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THE PROPHECY.

I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but in these days one need be neither in order to prophecy. All that is necessary is a correct equation of scientific facts and due care in the substitution of values, and the future appears as inevitably as if the equation were in truth algebraic. So it happens that nowadays we laugh the long-haired, wild-eyed sons of the wilderness, who go about in our midst crying "Woe, Woe!" back into their native Kansas deserts. We know all about the "woe" ourselves, and we haven't had to become barbarians in order to find it out either.

There is one of these scientific equations whose working out is to speculative folk—with whom I must acknowledge fellowship—as fascinating as the squaring of the circle is held to be among mathematicians. I allude to the theory of Evolution, as applied to the human family—to what might perhaps be termed the problem of life. It is not with evolution as a theory of the genesis of the race that I am interested. The nature of the events which induced some meditative anthropoid to discard his tail and set a new fashion that ended in revolutionizing society or the exact time at which the forerunners of our forefathers literally descended from their ancestral tree and took squatter's claim on some primitive quarter section, are matters of small moment to me. They may interest Darwinians and others addicted to antiquarian research; for myself, I am not yet an antiquarian. What evolution has done is interesting in its way—an everyday sort of interest; but what it is going to do—that is the question.

There are three facts of science, three main terms in the equation which leads to a solution of this problem. The first of these is the gradual dying of the sun's heat. Whether that heat is due to combustion of the sun's elements or to contraction of its mass or to both combined, matters little. The fact remains that it is lessening century by century and must eventually die out entirely. The second term in our scientific problem is what is known as the Malthusian theory—that the gradual increase of the human race must eventually exhaust the life-sustaining resources of Mother Earth. Our last term is somewhat less obvious than the preceding, yet the student of human progress must be forced to concede it. It is the doctrine of the final unity of the race. Intercommunication between all the branches of the human family is already beginning to frame the universal civilization. Common civilization means similar environment the world over, and this must shape similar development. The tendency of government is toward some form which shall as nearly as possible place all men under equal conditions. What government fails to accomplish invention will achieve. Absolute homogeneity must be the final outcome the world over. Men will in truth be cosmopolitan—citizens of the world.

Taking these terms together, I see but one natural solution, and on it base my prophecy—not at all, let it be understood, after the manner of the Kansas prophets.

Ages will have passed away. Man has reached a state of perfection never dreamed of by his primitive nineteenth century ancestors. Distinctions of race, of individual even, have largely disappeared. But mankind has steadily increased in numbers until he fills every corner of the globe. The productiveness of the earth has been increased a hundred, a thousand fold. Long since the light and heat given forth by the sun would have failed to sustain life,

but man has been equal to the occasion. Artificial light and heat of most subtle sorts have taken its place. Vast regions beneath the earth's surface have been made to yield their share of life-sustaining products. Blossoming islands cover the surface of the sea. Mountain ranges are leveled with the plains that they may not obstruct agriculture. The icy regions of the north and south are as prolific as the tropics, for human ingenuity has vaporized their congealed moisture and it is held in great clouds in the air ready to be blown to any desired point by artificial air-currents, there to descend as rain. Man has invaded, too, the kingdom of the air. There are his cities, for he must utilize each precious inch of earth for grain. Even in the atmosphere are floated gardens which give a portion to his support.

Still the race increases, slowly, steadily. But human invention is exhausted. The producing capacity of the earth is taxed to its utmost, to more than it can sustain. And as the years pass it begins to fail.

Finally the food supply for each is limited to fixed rations. Steadily there is an increase of consumers; steadily a decrease in allowance. But animals cannot fully develop without sufficiency of food. So in these days—with the gradual decrease of food supply come a corresponding decrease of physical vitality and mental power. At last mental retrogression reaches a stage in which it is impossible for the degenerate offspring of the noble race of former days to maintain its conquests. Dominion is lost over the air. The ice again occupies its old place at the poles and encroaches ever farther and farther toward the tropics, slaying the millions in its path with its deadly chill. Apparatus for light and heat in underground regions becomes deranged never to be repaired by the starving wretches who perish by thousands in those gloomy depths. The ocean waves, released, dash to pieces the island load. Only along the equator is a narrow strip where a few poor creatures survive on the scanty vegetation that is sustained by the little heat given forth from the dying sun. Poor old dame nature, ever kindly, does her best to clothe these, her last children, with the warm coat which they have no skill to provide for themselves. The tropical zone has an almost arctic climate and arctic vegetation, as we know, is stunted and clinging close to earth. Habitually in a bending posture to procure this scanty food, these last representatives of our race become unable to stand erect. Continual hunger and search for food produces a reassertion of purely animal characteristics. The skull changes, the forehead lowering and receding, the jaws protruding more and more. And so, finally, representing the topmost round, the perfected product of evolution exists a dying race having all the characteristics of apes, but with the pedigree of man.

Under the lee of a great rock, near the head of the Persian Gulf, burns a little flickering fire, the last spark of human intelligence. Crouching around it, pressing close to each other for warmth, are five emaciated, shivering little creatures—earth's last inhabitants. Are they human? Fur-covered, bestial skulls, their very attitude denoting only the animal, they look far more like apes. Yet in the eye there is a gleam of intelligence. And see! one seeks with his own body to protect his neighbor from the cold. Surely that denotes affection and self-sacrifice. And then there is the fire. Did any but man ever kindle a fire?

It is midday. And yon great glowing coal is the sun!—a dull red light like that from a dying ember, no perceptible heat. Yet such it may be for centuries.

Low on the horizon is a bank of dark, gray clouds. Fleecy fragments break off and are carried swiftly by the icy wind across the sky. The snow flakes begin falling—at first a few are blown past, then they come thickly, swiftly. The light of the sun grows indistinct. A moment later it is shut out altogether to shine no more on living creature. A fierce icy gust sweeps around the rock, the little flame is extinguished. A few moments the last representatives of animal life shiver and chatter. Then they are silenced forever.

The elements are wildly astir. Chaotic confusion reigns. Shrieking, cursing, mocking the ghosts of dead intelligences chase each other—hurl each other through their vast tomb.

Again all is silent. And the earth sweeps swiftly onward—onward, to be, perhaps, some time swallowed up in one of the giant fireballs flying through space.

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