CHAPTER THE FOURTH

The Voice of Nature

Section 1

Presently we recognise the fellow of the earthly Devil's Bridge, still intact as a footway, spanning the gorge, and old memories turn us off the road down the steep ruin of an ancient mule track towards it. It is our first reminder that Utopia too must have a history. We cross it and find the Reuss, for all that it has already lit and warmed and ventilated and cleaned several thousands of houses in the dale above, and for all that it drives those easy trams in the gallery overhead, is yet capable of as fine a cascade as ever it flung on earth. So we come to a rocky path, wild as one could wish, and descend, discoursing how good and fair an ordered world may be, but with a certain unformulated qualification in our minds about those thumb marks we have left behind.

"Do you recall the Zermatt valley?" says my friend, "and how on earth it reeks and stinks with smoke?"

"People make that an argument for obstructing change, instead of helping it forward!"

And here perforce an episode intrudes. We are invaded by a talkative person.

He overtakes us and begins talking forthwith in a fluty, but not unamiable, tenor. He is a great talker, this man, and a fairly respectable gesticulator, and to him it is we make our first ineffectual tentatives at explaining who indeed we are; but his flow of talk washes that all away again. He has a face of that rubicund, knobby type I have heard an indignant mineralogist speak of as botryoidal, and about it waves a quantity of disorderly blond hair. He is dressed in leather doublet and knee breeches, and he wears over these a streaming woollen cloak of faded crimson that give him a fine dramatic outline as he comes down towards us over the rocks. His feet, which are large and handsome, but bright pink with the keen morning air, are bare, except for sandals of leather. (It was the only time that we saw anyone in Utopia with bare feet.) He salutes us with a scroll-like waving of his stick, and falls in with our slower paces.

"Climbers, I presume?" he says, "and you scorn these trams of theirs? I like you. So do I! Why a man should consent to be dealt with as a bale of goods holding an indistinctive ticket--when God gave him legs and a face--passes my understanding."

As he speaks, his staff indicates the great mechanical road that runs across the gorge and high overhead through a gallery in the

rock, follows it along until it turns the corner, picks it up as a viaduct far below, traces it until it plunges into an arcade through a jutting crag, and there dismisses it with a spiral whirl. "No!" he says.

He seems sent by Providence, for just now we had been discussing how we should broach our remarkable situation to these Utopians before our money is spent.

Our eyes meet, and I gather from the botanist that I am to open our case.

I do my best.

"You came from the other side of space!" says the man in the crimson cloak, interrupting me. "Precisely! I like that--it's exactly my note! So do I! And you find this world strange! Exactly my case! We are brothers! We shall be in sympathy. I am amazed, I have been amazed as long as I can remember, and I shall die, most certainly, in a state of incredulous amazement, at this remarkable world. Eh? ... You found yourselves suddenly upon a mountain top! Fortunate men!" He chuckled. "For my part I found myself in the still stranger position of infant to two parents of the most intractable dispositions!"

"The fact remains," I protest.

"A position, I can assure you, demanding Tact of an altogether superhuman quality!"

We desist for a space from the attempt to explain our remarkable selves, and for the rest of the time this picturesque and exceptional Utopian takes the talk entirely under his control....

Section 2

An agreeable person, though a little distracting, he was, and he talked, we recall, of many things. He impressed us, we found afterwards, as a poseur beyond question, a conscious Ishmaelite in the world of wit, and in some subtly inexplicable way as a most consummate ass. He talked first of the excellent and commodious trams that came from over the passes, and ran down the long valley towards middle Switzerland, and of all the growth of pleasant homes and chalets amidst the heights that made the opening gorge so different from its earthly parallel, with a fine disrespect. "But they are beautiful," I protested. "They are graciously proportioned, they are placed in well-chosen positions; they give no offence to the eye."

"What do we know of the beauty they replace? They are a mere rash. Why should we men play the part of bacteria upon the face of our

Mother?"

"All life is that!"

"No! not natural life, not the plants and the gentle creatures that live their wild shy lives in forest and jungle. That is a part of her. That is the natural bloom of her complexion. But these houses and tramways and things, all made from ore and stuff torn from her veins----! You can't better my image of the rash. It's a morbid breaking out! I'd give it all for one--what is it?--free and natural chamois."

"You live at times in a house?" I asked.

He ignored my question. For him, untroubled Nature was the best, he said, and, with a glance at his feet, the most beautiful. He professed himself a Nazarite, and shook back his Teutonic poet's shock of hair. So he came to himself, and for the rest of our walk he kept to himself as the thread of his discourse, and went over himself from top to toe, and strung thereon all topics under the sun by way of illustrating his splendours. But especially his foil was the relative folly, the unnaturalness and want of logic in his fellow men. He held strong views about the extreme simplicity of everything, only that men, in their muddle-headedness, had confounded it all. "Hence, for example, these trams! They are always running up and down as though they were looking for the lost

simplicity of nature. 'We dropped it here!'" He earned a living, we gathered, "some considerable way above the minimum wage," which threw a chance light on the labour problem--by perforating records for automatic musical machines--no doubt of the Pianotist and Pianola kind--and he spent all the leisure he could gain in going to and fro in the earth lecturing on "The Need of a Return to Nature," and on "Simple Foods and Simple Ways." He did it for the love of it. It was very clear to us he had an inordinate impulse to lecture, and esteemed us fair game. He had been lecturing on these topics in Italy, and he was now going back through the mountains to lecture in Saxony, lecturing on the way, to perforate a lot more records, lecturing the while, and so start out lecturing again. He was undisguisedly glad to have us to lecture to by the way.

