STAR MAKER

"A PRODIGIOUS NOVEL"



FROM

WILLIAM OLAF STAPLEDON

ILLUSTRATED &

PUBLISHED BY

E-KİTAP PROJESİ & CHEAPEST BOOKS



www.cheapestboooks.com

www.facebook.com/EKitapProjesi

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Istanbul

ISBN: 978-625-6310-05-6

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CONTENTS:

About the Book & Author: 5

Preface 7

Chapter 1 THE EARTH 10

1. THE STARTING POINT 10

2. EARTH AMONG THE STARS 14

Chapter 2 INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL 18

Chapter 3 THE OTHER EARTH 28

1. ON THE OTHER EARTH 28

2. A BUSY WORLD 33

3. PROSPECTS OF THE RACE 47

Chapter 4 I TRAVEL AGAIN 59

Chapter 5 WORLDS INNUMERABLE 68

1. THE DIVERSITY OF WORLDS 68

2. STRANGE MANKINDS 75

3. NAUTILOIDS 84

Chapter 6 INTIMATIONS OF THE STAR MAKER 91

Chapter 7 MORE WORLDS 97

1. A SYMBOLIC RACE 97

2. COMPOSITE BEINGS 108

3. PLANT MEN AND OTHERS 116

Chapter 8 CONCERNING THE EXPLORERS 126

Chapter 9 THE COMMUNITY OF WORLDS 131

1. BUSY UTOPIAS 131

2. IN MUNDANE STRIFE 140

3. A CRISIS IN GALACTIC HISTORY 152
4. TRIUMPH IN A SUB-GALAXY 155
5. THE TRAGEDY OF THE PERVERTS 161
6. A GALACTIC UTOPIA 165
Chapter 10 A VISION OF THE GALAXY 170
Chapter 11 STARS AND VERMIN 179
1. THE MANY GALAXIES 179
2. DISASTER IN OUR GALAXY 182
3. STARS 187
4. GALACTIC SYMBIOSIS 196
Chapter 12 A STUNTED COSMICAL SPIRIT 201
Chapter 13 THE BEGINNING AND THE END 204
1. BACK TO THE NEBULAE 204
2. THE SUPREME MOMENT NEARS 210
3. THE SUPREME MOMENT AND AFTER 215
Chapter 14 THE MYTH OF CREATION 223
Chapter 15 THE MAKER AND HIS WORKS 227
1. IMMATURE CREATING 227
2. MATURE CREATING 237
3. THE ULTIMATE COSMOS AND THE ETERNAL SPIRIT 244
Chapter 16 EPILOGUE: BACK TO EARTH 248

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About the Book & Author:

He was born in Seacombe, Wallasey, on the Wirral peninsula near Liverpool, the only son of William Clibbert Stapledon and Emmeline Miller. The first six years of his life were spent with his parents at Port Said. He was educated at Abbotsholme School and Balliol College, Oxford, where he acquired a BA in Modern History in 1909 and a Master's degree in 1913. After a brief stint as a teacher at Manchester Grammar School, he worked in shipping offices in Liverpool and Port Said from 1910 to 1913. During World War I he served with the Friends' Ambulance Unit in France and Belgium from July 1915 to January 1919. On 16 July 1919 he married Agnes Zena Miller (1894-1984), an Australian cousin whom he had first met in 1903, and who maintained a correspondence with him throughout the war from her home in Sydney. They had a daughter, Mary Sydney Stapledon (1920-), and a son, John David Stapledon (1923-).

In 1920 they moved to West Kirby, and in 1925 Stapledon was awarded a PhD in philosophy from the University of Liverpool. He wrote A Modern Theory of Ethics, which was published in 1929. However he soon turned to fiction to present his ideas to a wider public. Last and First Men was very successful and prompted him to become a full-time writer. He wrote a sequel, and followed it up with many more books on subjects associated with what is now called Transhumanism. In 1940 the family built and moved into Simon's Field, in Caldy. After 1945 Stapledon travelled widely on lecture tours, visiting the Netherlands, Sweden and France, and in 1948 he spoke at the Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wrocl/aw, Poland. He attended the Conference for World Peace held in New York in 1949, the only Briton to be granted a visa to do so. In 1950 he became involved with the anti-apartheid movement; after a week of lectures in Paris, he cancelled a projected trip to Yugoslavia and returned to his home in Caldy, where he died very suddenly of a heart attack. Olaf Stapledon was cremated at Landican Crematorium; his widow Agnes and their children Mary and John scattered his ashes on the sandy cliffs overlooking the Dee

Estuary, a favourite spot of Olaf's, and a location that features in more than one of his books.

"***Star Maker***", regarded as one of the true classics of science fiction, Star Maker is a poetic and deeply philosophical work. The story details the mental journey of an unnamed narrator who is transported not only to other worlds but also other galaxies and parallel universes, until he eventually becomes part of the "cosmic mind." First published in 1937, Olaf Stapledon's descriptions of alien life are a political commentary on human life in the turbulent inter-war years. The book challenges preconceived notions of intelligence and awareness, and ultimately argues for a broadened perspective that would free us from culturally ingrained thought and our inevitable anthropomorphism. This is the first scholarly edition of a book that influenced such writers as C.S. Lewis and Arthur C. Clarke and which Jorge Luis Borges called "***a prodigious novel***."

