

ON BOARD THE GOOD SHIP EARTH

CHAPTER I

WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT

OFTEN we hear the saying, "We are all in the same boat"; but how seldom do we think of the world-wide, universal, physical sense in which the maxim is true. We are all passengers on the good ship *Earth*, and all history is the record of the relations between human beings as such passengers.

A great air-ship, is the *Earth*, twenty-five thousand miles in girth, covered with water, save where the high spots of the solid crust protrude in patches and spots to the extent of a quarter of her deck room. On those spots, called land, we, the passengers, must, in the main, live. It is the great gift of the Creative Principle to all men.

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The good ship *Earth* has no crew. She is like an air-ship, automatically controlled by some force not contained in the vessel guided. She has no rudder, no sails, no motors, no engines. She works herself. The shove into space which set her going is all the impulse she needs; so on, and on, and on she flies in her predestined path, without a crew, laden with passengers.

We know that she moves, just as we know that a railway train moves—by the way in which things beside her path *seem* to move. The stars and planets are to the earth what the farms, towns and buildings are to the train. They show us passengers that our good ship *Earth* is on her way. But we do not know whither she is bound. We are embarked on a vessel that left port eons ago under sealed orders.

Our air-ship is globular, and spins around and around—for the pitcher who hurled her gave her the whirl that means a curve-ball. She holds us to her, so we can not fly off. She draws us, as a magnet draws steel dust, so

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that as she spins from the thumb and finger of God, we stay on. We know that our round ship whirls; just as we know the same thing of a merry-go-round—because we pass the same things regularly—once every twenty-four hours. The things we pass are the sun, moon, planets and stars—our whirling is proven by the identical evidence that proves our forward motion.

Our forward path, too, is a circle—for after three hundred and sixty-five days, we return to the place occupied a twelvemonth ago. This is our trip about the sun, and makes our year. Thus we go spinning like a curved baseball, and behaving as would the baseball if the pitcher could throw in a circle—the sun being the pitcher's box in the center of the ring.

But do we return to the very spot occupied a year ago? No, for the sun, too, moves, as if the whole diamond and planet-studded outfield were traveling, carrying the great Game with it; or like a ball whirled about the head of a man who walks as he whirls it. Whither does the man walk who whirls about his head

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our good air-ship *Earth*? We do not know. We only know that toward some unimaginable goal the sun travels, dragging with him all our planets with all their moons, and a great cloud of comets, asteroids and meteors. It is one of the mysteries incident to the fate of the human race—that of sailing on their ship *Earth* under sealed orders.

We are on this ship as passengers; but there is no café service. The passengers must feed themselves. Moreover, they must subsist out of the ship itself. The ship breaks out in a green rash called plant life. On this, millions of things called animals live by taking the green substance into their bodies and making it over into body-tissue. Certain other animals eat these plant-eating animals. The decks of the ship, even the watery parts, are thus full of growing, and eating, and killing and digesting. And we, the passengers, who believe all this is for us, are of the sort that eat plants, and devour animals, and do more killing and destroying than any of the other creatures on board.

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Now all these plants and animals are made out of the substance of the ship itself. We are all in the same boat with the plants and brutes in this respect—we are made of the earth, and we dissolve back into the earth. When the earth was a molten, uninhabited, uninhabitable mass, it weighed (save for an occasional meteor which we pick up as we fly) to a pennyweight what it weighs now, with its plants and animals and its billion and a half people; just as a cheese weighs no more when it becomes full of mites. We are earth-mites. We are just bits of earth organized into two-legged bubbles of earth which last a score, or two score, or three score years and ten, and then—death pricks the bubble, and we are earth again. We last only for a few whirls of the merry-go-round, the longest-lived of us.

All the time the high places on which we live—the dry parts of the decks called land—are being worn down. And when the plants and animals go back into the earth, a part of them only can be turned again into things the passengers can consume. So there is a loss of

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matter to subsist upon. Furthermore, we passengers multiply in numbers. In some portions of the ship, they are already so numerous that we can not find adequate subsistence. We seem to be growing in numbers almost everywhere. In our part of the ship, we have a hundred millions where a hundred years ago there were not three millions, and we are told that in three hundred years there will be ten hundred millions of us here, in the United States.

Can so many passengers find subsistence on the ship? We are for the first time in our world's history, as far as we know, possessed of the knowledge and the intelligence which make us able even to ask such questions. One by one the bandages have been removed from our eyes, and we see the good ship *Earth* round and entire, and we can achieve some approach to a realization of her problems. What are these problems, and how shall we meet them? We can no longer face the future blindly asserting that all will be well. All is not well. All has never been well. We can no longer see nation go up against nation to

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slaughter and burn with the feeling that it does not concern us. It *does* concern us. For the first time in the world's history, we are able intelligently to ask ourselves what this tremendous voyage on the good ship *Earth* really means, how we are to treat our fellow passengers, how we are to possess our great vessel, whether life for all of us and all our children is possible, and if not possible, who with his progeny shall survive or *should* survive.