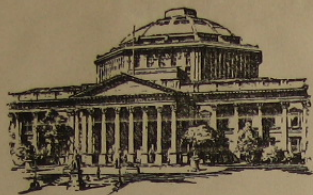




By ...
FRANK MORTON.



*PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF VICTORIA*

*J. K. MOIR COLLECTION
OF
AUSTRALIANA*

*Presented to the
LaTROBE LIBRARY
by
JOHN KINMONT MOIR, O.B.E.*

ANGUS & ROBERTSON LTD.
BOOKSELLERS & PUBLISHERS
89 CASTLEREAGH ST. SYDNEY.
66-68 ELIZABETH ST. MELBOURNE

The Angel of the E a r t h q u a k e

— By FRANK MORTON —

¶ These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear : clouds they are without water, carried about of winds ; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots. :: :: :: —St. Jude.

From
J. K. MORTON
COLLECTION

MELBOURNE, 1909 :: :: THE ATLAS PRESS

619114

MC

A823.2

M846A

TO HAROLD ASHTON.

Dear Harold,—

You may remember that night of purple recompense when you and I sat on the hillside at Toowong, and discussed Spinoza, Haddon Chambers, Bobby Byrne (God rest his soul!), and Ivory's Theorem, comparing our warm enthusiasms under the pallid gentle stars. Above us an appealing crescent of moon floated like a shallop of Hydaspes (whatever that may be) across the ancient ocean of the sky be-diamonded. In the valley beneath us, a curate and a housemaid furnished the modern note. You the Fabian and I the Anarchist smiled into each other's soul, tender of each other's preferences, speaking evil of none. You spoke of the opportunities you had just missed with comfort, and I of the opportunities I had just seized with joy. We agreed that Drink was a curse. And the world went very well then.

Will you permit me now, in all seriousness,

remembering our ancient friendship, to offer you this little book—this dream beclouded with a somewhat too deliberate morality? Recalling your delicate kindness and gentle comradeship, I feel that it is a slight and dubious gift enough that I bring you; but I dare say that if the Widow's Mite had happened to be counterfeit, the effect of her humane intention would not have been seriously impaired. As the widow, I am defective in some essentials; but we will let that pass. And you are not the man to look your gift-ass in the mouth, even though the beast be an unconvincing widow and well aged.

You may remember also that the other night, here in this country that is extravagantly called God's, we talked again. This time there was no hillside and no curate. We were years older and soberer. My speech had become subdued to a tremulous dubiety, my riotous thatch had thinned to a foolish pretence; the years (indeed) had left me little but my teeth. You agreed with me that it was possible that things were not quite so bright in New Zealand as some braying publicists would have us think. You admitted—an admission marvellous enough, as between

you the Democrat and I the Tory—you admitted that possibly all the political experiments of a dozen years had not borne fruit of virtue.

Having got you so far, I can offer the little book without apology. So far as its contentions go, it is unfashionably sincere. I do not believe that New Zealand is really as prosperous as Australia is, if only because Australians live more largely. I do not believe that the enthronement of the mob is a good thing. I believe that any community is best governed by its best brains. I believe that the reckless application of specious theories degrades a country and greatly retards its true development. I believe, in especial and most emphatically, that the political enfranchisement of women in New Zealand will prove, in the ultimate result, to be the worst thing that ever befel the country: because in practice, the great majority of the women that trouble to vote are either tools or dupes. I find women in this country voting for men for all sorts of reasons—because this man or that is such a "good" man, because he is a teetotaller, because he was so good to Willy that time, because he is so awf'ly nice, because he is so kind to his mother, because

he is such a good speaker. And I find, as I go about, that of the questions that most vitally affect this state endangered these voting women know little or nothing. Many of the wisest and noblest of the women do not vote. In England, many or most of the noblest and wisest of the women are guided, by some divine intuition that directs the whitest souls, to oppose the Suffragists' cry and claim. I'm glad of that. I am glad of it, because there are perilous times ahead for the great nations, and I would not have my England weakened now. I am glad of it, because I realize that the future is for the Individual, and the average woman moves naturally in masses whenever she gets into the arena of public affairs.

I hate these little, pestilent lawmakers who are for ever forging new fetters for the feet of the people. And I love a Statesman—the man who with an unflinching purpose and an open mind will determinedly do what he thinks is best. For myself, I would rather die in the ooze of these entanglements honestly hopeless of my own strength than I would be carried over the morasses by any unclean beast of the newest political pattern and upbringing.

F. M.

CHAPTER I.

DECEMBER 31, 1960.—Writing the date coolly, like that, I realize how many years have passed since first I held a pen. I see, too, that I am becoming an old man, according to the ancient computation. I have lived eighty years, and fifty of them—save for such brief occasional absences as have sufficed for my little flittings around and about the world on holiday—over fifty years, I say, I have spent in Wellington. How I hated the place, when I had been here a few months only! How differently I think of it now! How different it is, though!—how vastly and how finely different! As I recall my boyish dreams and hopes and prejudices, my little selfish theories of this and that, I chuckle at the wiser world's complete ignoring of my fanciful prescriptions. Here, where the nastiest new nostrums were tested *ad nauseam* before they were flung for ever out of window, it is good to let one's mind wander back over these last

fifty years. It is good to mark, with gratitude and ever-new delight, how wholesomely during these fifty years man has cleansed himself of blood and slime, has been uplifted and made free by means scarce dreamt of in that jostling century of ineffective half-measures, the Nineteenth. Then . . . barbarism, hypocrisy, tyranny, oppression of class by class, general disorder and unrest, Science herself too often the smirking prostitute of the few that grabbed and slew. Now—

But I must not get away on my hobby, lest these be taken for the dodderings of a dotard. Have no fear. My eye is clear, my form tolerably erect, my brain reasonably active and healthy, my mind open enough, for all my eighty years. Growing old is one of the bad habits that men have latterly been breaking themselves of. Not too soon.

