P.E.N. BOOKS

OLD MAN IN
NEW WORLD
P.E.N. BOOKS

The End of this War
STORM JAMESON

Magic Casements
ELEANOR FARJEON

Thomas Hardy
HENRY W. NEVINSON

John Millington Synge
L. A. G. STRONG

Plato's Mistake
RICHARD CHURCH

Word from Wales
WYN GRIFFITH

The English Regional Novel
PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Critical Thoughts in Critical Day
F. L. LUCAS

Etching of a Tormented Age
HSIAO CH’IEN

The Mechanized Muse
MARGARET KENNEDY

The Unacknowledged Legislator
BONAMY DOBREE

Marcus Aurelius
JOHN LYTH

Literature and Authorship in India
K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

Literature and Authorship in New Zealand
ALAN MULGAN

Little Reviews 1914–1943
DENY VAL BAKER

Old Man in New World
OLAF STAPLEDON

Hero or Fool?
G. ROSTREVOR HAMILTON
OLD MAN IN NEW WORLD

by

Olaf Stapledon

London

George Allen & Unwin Ltd
The P.E.N. is a world association of writers. Its object is to promote and maintain friendship and intellectual co-operation between writers in all countries, in the interests of literature, freedom of artistic expression, and international goodwill.

The author of this book is a member of the P.E.N., but the opinions expressed in it are his personal views and are not necessarily those of any other member.
OLD MAN IN NEW WORLD

The old man could not help feeling flattered by the Government's thoughtfulness in sending a special aeroplane to fetch him from his home in Northumberland to witness the great celebration in London. Born during the First World War, he was now nearly eighty, though still, he believed, remarkably clear-headed. Today he was to take his place among the honoured but ever dwindling band of the Fathers of the Revolution. The occasion was the Procession of the Peoples, which was organized every year in some selected city of the world to commemorate the founding of the New World Order, thirty years ago, and twenty-three years after the end of the Second World War. This time the pageant and its concluding ceremony were to be given a new character by a special reference to the young; for today mankind was celebrating also the "Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the First Generation of the New World," the young people who were born when the New Educational Policy had first come into full operation, five years after the world-wide revolution was completed. By good luck it had fallen to London to be the hostess city on this very special occasion. It was surely fitting that the British metropolis should have the privilege of providing the setting of this event, for it was the shrunken population of Britain that had achieved the most striking change in its fortunes by centring its whole economy on the care and education of its young.

When the agile little two-seater plane had lightly settled on his lawn, the old man stuffed a book in his pocket, hurried out, and climbed into his place, greeting the young pilot. The plane
Old Man in New World

rose vertically above the trees, then slid forward, folding its helicopter vanes into its body. The familiar landscape flattened into a shifting green and brown patchwork.

The old man was pleased to find that the purring sound of the modern silenced plane offered little hindrance to conversation. Small talk soon established friendly relations with his companion, but there inevitably remained a gulf between the aged revolutionary and this young product of the Revolution. The difficulty was not simply due to the years. Between the seniors and the new young there was a subtle difference of mental texture, a difference so deep and far-reaching that one could almost believe that these young minds were based on a different bio-chemical structure from one’s own. Of course, they were always respectful, and even friendly, in a superficial way; but always they seemed to withhold something. It was as though, the old man fantastically imagined, they were humouring a child that had suffered and been warped, and would never really grow up. On the rare occasions when they did let themselves go, they talked the strangest stuff. It made one question whether the New Educational Policy had really been sound. But then, was this modern England itself really sound? Was the New World sound? In some ways, of course, it was magnificent; but too many queer new values were in the air. He suspected them. Well, perhaps the show that he was to witness might throw some light on the matter. Rumour had it that there were to be innovations of a startling kind, and that these were designed to indicate that the new and rather young President of the World Federation and many of his colleagues approved of the widespread change of temper in the life of mankind, and intended to foster it.

Secretly the old man regarded this expedition to London as
Old Man in New World

something more than a pleasant jaunt at the Government’s expense. It was a mission of inspection. He was an emissary from the past, charged with assessing the achievement of the present. Were the generations that were now in the prime of life making the best possible use of the great opportunity which earlier generations had won for them, after decades of climax and heroic struggle?

He decided to begin his investigation on the young airman. “It must be grand to be young in these prosperous times,” he said, “with all the troubles well over.” The young man looked quickly at him, and laughed. Somewhat disconcerted, the senior wondered whether the new young, brought up so tenderly and scientifically, could possibly realize what the barbaric pre-revolutionary age had been like. This boy had missed that stern schooling.

“Well,” the elder said, “there’s no fear of war now, or of tyranny, or of starvation, or of being allowed to rot with nothing to do, or of being worked to death. The world standard of living is high, and rising rapidly; and the backward peoples have almost been brought up to the general level. Everyone is living a fairly full and satisfying life, I suppose. When you young people take charge, there’ll be no serious problems left, nothing to do but to carry on improving things all round. What more do you want?”

