Ah, yes, I see," he said, "so as to shoot at the people. You must excuse my ignorance," he continued, "as to some of your social customs in the past. When I took my education I was operated upon for social history, but the stuff they used was very inferior."

I didn't in the least understand what the man meant, but had no time to question him, for at that moment we came out upon the street, and I stood riveted in astonishment.

Broadway! Was it possible? The change was absolutely appalling! In place of the roaring thoroughfare that I had known, this silent, moss−grown desolation! Great buildings fallen into ruin through the sheer stress of centuries of wind and weather, the sides of them coated over with a growth of fungus and moss! The place was soundless. Not a vehicle moved. There were no wires overhead−−no sound of life or movement except, here and there, there passed slowly to and fro human figures dressed in the same asbestos clothes as my acquaintance, with the same hairless faces, and the same look of infinite age upon them.

Good heavens; And was this the era of the Conquest that I had hoped to see! I had always taken for granted, I do not know why, that humanity was destined to move forward. This picture of what seemed desolation on the ruins of our civilization rendered me almost speechless.

There were little benches placed here and there on the street. We sat down.

"Improved, isn't it," said man in asbestos, "since the days when you remember it?"

He seemed to speak quite proudly.

I gasped out a question.

"Where are the street cars and the motors?"

"Oh, done away with long ago," he said; "how awful they must have been. The noise of them!" and his asbestos clothes rustled with a shudder.

"But how do you get about?"

"We don't," he answered. "Why should we? It's just the same being here as being anywhere else." He looked at me with an infinity of dreariness in his face.

A thousand questions surged into my mind at once. I asked one of the simplest.

"But how do you get back and forwards to your work?"

"Work!" he said. "There isn't any work. It's finished. The last of it was all done centuries ago."

I looked at him a moment open−mouthed. Then I turned and looked again at the grey desolation of the street with the asbestos figures moving here and there.

I tried to pull my senses together. I realized that if I was to unravel this new and undreamed−of future, I must go at it systematically and step by step.

"I see," I said after a pause, "that momentous things have happened since my time. I wish you would let me ask you about it all systematically, and would explain it to me bit by bit. First, what do you mean by saying that there is no work?"

"Why," answered my strange acquaintance, "it died out of itself. Machinery killed it. If I remember rightly, you had a certain amount of machinery even in your time. You had done very well with steam, made a good beginning with electricity, though I think radial energy had hardly as yet been put to use."

I nodded assent.

"But you found it did you no good. The better your machines, the harder you worked. The more things you had the more you wanted. The pace of life grew swifter and swifter. You cried out, but it would not stop. You were all caught in the cogs of your own machine. None of you could see the end."

"That is quite true," I said. "How do you know it all?"

"Oh," answered the Man in Asbestos, "that part of my education was very well operated−−I see you do not know what I mean. Never mind, I can tell you that later. Well, then, there came, probably almost two hundred years after your time, the Era of the Great Conquest of Nature, the final victory of Man and Machinery."

"They did conquer it?" I asked quickly, with a thrill of the old hope in my veins again.

"Conquered it," he said, "beat it out! Fought it to a standstill! Things came one by one, then faster and faster, in a hundred years it was all done. In fact, just as soon as mankind turned its energy to decreasing its needs instead of increasing its desires, the whole thing was easy. Chemical Food came first. Heavens! the simplicity of it. And in your time thousands of millions of people tilled and grubbed at the soil from morning till night. I've seen specimens of them−−farmers, they called them. There's one in the museum. After the invention of Chemical Food we piled up enough in the emporiums in a year to last for centuries. Agriculture went overboard. Eating and all that goes with it domestic labour, housework−−all ended. Nowadays one takes a concentrated pill every year or so, that's all. The whole digestive apparatus, as you knew it, was a clumsy thing that had been bloated up like a set of bagpipes through the evolution of its use!"

I could not forbear to interrupt. "Have you and these people," I said, "no stomachs−−no apparatus?"

"Of course we have," he answered, "but we use it to some purpose. Mine is largely filled with my education−−but there! I am anticipating again. Better let me go on as I was. Chemical Food came first: that cut off almost one−third of the work, and then came Asbestos Clothes. That was wonderful! In one year humanity made enough suits to last for ever and ever. That, of course, could never have been if it hadn't been connected with the revolt of women and the fall of Fashion."

"Have the Fashions gone," I asked, "that insane, extravagant idea of−−−−" I was about to launch into one of my old−time harangues about the sheer vanity of decorative dress, when my eye rested on the moving figures in asbestos, and I stopped.