Some Books of Stapledon:

Last and First Men (1930)

Sirius: A Fantasy of Love and Discord (1944)

Odd John: A Story Between Jest and Earnest (1935)

Last Men in London (1932)

A Modern Magician (1979)

Death into Life (1946)

Darkness and the Light (1942)

A World of Sound (1936)

A Man Divided (1950)

The Seed and the Flower (1916)

Preface

At a moment when Europe is in danger of a catastrophe worse than that of 1914 a book like this may be condemned as a distraction from the desperately urgent defence of civilization against modern barbarism.

Year by year, month by month, the plight of our fragmentary and precarious civilization becomes more serious. Fascism abroad grows more bold and ruthless in its foreign ventures, more tyrannical toward its own citizens, more barbarian in its contempt for the life of the mind. Even in our own country we have reason to fear a tendency toward militarization and the curtailment of civil liberty. Moreover, while the decades pass, no resolute step is taken to alleviate the injustice of our social order. Our outworn economic system dooms millions to frustration.

In these conditions it is difficult for writers to pursue their calling at once with courage and with balanced judgment. Some merely shrug their shoulders and withdraw from the central struggle of our age. These, with their minds closed against the world's most vital issues, inevitably produce works which not only have no depth of significance for their contemporaries but also are subtly insincere. For these writers must consciously or unconsciously contrive to persuade themselves either that the crisis in human affairs does not exist, or that it is less important than their own work, or that it is anyhow not their business. But the crisis does exist, is of supreme importance, and concerns us all. Can anyone who is at all intelligent and informed hold the contrary without self-deception?

Yet I have a lively sympathy with some of those "intellectuals" who declare that they have no useful contribution to make to the struggle, and therefore had better not dabble in it. I am, in fact, one of them. In our defense I should say that, though we are inactive or ineffective as direct supporters of the cause, we do not ignore it. Indeed, it constantly, obsessively, holds our attention. But we are convinced by prolonged trial and error that the most useful service open to us is indirect. For some writers the case is different. Gallantly plunging into the struggle, they use their powers to

spread urgent propaganda, or they even take up arms in the cause. If they have suitable ability, and if the particular struggle in which they serve is in fact a part of the great enterprise of defending (or creating) civilization, they may, of course, do valuable work. In addition they may gain great wealth of experience and human sympathy, thereby immensely increasing their literary power. But the very urgency of their service may tend to blind them to the importance of maintaining and extending, even in this age of crisis, what may be called metaphorically the "self-critical self-consciousness of the human species," or the attempt to see man's life as a whole in relation to the rest of things. This involves the will to regard all human affairs and ideals and theories with as little human prejudice as possible. Those who are in the thick of the struggle inevitably tend to become, though in a great and just cause, partisan. They nobly forgo something of that detachment, that power of cold assessment, which is, after all, among the most valuable human capacities. In their case this is perhaps as it should be; for a desperate struggle demands less of detachment than of devotion. But some who have the cause at heart must serve by striving to maintain, along with human loyalty, a more dispassionate spirit. And perhaps the attempt to see our turbulent world against a background of stars may, after all, increase, not lessen the significance of the present human crisis. It may also strengthen our charity toward one another.

In this belief I have tried to construct an imaginative sketch of the dread but vital whole of things. I know well that it is a ludicrously inadequate and in some ways a childish sketch, even when regarded from the angle of contemporary human experience. In a calmer and a wiser age it might well seem crazy. Yet in spite of its crudity, and in spite of its remoteness, it is perhaps not wholly irrelevant.

At the risk of raising thunder both on the Left and on the Right, I have occasionally used certain ideas and words derived from religion, and I have tried to interpret them in relation to modern needs. The valuable, though much damaged words "spiritual" and "worship," which have become almost as obscene to the Left as the good old sexual words are to the Right, are here intended to suggest an experience which the Right is apt to pervert and the Left to misconceive. This experience, I should say, involves de-

tachment from all private, all social, all racial ends; not in the sense that it leads a man to reject them, but that it makes him prize them in a new way. The "spiritual life" seems to be in essence the attempt to discover and adopt the attitude which is in fact appropriate to our experience as a whole, just as admiration is felt to be in fact appropriate toward a well-grown human being. This enterprise can lead to an increased lucidity and finer temper of consciousness, and therefore can have a great and beneficial effect on behavior. Indeed, if this supremely humanizing experience does not produce, along with a kind of piety toward fate, the resolute will to serve our waking humanity, it is a mere sham and a snare.

Before closing this preface I must express my gratitude to Professor L. C. Martin, Mr. L. H. Myers, and Mr. E. V. Rieu, for much helpful and sympathetic criticism, in consequence of which I rewrote many chapters. Even now I hesitate to associate their names with such an extravagant work. Judged by the standards of the Novel, it is remarkably bad. In fact, it is no novel at all.

Certain ideas about artificial planets were suggested by Mr. J. D. Bernal's fascinating little book The World, the Flesh, and the Devil. I hope he will not strongly disapprove of my treatment of them.