There was a long pause before the young man spoke. “New times, new ideas,” he said, “and new problems.”

Again a pause, broken by the senior. “No doubt when subatomic power comes into full commercial use we shall find ourselves in the thick of another industrial revolution. But . . .”

“I wasn’t thinking of that,” the pilot said, “though certainly
Old Man in New World

in a few years sub-atomic power will produce terrific strains if it isn’t properly managed. There’ll be new skills, new social groupings, an entirely new texture of economic life. We shall warm the Arctic, cool the tropics, reshape the continents, water the deserts, and everyone will have his private rocket-plane for long-distance travel. Quite soon we shall explore the planets. But even that huge economic change will work smoothly enough if . . .”

“If social discipline is properly maintained,” the other said.

“Oh, it will be. That’s not the problem. Today the danger is rather that the highly successful world-wide ideology will clamp down on our minds so tightly that we shall lose all power of radical originality, of originality outside the general pattern of culture. If so, we shall never be able to cope with circumstances that call for radical innovation. Sub-atomic energy may be among those circumstances. New advances in educational psychology certainly are. In your days it was discipline and unity that were wanted, but today diversity, originality, and full expression. Then, the vital thing was to teach people to feel community, and to live it, and to give up everything to fight for it. But that battle has been well won. Now, it’s individuality that has to be fostered, helped to develop, to deepen itself, to break out into as many new forms as possible. The people in charge don’t seem to be able to see how important this is. They have been thinking still in terms of the old half-savage pre-revolutionary human being.”

“That’s me, I take it,” put in the old man.

The young man laughed. “There were many, no doubt, who were ahead of their time. But the mass were half-savage, warped in mind from birth onwards by ignorant warped
Old Man in New World

parents and teachers, by a hostile economic environment, and by a culture that put a premium on self-seeking."

"You don’t mince matters," laughed the old man, "but what you say is true."

"The point is this," the pilot continued, "human beings can be far more different from one another than sub-human animals can be, and yet they can also be far more aware of one another, and enriching to one another. Well, practically all post-revolutionary human beings can go beyond the average of pre-revolutionary human beings in that way, because they are more conscious. Events before the revolutionary period were already forcing many people to be more penetratingly aware of themselves and their world, and the New Educational Policy has carried the young ones much further. But there’s a horrible discrepancy between our educational system and our Government’s old-fashioned attempt to keep a firm hand on us. It’s so silly, childish. No one wants to be anti-social now, so why discipline them? The economic system in the old days forced people to be self-seeking and anti-social, but the present one doesn’t. The only serious self-seeking there can be now is selfish rivalry in social service."

"True in the main," said the old man, "but we must remember the foundations of human nature. We are still at bottom self-regarding animals, and society must compensate for our inveterate individualism by a good deal of discipline. After all, community involves some cramping of the longing for unrestrained self-expression. Never forget that."

"We won’t, we won’t," the young man said, "but community, true community of self-aware and other-aware persons, also involves real differences, otherwise—the ant-hill. And for real persons, discipline must be self-discipline, otherwise
Old Man in New World

it defeats itself. Besides—well, the New Educational Policy was meant to produce a new kind of human being, unwarped, fully personal, and all that. It has already gone far; but when the new techniques of psycho-synthesis and telepathic influence have been perfected it will go much further. Maybe it has succeeded better than you intended, even now. Maybe its success makes new social principles necessary, perhaps a new revolution. In your day, I suppose, the vital problems were economic, but now they’re psychological.

There was silence, save for the subdued murmur of the plane and the sound of the streaming air. Far below, and to the left, a silver scribble was the Tyne. Through the clear atmosphere of the new smokeless England one could see the towns and docks as sharply defined as a model at arm’s length.

The old man had always prided himself on keeping a supple mind open to new ideas, and his junior had given him something which deserved serious consideration. For a long while he silently ruminated, while the plane slid quietly forward over the counties. At last he reached a conviction that these new-fangled ideas really were dangerous. The boy must be made to see that they were dangerous.

“You young people are so fortunate in your world,” he said, “that you probably can’t realize how thin the veneer of civilization is, and how easily it may break down again unless it is very jealously preserved.”

“We think,” said the young man, “that your generation were so unfortunate in your youth that you cannot really know how far-reaching the change has been.”

The old man sighed, and said, “Let me try to make the past live for you.” “Do!” said the junior, “Those towers are Ripon. There’s plenty of time.”
Old Man in New World

The old revolutionary embarked on a lecture.