My house is set solidly on a hill, full in the path of the clean, keen winds I love. Below me and around me the city stretches, far-reaching lines of commodious, comely houses and broad, well-ordered thoroughfares. The haven—"harbour" they used to call it, in the days when the world was full of harbours

of sorts, not without need—lies unruffled and pellucid, save where the pleasure-barges and skiffs flash radiantly here and there. Far away to the west as I write, there is a black point that falls and rises, growing momentarily larger as one of the great public ærostats swoops onward to the city. There is no smoke anywhere, no needless dirt, no unsightliness. These are the days of pleasantness and peace. And it's a good world to live in.

And just below me, in the open space of garden where, in my first days here, the Post Office, and a host of other snug, uncomely buildings, used to cumber the ground, Water-ton's statue stands. I can see it very distinctly through my glasses. The massive pediment is chaste and noble. On it, there is a man with a determined face, clothed in the extraordinary fashion of his time. With one hand he holds a little child close to his side. The other hand grasps a revolver—the curious weapon that became in a sense the characteristic sign or symbol of that most Christian epoch. The man's face is set, his mien resolute. The Angel of the Earthquake. . . . Lord! how long ago it seems, all that!

It was of the Earthquake, and Waterton's great part in it, that I set out to write. I wandered a little at the outset; but I shall try to be direct and terse from this onward. I suppose I really am growing old, you know. But it's a good world, and I'm not pining for the dark—yet.

CHAPTER II.

Christmas Day, 1910, broke dismally, a dawn of omens. It had rained steadily for a week, and though the downpour had ceased that morning, the sky was blocked by lowering masses of leaden cloud, and the wind that shrilled dismally across the city was cheerless as a corpse. But Wellington was a stalwart little community, careless of omens. For some years the cables had brought almost weekly tidings of cataclysms and disasters. In 1906, the grim procession started with somewhat of an earthquake in San Francisco. A year or two earlier still, there had been a terrible volcanic eruption in Martinique. After the San Francisco affair, old Vesuvius growled

and choked and vomited again. Next, the capital of Jamaica was badly shaken. Early in 1909 the great earthquake at Messina had destroyed a quarter of a million people. From all parts of the world there came frequent stories of such convulsions. And so the march of dire events went on. But in Wellington, a city built on a fault in volcanic country, there was neither dismay nor perturbation; and no steps were taken. Even the old shrewd habit of building in wood was dying out. In the city there were hundreds of buildings, big as that period went, carelessly thrown together with bricks and concrete. It was the age of stucco and shoddy, and the commercial spirit—of which one Samuel Smiles, then deceased and now forgotten, had been the saint and prophet—was undeterred by omens or good counsel. Christmas Day, 1910, broke cheerless over an inveterately cheerful city.

That morning, to please my gentle wife, I went to church. The quaint old service, a survival as apt as the pterodactyl might have been, amused but scarcely soothed me. I saw men, mechanically exuding peace and good-

will according to the established formulæ, whom I knew for callous sharks and sordid hucksters better dead; and, because I was still too young to have things properly in perspective, I was horribly annoyed. Even for 1910, I was not what you would call a particularly happy young man. I had travelled a good deal among various peoples, and had seen much of the futility of effort, much of the meanness of average human character. I had read omnivorously, and was greatly given to discovering infallible specifics. My dreams had brought me to New Zealand, where many unskilled and deluded persons were eagerly at work creating Paradise by act of Parliament; and in New Zealand I had been dismally disillusioned. I had found that socialism in action was merely made a means for the extension of calculated selfishness, and that as society was prodded along the road to Paradise—a muddy road, and tortuous—cherished individual liberties were daily more zealously restricted and contemned. I found that such fine ancient flowers as courtesy and gentleness did not flourish notably in the new atmosphere. I found wrangling churches

and scheming sects hastening to make the worst possible uses of the new stalking-horse. And outside the church, that Christmas noon, I found a vapourous, breathless day, a sky of tarnished copper, an atmosphere of vague forebodings.

For me, then, it was not on the whole a merry Christmas. At home, the heat suffocating appetite, dinner seemed flaccid and unappetizing. My tobacco had lost its savour. I could win no comfort from the hearts of favourite books. My dog—a valiant little terrier that lived till 1920—whimpered and scratched about the room, increasing my agitation. My usually too-voluble cockatoo was as depressed as a saturated mute.

I went to bed early, pleading a headache; and I have no doubt that my wife was glad to be rid of me. I awoke just before midnight, awoke suddenly and completely, as though some icy hand had touched me. My little boy, who slept in a cot near by, was crying. (I can hear his grandson prattling in the next room now). I got out of bed to comfort him, and as I walked across the floor, I lurched, lost my footing, and fell into the fireplace. A big

picture on the opposite wall came down with a crash. The heavy bed my wife and I shared rolled along the floor. I had turned the switch when I got up, and now the light went out suddenly. I got to my feet, and steadied myself by the mantelpiece. The house was swaying and heaving like a ship at sea, but the sensation was uniquely sickening. The chimney outside fell with a tremendous clatter. A confused noise of disturbance in the city came through the open window. I lit a candle, put the boy into bed with my wife, and re-assured them both. Then I went to the window and looked out.