My wife I must thank both for work on the proofs and for being herself.

At the end of the book I have included a note on Magnitude, which may be helpful to readers unfamiliar with astronomy. The very sketchy time scales may amuse some.

O. S. March 1937

Chapter 1 THE EARTH

1. THE STARTING POINT

ONE night when I had tasted bitterness I went out on to the hill.

Dark heather checked my feet. Below marched the suburban lamps. Windows, their curtains drawn, were shut eyes, inwardly watching the lives of dreams. Beyond the sea's level darkness a lighthouse pulsed. Overhead, obscurity. I distinguished our own house, our islet in the tumultuous and bitter currents of the world. There, for a decade and a half, we two, so different in quality, had grown in and in to one another, for mutual support and nourishment, in intricate symbiosis. There daily we planned our several undertakings, and recounted the day's oddities and vexations. There letters piled up to be answered, socks to be darned. There the children were born, those sudden new lives. There, under that roof, our own two lives, recalcitrant sometimes to one another, were all the while thankfully one, one larger, more conscious life than either alone.

All this, surely, was good. Yet there was bitterness. And bitterness not only invaded us from the world; it welled up also within our own magic circle. For horror at our futility, at our own unreality, and not only at the world's delirium, had driven me out on to the hill.

We were always hurrying from one little urgent task to another, but the upshot was insubstantial. Had we, perhaps, misconceived our whole existence? Were we, as it were, living from false premises? And in particular, this partnership of ours, this seemingly so well-based fulcrum for activity in the world, was it after all nothing but a little eddy of complacent and ingrown domesticity, ineffectively whirling on the surface of the great flux, having in itself no depth of being, and no significance? Had we perhaps after all deceived ourselves? Behind those rapt windows did we, like so many others, in-deed live only a dream? In a sick world even the hale are sick.

And we two, spinning our little life mostly by rote, sel-dom with clear cognizance, seldom with firm intent, were products of a sick world.

Yet this life of ours was not all sheer and barren fantasy. Was it not spun from the actual fibres of reality, which we gathered in with all the comings and goings through our door, all our traffic with the suburb and the city and with remoter cities, and with the ends of the earth? And were we not spinning together an authentic expression of our own nature? Did not our life issue daily as more or less firm threads of active living, and mesh itself into the growing web, the intricate, ever-proliferating pattern of mankind?

I considered "us" with quiet interest and a kind of amused awe. How could I describe our relationship even to myself without either disparaging it or insulting it with the tawdry decoration of sentimentality? For this our delicate balance of dependence and independence, this coolly critical, shrewdly ridiculing, but loving mutual contact, was surely a microcosm of true community, was after all in its simple style an actual and living example of that high goal which the world seeks.

The whole world? The whole universe? Overhead, obscurity unveiled a star. One tremulous arrow of light, projected how many thousands of years ago, now stung my nerves with vision, and my heart with fear. For in such a universe as this what significance could there be in our fortuitous, our frail, our evanescent community?

But now irrationally I was seized with a strange worship, not, surely of the star, that mere furnace which mere distance falsely sanctified, but of something other, which the dire contrast of the star and us signified to the heart. Yet what, what could thus be signified? Intellect, peering beyond the star, discovered no Star Maker, but only darkness; no Love, no Power even, but only Nothing. And yet the heart praised.

Impatiently I shook off this folly, and reverted from the inscrutable to the familiar and the concrete. Thrusting aside worship, and fear also and bitterness, I determined to examine more coldly this remarkable "us," this surprisingly impressive datum, which to ourselves remained basic to the universe, though in relation to the stars it appeared so slight a thing.

Considered even without reference to our belittling cosmical background, we were after all insignificant, perhaps ridiculous. We were such a commonplace occurrence, so trite, so respectable. We were just a married couple, making shift to live together without undue strain. Marriage in our time was suspect. And ours, with its trivial romantic origin, was doubly suspect.

We had first met when she was a child. Our eyes encountered. She looked at me for a moment with quiet attention; even, I had romantically imagined, with obscure, deep-lying recognition. I, at any rate, recognized in that look (so I persuaded myself in my fever of adolescence) my destiny. Yes! How predestinate had seemed our union! Yet now, in retrospect, how accidental! True, of course, that as a long-married couple we fitted rather neatly, like two close trees whose trunks have grown upwards together as a single shaft, mutually distorting, but mutually supporting. Coldly I now assessed her as merely a useful, but often infuriating adjunct to my personal life. We were on the whole sensible companions. We left one another a certain freedom, and so we were able to endure our proximity.

Such was our relationship. Stated thus it did not seem very significant for the understanding of the universe. Yet in my heart I knew that it was so. Even the cold stars, even the whole cosmos with all its inane immensities could not convince me that this our prized atom of community, imperfect as it was, short-lived as it must be, was not significant.