"The main outcome of the First World War was the new Russia, the first state ever planned and controlled for the welfare of ordinary people. Discipline and bold planning alone could make that great revolution, and preserve it against the money-men all over the world. When I was very young, between the First and Second Wars, the Russians were patiently and firmly building up their new Society, and nearly everywhere else men were blindly clinging to their various petty freedoms—freedom to buy and sell, freedom to climb on the shoulders of their fellows by money-power, freedom to propagand lies and folly and hate, freedom of national sovereign states against all attempts at world-wide discipline, freedom of every individual just to destroy himself with aimless frittering, if he had the money and the inclination. All this you know from your history books. But what you can’t possibly realize is what it felt like to be young in that time. You can’t feel the impact of a deadly-sick world on young eager minds. You can’t feel what we unemployed felt. You can’t feel the foul, stinking, poisonous mist soaking into all our hearts and ruining our humanity."

“All honour,” said the young man, “to the Russians for magnificently breaking the spell, and to you and your revolutionary comrades too, for fighting against the poison. But—well, circumstances have been kinder to us. We are not poisoned. And so——”

But the old man refused to be silenced. He had forgotten that he intended to study his companion, not to preach to him. “Knowledge about Russia,” he said, “was gradually spreading. Along with the deepening misery went a deepening conviction that the mess was not really inevitable. Russia at
least knew how to cure it. And when at last the Second World War came, people said that after this war there really would be a new age. The will for a more human order, the will for the light, was stronger than ever before.”

The old man seemed to fall into a reverie, till the pilot said, “The will for the light! Yes, it was growing stronger and clearer all the time, really. Well? And then?” It was almost as though he were encouraging a child to repeat its lesson.

“Well,” said the elder, “You know as well as I do. We won the war, and lost the peace. But what you young people seem in danger of forgetting is why we lost the peace. We lost it because we threw off all the promising disciplines of war. God! How I remember the wild hope when peace came! Never again should gangsters rule! Never again should money power mess up everything. The Atlantic Charter would at once be applied throughout the world. People really believed that the incubus of the old system could be shifted as easily as that! Unfortunately they forgot that everything depended on the Americans, and that those former pioneers were still stuck in the nineteenth century. The American money-bosses were able to bolster up our own tottering capitalist rulers and prevent our revolution.”

“And yet the Americans did well at first,” said the young man, “pouring food and goods into Europe without expectation of payment.”

“Yes,” replied the old man, “but think how the American rulers, the men of big business, when they had recaptured the state after the decline of the New Deal, used the power of the larder and the store-cupboard to establish swarms of their own people in charge of relief work throughout Europe. These ‘relieving’ Americans settled down as a kind of aris-
Old Man in New World
tocracy, benevolent in the main, but blind, fundamentally unenlightened. In the name of freedom and mercy they set up a despotism almost as strict as Hitler's."
The pilot laughed. "And yet you say the cause of all the trouble was lack of social discipline."
"My dear boy," cried the old revolutionary, "I want an accepted discipline under the community as a whole, in order to prevent imposed disciplines by sections of it. A very different matter! Anyhow, think what happened! The American bosses were scared stiff when the beaten Germans turned from Nazism to Communism, and the Italians and most other Europeans followed suit. So they had to use their larder-power to check Communism at all costs. They preached their precious old dead-as-mutton liberal democracy for all they were worth. Individual initiative, private enterprise, freedom of thought, and all the old slogans, went ringing through Europe; and not a soul believed them. But the Americans themselves believed them; and their bosses persuaded them it was their mission to lead mankind into that heaven. They were God's people, and they must fulfil their destiny. The old, old story! Of course, many Americans must have known it was cant, but it worked all right on the American masses, so that they backed their bosses. And so in the end the job of salvaging Europe got turned into a business undertaking after all. Instead of putting European industry really on its feet again the American bosses damped it down so that it couldn't compete with their own industry, and so that they could keep a firm hand on Europe, because of Communism."
"True, true," sighed the young man, "but what are you getting at? We all know what happened. America, which by the way was really no longer ruled by the men of money, but
Old Man in New World

by the new ruling class of skilled managers and technicians, came into conflict with Russia, where the same class was ruling, but with a different set of ideas. There was rivalry between the two ruling cliques for the control of Europe, and over Japan and China. The American bosses were aiming at a world-wide commercial empire; and the leaders of Russia were determined that as soon as they had repaired their country’s war-damage, they would revert to the original policy of instigating a worldwide Communist revolution. Very soon, of course, they tumbled to it that the American bosses were out to control the planet. And so they began slowly damping down their huge job of reconstruction so as to re-arm. And of course the Americans were doing the same. Well, what about it?”