It was like peering into a pit. There was absolutely no glimmer of light. But the awful noises from the city continued and increased. Our house was a stout building of weatherboard, and, save for the fallen chimney, seemed to have suffered no hurt. I dressed hastily, and went out.



CHAPTER III.

I am very strong and fit at eighty, but I still think that that first night of terrors added ten years to my age. When I got out of our side-street, and groped my way into Willis Street, I found the roadway lumbered with debris every few yards. A lot of the electric wires were down, and a dead horse lay across the tram-line at the intersection of Ingestre Street. Many folk were already afoot, but all men at the outset instinctively kept silence. At the corner of Manners Street, a strayed reveller, silly with drink, roared an incongruous song, till a passer smote him savagely across the mouth. He was whimpering stupidly in the gutter when I went by. Men carried lanterns here and there, and I came across a frightened boy from my own office who had an acetylene bicycle-lamp. But the night was still intolerably dark. Willis Street, from Manners Street on, was practically blocked. Two big hotels and all sorts of smaller places had fallen into ruins, and scared

pedestrians were already muttering fearfully of thousands dead. Here and there, bursted water-mains were flooding the roadways. The electric and gas services had broken down at the first shock. The air was thick with an indescribably pungent dust. It seemed to eddy from every direction like a writhing smoke. Through this enfolding dust the men and women wandered strangely disguised and blurred, like figures in some ill dream.

The second shock came at 1.20. The whole front fell out of a shop close by where I was standing, and so I had the first of my narrow escapes. There was a big crash higher up the road, and someone said that the spire of St. John's had fallen. For a moment it seemed that the roadways rolled like waves. This second shock, although it only lasted twenty seconds, did even more havoc than the first, and added to the terror of the overthrow the terror of fire. The huge wooden block of the Government Buildings was the first ablaze, and as the glare grew, desolation was made visible. A great mass of Wellington Terrace had slipped, and fallen on Lambton Quay like a mighty avalanche. It seemed on a first

glance that the whole city was in ruins. The Harbour had risen, and the water at some points touched Lambton Quay. All the shipping was adrift; and the *Toowoomba*, sailing in from Sydney, went to pieces on a huge new rock in the fairway between the Heads. Half-a-dozen buildings were soon in flames, including Parliament House; and nothing could be done to save them. Happily, there was no wind. But worse was to follow. At three o'clock in the morning there was added to the terrors of earthquake and fire, the terror of the panic.

On that I shall touch as lightly as may be, this being only the merest summary of events. It was a panic unparelled and most inhuman. Men and women swarmed into the dark streets half-dressed, and jibbered viciously into each other's faces. I saw and heard such things as it is hateful even to remember. Looting had begun early, but that was a minor evil. The panic added the culminating element of horror; and the panic lasted a long two hours, so that the streets were full of demented creatures till well after sun-up.

The women gave an element of special horror

to these hours of panic. Afraid to remain in their houses, shaken out of all reserve, feeling nothing but the clutch of the giant fear, they wandered about the city. Some had lost their menfolk, and some men half unmanned strove miserably to pacify. The women, despite their enfranchisement and general confidence, looked to the men, and the men, during those worst hours, were themselves distraught. The city was full of human creatures that huddled shrieking in corners or scurried across open spaces whimpering like scared beasts. A horror.

The stricken town lay utterly at the mercy of these new terrors. The police-force, scarcely adequate during normal times, was foolishly impotent now. I saw a burly quaking constable solemnly arrest a drunken sailor amid the choking dust from a fallen building, although the sailor was placidly and harmlessly drunk, and other ruffians in the near vicinity were doing grisly work. On the skirts and in the thick of the panic foul outrage lurked and snarled. Such things were done as it is needless to recall. The futility of the police was proved beyond all question. The whole

police-system was in process of being irrevocably doomed.

By seven o'clock we began to have some idea of the proportions of the catastrophe. Certain of the suburbs, Newtown most notably, had suffered terribly. Petone was submerged. The perplexed authorities reckoned that there were at least five thousand dead. In one hotel two hundred persons had perished. Confirmation of the news of the total wreck of the *Toowoomba* brought with it the certainty of four hundred lives lost there. All the public services were dislocated. The General Post Office was a smoking ruin. Neither trams nor trains could run. The water-supply had failed. And this was only the commencement.

I went home, and was cheered to find all right there. My wife's brothers were visiting us, and they volunteered to stand by the house. I snatched some breakfast, and made my way back to town.



CHAPTER IV.

In a world of this size, the downfall of a comparatively small city like Wellington would seem to be a matter of slight moment ; but great issues spring from small causes, and the overthrow of Wellington stands for all time as one of the great events of human history. This being so, I am impelled to tell the truth, however briefly.

When I got back to town, the panic had largely subsided, but what remained was chaos. The very streets were strewn with dead. The looters, many of them unkempt sailors who had deserted the drifting ships in the Harbour (but all were not sailors, or unkempt)—the looters, inflamed with stolen liquor, were still beyond control. The morning's tale of savage murders so far known was twelve. Among the law-abiding population, there was as yet no cohesion, no system. Constant reports of gruesome outrages kept most heads of households in their homes. But a hundred resolute men met at nine o'clock by

the wrecked Town Hall, and there the famous Vigilance Corps was formed. I had the fortune to be enrolled among the first, and I was sent with a squad to one of the shattered hotels in Willis Street. It was heart-breaking work ; but in the course of the morning we succeeded in rescuing a few injured folk. More than that it was impossible to do at the outset ; but as new recruits came in the operations were extended. Among the salvage by noon there were already eight hundred corpses. Heavy rain had set in again, and the fires had not spread. The looting remained virtually unchecked ; but, beset as we were by grave matters, that passed almost unheeded. Our corps, now over five hundred strong, was armed with revolvers ; but throughout that dread forenoon the revolvers were not used. We received by wireless telegraph a good many messages of condolence and promised help ; and we were informed at 11.30 that Dunedin had proclaimed a day of humiliation and prayer. There was a general grim laugh at this news, the first laugh I had heard that day.