But could this indescribable union of ours really have any significance at all beyond itself? Did it, for instance, prove that the essential nature of all human beings was to love, rather than to hate and fear? Was it evidence that all men and women the world over, though circumstance might prevent them, were at heart capable of supporting a world-wide, love-knit community? And further, did it, being itself a product of the cosmos, prove that love was in some way basic to the cosmos itself? And did it afford, through its own felt intrinsic excellence, some guarantee that we two, its frail supporters, must in some sense have eternal life? Did it, in fact, prove that love was God, and God awaiting us in his heaven?

No! Our homely, friendly, exasperating, laughter-making, undecorated though most prized community of spirit proved none of these things. It was no certain guarantee of anything but its own imperfect rightness. It was nothing but a very minute, very bright epitome of one out of the many potentialities of existence. I remembered the swarms of the unseeing stars. I remembered the tumult of hate and fear and bitterness which is man's world. I remembered, too, our own not infrequent discordancy. And I reminded myself that we should very soon vanish like the flurry that a breeze has made on still water.

Once more there came to me a perception of the strange contrast of the stars and us. The incalculable potency of the cosmos mysteriously enhanced the Tightness of our brief spark of community, and of mankind's brief, uncertain venture. And these in turn quickened the cosmos.

I sat down on the heather. Overhead obscurity was now in full retreat. In its rear the freed population of the sky sprang out of hiding, star by star.

On every side the shadowy hills or the guessed, featureless sea extended beyond sight. But the hawk-flight of imagination followed them as they curved downward below the horizon. I perceived that I was on a little round grain of rock and metal, filmed with water and with air, whirling in sunlight and darkness. And on the skin of that little grain all the swarms of men, generation by generation, had lived in labor and blindness, with intermittent joy and intermittent lucidity of spirit. And all their history, with its folk-wanderings, its empires, its philosophies, its proud sciences, its social revolutions, its increasing hunger for community, was but a flicker in one day of the lives of stars.

If one could know whether among that glittering host there were here and there other spirit-inhabited grains of rock and metal, whether man's blundering search for wisdom and for love was a sole and insignificant tremor, or part of a universal movement!

2. EARTH AMONG THE STARS

Overhead obscurity was gone. From horizon to horizon the sky was an unbroken spread of stars. Two planets stared, unwinking. The more obtrusive of the constellations asserted their individuality. Orion's four-square shoulders and feet, his belt and sword, the Plough, the zigzag of Cassiopeia, the intimate Pleiades, all were duly patterned on the dark. The Milky Way, a vague hoop of light, spanned the sky.

Imagination completed what mere sight could not achieve. Looking down, I seemed to see through a transparent planet, through heather and solid rock, through the buried graveyards of vanished species, down through the molten flow of basalt, and on into the Earth's core of iron; then on again, still seemingly downwards, through the southern strata to the southern ocean and lands, past the roots of gum trees and the feet of the inverted antipodeans, through their blue, sun-pierced awning of day, and out into the eternal night, where sun and stars are together. For there, dizzyingly far below me, like fishes in the depth of a lake, lay the nether constellations. The two domes of the sky were fused into one hollow sphere, star-peopled, black, even beside the blinding sun. The young moon was a curve of incandescent wire. The completed hoop of the Milky Way encircled the universe. In a strange vertigo, I looked for reassurance at the little glowing windows of our home. There they still were; and the whole suburb, and the hills. But stars shone through all. It was as though all terrestrial things were made of glass, or of some more limpid, more ethereal vitreosity. Faintly the church clock chimed for midnight. Dimly, receding, it tolled the first stroke.

Imagination was now stimulated to a new, strange mode of perception. Looking from star to star, I saw the heaven no longer as a jeweled ceiling and floor, but as depth beyond flashing depth of suns. And though for the most part the great and familiar lights of the sky stood forth as our near neighbors, some brilliant stars were seen to be in fact remote and mighty, while some dim lamps were visible only because they were so near. On

every side the middle distance was crowded with swarms and streams of stars. But even these now seemed near; for the Milky Way had receded into an incomparably greater distance. And through gaps in its nearer parts appeared vista beyond vista of luminous mists, and deep perspectives of stellar populations.

The universe in which fate had set me was no spangled chamber, but a perceived vortex of star-streams. No! It was more. Peering between the stars into the outer darkness, I saw also, as mere flecks and points of light, other such vortices, such galaxies, sparsely scattered in the void, depth beyond depth, so far afield that even the eye of imagination could find no limits to the cosmical, the all-embracing galaxy of galaxies. The universe now appeared to me as a void wherein floated rare flakes of snow, each flake a universe.

Gazing at the faintest and remotest of all the swarm of universes, I seemed, by hypertelescopic imagination, to see it as a population of suns; and near one of those suns was a planet, and on that planet's dark side a hill, and on that hill myself. For our astronomers assure us that in this boundless finitude which we call the cosmos the straight lines of light lead not to infinity but to their source. Then I remembered that, had my vision depended on physical light, and not on the light of imagination, the rays coming thus to me "round" the cosmos would have revealed, not myself, but events that had ceased long before the Earth, or perhaps even the Sun, was formed.

