

AN AMERICANIZED PLANET, THE DOMINANCE OF SCIENCE

"Science now held a position of unique honour among the First Men. This was not so much because it was in this field that the race long ago during its high noon had thought most rigorously, nor because it was through science that men had gained some insight into the nature of the physical world, but rather because the application of scientific principles had revolutionized their MATERIAL CIRCUMSTANCES . . . Inventive scientific intelligence still exercised itself brilliantly in improving the technique of industry, and thus completely dominated the imagination of a race in which the pure intellectual curiosity had waned. The scientist was regarded as an embodiment, not merely of knowledge, but of power . . .

The Son of God, in this his Second Coming, had proposed to bring about the millennium by publishing the secret of divine power, but finding the peoples still unable to put into practice even the more primitive gospel of love which was announced at his First Coming, suffered martyrdom for man's sake, and entrusted his secret to the scientists.

Science itself, the actual corpus of natural knowledge, had by now become so complex that only a tiny fraction of it could be mastered by one brain. Thus students of one branch of science knew practically nothing of the work of others in kindred branches . . . In an earlier period, the sciences had been co-ordinated and criticized philosophically by their own leaders and by the technical philosophers, but philosophy as a rigorous technical discipline no longer existed. *There was of course a vague framework of ideas of assumptions based on science and common to all men, a popular pseudo-science constructed by the journalists from striking phrases current among scientists.*

The material circumstances of the race at this time would have amazed all its predecessors, even those who were in the true sense far more civilized. *But to*

us, the Last Men, there is an extreme pathos and even comicality in this most thorough confusion of material development with civilization . . .

All the continents, indeed, were by now minutely artificialized. Save for the many wild reserves which were cherished as museums and playgrounds, not a square mile of territory was left in a natural state. Nor was there any longer a distinction between agriculture and industrial areas . . .

In spite of this material prosperity, man was a slave . . . for the all-pervading idea which tyrannized over the race was the fanatical worship of movement . . . From childhood to death, the individual's conduct was determined by the obligation to produce as much motion as possible, whether by his own muscular activity, or by the control of natural forces."

Last and First Men by Olaf Stapledon
Dover Publications, Inc.

Living phenomena are indeed intelligible in physical terms. And although much remains to be learned and understood, and the details of many processes remain elusive, those engaged in such studies hold no doubt that answers will be forthcoming in the reasonably near future. Indeed only two truly major questions remain enshrouded in a cloak of not quite fathomable mystery:

(1) *THE ORIGIN OF LIFE*, i.e. the events that first gave rise to the remarkable cooperative functioning of nucleic acids and proteins which constitutes the genetic apparatus, and (2) *THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM*, i.e. the physical basis for self-awareness and personality. *Great strides have been made in the approaches to both these problems as summarized in Chapters 6 and 9, but the ultimate explanations are perceived very dimly indeed."*

Biology and the Future of Man edited by Philip Handler
Oxford University Press

