

## A Trap to Catch the Sun

*... "It has begun," he writes in the diary in which these things are recorded. "It is not for me to reach out to consequences I cannot foresee. I am a part, not a whole; I am a little instrument in the armoury of Change. If I were to burn all these papers, before a score of years had passed some other man would be doing this."*

*Holsten, before he died, was destined to see atomic energy dominating every other source of power, but for some years yet a vast network of difficulties in detail and application kept the new discovery from any effective invasion of ordinary life. The path from the laboratory to the workshop is sometimes a tortuous one; electro-magnetic radiations were known and demonstrated for twenty years before Marconi made them practically available, and in the same way it was twenty years before induced radioactivity could be brought to practical utilization. The thing, of course, was discussed very much, more perhaps at the time of its discovery than during the interval of technical adaptation, but with very little realization of the huge economic revolution that impended...*

Wells, H.G.

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*...It was in 1953 that the first Holsten-Roberts engine brought induced radioactivity into the sphere of industrial production, and its first general use was to replace the steam-engine in electrical generating-stations. Hard upon the appearance of this came the Dass-Tata engine, the invention of two among the brilliant galaxy of Bengali inventors the modernization of Indian thought was producing at this time, which was used chiefly for automobiles, aeroplanes, water-planes, and similar mobile purposes. The American Kemp engine, differing widely in principle, but equally practicable, and the Krupp-Erlanger came hard upon the heels of this, and by the autumn of 1954 a gigantic replacement of industrial methods and machinery was in progress all about the habitable globe. For many years the price of coal and every form of liquid fuel had been clambering to levels that made even the revival of the draft-horse seem a practicable possibility, and now with the abrupt relaxation of this stringency the change in appearance of the traffic upon the world's roads was instantaneous. In three years the frightful armoured monsters that had hooted and smoked and thundered about the world for four awful decades were swept away to the dealers in old metal, and the highways thronged with light and clean and shimmering shapes of silvered steel.*

*At the same time a new impetus was given to aviation by the relatively enormous power for weight of the atomic engine; it was at last possible to add Redmayne's ingenious helicopter ascent-and-descent engine to the vertical propeller that had hitherto been the sole driving force of the aeroplane without overweighting the machine, and men found themselves possessed of an instrument of flight that could hover or ascend or descend vertically and gently as well as rush wildly through the air. The last dread of flying vanished. As the journalists of the time phrased it, this was the epoch of the Leap into the Air. The new atomic aeroplane became indeed a mania; every one of means was frantic to possess a thing so controllable, so secure, and so free from the dust and danger of the road; and in France alone in the year 1953 thirty thousand of these new aeroplanes were manufactured and licensed, and soared, humming softly into the sky. And with an equal speed atomic engines of various types invaded industrialism. The railways paid enormous premiums for priority in the delivery of atomic traction-engines; atomic smelting was embarked upon so eagerly as to lead to a number of disastrous explosions due to inexperienced handling of the new power, and the revolutionary cheapening of both materials and electricity made the entire reconstruction of domestic buildings a matter merely dependent upon a reorganization of the methods of the builder and the house-furnisher. Viewed from the side of the new powers and from the point of view of those who financed and manufactured the new engine and material it required, the age of the Leap into the Air was one of astonishing prosperity.*

### THE BLIGHT OF SUCCESS

*THIS spectacle of feverish enterprise was productivity, this crowding flight of happy and fortunate rich people—every great city was as if a crawling ant-hill had suddenly taken wing—was the bright side of the opening phase of the new epoch in human history.*

*Beneath that brightness was a gathering darkness, a deepening dismay. If there was a vast development of production, there was also a huge destruction of values. These glaring factories working night and day, these glittering new vehicles swinging noiselessly along the roads, these flights of dragon-flies that soared and circled in the air, were indeed no more than the brightnesses of lamps and fires that gleam out when the world sinks toward twilight and the night. Between these high lights accumulated disaster, social catastrophe. The coal-mines were manifestly doomed to closure at no very distant date; the vast amount of capital invested in oil was becoming unsalable; millions of coal-miners, steelworkers upon the old lines, vast swarms of unskilled or under-skilled labourers in human affairs. The world in these days was not really governed at all in the sense in which government came to be understood in subsequent years.*

*Government was a treaty, not a design ; it was forensic, conservative, disputatious, unseeing, unthinking, uncreative. Throughout the world, except where the vestiges of absolutism still sheltered the court favourite and the trusted servant, it was in the hands of the predominant caste of lawyers, who had an enormous advantage in being the only trained caste. Their professional education, and every circumstance in the manipulation of the fantastically naive electoral*

*methods by which they clambered to power, conspired to keep them contemptuous of facts, conscientiously unimaginative, alert to claim and seize advantages, and suspicious of every generosity. The world was so little governed that with the very coming of plenty, in the full tide of an incalculable abundance, when everything necessary to satisfy human needs and everything necessary to realize such will and purpose as existed then in human hearts was already at hand, one has still to tell of hardship, famine, anger, confusion, conflict, and incoherent suffering.*

*There was no scheme for the distribution of this vast new wealth that had come at last within the reach of men; there was no clear conception that any such distribution was possible. As one attempts a comprehensive view of those opening years of the new age, as one measures it against the latent achievement that later years have demonstrated, one begins to measure the blindness, the narrowness, the insensate, unimaginative individualism of the pre-atomic time. Under this tremendous dawn of power and freedom, under a sky ablaze with promise, in the very presence of science standing like some bountiful goddess over all the squat darkneses of human life, holding patiently in her strong arms, until men chose to take them, security, plenty, the solution of riddles, the key of the bravest adventures—in her very presence, and with the earnest of her gifts in court, the world was to see the black shadow of war sweeping down from the skies...*

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