“Try to think what it all meant in terms of living,” the old man said. “Think of all the social misery we in Britain had to go through; and on top of it was the certainty of war. In Britain, after the Second War, there had been first a brave attempt to work out a new social order, with security, health, education and leisure for every citizen. But of course that was soon smashed by the moneyed class with help from their American big brothers. Our financial magnates propagated hard for ‘freedom,’ abolition of war-time restrictions on private enterprise, back to the good old times, and so on. Instead of letting the Government reshape our whole production system and simplify our living conditions so as to combine frugality with health for all, they just closed down factories, and let millions of workers wallow in unemployment. Everywhere there were ruined factories, deserted mines, streets of dilapidated houses, whole cities neglected and in ruins. Several towns were completely deserted. Those that still functioned at all were inhabited by a few ragged and unhealthy,
Old Man in New World

and mostly middle-aged, people who had lost all hope. The few boys and girls, moreover, seemed prematurely old and grim, oppressed by the preponderance of their elders. How I remember the sickening feeling that we were all just rats that couldn’t leave the sinking ship. Day in, day out, one was gripped by that sense of being trapped. To preach revolution, whether to old or young, was like exhorting a man sunk to the neck in a bog to climb a mountain and admire the dawn. Social services decayed, disease increased, the birthrate sank alarmingly. People used to kill their children out of pity, and then kill themselves. The British scarcely noticed the disintegration of their empire, for they had more serious troubles nearer home. It was hell on earth, if ever there was one. The general despair seemed to disintegrate our moral fibre. Too often hopes had been revived and shattered. Too often the promised world seemed to be at hand, only to vanish. The will for the light had always been frail, but now at last it seemed to be withering, like a young plant exposed to too fierce a blizzard. The standard of personal relations was falling. People were becoming in their ordinary contacts with each other less responsible, more callous, less kindly, more vindictive. The mere memory of it all puts me in a cold sweat of fright.”

“Well, so what?” said the pilot, with a secret smile.

“What? Well, you know as well as I do. Added to everything else there was the terror of the coming World-War. And stratosphere rocket-planes and sub-atomic bombs promised something far worse than the last war.”

“But,” the young man interrupted, “the Third World War never happened. Why? You’re forgetting something very important. You’re forgetting that when both sides were mobilizing, and the war was due at any minute, something
Old Man in New World

happened that would have been impossible at any other stage of history. You remember how government propaganda for the war never really caught on, on either side; and how at the critical moment an extraordinary popular clamour against war and against social robotism broke out on both sides. Who was really responsible for that? Why, the new ‘agnostic mystics,’ of course. They started the world strike in America and Russia. Decades earlier, the pacifists had tried to stop war by popular protest, but they failed miserably, because conditions were not ripe. But the new group, who weren’t strictly pacifists at all but social revolutionaries with a religious motive—they found conditions ripe, and they did the trick. Obviously you must know that story, how everyone downed tools and was ready to die for the new hope. Thousands must have been imprisoned, hundreds shot. But presently the governments found their armed forces were mutinying. Then came the American Revolution and the big change in Russia. The driving force, as you must surely know, was an odd assortment of airmen, skilled workers, and—the agnostic mystics. You ignore those modern saints, but it was those that inspired the whole movement and kept it going. Remember, of course, that for many decades a big change had been slowly going on deep down in people’s minds. It had begun away back in the First War and made steady progress through the inter-war period, but it was never effective till after the Second War. It came to a head among the young fighters in that war, particularly among the airmen, and also among all the oppressed peoples of Europe, and in the occupied parts of Russia and China, and later in broken-down Britain. These two very different groups, the fighters and the broken, rediscovered the power of comradeship, as the Russians had done in their
Old Man in New World

first Revolution. But this time it was discovered with far deeper consciousness of its meaning. So much had happened since that earlier awakening. This time it developed into a purged and clarified will for the light, as you yourself called it; a will for a more fully human way of living, for intelligence, and other-respecting community, and for creative action in all human affairs.”

“Not much new in that,” interposed the old man.

“Oh yes, there was,” said the junior, “it was a moral passion for this way of living as an absolute good, not just as a means to social prosperity. It was mystical, too, because though these people didn’t pledge themselves to any beliefs about the ultimate reality, and were mostly outside all organized religion, they felt with complete certainty that in some way, which they couldn’t state intellectually at all, the struggle for the light was the real meaning and purpose of all conscious existence. And in keeping themselves in severe training for that struggle they found—well, ‘the peace that passeth all understanding.’ It was this new attitude, this humbly agnostic, yet deeply mystical, feeling, that broke the spell of disillusion and spread like a fire from heart to heart.”

The old man had been shifting restlessly in his seat, and now he expostulated. “Wait a minute, wait a minute! What are you getting at? This mystical feeling, as you call it, was just the subjective side of the objective pressure of circumstances, which forced people to see that they must stand together or perish. Of course, I know your mystics mostly came in on the right side, and that they provided a lot of heartening though questionable ideology, and appreciably strengthened the passion and drive of the Revolution. But——”

“They played the leading part in the preliminary American
Old Man in New World

Revolution," said the pilot, "and that prevented the war." "Oh, yes," the old man admitted. "But——" "And they inspired a change in Russia that almost amounted to a second Russian revolution. They made Russia the stronghold of the new agnostic-mystical Communism, as it had been also of the earlier kind of Communism."