But now, once more shunning these immensities, I looked again for the curtained windows of our home, which, though star-pierced, was still more real to me than all the galaxies. But our home had vanished, with the whole suburb, and the hills too, and the sea. The very ground on which I had been sitting was gone. Instead there lay far below me an insubstantial gloom. And I myself was seemingly disembodied, for I could neither see nor touch my own flesh. And when I willed to move my limbs, nothing happened. I had no limbs. The familiar inner perceptions of my body, and the headache which had oppressed me since morning, had given way to a vague lightness and exhilaration.

When I realized fully the change that had come over me, I wondered if I had died, and was entering some wholly unexpected new existence. Such a banal possibility at first exasperated me. Then with sudden dismay I understood that if indeed I had died I should not return to my prized, concrete atom of community. The violence of my distress shocked me. But soon I comforted myself with the thought that after all I was probably not dead, but in some sort of trance, from which I might wake at any minute. I resolved, therefore, not to be unduly alarmed by this mysterious change. With scientific interest I would observe all that happened to me.

I noticed that the obscurity which had taken the place of the ground was shrinking and condensing. The nether stars were no longer visible through it. Soon the earth below me was like a huge circular table-top, a broad disc of darkness surrounded by stars. I was apparently soaring away from my native planet at incredible speed. The sun, formerly visible to imagination in the nether heaven, was once more physically eclipsed by the Earth. Though by now I must have been hundreds of miles above the ground, I was not troubled by the absence of oxygen and atmospheric pressure. I experienced only an increasing exhilaration and a delightful effervescence of thought. The extraordinary brilliance of the stars excited me. For, whether through the absence of obscuring air, or through my own increased sensitivity, or both, the sky had taken on an unfamiliar aspect. Every star had seemingly flared up into higher magnitude. The heavens blazed. The major stars were like the headlights of a distant car. The Milky Way, no longer watered down with darkness, was an encircling, granular river of light.

Presently, along the Planet's eastern limb, now far below me, there appeared a faint line of luminosity; which, as I continued to soar, warmed here and there to orange and red. Evidently I was traveling not only upwards but eastwards, and swinging round into the day. Soon the sun leapt into view, devouring the huge crescent of dawn with its brilliance. But as I sped on, sun and planet were seen to drift apart, while the thread of dawn thickened into a misty breadth of sunlight. This increased, like a visibly waxing moon, till half the planet was illuminated. Between the areas of night and day, a belt of shade, warm-tinted, broad as a sub-continent, now marked the area of dawn. As I continued to rise and travel eastwards, I saw

the lands swing westward along with the day, till I was over the Pacific and high noon. The Earth appeared now as a great bright orb hundreds of times larger than the full moon. In its center a dazzling patch of light was the sun's image reflected in the ocean. The planet's circumference was an indefinite breadth of luminous haze, fading into the surrounding blackness of space. Much of the northern hemisphere, tilted somewhat toward me, was an expanse of snow and cloud-tops. I could trace parts of the outlines of Japan and China, their vague browns and greens indenting the vague blues and grays of the ocean. Toward the equator, where the air was clearer, the ocean was dark. A little whirl of brilliant cloud was perhaps the upper surface of a hurricane. The Philippines and New Guinea were precisely mapped. Australia faded into the hazy southern limb.

The spectacle before me was strangely moving. Personal anxiety was blotted out by wonder and admiration; for the sheer beauty of our planet surprised me. It was a huge pearl, set in spangled ebony. It was nacrous, it was an opal. No, it was far more lovely than any jewel. Its patterned coloring was more subtle, more ethereal. It displayed the delicacy and brilliance, the intricacy and harmony of a live thing. Strange that in my remoteness I seemed to feel, as never before, the vital presence of Earth as of a creature alive but tranced and obscurely yearning to wake.

I reflected that not one of the visible features of this celestial and living gem revealed the presence of man. Dis-played before me, though invisible, were some of the most congested centers of human population. There below me lay huge industrial regions, blackening the air with smoke. Yet all this thronging life and humanly momentous enterprise had made no mark whatever on the features of the planet. From this high look-out the Earth would have appeared no different before the dawn of man. No visiting angel, or explorer from another planet, could have guessed that this bland orb teemed with vermin, with world-mastering, self-torturing, incipiently angelic beasts.

Chapter 2 INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL

WHILE I was thus contemplating my native planet, I continued to soar through space. The Earth was visibly shrinking into the distance, and as I raced eastwards, it seemed to be rotating beneath me. All its features swung westwards, till presently sunset and the Mid-Atlantic appeared upon its eastern limb, and then the night. Within a few minutes, as it seemed to me, the planet had become an immense half-moon. Soon it was a misty, dwindling crescent, beside the sharp and minute crescent of its satellite.

With amazement I realized that I must be traveling at a fantastic, a quite impossible rate. So rapid was my progress that I seemed to be passing through a constant hail of meteors. They were invisible till they were almost abreast of me; for they shone only by reflected sunlight, appearing for an instant only, as streaks of light, like lamps seen from an express train. Many of them I met in head-on collision, but they made no impression on me. One huge irregular bulk of rock, the size of a house, thoroughly terrified me. The illuminated mass swelled before my gaze, displayed for a fraction of a second a rough and lumpy surface, and then engulfed me. Or rather, I infer that it must have engulfed me; but so swift was my passage that I had no sooner seen it in the middle distance than I found myself already leaving it behind.