A quiet, grey-eyed man had been working

with me all the morning. There was nothing especially striking about him, except his resourcefulness and nerve. He told me that he lived out at Newtown; so when we paused for refreshment at noon I took him home with me.

Home! How good it was! The wife had settled quietly to her tasks, and in the well-ordered house there were now no signs of disruption. The chimney smoked a little, but that was to be expected; there was nothing worse. Lunch was good, and we ate it with good appetites. Then we left, and they barricaded the doors again.

The man with me—there had been no sort of formal introduction—told me that he was a journalist, newly arrived. I also was a journalist, but my office was a ruin. The editor had escaped unscathed. There used to be a proverb about the mysterious workings of Providence. . . .

In Willis Street we came across a party of looters—five of them. They looked a bad lot, but were comparatively sober. As we came up, one of them grabbed a young girl who was walking timidly past.

"Let go that girl!" said my companion, quietly.

The ruffian looked up with a curse, kissed the girl brutally on the face, flung her aside, and rushed at her defender.

My companion raised his revolver, and the looter fell, shot clean through the head. Another of them rushed my man, and again the revolver spoke. The remaining three went off at a run.

"That was good," I said, "and necessary. Do you mind telling me your name?"

"Andrew Waterton."

We gripped each other's hand, and went on to our squad.

CHAPTER V.

That afternoon, Waterton, still working steadily in that quiet way of his, came to the front. The work of rescue, where rescue still was possible, was often very dangerous, and Waterton, time and time again, cheerfully took risks at which we others hesitated. The chances he faced were desperate. Once—he

had gone in among a lot of debris, between tottering walls—some stuff fell, and we thought that we had lost him ; but he emerged presently, carrying a chubby child of three, and looking happier than I had seen him theretofore.

"Mother dead," he said. "Better send the youngster along to your place."

Of course I agreed, and Waterton interpreted my natural assent so liberally that three or four other children were sent along during the afternoon.

Somehow, my new friend was gradually edged to the front, till before evening he was virtually in charge of operations. The corps met by arrangement just before dark. An ineffective military person had been in charge, and him we deposed without ceremony. The story of Waterton and the looters had gone round, and presently one of the younger men proposed that Waterton should have the command. To this no dissentient voice was raised.

"See here," said Waterton simply. "Time's precious. I'll lead you to the best of my ability while you see fit to follow me, so long as I lead in earnest. While I'm tsar, I'm tsar. That understood?"

There was a hearty chorus of assent.

"Right. Now a section of this populace has gone mad, and is suffering from dishonesty and blood-lust—and otherwise. That section must be whipped out of hand. It's no use depending on your fool police, and ordinary laws don't apply here. There are a thousand of us. It's quite enough, if we hang together. If you see any man looting, warn him ; if he persists, shoot."

That night at eight, the third and last bad shock came, and much more damage and death resulted. Also, there was another panic. Waterton had undisputed charge now. He worked like ten men, and he proved (a fact I had for some time been suspecting) that the cool mind of one wise and courageous man is better than the brains of a thousand dunder-heads in counsel. First of all, he sent us out in parties of five, and we gathered up the homeless women and children and billeted them in the habitable houses. We took no refusals or excuses, and few were offered. We found that the majority of the men were dazed and helpless, and many sat sullen with their dead. Some we left alone, and some we drove like

cattle to whichever tasks lay nearest—which meant, generally, to whichever corpses lay handiest for burial.

Then the Corps, sternly directed by Waterton, commenced to beat the city for its vermin. Fifty looters and ruffians were summarily shot that night. Resolutions of protest were passed afterwards by some Australian churches; but I never heard that anyone was any the worse for that. When Waterton and I went home at three, leaving two hundred of the Corps on patrol duty, things were looking quieter. We found my wife still up, with supper waiting for us. The salvaged children were sleeping like strayed cherubs.

CHAPTER VI.

Thus the position stood, then, on the morning of the 27th of December. A large part of the city was destroyed. Nearly ten thousand bodies, as it afterwards proved, were awaiting burial. The authorities had utterly failed to grasp the position and its necessities. On the heels of the first panic there had been a strange

and unprecedented outcrop of lawlessness. There was the possibility of another shock at any moment. Beset by these uncertainties, the terror was not laid. Control lay in the hands of a thousand men—ultimately, in the hands of one man. The Government did nothing and said nothing. Two ministers of the Crown were among the slain; probably about the lightest loss the city suffered. The labour organizations proved that they were useless for any purpose other than political agitation. There was talk of the speedy arrival of a man-o'-war; but that could have made little difference, in any case. Our Corps—it was composed principally of men of the professional classes, a curious thing—was adequate for the needs of direction and management; but the strength of the Corps lay chiefly in the fact that it moved as one man whenever Waterton gave the signal.