"But wait!" cried the old man, "Though the Russians did indulge in a dash of mysticism, there wasn’t much of mysticism about the new world-organization. After the decade of revolutions, what came out was nothing highfalutin, just a common-sense world-wide federation of socialist states."

"Yes," the young man said, "because, although it was the agnostic-mystics who generated the passion and drive of the world-wide revolution, the people who actually managed the setting up of the new order were the professional revolutionaries. Their job was to bring off the great economic and social change, and to make it secure. And so they concentrated, quite rightly, on self-discipline for the masses of their supporters and imposed-discipline for their opponents. But when the new order was firmly established, something different was needed, and you old warriors of the revolution" (the young man smiled apologetically at his companion) "could never really see that. It was only with your tongues in your cheeks that you had used the power of the new religious feeling to establish the Revolution. For you it was just a heartening rum-ration to fire the simple masses with Dutch courage. You couldn’t appreciate that it was a real awakening, and that it must cause a deep and lasting change of temper in the life of mankind, and therefore that it would insist on transforming the whole tone of your new world-order."

"Oh, but we did appreciate that," said the old man, "and we
Old Man in New World

saw both the good in it and the danger. It looked like a first mild dose of those two ancient social poisons, individualism and superstitution. Take that word 'instrument' that your friends are so fond of. They are not content to say that the individual is an 'instrument' of social advancement; they say that individuals, and the race as a whole, are 'instruments' for the fulfilling of 'the spirit.' That's sheer superstition."

"When we say mankind is an instrument," the pilot replied, "we say something that your generation almost inevitably dismisses as cant. And we certainly can't prove it intellectually. But intellect can't disprove it either. Really, it needs no proof. It's as obvious as daylight, when one opens one's eyes. And the early agnostic-mystics, by capturing your New Educational Policy, managed to open the eyes of the young to it. We," the young man announced with a smile that prevented the remark from being either pompous or offensive, "are at once the first undamaged generation and the first clear-sighted generation. The credit must go to our elders, not to us; but that's what we are, and we must be treated as such, not with all the trivial discipline that was appropriate to social insecurity, and is now quite out of date."

The couple in the sky fell silent. The old man watched the green land pass under the aeroplane like a great map, unrolled before them and rolled up again behind. From this height England looked much the same as it had in his youth, yet how different were the English, particularly the new young!

Presently, remembering his original intention, he said to his companion "Tell me about yourself. Help me to understand what sort of supermen you amazing young people really are."

The other laughed. After a pause he said, "Well, I'm twenty-three, professional flier, and university student. Reading
Old Man in New World

biology. Special subject, the flight of birds and insects. I'm making a fine set of tele-cinematograph pictures of birds in flight, and microcine pictures of insects. But I'm getting more and more interested in psychology, and when I'm too old for first-class flying, maybe I shall be good enough for some psychological job. If not, I'll train fliers. Eighteen months ago I married. My wife, of course, really is a super-girl. She was twenty then, and now she is just about to have a baby. She's studying at the London College of Teachers, and very soon she will be going into their Maternity Home. When she's fit again she'll go back to her studies and her teaching, on the half-time and later the three-quarter-time basis. The College's own crèche and nursery school will help her, of course. We have a flat within five minutes of them."

"Rather an early marriage, wasn't it?" put in the old man.

"Not for these days. I don't mean merely because the country needs children. I mean from the individual point of view. We realize now that it's impossible to live fully without the experience of a lasting partnership. A good marriage is the microcosm of all community experience. Of course, if it fails, we can drop it, acknowledging our mistake; but it won't fail. We had other affairs first, of course, and may have occasional fresh ones in the future. But we do belong to one another fundamentally, and we decided to register the fact. Besides, we want the children to know that we were sure of one another right at the beginning."

Strange, the old man mused, how monogamy was being rehabilitated! The only snobbery in the typical modern young mind was the snobbery of the happily married who were also parents. But to be so sure of one another at twenty-two and twenty! The venture seemed bound to fail. And yet—perhaps
Old Man in New World

the New Educational Policy, with its minute care for emotional education and its new technique of psycho-synthesis, really had produced a more self-aware and other-aware and passionally stable type. The new young did seem to have an inner stability and harmony lacking in the young of his own early days. Monogamy, when it worked, evidently gave both partners something extraordinarily valuable, something steadying and strengthening. He looked back at the sweet but torturing and transitory affairs of his own life. How superficially he and his beloveds had been aware of one another! He remembered, too, his late, desperate, childless marriage and stormy separation.