Very soon the Earth was a mere star. I say soon, but my sense of the passage of time was now very confused. Minutes and hours, and perhaps even days, even weeks, were now indistinguishable.

While I was still trying to collect myself, I found that I was already beyond the orbit of Mars, and rushing across the thoroughfare of the asteroids. Some of these tiny planets were now so near that they appeared as great stars streaming across the constellations. One or two revealed gibbous, then crescent forms before they faded behind me.

Already Jupiter, far ahead of me, grew increasingly bright and shifted its position among the fixed stars. The great globe now appeared as a disc, which soon was larger than the shrinking sun. Its four major satellites were little pearls floating beside it. The planet's surface now appeared like streaky bacon, by reason of its cloud-zones. Clouds fogged its whole circumference. Now I drew abreast of it and passed it. Owing to the immense depth of its atmosphere, night and day merged into one another without assignable boundary. I noted here and there on its eastern and unilluminated hemisphere vague areas of ruddy light, which were perhaps the glow cast upwards through dense clouds by volcanic upheavals.

In a few minutes, or perhaps years, Jupiter had become once more a star, and then was lost in the splendor of the diminished but still blazing sun. No other of the outer planets lay near my course, but I soon realized that I must be far beyond the limits of even Pluto's orbit. The sun was now merely the brightest of the stars, fading behind me.

At last I had time for distress. Nothing now was visible but the starry sky. The Plough, Cassiopeia, Orion, the Pleiades, mocked me with their familiarity and their remoteness. The sun was now but one among the other bright stars. Nothing changed. Was I doomed to hang thus for ever out in space, a bodiless view-point? Had I died? Was this my punishment for a singularly ineffectual life? Was this the penalty of an inveterate will to remain detached from human affairs and passions and prejudices?

In imagination I struggled back to my suburban hilltop. I saw our home. The door opened. A figure came out into the garden, lit by the hall light. She stood for a moment looking up and down the road, then went back into the house. But all this was imagination only. In actuality, there was nothing but the stars.

After a while I noticed that the sun and all the stars in his neighborhood were ruddy. Those at the opposite pole of the heaven were of an icy blue. The explanation of this strange phenomenon flashed upon me. I was still traveling, and traveling so fast that light itself was not wholly indifferent to my passage. The overtaking undulations took long to catch me. They therefore affected me as slower pulsations than they normally were, and I saw

them therefore as red. Those that met me on my headlong flight were congested and shortened, and were seen as blue.

Very soon the heavens presented an extraordinary appearance, for all the stars directly behind me were now deep red, while those directly ahead were violet. Rubies lay behind me, amethysts ahead of me. Surrounding the ruby constellations there spread an area of topaz stars, and round the amethyst constellations an area of sapphires. Beside my course, on every side, the colors faded into the normal white of the sky's familiar diamonds. Since I was traveling almost in the plane of the galaxy, the hoop of the Milky Way, white on either hand, was violet ahead of me, red behind. Presently the stars immediately before and behind grew dim, then vanished, leaving two starless holes in the heaven, each hole surrounded by a zone of colored stars. Evidently I was still gathering speed. Light from the forward and the hinder stars now reached me in forms beyond the range of my human vision.

As my speed increased, the two starless patches, before and behind, each with its colored fringe, continued to encroach upon the intervening zone of normal stars which lay abreast of me on every side. Amongst these I now detected movement. Through the effect of my own passage the nearer stars appeared to drift across the background of the stars at greater distance. This drifting accelerated, till, for an instant, the whole visible sky was streaked with flying stars. Then everything vanished. Presumably my speed was so great in relation to the stars that light from none of them could take normal effect on me.

Though I was now perhaps traveling faster than light itself, I seemed to be floating at the bottom of a deep and stagnant well. The featureless darkness, the complete lack of all sensation, terrified me, if I may call "terror" the repugnance and foreboding which I now experienced without any of the bodily accompaniments of terror, without any sensation of trembling, sweating, gasping or palpitation. Forlornly, and with self-pity, I longed for home, longed to see once more the face that I knew best. With the mind's eye I could see her now, sitting by the fire sewing, a little furrow of anxiety between her brows. Was my body, I wondered, lying dead on the heather?

Would they find it there in the morning? How would she confront this great change in her life? Certainly with a brave face; but she would suffer.

But even while I was desperately rebelling against the dissolution of our treasured atom of community, I was aware that something within me, the essential spirit within me, willed very emphatically not to retreat but to press on with this amazing voyage. Not that my longing for the familiar human world could for'.a moment be counterbalanced by the mere craving for adventure. I was of too home-keeping a kind to seek serious danger and discomfort for their own sake. But timidity was overcome by a sense of the opportunity that fate was giving me, not only to explore the depths of the physical universe, but to discover what part life and mind were actually playing among the stars. A keen hunger now took possession of me, a hunger not for adventure but for insight into the significance of man, or of any manlike beings in the cosmos. This homely treasure of ours, this frank and spring-making daisy beside the arid track of modern life, impelled me to accept gladly my strange adventure; for might I not discover that the whole universe was no mere place of dust and ashes with here and there a stunted life, but actually beyond the parched terrestrial waste land, a world of flowers?