Now, this paralysis of a rampant democracy will doubtless seem very strange to such of you as have not made a close study of the past history of this country. In 1910, public men in New Zealand were too busy with politics to get any grasp of affairs. Accustomed to

move in mobs, men were losing the very instinct of personal initiative. Amid the everlasting turmoil of schemes for social betterment, the individual had been lost sight of; and, worse than that, the individual had begun to lose sight of himself. All things being regarded as the business of the state, were accounted the business of nobody in particular; and whenever the state made a worse than usual bungle of the business, individual citizens became hysterical and sat down. The state, on the night of the earthquake, was really represented in Wellington by five respectable gentlemen of the middle class. Two of these went forthwith to whatever may have happened to be their reward. Of the other three, one was rescued fuddled from his club; one was a narrow sectary who had absolutely no ideas outside the groove of party; and one was an impulsive good fellow who promptly lost his head and made a rather pathetic spectacle of himself. The police, as already noted, proved worse than useless. Three constables were among the fifty looters shot, thus paying a heavier penalty than was paid by constables convicted of burglary and theft in

Dunedin a year or two earlier. But it is useless to blame the police. As a class, they were miserably paid, and miserably esteemed. Their general stupidity had long passed into a byword. It seems that ordinary intelligence was neither expected nor required of them. The law, which had not been framed to meet the contingencies of earthquake, was as useless as the police. That morning of the 27th the Government got sense enough to recognise and establish Waterton's position. The law, from that time on till the finish, was a sort of martial law approved by Waterton; very stern and summary law indeed. He was more given to action than to argument, and when the puerile majority talked about his "brutal harshness," and all the rest of it, he only smiled in protest. On the 27th he ordered that all men fit for service must work, and there was much weak repining and rebellion of timid stomachs before we got that order into action. Meantime, in that close weather, the thousands of the poor dead were becoming every moment a graver source of menace and offence. Where no possible place of burial was at hand, huge fires were lighted, and the dead disposed of by

process of rough cremation. To all this grisly work there was the most stubborn opposition we had yet encountered. The sickly sentiment of the time was solidly against us. There was a general howl for burial in what was called consecrated ground. This was the fattened glebe of church and sects, the tracts that in the old world had for centuries been the crawling hotbeds of the worst diseases. More than once, as this work of burial went forward, revolvers were used again. The necessity was as repulsive as it was urgent, and Waterton never flinched. I don't suppose that any man ever made more enemies in a day. One of the men shot was a constable who, in the teeth of the sternest warning from our chief, had attempted to assist in the "rescue" of three corpses from one of the pyres. No rescue of that sort could be tolerated, and the constable paid the price of his stupidity and greed. I, for one, did not enrol him in the number of the martyrs; but hysterical ignorance in Wellington and outside made much of the incident. One way and another, by the night of the 27th twelve hundred corpses had been disposed of. There

was no order or discrimination in the filling of the burial-pits; but the bodies were drenched in the strongest disinfectants that could be procured. Waterton, you see, was an eminently practical man, even at the outset. He was cool and resolute, and he never wilted. Among other matters, on that night of the 27th, he had five thousand homeless orphans on his hands. And the worst was still to come.

CHAPTER VII.

Early on the 28th, three steamers felt their way out of the Harbour, with a thousand passengers on board. Among the number were fourteen clergymen, a dozen justices of the peace, and six members of Parliament. Many others escaped by road. We could well have spared many more; but that day the port and the roads were shut.

The new terror came at ten o'clock on that hot morning of the 28th. Off Cuba Street there was a dingy thoroughfare given over to the Chinese—a thoroughfare that no sane civilized democracy should have tolerated. It

was from this quarter that the alarming news came. Dr. Pilkington, one of the finest fellows in our Corps, came up to Waterton.

"Small-pox," he said. "Ten cases already; four hæmorrhagic."

Two hundred of us, led by Waterton, went to the infected quarter, taking ammunition and ambulances. The order was that the patients and all possible contacts were to be removed to the Quarantine Station. The Chinese fought like wild-cats. If you had ever seen a low-class Asiatic suffering from hæmorrhagic small-pox, you might be able to form some idea of the horror of the situation. Before the victims and contacts were removed, eighteen Chinese had been killed, and we had lost three of our own men. We had to get the best isolation possible, and as eight hundred persons were isolated together, in one fairly restricted area, the reluctance of the contacts was not inexplicable. Three doctors and ten nurses went along. The behaviour of the nurses, many of them gently bred women who volunteered, was magnificent, right through. Bravery and altruism were part of the doctor's daily equipment in those times; so that they

came in for no special plaudits. But Pilkington must be remembered as the second man of the earthquake.

At three o'clock that afternoon, the tale of the buried and burnt then totalling 2,100, the first case of plague was reported, from a Chinese laundry in Willis Street. The place had been partially demolished by the second shock, and the patient lay in a room with two corpses. For this new horror no suitable area of isolation was available; so Waterton commandeered the *Lubra*, a great mail-steamer just making ready for sea. The agents protested, and the captain made a loud noise; but under the direction of fifty men of the Corps, the *Lubra* was taken into the stream off Day's Bay, and moored there. I remember that the people of Day's Bay, which had not suffered from the quake, held a meeting and made furious speeches; whereupon Waterton sent them five hundred orphans and some terse instructions. Three officers (including the Captain), two cooks, and ten stewards were left on the *Lubra*. They did not volunteer; they obeyed orders, under persuasion. And before nightfall a doctor and four nurses

arrived, with five plague patients. In the city, the Corps was kept hard at work ; for the new panic was worse than the old, being quieter. At seven o'clock news arrived that the whole of Australasia had declared a close quarantine against us. The coming fight, then, was for us ; and we were glad of it.