"All gone," said the Man in Asbestos. "Then next to that we killed, or practically killed, the changes of climate. I don't think that in your day you properly understood how much of your work was due to the shifts of what you called the weather. It meant the need of all kinds of special clothes and houses and shelters, a wilderness of work. How dreadful it must have been in your day−−wind and storms, great wet masses−−what did you call them?−−clouds−−flying through the air, the ocean full of salt, was it not?−−tossed and torn by the wind, snow thrown all over everything, hail, rain−−how awful!"

"Sometimes," I said, "it was very beautiful. But how did you alter it?"

"Killed the weather!" answered the Man in Asbestos. "Simple as anything−−turned its forces loose one against the other, altered the composition of the sea so that the top became all more or less gelatinous. I really can't explain it, as it is an operation that I never took at school, but it made the sky grey, as you see it, and the sea gum−coloured, the weather all the same. It cut out fuel and houses and an infinity of work with them!"

He paused a moment. I began to realize something of the course of evolution that had happened.

"So," I said, "the conquest of nature meant that presently there was no more work to do?"

"Exactly," he said, "nothing left."

"Food enough for all?"

"Too much," he answered.

"Houses and clothes?"

"All you like," said the Man in Asbestos, waving his hand. "There they are. Go out and take them. Of course, they're falling down−−slowly, very slowly. But they'll last for centuries yet, nobody need bother."

Then I realized, I think for the first time, just what work had meant in the old life, and how much of the texture of life itself had been bound up in the keen effort of it.

Presently my eyes looked upward: dangling at the top of a moss−grown building I saw what seemed to be the remains of telephone wires.

"What became of all that," I said, "the telegraph and the telephone and all the system of communication?"

"Ah," said the Man in Asbestos, "that was what a telephone meant, was it? I knew that it had been suppressed

centuries ago. Just what was it for?"

"Why," I said with enthusiasm, "by means of the telephone we could talk to anybody, call up anybody, and talk at any distance."

"And anybody could call you up at any time and talk?" said the Man in Asbestos, with something like horror. "How awful! What a dreadful age yours was, to be sure. No, the telephone and all the rest of it, all the transportation and intercommunication was cut out and forbidden. There was no sense in it. You see," he added, "what you don't realize is that people after your day became gradually more and more reasonable. Take the railroad, what good was that? It brought into every town a lot of people from every other town. Who wanted them? Nobody. When work stopped and commerce ended, and food was needless, and the weather killed, it was foolish to move about. So it was all terminated. Anyway," he said, with a quick look of apprehension and a change in his voice, "it was dangerous!"

"So!" I said. "Dangerous! You still have danger?"

"Why, yes," he said, "there's always the danger of getting broken."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Why," said the Man in Asbestos, "I suppose it's what you would call being dead. Of course, in one sense there's been no death for centuries past; we cut that out. Disease and death were simply a matter of germs. We found them one by one. I think that even in your day you had found one or two of the easier, the bigger ones?"

I nodded.

"Yes, you had found diphtheria and typhoid and, if I am right, there were some outstanding, like scarlet fever and smallpox, that you called ultra−microscopic, and which you were still hunting for, and others that you didn't even suspect. Well, we hunted them down one by one and destroyed them. Strange that it never occurred to any of you that Old Age was only a germ! It turned out to be quite a simple one, but it was so distributed in its action that you never even thought of it."

"And you mean to say," I ejaculated in amazement, looking at the Man in Asbestos, "that nowadays you live for ever?"

"I wish," he said, "that you hadn't that peculiar, excitable way of talking; you speak as if everything mattered so tremendously. Yes," he continued, "we live for ever, unless, of course, we get broken. That happens sometimes. I mean that we may fall over a high place or bump on something, and snap ourselves. You see, we're just a little brittle still−−some remnant, I suppose, of the Old Age germ−−and we have to be careful. In fact," he continued, "I don't mind saying that accidents of this sort were the most distressing feature of our civilization till we took steps to cut out all accidents. We forbid all street cars, street traffic, aeroplanes, and so on. The risks of your time," he said, with a shiver of his asbestos clothes, "must have been awful."

"They were," I answered, with a new kind of pride in my generation that I had never felt before, "but we thought it part of the duty of brave people to−−−−"

"Yes, yes," said the Man in Asbestos impatiently, "please don't get excited. I know what you mean. It was quite irrational."

We sat silent for a long time. I looked about me at the crumbling buildings, the monotone, unchanging sky, and the dreary, empty street. Here, then, was the fruit of the Conquest, here was the elimination of work, the end of hunger and of cold, the cessation of the hard struggle, the downfall of change and death−−nay, the very millennium of happiness. And yet, somehow, there seemed something wrong with it all. I pondered, then I put two or three rapid questions, hardly waiting to reflect upon the answers.

"Is there any war now?"

"Done with centuries ago. They took to settling international disputes with a slot machine. After that all foreign dealings were given up. Why have them? Everybody thinks foreigners awful."

"Are there any newspapers now?"