The plane was now over the outskirts of London, and the old man’s attention was drawn to the impressive spectacle of the giant city, spread out below him and stretching away in all directions to fade into the summer haze. Of smoke there was none. Every building below him stood out sharply in the sunshine, like a precise little crystal among thousands of fellow crystals. The whole was like a patchwork of crystallization and green mould, which was really the many parks and gardens, and the long ranks of trees lining the great new boulevards. The Thames was a bright ribbon that borrowed colour from the blue sky. As the plane circled and sank, the old man picked out familiar landmarks, the tower of the new House of Parliament (the former buildings had been destroyed in the troubles), the ancient dome of St. Paul’s, the great pile of University College. Now he could see cars moving in the streets. Boats on the Thames were little water-beetles. Towers and spires rose upwards as the plane descended, till weather-cocks were at eye-level. The plane protruded its helicopter vanes and hovered here and there, like a bee
Old Man in New World

choosing a flower, as the pilot sought a good landing. Then it sank to ground in a crowded little aeroplane park that still bore the name Leicester Square.

As there was some time to put in before he was due to take his seat among the Fathers of the Revolution, the old man made his way through cheerful crowds toward the Embankment, and a favourite eating house. On all his rare visits to London he was struck with the contrast between the modern fresh-complexioned Londoners, so well though simply dressed, and the Londoners of his youth, who ranged from frank shabbiness through a pathetic and unsuccessful imitation of smartness to gross ostentation. Now, even in the East End, shabbiness was abolished both from dress and houses. The slums and their inmates had vanished. There was also a subtler contrast between the earlier and the later Londoners, hard to focus. In comparison with these notably self-assured and genial faces, his memory's composite picture of the faces of former crowds expressed a chivvied, anxious, furtive, sometimes vindictive temper in which native friendliness flickered insecurely.

When he had crossed the wide stretch of grass which now flanked the Thames, he came to his eating house, right on the water's edge. It stood almost on the site where, long ago, stood Cleopatra's Needle, now repatriated. Here, too, long ago, he himself as an unemployed youth had once spat into the Thames with contempt and fury against the universe. Now, having entered the bright little building and slipped coins into appropriate slots, he served himself with coffee and cakes. He carried his tray to a table out of doors by the river. Almost the only link with the past was the dome of St. Paul's, far down stream but sharply defined and silvery grey in the purged atmosphere. Of course there was also the Waterloo Bridge,
Old Man in New World

which in his young days had been a novelty, and was indeed a precursor of the new order. Across the almost clean water with its smokeless tugs and strings of barges, its pleasure-launches and its long sleek public passenger vessels, the southern bank had been transformed. Where formerly was a muddle of shabby buildings, much battered by war, stood now a rather austere form of concrete and glass, the Office of the World Commissioners in Britain. Above it waved a great flag, displaying a white orb on a bright blue field, the already storied emblem of loyalty to man. This had long been the focal symbol of that passion for humanity which, after so many decades of tragedy and heroism had at last swollen to an irresistible torrent and founded the New World. Up stream, where formerly was the railway bridge to Charing Cross Station, the old man admired the great new road bridge, which spanned the river in a single flattened arch, impossible before the advent of the new synthetic metals. Beyond, he could see once more the tower of the new Parliament House.

The old revolutionary had reason to be proud of this new London, since he had played a modest but useful part in making it possible. He loved not only its new wide boulevards with their modern edifices, but also the old Georgian squares. The new architecture, he felt, blended into a seamless unity with the old-time buildings, a unity symbolical of the new life of the English people. Yet he was irrationally haunted by nostalgia for the old smoky, class-ridden, snob-bound, Philistine London, the London in which, after all, men had learnt manhood without all this modern pampering. Oh well, it was time to make a move. After a few minutes’ walk he was at the appropriate tier of seats in the new Great Square of London, where the procession would concentrate for the final ceremony.
Old Man in New World

He settled into his place among the other ancient relics of a mythical period, feeling somehow at once a distinguished guest and an exhibit. Band music heralded the approach of the procession. Soon the first national column entered the Great Square, circled round it, and took up its allotted place. The leaders were the Chinese, the senior civilization of the world. Column by column, the representatives of all the nations followed.

As on previous occasions, each of the national contingents carried its national flag. Why, the old man wondered, did men still cling to these silly and rather dangerous local emblems? However, each nation also displayed, and in the place of honour in front of its own flag, the simple banner of the World Federation. Some of the marchers were dressed in their agricultural or industrial or other vocational uniforms. For uniforms had, of course, greatly increased in the world since the will for social cohesion had come into its own; and during the anxious period of world-reconstruction the need for economy had emphasized this tendency. But to-day's procession included many marchers in diversified and quaintly stylized individual clothing. As usual, the national columns carried with them the instruments or products of their most distinctive national occupations. Sheaves of corn, fruit, rolls of gorgeous cloth and silk, scientific and optical instruments, sleek electrical machinery, models of ships and aeroplanes, were borne upon shoulders, or on tractors which were themselves exhibits. Some peoples had deliberately stressed culture rather than industry; in particular the Germans, proudly bearing their books, musical instruments, paintings, sculpture.

It had been arranged that the peoples should be represented
Old Man in New World

roughly in proportion to their actual population. Consequently the faces of the marchers were predominantly swarthy or "yellow" or black. But the columns of North America, of Northern Europe, and of European Russia showed that the fair type was still a notable factor in the human community.