"At such a time," said Waterton, "interference is the devil. We can work now."

Work, indeed, rushed down on us. The city had lost its head. The burial-parties had to be kept to their work by bitter compulsion, and over and over again, as the dire need arose, the revolvers talked. The labour unions were organizing opposition ; so Waterton dealt with a few of the leaders summarily, and locked up the others. Less prominent disaffected men were set to the hardest duties, and kept to them. For those who opposed or hindered him at this crisis, Waterton showed no consideration. His open opponents were worked like slaves, and slept under guard. And even so, with the pestilence creeping on us, with typhus getting a strong hold in every direction, there were seven thousand corpses yet unburied on that night of the 28th.

CHAPTER VIII.

In these days of humane individual liberty, it is very difficult to appreciate or to explain the awful outbreak of lawlessness and wrong that swept over Wellington in those terribly dark days, from the morning of the 29th onwards. In New Zealand there had been much gratuitous boasting of the law-abiding tendencies of the democracy, and contrary indications had been ignored, glossed over, or scouted as exceptional. The accepted code inculcated a purely negative morality, and positive virtues were seldom obtruded or esteemed. Certain things were forbidden—a list of things almost daily extended—and on these things the minds of the people dwelt morbidly, if not exclusively. Any too close contemplation of the forbidden begets the desire or inclination to transgress ; so that much even of New Zealand's negative morality was merely superficial. Although the idea of virtue, for instance, had been narrowed down to the observance of a certain strict idea

of physical chastity, there could be no pretence that the majority of the men were physically chaste; and the women spent much of their newly-equipped energy in the vain attempt to make men chaste by statute. And always, the women quaintly overlooked or neglected the fact that in any given transgression of the sexual code there must be two offenders, one a woman. Though women in all the ages have practised the subtlest and most unscrupulous arts of seduction, women generally joined in clamorous condemnation of the seducer man. To handicap the man, and so incidentally to raise the cost of forbidden luxury, the women pulled many devious wires, and devised many oppressive and dangerous acts of reckless legislation; so that the average young man of that civilization, turned from wholesome courses and conceptions, came to look on the average woman as his natural opponent, fair game. All this mechanical suppression of normal impulse, all this insensate cumbering of the natural way, led inevitably to the aftermath. Let any human impulse be dragged arbitrarily in an artificial direction, and sooner or later there

comes the recoil. The recoil came in Wellington, where for some time the arbitrary pull had been applied more thoroughly and more thoughtlessly than anywhere else on earth since the earlier recoil from puritanism. Hundreds of these young men who now developed so sudden and so dire a spirit of lawlessness had been for years excessive meat-eaters, more or less secret lechers, intemperate, careless, empty-headed and content to be empty-headed. Their education had been shallow and according to rote, taking no account of individual tendencies and idiosyncrasies. They had lost all sense of that chivalrous spirit which, whatever its defects in practice, had been a sweetening influence and a deterrent from the grosser sins. They had been taught (as far as their teaching in that matter went) that religion was essentially not a matter of personal morality, and that the whole responsibility of man on that side lay in the blind acceptance of an alleged vicarious sacrifice attested by dubious tradition and variously interpreted and esteemed by a hundred jangling sects. This essential dogma of the Christian faith, removing per-

sonal responsibility, was essentially immoral; but the eyes of the mass of men had been blinded by the dust of an effete theology. A religion that taught that a good man might live worthily all his life, and still move on a set path to eternal perdition, while any murderer or thug blackened by abominable crime might win eternal felicity by deliberate repentance at the gallows-head, was a religion infinitely dangerous. But that was the religion to which the young men of Wellington had been born, and in which they had been bred.

The social order of Christendom was deep-based in hypocrisy and infamous pretence. Men naturally polygamous indulged their passions indiscriminately under the mask of Christian marriage, and there was at least a strong probability that a large percentage of illegitimate children were born in wedlock. These considerations, and such considerations as these, were the impelling cause of what I can only call the recoil from matrimony. In the early days of this century a clamour arose concerning the declining birth-rate in certain civilized countries. The best people, from

the standpoint of science, were showing a desire to refrain from marriage, while those that did marry had few or no children. But in the slums and mean streets there was still fecundity, and a terribly large proportion of the children born in many crowded centres were offshoots of degenerate seed, factors in the perpetuation of the unfit. No civilized state attempted to have any such care for its people as a horse-owner has for his stud. Men and women of diseased and criminal stocks (terms often enough synonymous) were permitted to marry, and did marry. The tendency to marriage was especially noteworthy among persons suffering from those dread forms of tuberculosis that our science and care have since those days extirpated. Mental degenerates married and begot mental degenerates. In some conspicuous families, sturdy surreptitious lovers of neurotic ladies actually strengthened and redeemed the strain. It was a very curious civilization to take its moral tone so seriously and claim chastity as its distinctive virtue.