Was man indeed, as he sometimes desired to be, the growing point of the cosmical spirit, in its temporal aspect at least? Or was he one of many million growing points? Or was mankind of no more importance in the universal view than rats in a cathedral? And again, was man's true function power, or wisdom, or love, or worship, or all of all these? Or was the idea of function, of purpose, meaningless in relation to the cosmos? These grave questions I would answer. Also I must learn to see a little more clearly and confront a little more rightly (so I put it to myself) that which, when we glimpse it at all, compels our worship.

I now seemed to my self-important self to be no isolated individual, craving aggrandizement, but rather an emissary of mankind, no, an organ of exploration, a feeler, 'projected by the living human world to make contact with its fellows in space. At all cost I must go forward, even if my trivial earthly life must come to an untimely end, and my wife and children be left

without me. I must go forward; and somehow, some day, even if after centuries of interstellar travel, I must return.

When I look back on that phase of exaltation, now that I have indeed returned to earth after the most bewildering adventures, I am dismayed at the contrast between the spiritual treasure which I aspired to hand over to my fellow men and the paucity of my actual tribute. This failure was perhaps due to the fact that, though I did indeed accept the challenge of the adventure, I accepted it only with secret reservations. Fear and the longing for comfort, I now recognize, dimmed the brightness of my will. My resolution, so boldly formed, proved after all frail. My unsteady courage often gave place to yearnings for my native planet. Over and over again in the course of my travels I had a sense that, owing to my timid and pedestrian nature, I missed the most significant aspects of events.

Of all that I experienced on my travels, only a fraction was clearly intelligible to me even at the time; and then, as I shall tell, my native powers were aided by beings of superhuman development. Now that I am once more on my native planet, and this aid is no longer available, I cannot recapture even so much of the deeper insight as I formerly attained. And so my record, which tells of the most far-reaching of all human explorations, turns out to be after all no more reliable than the rigmarole of any mind unhinged by the impact of experience beyond its comprehension.

To return to my story. How long I spent in debate with myself I do not know, but soon after I had made my decision, the absolute darkness was pierced once more by the stars. I was apparently at rest, for stars were visible in every direction, and their color was normal.

But a mysterious change had come over me. I soon discovered that, by merely willing to approach a star, I could set myself in motion toward it, and at such a speed that I must have traveled much faster than normal light. This, as I knew very well, was physically impossible. Scientists had assured me that motion faster than the speed of light was meaningless. I inferred that my motion must therefore be in some manner a mental, not a physical phenomenon, that I was enabled to take up successive viewpoints without physical means of locomotion. It seemed to me evident, too, that

the light with which the stars were now revealed to me was not normal, physical light; for I noticed that my new and expeditious means of travel took no effect upon the visible colors of the stars. However fast I moved, they retained their diamond hues, though all were somewhat brighter and more tinted than in normal vision.

No sooner had I made sure of my new power of locomotion than I began feverishly to use it. I told myself that I was embarking on a voyage of astronomical and metaphysical research; but already my craving for the Earth was distorting my purpose. It turned my attention unduly toward the search for planets, and especially for planets of the terrestrial type.

At random I directed my course toward one of the brighter of the near stars. So rapid was my advance that certain lesser and still nearer luminaries streamed past me like meteors. I swung close to the great sun, insensitive to its heat. On its mottled surface, in spite of the pervading brilliance, I could see, with my miraculous vision, a group of huge dark sun-spots, each one a pit into which a dozen Earths could have been dropped. Round the star's limb the excrescences of the chromosphere looked like fiery trees and plumes and prehistoric monsters, atiptoe or awing, all on a globe too small for them. Beyond these the pale corona spread its films into the darkness. As I rounded the star in hyperbolic flight I searched anxiously for planets, but found none. I searched again, meticulously, tacking and veering near and far. In the wider orbits a small object like the earth might easily be overlooked. I found nothing but meteors and a few insubstantial comets. This was the more disappointing because the star seemed to be of much the same type as the familiar sun. Secretly I had hoped to discover not merely planets but actually the Earth.

Once more I struck out into the ocean of space, heading for another near star. Once more I was disappointed. I approached yet another lonely furnace. This too was unattended by the minute grains that harbor life.

I now hurried from star to star, a lost dog looking for its master. I rushed hither and thither, intent on finding a sun with planets, and among those planets my home. Star after star I searched, but far more I passed impatiently, recognizing at once that they were too large and tenuous and young

to be Earth's luminary. Some were vague ruddy giants broader than the orbit of Jupiter; some, smaller and more definite, had the brilliance of a thousand suns, and their color was blue. I had been told that our Sun was of average type, but I now discovered many more of the great youngsters than of the shrunken, yellowish middle-aged. Seemingly I must have strayed into a region of late stellar condensation.

