

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE IRON AGE—AND THEN?

**N**OW that we think of it, every one of us must see that it's our business if the supplies for the maintenance of the passengers on the good ship *Earth* are in danger of running out. It's everybody's business, no matter who has the paper title to the supplies. For everybody is a passenger, and the descendants of everybody must be passengers.

The supply of coal is absolutely essential to civilization. Mankind in their present numbers can not be supported without its heat, and the work it does. The coal will last much longer than it would otherwise do, because in burning it we fill the air with carbon dioxide which in a few hundred years will cover all countries like the glass of a greenhouse, and make the climate of the ship warmer than now. So we shall not need to burn so much coal per capita.

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But there is another necessary of life in the bunkers of the ship which must be used with coal if civilization is to be maintained. It is iron. As steel, and under its own title, this metal gives name to our epoch—the Iron Age or the Age of Steel. Think of a world without iron—and except in a small way the world was practically without it, just a few generations back. No factories. No engines. No motor-cars. No watches. No effective tools. No nails. No bolts. No railways. No telegraph. No telephone. No sky-scrapers. No truss bridges. No typewriters. No steel pens. No printing presses. No reapers. No threshers. No cotton gins. No machine-made shoes or factory cloth, or machine-made anything. No guns. No battle-ships. No real ships of any sort, not even sailing vessels. No stoves or furnaces. No steam heat. No chains. No ropes—for metal machinery is used in making them. No cordage or thread of any sort save hand-twisted strings. No needles. No sewing-machines. No pianos. No saws, and therefore no lumber. No houses—only caves

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or huts. No gasoline or kerosene—for the petroleum business is based on iron pipes and iron machinery. No gas. No ice in summer. No exhaustion of the soil, through agriculture. No waste of coal by mining. No coal. No wastage of oil or natural gas. No whale oil, even. No fish-hooks, save bone ones. No denudation of forests through cutting, by reason of lack of axes. No conservation problem. No civilization. Nobody to write essays like this about the good ship *Earth*. Nobody able to see the questions. This is indeed the Age of Iron, and coal is the agent by which alone it can be thawed for use.

Of necessity I speak of the iron in the bunkers of our *Zeppelin* as it careers through space, as "ours." I hope in doing so I do not offend Judge Gary of the United States Steel Corporation. Once I spoke of that Colonel North who believed himself to have the nitrogen of the world reduced to possession in the nitrate beds of Chili so effectively that his descendants would have the power to starve our descendants if they chose. Science found a

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way out of the North clutches. Who shall show us a way out of the clutches of Judge Gary of the United States Steel Corporation? For he—or rather his immortal entity the corporation itself—is the Colonel North of Iron.

Fellow passengers on a wild air-ship named the *Earth!* Our *Zeppelin* can not stop to take on supplies—therefore consider this:

Most of our iron now available is in the Lake Superior bunkers—the supplies for the steel and iron works on the lakes and in the Pittsburgh district come from there—Gary, South Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Buffalo, Cleveland, Conneaut, Lorain and the rest. These stores, amounting to 1,500,000,000 tons, are owned mostly by Judge Gary's immortal entity—which we created by law. In the southern iron bins God has stored almost twice as much—Andrew Carnegie thinks about 2,500,000,000 tons—and the best of this the entity picked up one stormy day in 1907 when Mr. Roosevelt let Gary have the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company—to prevent a panic! Altogether we have in the United States about

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10,000,000,000 tons of iron, which is worth taking into account. That's what the Laird of Skibo thinks—but he also says that the ore bodies when worked out usually fall short of the estimates.

There is no reason to think we shall find any great supply to add to these—not in the United States. Canada is a promising place to search, and in the unexplored mountains of the other continents a great deal may be found—but to depend on such a thing is like throwing found money to the dogs in the confident expectation of picking up treasure-trove before it's gone. Germany and Britain and Sweden have the only other supplies comparable to ours—though Cuba and Brazil have immense deposits—but they do not relieve the anxieties much, of a passenger who cares what becomes of the folk on board.

Now without any increase in the rate of mining, the known supply in the Lake Superior region will give out within thirty years. Judge Gary's entity will empty those bunkers. By 1938 half the workable ore in

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this country will be gone—and all the time Sweden, Britain and Germany will be eating up their supply, and then, resorting to the poorer ores, the work will go on, until by the year 2000 our supply will be gone.

I think the case is one that demands attention on the part of those who expect to leave descendants—or who care about the descendants of others—and that ought to take in nearly everybody.

We as a race should see to it that iron is saved by all possible means. For this reason, if for no other, we should provide for the carrying of freight on natural or artificial waterways, so as to prevent the loss of iron by the wearing out of steel rails in carrying an unnecessary amount of traffic. It is the cheapest way of carrying freight, anyhow. More waterways, and less spending of iron on railways. And it would save half the coal bill for transportation, too—thus easing up the emptying of the coal bunkers.

We should use concrete for all erections for which it is adapted—for there is cement and

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stone in plenty for all ages. The next age should be the Age of Concrete.

We should stop building battle-ships.

Think of robbing the bunkers filled by the Master who built and launched the ship with things necessary to the highest good of the passengers, and of making the goods over into murder-factories like war-ships! And the war-ship industry is what keeps a lot of steam-shovels at work scooping out our iron, day after day, year after year. Imagine the passengers on any vessel using the supplies as weapons with which to kill one another.

Then we should see to it that all iron when worn out is saved, worked up into new forms and used instead of iron newly-taken from the earth. For iron, unlike coal, is not limited to one occasion of use. It lasts. Probably as the store in use increases, the need for digging it out of the bunkers will lessen. Let us hope so. But those steel ships sunk in war—they are lost forever! Let us stop wasting our iron on war-ships!

For, be as optimistic as we will, we should

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remember that only two of the five continents are at all well supplied with railways, and that when the two-thirds of the passengers who do not mine iron, or use many machines, really wake up, we may face an iron famine, which will endanger civilization itself.