And this was the civilization that had bred the young men who got to work on the morning of the 29th. I make excuses for them now:

the excuses just suggested in my summary of conditions ; but none of the Corps made any excuses for them then. They were intoxicated by the terror of death, which with mean minds is the worst and foulest intoxication. Goaded by each others' example, they were freed from the old restraints. They were for the most part young men who had worked at ungenial callings for a wage that just sufficed to keep them in rough material comfort—an infamy common enough at that time—and left no margin for indulgence in spiritual or æsthetic pleasures. Their preferred amusements, apart from the general serious and systematic amusement of the chase of women, were gambling, and sport debased by gambling and professionalism. They haunted the music halls, where, side by side with reasonably clean and innocent entertainers, they were gladdened by singers of covertly bestial songs that had no excuse in art. Their untrained minds could not rise to enjoyable appreciation of dramatic subtleties. When they visited the theatre, it was either to witness some illiterate and ill-ordered drama of criminality and blood, with emotionally virtuous passages splashed in in

grease, or some gorgeously staged musical-comedy or burlesque that depended for acceptance on its tuneful triviality of musical pinchbeck, the smutty allusions of its libretto, and the largely undraped limbs of its leering chorus-women. Similarly, anything approaching genuine love of literature was confined to a very small minority of the people. The growth of cheap and popular education had not resulted in any general perspicacity on the side of art. Many of the greatest painters and writers were still made the jest of the multitude. The ruling public taste was for the nastiest, silliest, and tawdriest sort of fiction. Thus one Marie Corelli, whose excessively rare books are still in demand as bibliographic curiosities, was published in huge editions. She was a potent instrument of the devil in the game of mock-morality ; for great multitudes of the people greedily devoured everything she wrote. She was an illiterate, freakish person, unwholesome as a drunkard's nightmare, with no style other than such as lay in the consistency of her stylelessness, with no command of pure English, and her morality was mere miasma of hysteria touched by

greed and stimulated by a silly womanish vanity. She is the worst accusation that one can bring against the English herd of fifty years ago; and, remembering her deplorable success, it is impossible to assume that the English herd of fifty years ago had any saving sense of humour.

In short, the times were ripe for revolution, and the earthquake at Wellington started the mighty back-spin of the wheel.

CHAPTER IX.

On the morning of the 29th, as Waterton and I were superintending work at the big pyre on Lambton Quay, news was brought to us that a strong gang of young fellows was causing trouble in Cuba Street. We rounded up a hundred of the Corps, and started. The thing proved more serious than we had feared. The gang was at least three hundred strong, and fully half the men were in liquor. There was a scattering of light women among them, but screams from some quarters told us of other women present who were not there by

their own free will. Some of the men had firearms, and some had sticks; all were armed, one way or another. We fought our way to the points where the women were. It was hot work, and we were badly outnumbered; but the Corps had by this time got into its stride, and we won through. Of the better class of women we rescued some. Some were not rescued.

In that first hot scrimmage we lost four of our men; but the gang left twenty of its number disabled and dead. Some of these I knew, and as I looked at them the horror of the new development was borne in upon me.

"They must have gone mad," I said.

Waterton was binding a handkerchief round a wound on his left wrist. He smiled grimly.

"Have it that way, if you will. There's that in their blood that is the oldest incentive to madness, any way. Some of those fellows have sisters, you know, but that doesn't count now. The seamy side of civilization's coming up, and we're going to have trouble with it."

We had trouble, trouble worse than we had dreamt of. It is only the first step that counts, and the rioters, once committed, were

not for turning back. Disquieting rumours and reports of fresh outrages poured in on us. We sent out posses of our men, and began bringing in such women as were not adequately protected. Some came willingly, and some we had to drag from homes made desolate by their dead. Waterton cleared the buildings left standing in the central area, and in these the women were accommodated under guard. But time was too short for the work, our hands too few. Doing our best, there was still terribly much had to remain undone. All the time the riot and rapine went on, shifting this way and that as we strove to check and localize it. There were horrors we were powerless to prevent, horrors only known to us too late for remedy. These things are better not talked about, even now; but the fact cannot be slurred.

We armed the householders, so far as we were able, and we got horses for the Corps. But all these things took time, and on that day of the 29th December, the urgency of burial becoming graver every minute and the horror of it increasing in like ratio, the work of burial went on more slowly, with frequent interruptions.

Meantime, the pestilence in all kinds made fearful progress. There were ninety plague cases on the *Lubra*, and double that number of cases of small-pox at the Quarantine Station. To these must be added a number of cases in which death had resulted too speedily for removal. It was no longer possible to quarantine any area of the city, for the pestilence was everywhere.

Waterton had justified himself. He had few critics or enemies now, outside the ranks of the rioters. For once the man and the moment had met. His energy was superb, his will indomitable; but he had little to say. During this day of the 29th December we had abundant opportunity of noting his strange tenderness to women, his almost morbid love of little children. I cannot make this rapid memoir a catalogue of incidents in detail, or I might tell you a thousand things that would more clearly show you how and why this man won our worship; but his name has become a monument, and I have no wish to heap up words. Only, there is one incident I must record.

On the *Lubra* there was a poor woman whose

husband and son had both been killed by the falling of one of the newspaper-offices. Wandering the streets distracted during the hours of panic of that first awful night she had lost her only other child, a sweet girl of ten. All the next day the mother sought the child, till the agony of her search was rudely interrupted, and the poor woman was taken aboard the plague-ship. The pity of this thing had appealed to Waterton, and I think that the brightest gleam of all that dark 29th for him was when the news came to us that the child was found. She had been slightly injured by some falling debris, and was in the house of good people in Cuba Street. The people had grave troubles of their own, and we moved little Netta up to my place. As soon as we could manage it, Waterton and I went off to the *Lubra*. The doctor told us where Mrs. Silcott was lying, and we went along the strangely silent ship to the ward. The nurse in charge was a very beautiful girl, one of our society volunteers, and one of the noblest and most devoted of them all. But this is not the place for her story. She came softly towards us.

"I am Waterton," he said simply. "Where is Mrs. Silcott?"