I noticed, but only to avoid them, great clouds of dust, huge as constellations, eclipsing the star-streams; and tracts of palely glowing gas, shining sometimes by their own light, sometimes by the reflected light of stars. Often these nacrous cloud-continents had secreted within them a number of vague pearls of light, the embryos of future stars. I glanced heedlessly at many star-couples, trios, and quartets, in which more or less equal partners waltz in close union. Once, and once only, I came on one of those rare couples in which one partner is no bigger than a mere Earth, but massive as a whole great star, and very brilliant. Up and down this region of the galaxy I found here and there a dying star, somberly smoldering; and here and there the encrusted and extinguished dead. These I could not see till I was almost upon them, and then only dimly, by the reflected light of the whole heaven. I never approached nearer to them than I could help, for they were of no interest to me in my crazy yearning for the Earth. Moreover, they struck a chill into my mind, prophesying the universal death. I was comforted, however, to find that as yet there were so few of them.

I found no planets. I knew well that the birth of planets was due to the close approach of two or more stars, and that such accidents must be very uncommon. I reminded myself that stars with planets must be as rare in the galaxy as gems among the grains of sand on the sea-shore. What chance had I of coming upon one? I began to lose heart. The appalling desert of darkness and barren fire, the huge emptiness so sparsely pricked with scintillations, the colossal futility of the whole universe, hideously oppressed me. And now, an added distress, my power of locomotion began to fail. Only with a great effort could I move at all among the stars, and then but slowly, and ever more slowly. Soon I should find myself pinned fast in space like a fly in a collection; but lonely, eternally alone. Yes, surely this was my special Hell.

I pulled myself together. I reminded myself that even if this was to be my fate, it was no great matter. The Earth could very well do without me. And even if there was no other living world anywhere in the cosmos, still, the Earth itself had life, and might wake to far fuller life. And even though I had lost my native planet, still, that beloved world was real. Besides, my whole adventure was a miracle, and by continued miracle might I not stumble on some other Earth? I remembered that I had undertaken a high pilgrimage, and that I was man's emissary to the stars.

With returning courage my power of locomotion returned. Evidently it depended on a vigorous and self-detached mentality. My recent mood of self-pity and earthward-yearning had hampered it.

Resolving to explore a new region of the galaxy, where perhaps there would be more of the older stars and a greater hope of planets, I headed in the direction of a remote and populous cluster. From the faintness of the individual members of this vaguely speckled ball of light I guessed that it must be very far afield. On and on I traveled in the darkness. As I never turned aside to search, my course through the ocean of space never took me near enough to any star to reveal it as a disc. The lights of heaven streamed remotely past me like the lights of distant ships. After a voyage during which I lost all measure of time I found myself in a great desert, empty of stars, a gap between two star-streams, a cleft in the galaxy. The Milky Way surrounded me, and in all directions lay the normal dust of distant stars; but there were no considerable lights, save the thistle-down of the remote cluster which was my goal.

This unfamiliar sky disturbed me with a sense of my increasing dissociation from my home. It was almost a comfort to note, beyond the furthest stars of our galaxy, the minute smudges that were alien galaxies, incomparably more distant than the deepest recesses of the Milky Way; and to be reminded that, in spite of all my headlong and miraculous traveling, I was still within my native galaxy, within the same little cell of the cosmos where she, my life's friend, still lived. I was surprised, by the way, that so many of the alien galaxies appeared to the naked eye, and that the largest was a pale, cloudy mark bigger than the moon in the terrestrial sky.

By contrast with the remote galaxies, on whose appearance all my voyaging failed to make impression, the star-cluster ahead of me was now visibly expanding. Soon after I had crossed the great emptiness between the star-streams, my cluster confronted me as a huge cloud of brilliants. Presently I was passing through a more populous area, and then the cluster itself opened out ahead of me, covering the whole forward sky with its congested lights. As a ship approaching port encounters other craft, so I came upon and passed star after star. When I had penetrated into the heart of the cluster, I was in a region far more populous than any that I had explored. On every side the sky blazed with suns, many of which appeared far brighter than Venus in the Earth's sky. I felt the exhilaration of a traveler who, after an ocean crossing, enters harbors by night and finds himself surrounded by the lights of a metropolis. In this congested region, I told myself, many close approaches must have occurred, many planetary systems must have been formed. Once more I looked for middle-aged stars of the sun's type. All that I had passed hitherto were young giants, great as the whole solar system. After further searching I found a few likely stars, but none had planets. I found also many double and triple stars, describing their incalculable orbits; and great continents of gas, in which new stars were condensing. At last, at last I found a planetary system. With almost insupportable hope I circled among these worlds; but all were greater than Jupiter, and all were molten. Again I hurried from star to star. I must have visited thousands, but all in vain. Sick and lonely I fled out of the cluster. It dwindled behind me into a ball of down, sparkling with dew-drops. In front of me a great tract of darkness blotted out a section of the Milky Way and the neighboring area of stars, save for a few near lights which lay between me and the obscuring opacity. The billowy edges of this huge cloud of gas or dust were revealed by the glancing rays of bright stars beyond it. The sight moved me with self-pity; on so many nights at home had I seen the edges of dark clouds silvered just so by moonlight. But the cloud which now opposed me could have swallowed not merely whole worlds, not merely countless planetary systems, but whole constellations.

Once more my courage failed me. Miserably I tried to shut out the immensities by closing my eyes. But I had neither eyes nor eyelids. I was a