At the end of the long procession came the diminutive columns of the three hostess peoples themselves, the English, the Scotch, the Welsh. Great enthusiasm and considerable amusement was caused among the spectators by the fact that at the head of each of these little companies came a rank of young mothers carrying their babies. Behind these marched three ranks of older children, and then nurses and child­welfare workers, followed by teachers, in the grey tweed which had become the uniform of all those engaged in education, and was now the most respected cloth in the Island. Then came the Young Pioneers, boys and girls equipped for harvesting, digging, afforestation, and so on. Behind these were the representatives of the Universities and Technical Colleges, and finally the usual ranks of industry and agriculture characteristic of the Island. By giving to maternity and education pride of place in their columns the British peoples manifested to the world the fact that they were successfully stemming the decline of their population, and that their whole economy was purposefully directed toward the creation of noble future citizens.

All this was admirable. But there was a novelty, and one which was very disturbing to the old man, though it elicited from the spectators hilarity and applause. According to the official programme the innovation had been conceived by a group of young French writers and artists; and the authorities,
Old Man in New World

after careful consideration, had sanctioned it as “a symbol of the new feeling for individuality which was rising in all parts of the world.” Social harmony, the programme declared, was now well established, and mankind was in a position to relax its discipline and smile at its hard-won triumphs, without either disparaging the heroic self-abnegation of the founders of the New World or undermining the loyalty of its present supporters. The programme said nothing of the violent conflict of opinion which had preceded the official sanctioning of the innovation, a conflict which had led to the resignation of a number of persons in high places.

The daring new feature was this. Many of the national columns were accompanied by two or three unattached individuals whose task it was to clown hither and thither beside the marchers, and even among their ranks. Most of the columns were without these strange attendants; but besides the French, who had conceived the device and executed it with characteristic subtlety, a rather odd assortment of peoples had adopted it. The Russians, with their vein of self-criticism and their genius for ballet, the Chinese with their humour, the Irish, who welcomed every opportunity of irreverence toward authority, and the English, whose presentation was more genial than subtle—these peoples alone had found sufficient interest and moral courage to submit themselves to the penetrating fire of self-criticism.

Each of these comedians was dressed in a stylized and extravagant version of some costume prominent in his own national contingent. All were clearly meant to represent the undisciplined individuality of the common man. In their behaviour they combined something of that almost legendary film-star, Chaplin, with characters of the privileged mediaeval
Old Man in New World

jester. Sometimes they merely blundered along enthusiastically and inefficiently beside the column, vainly trying to conform to the regimented conduct of their fellows; sometimes they would seem to be torn between the spell of the group and personal impulse, breaking suddenly into an abortive caper and then shamefacedly falling into step again to bear themselves with an exaggerated air of rapture in the common rhythm. Sometimes they would stop to joke with individual spectators, and then scuttle anxiously and penitently back to their places. Occasionally one of them would attach himself to a leader of the column, mimicking his pompous bearing and military gait. Evidently, these clowns had been very carefully chosen, and were highly skilled artists; for they contrived to single out any slightly mechanical, officious or arrogant mannerisms of the leaders, and caricature them in a style that was at once devastating and kindly. Theirs was in part the flattering but sometimes shattering imitation with which children often pay tribute to their elders, and in part the friendly ridicule with which adults may temper the crude enthusiasm of the young. And such was their artistry that, in spite of their criticism of individual leaders and of the common enthusiasm, there was no doubt at all about their acceptance of the spirit of the whole occasion.

The startling climax of this daring innovation was reached in the final ceremony, which took place in the Great Square itself. As was customary, the last of the national columns saluted the dignitaries of the world and passed on to their allotted place in the Square. The flags of all the peoples were duly brought forward by their bearers into the open space before the dais, and together bowed to the ground before the great Standard of Mankind; then raised to be held erect for the
Old Man in New World

rest of the ceremony. One by one the heads of the nations mounted the dais, bowed deeply to the President of the World, and handed him a book in which was inscribed a record of the particular nation’s achievement during the preceding year. There followed the usual broadcast speeches by high officials, culminating in an oration by the President of the World, reviewing the whole contemporary state of the human species.

Events on the dais were of course televised, as was the procession. But this final ceremony was televised largely in “close-ups,” so that all the world could appreciate its detail. There on the dais the leading personalities of the whole planet were assembled with the eyes of mankind upon them. And there, also, visible throughout the world, was the most daring novelty of all. At large among the great ones was a sort of court fool, a prince of jesters, clothed to symbolize Everyman. This individual was made up very differently from his humbler colleagues in the procession; and in spite of its humour his whole performance had about it something sad, compassionate and trance-like. For the most part he stood quietly watching the salutations of the national representatives, or listening to the speeches; but now and then he ranged freely about the dais, making play with a fool’s sceptre, to which was attached a bladder, roughly mapped with the outlines of the continents. And sometimes, while listening to a speech, he would silently and in a rapt, absentminded way, imitate the gestures of the orator, or move aside to caricature some applauding dignitary. Thus with his delicate and fleeting mimicry he would expose the foibles of the political stars among whom he was stationed. Mostly they endured the ordeal without flinching, entering amiably into the joke against themselves. But one or two failed to conceal their mortification at some shrewd hit; and then the
Old Man in New World

Fool, perceiving this, immediately dropped his foolery, and with raised eyebrows turned away.