I saw a new radiance in the nurse's eyes as she looked at him.

"Have you found her child?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"And you—you came off specially to tell her?"

Waterton smiled. No other man, I think, ever smiled quite so.

"I gave myself that pleasure."

She led us to the bed. The patient lay very still, and something told us that there was little hope for her.

"Are you feeling any better, Mrs. Silcott?"

Waterton asked.

The woman opened her eyes and looked at us.

"I shall be no better till I go," she said.

"I have lost all."

"Not all." His voice was very gentle.

"You have still a great responsibility. You must live for little Netta's sake. She is safe at my friend's house."

"God bless you!" she said. "I shall live now."

And she did, in defiance of all established order. There is no reckoning with these women.

But as we turned away I heard her say, "Who is that?"

"That," the sweet nurse murmured proudly, "is the Angel of the Earthquake."

The title clung to him, through all those days, and afterwards.

CHAPTER X.

Of the next days, the long accumulation of horrors, it is not desirable that I should speak in detail. The pestilence raged with such fury that by the third day of the new year there were three plague ships where there had been one, while two other large steamers lay at anchor off the Quarantine Station, floating small-pox hospitals. The bluejackets of the war-ship *Clianthus*, which arrived on New Years Day, did us great service. Other volunteers came in from north and south. It was a long fight and a bitter one, but by the 5th the rabid element of disorder was practic-

ally wiped out, and all the bodies that we could discover had been buried. The pestilence was a greater matter, though Pilkington and his staff worked like the heroes they were. In one week there were nearly two thousand deaths from small-pox and plague. By the 15th the death-roll from those causes had mounted to over five thousand. But Pilkington got hold. A dozen squalid streets that had proved hotbeds of contagion were cleared, and the houses burnt. Slowly the death-rate dwindled. On January the 26th, with 314 cases isolated, the pestilence in the city had run its course and men began to breathe freely. The worst was over.

Of what those weeks meant, to us who were concerned in the work, I can give you but a slight idea; but the weeks of outrage and violence were the worst of all. There were a thousand things we were all eager to forget, and a thousand we were zealous to remember. We realized how thin a crust lay between our civilization and the Pit. We learned to despise the fallacies to which we had clung, to recognise the hopelessness and sheer futility of the theories we had spun. In that little crucible

of Wellington, many things were reduced to their essences and found worthless. The work of Waterton was the triumph of the individual over the mob. There was a great crop reaped amid death and disillusion, and the seeds of it that were sown across the world were not the seeds of communism or of socialism. Those were the days of the dawn of individual liberty. Before that there had been butcherly effort and forlorn experiment, a groping and a making-ready in the dark.

CHAPTER XI.

And so, as you all know, New Zealand became a paradise of the working man in very truth—or, shall we say, a bright suburb of the wider paradise we know. The term "working man" acquired a new significance, and became a term of honour. The day passed when any man could with honour live by the ruthless exploitation of his brother's labour. The sweet old pre-Christian ideals were restored, and what had been a civilization of blood-and-iron was slowly transformed to a civiliz-

ation of white-and-gold. Men ceased to grovel to the fetich of their prejudices, and so began in joyous earnest to cultivate their intelligence. The farce of cheap democracy was played out. Men suddenly became alive to the fact that government by party was at best only a stupid subterfuge. And so the good time came in when there began to be general recognition of the fact that, apart from very few matters, there were no interests in regard to which any man's individual liberty could properly be restricted. The churches collapsed, and Christianity—whatever was good in it—came in. Men were brought to see that they could only be comfortable in each other's comfort, only be truly happy in each other's joy. It was discovered anew that whatever was good in Christianity was good in all the great religions. Whether there may be anything after death—riper spiritual growth, or only a sleep and a forgetting—we do not know; but our general dream-ideal is the Buddhist one of absorption into the Infinite. Dear Waterton, who lived till 1945, in happy union with that sweet nurse we wot of, was a pantheist, and his genial retreat on the

Wanganui River was populous with the old gods and graces of his fancy. His children we know, and his children's children. I don't know whether they have any religion in especial; I never asked them. But sometimes—sometimes when I go about this gracious earth that nurtures us, and look on the sky of stars and the manifold mysteries our science fails to pierce—sometimes I think that beyond and behind all this grandeur and perfect order there is supernal Mind. Sometimes I think that perhaps . . . perhaps . . . Who knows?

CHAPTER XII.

DECEMBER 31, 1960! Lord! how the time goes! As I write, rockets are flashing against the deep, clear sky of midnight, and another year of the delight of life is being born. My house has been bright all day with the laughter of my grandchildren; my thoughts as I have written have been sweet with memories of her I loved so well. The changing conditions of life after the great peril . . . how they

perplexed and startled her! And yet how glad she was to mark the dawning day! She left me ten years ago, and I still thrill with somewhat of the sadness with which I committed her dear body to the closing fire. Does she see me still, and love me, and understand me, as she always loved and understood me during the fifty years we were true mates and comrades? I wonder!

Across the way, the lights are twinkling in the little house, our latest cage of love-birds. They have been building their nest these many months, lavishing wealth of loving care upon it. They spent Christmas Day with us. I wonder who they are, and where they came from. Francis Grant and Sadie Wilmington. The names sound American, and I know that they have spent some time in Washington. But then, everybody goes everywhere, in these good days. I wonder who they are. But, of course, one cannot pester one's own and the city's guests with curious questions. And it is good to be near young love, you know, good for old bones and memories that fade, that fade. . . .