"Newspapers! What on earth would we want them for? If we should need them at any time there are thousands of old ones piled up. But what is in them, anyway; only things that happen, wars and accidents and work and death. When these went newspapers went too. Listen," continued the Man in Asbestos, "you seem to have been something of a social reformer, and yet you don't understand the new life at all. You don't understand how completely all our burdens have disappeared. Look at it this way. How used your people to spend all the early part of their lives?"

"Why," I said, "our first fifteen years or so were spent in getting education."

"Exactly," he answered; "now notice how we improved on all that. Education in our day is done by surgery. Strange that in your time nobody realized that education was simply a surgical operation. You hadn't the sense to see that what you really did was to slowly remodel, curve and convolute the inside of the brain by a long and painful mental operation. Everything learned was reproduced in a physical difference to the brain. You knew that, but you didn't see the full consequences. Then came the invention of surgical education−−the simple system of opening the side of the skull and engrafting into it a piece of prepared brain. At first, of course, they had to use, I suppose, the brains of dead people, and that was ghastly"−−here the Man in Asbestos shuddered like a leaf−−"but very soon they found how to make moulds that did just as well. After that it was a mere nothing; an operation of a few minutes would suffice to let in poetry or foreign languages or history or anything else that one cared to have. Here, for instance," he added, pushing back the hair at the side of his head and showing a scar beneath it, "is the mark where I had my spherical trigonometry let in. That was, I admit, rather painful, but other things, such as English poetry or history, can be inserted absolutely without the least suffering. When I think of your painful, barbarous methods of education through the ear, I shudder at it. Oddly enough, we have found lately that for a great many things there is no need to use the head. We lodge them−−things like philosophy and metaphysics, and so on−−in what used to be the digestive apparatus. They fill it admirably."

He paused a moment. Then went on:

"Well, then, to continue, what used to occupy your time and effort after your education?"

"Why," I said, "one had, of course, to work, and then, to tell the truth, a great part of one's time and feeling was devoted toward the other sex, toward falling in love and finding some woman to share one's life."

"Ah," said the Man in Asbestos, with real interest. "I've heard about your arrangements with the women, but never quite understood them. Tell me; you say you selected some woman?"

"Yes."

"And she became what you called your wife?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you worked for her?" asked the Man in Asbestos in astonishment.

"Yes."

"And she did not work?"

"No," I answered, "of course not."

"And half of what you had was hers?"

"Yes."

"And she had the right to live in your house and use your things?"

"Of course," I answered.

"How dreadful!" said the Man in Asbestos. "I hadn't realized the horrors of your age till now."

He sat shivering slightly, with the same timid look in his face as before.

Then it suddenly struck me that of the figures on the street, all had looked alike.

"Tell me," I said, "are there no women now? Are they gone too?"

"Oh, no," answered the Man in Asbestos, "they're here just the same. Some of those are women. Only, you see, everything has been changed now. It all came as part of their great revolt, their desire to be like the men. Had that begun in your time?"

"Only a little." I answered; "they were beginning to ask for votes and equality."

"That's it," said my acquaintance, "I couldn't think of the word. Your women, I believe, were something awful, were they not? Covered with feathers and skins and dazzling colours made of dead things all over them? And they laughed, did they not, and had foolish teeth, and at any moment they could inveigle you into one of those contracts? Ugh!"

He shuddered.

"Asbestos," I said (I knew no other name to call him), as I turned on him in wrath, "Asbestos, do you think that those jelly−bag Equalities out on the street there, with their ash−barrel suits, can be compared for one moment with our unredeemed, unreformed, heaven−created, hobble−skirted women of the twentieth century?"

Then, suddenly, another thought flashed into my mind−−

"The children," I said, "where are the children? Are there any?"

"Children," he said, "no! I have never heard of there being any such things for at least a century. Horrible little hobgoblins they must have been! Great big faces, and cried constantly! And grew, did they not? Like funguses! I believe they were longer each year than they had been the last, and−−−−"

I rose.

"Asbestos!" I said, "this, then, is your coming Civilization, your millennium. This dull, dead thing, with the work and the burden gone out of life, and with them all the joy and sweetness of it. For the old struggle mere stagnation, and in place of danger and death, the dull monotony of security and the horror of an unending decay! Give me back," I cried, and I flung wide my arms to the dull air, "the old life of danger and stress, with its hard toil and its bitter chances, and its heartbreaks. I see its value! I know its worth! Give me no rest," I cried aloud−−−−

. . . . . .

"Yes, but give a rest to the rest of the corridor!" cried an angered voice that broke in upon my exultation.

Suddenly my sleep had gone.

I was back again in the room of my hotel, with the hum of the wicked, busy old world all about me, and loud in my ears the voice of the indignant man across the corridor.

"Quit your blatting, you infernal blatherskite," he was calling. "Come down to earth."

I came.