Clearly this most surprising innovation released pent-up forces in the crowd, most of whom, through their pocket television sets, must have seen the detail of these little dramas as clearly as the old man himself had done from his privileged position among the Fathers of the Revolution. He too had responded to the Fool’s artistry, but with a sense of guilt, as though he were enjoying something secret and obscene. Such indulgence of individual genius, delightful as it was, must surely weaken the authority of the persons who were exposed to it, must also tend to a general loosening of the social fibre. No doubt it might be said that only a strong government could have permitted itself to be thus criticized. Only an intelligent government, and one which could count on the loyalty of an intelligent and contented population could have recognized in the device a source of strength rather than of weakness. Moreover, only a government that had sensed the changing mood of the peoples of the world, and wished to register its approval, would have troubled to submit itself to this fantastic aesthetic commentary. The old man had to admit intellectually the force of these arguments, but the innovation violated the emotional habit of one whose mind had been formed in a more primitive age.

The supreme incident was still to come. It was one which showed by its obvious power over the assembled multitude the extraordinary change that had come over mankind within a few decades. No earlier populace could have understood, still less have been so profoundly moved by, a symbol of such austere significance. The President of the World was at the height of his speech. He had been dilating upon the incredible
Old Man in New World

improvement in the fortunes of the common man in all lands, and glorifying the achievement and the promise of the human species under its new regime. He was, of course, frequently interrupted by applause. After the most vociferous of these outbursts, at the very moment when silence had been restored and the President was about to continue, the Fool stepped up to him, laid a hand on his shoulder and gently ousted the surprised orator from the microphone. Most startling fact of all, the President, with an awkward smile, acquiesced. And no one interfered.

Then the Fool, confronting the microphone, spoke to the world, “Happy, happy beings!” he said, and his quiet voice was now for the first time heard. “Happy, happy beings! But death dogs you. Conquerors of a world, but of a sand-grain among the stars! We are mere sparks that flash and die. Even as a species we are upstart, sprung so lately from beasts and fishes; soon to vanish. After us our planet will spin for aeons, and nothing will remember us. Then why, why, why are we here?”

He was silent. Throughout the Great Square there was a sound like a drift of air passing over a ripe cornfield. The whole populace had drawn in its breath. For a long moment the silence and the stillness continued, broken only by the quiet movement of the flags, and the sound of wings as a couple of pigeons settled in the Square.

Then at last the Fool spoke again. “The stars give no answer. But within ourselves, and in one another, and in our unity together, the answer lies; for in consciousness of our humanity we see deeper than through telescopes and microscopes. And from the depth of each one of us, and from our community together, a will arises; whence, we know not, but inexorable.
Old Man in New World

‘Live, oh fully live!’ it bids us. ‘To be aware, to love, to make—this is the music that I command of all my instruments. Let your sand-grain resound with a living flood of music; harmonious in itself, and harmonized with the song of all the spheres, which I alone can hear.’ Thus commands the will in us. And we, little human instruments, though death will surely hunt us down, and though our species is ephemeral, we shall obey. Weak we are, and blind, but the Unseen makes music with us.”

Silence once more occupied the Great Square, and persisted. The ranked columns and the surrounding populace stood motionless, held by the Unseen. Then at last the Fool, with bowed head, withdrew from sight. And then the President, after a moment’s hesitation, returned to the microphone and said, “Our celebration has found an unexpected but a fitting climax. I will say no more but that your leaders, who are also your comrades, will go forward with you to make the living music that is man.” As the President retired, a murmur rose from the populace and soon swelled into an oceanic thunder of applause. When at last the noise had died down, the massed bands struck up the familiar strains of the world anthem, the “Song of Man,” while the whole great company stood at attention to sing. Then the columns, one by one, moved and wheeled, and flowed out of the Square, and the huge crowd of onlookers dispersed.

In deep abstraction and perplexity the old man threaded his way along the congested streets, brooding on the strange scene that he had witnessed. To his shame he found that tears had spilled from his eyes. Oh yes, it was a great feat of stage-craft. One could not but be moved. But it was dangerous, and subtly false to the spirit of the Revolution. The President
Old Man in New World

of the World, who was surely too young a man for such a responsible post, must have known beforehand of the intended interruption. It was all a cunning bid for popularity. Worse, it was a reversion to religion, a dose of that ancient opium, shrewdly administered by the new rulers. Where would this thing end? But tears were in his eyes.