He called our attention to his costume at an early stage. It was the embodiment of his ideal of Nature-clothing, and it had been made especially for him at very great cost. "Simply because naturalness has fled the earth, and has to be sought now, and washed out from your crushed complexities like gold."

"I should have thought," said I, "that any clothing whatever was something of a slight upon the natural man."

"Not at all," said he, "not at all! You forget his natural vanity!"

He was particularly severe on our artificial hoofs, as he called our boots, and our hats or hair destructors. "Man is the real King of Beasts and should wear a mane. The lion only wears it by consent and in captivity." He tossed his head.

Subsequently while we lunched and he waited for the specific natural dishes he ordered--they taxed the culinary resources of the inn to the utmost--he broached a comprehensive generalisation. "The animal kingdom and the vegetable kingdom are easily distinguished, and for the life of me I see no reason for confusing them. It is, I hold, a sin against Nature. I keep them distinct in my mind and I keep them distinct in my person. No animal substance inside, no vegetable without;--what could be simpler or more logical? Nothing upon me but leather and allwool garments, within, cereals, fruit, nuts, herbs, and the like. Classification--order--man's function. He is here to observe and accentuate Nature's simplicity. These people"--he swept an arm that tried not too personally to include us--"are filled and covered with confusion."

He ate great quantities of grapes and finished with a cigarette. He demanded and drank a great horn of unfermented grape juice, and it seemed to suit him well.

We three sat about the board--it was in an agreeable little arbour on a hill hard by the place where Wassen stands on earth, and it looked down the valley to the Uri Rothstock, and ever and again we

sought to turn his undeniable gift of exposition to the elucidation of our own difficulties.

But we seemed to get little, his style was so elusive. Afterwards, indeed, we found much information and many persuasions had soaked into us, but at the time it seemed to us he told us nothing. He indicated things by dots and dashes, instead of by good hard assertive lines. He would not pause to see how little we knew. Sometimes his wit rose so high that he would lose sight of it himself, and then he would pause, purse his lips as if he whistled, and then till the bird came back to the lure, fill his void mouth with grapes. He talked of the relations of the sexes, and love--a passion he held in great contempt as being in its essence complex and disingenuous--and afterwards we found we had learnt much of what the marriage laws of Utopia allow and forbid.

"A simple natural freedom," he said, waving a grape in an illustrative manner, and so we gathered the Modern Utopia did not at any rate go to that. He spoke, too, of the regulation of unions, of people who were not allowed to have children, of complicated rules and interventions. "Man," he said, "had ceased to be a natural product!"

We tried to check him with questions at this most illuminating point, but he drove on like a torrent, and carried his topic out of sight. The world, he held, was overmanaged, and that was the root of

all evil. He talked of the overmanagement of the world, and among other things of the laws that would not let a poor simple idiot, a "natural," go at large. And so we had our first glimpse of what Utopia did with the feeble and insane. "We make all these distinctions between man and man, we exalt this and favour that, and degrade and seclude that; we make birth artificial, life artificial, death artificial."

"You say We," said I, with the first glimmering of a new idea, "but you don't participate?"

"Not I! I'm not one of your samurai, your voluntary noblemen who have taken the world in hand. I might be, of course, but I'm not."

"Samurai!" I repeated, "voluntary noblemen!" and for the moment could not frame a question.

He whirled on to an attack on science, that stirred the botanist to controversy. He denounced with great bitterness all specialists whatever, and particularly doctors and engineers.

"Voluntary noblemen!" he said, "voluntary Gods I fancy they think themselves," and I was left behind for a space in the perplexed examination of this parenthesis, while he and the botanist--who is sedulous to keep his digestion up to date with all the newest

devices--argued about the good of medicine men.

"The natural human constitution," said the blond-haired man, "is perfectly simple, with one simple condition--you must leave it to Nature. But if you mix up things so distinctly and essentially separated as the animal and vegetable kingdoms for example, and ram that in for it to digest, what can you expect?

"Ill health! There isn't such a thing--in the course of Nature. But you shelter from Nature in houses, you protect yourselves by clothes that are useful instead of being ornamental, you wash--with such abstersive chemicals as soap for example--and above all you consult doctors." He approved himself with a chuckle. "Have you ever found anyone seriously ill without doctors and medicine about? Never! You say a lot of people would die without shelter and medical attendance! No doubt--but a natural death. A natural death is better than an artificial life, surely? That's--to be frank with you--the very citadel of my position."

That led him, and rather promptly, before the botanist could rally to reply, to a great tirade against the laws that forbade "sleeping out." He denounced them with great vigour, and alleged that for his own part he broke that law whenever he could, found some corner of moss, shaded from an excess of dew, and there sat up to sleep. He slept, he said, always in a sitting position, with his head on his wrists, and his wrists on his knees--the simple natural position for

sleep in man.... He said it would be far better if all the world slept out, and all the houses were pulled down.

You will understand, perhaps, the subdued irritation I felt, as I sat and listened to the botanist entangling himself in the logical net of this wild nonsense. It impressed me as being irrelevant. When one comes to a Utopia one expects a Cicerone, one expects a person as precise and insistent and instructive as an American advertisement--the advertisement of one of those land agents, for example, who print their own engaging photographs to instil confidence and begin, "You want to buy real estate." One expects to find all Utopians absolutely convinced of the perfection of their Utopia, and incapable of receiving a hint against its order. And here was this purveyor of absurdities!

And yet now that I come to think it over, is not this too one of the necessary differences between a Modern Utopia and those finite compact settlements of the older school of dreamers? It is not to be a unanimous world any more, it is to have all and more of the mental contrariety we find in the world of the real; it is no longer to be perfectly explicable, it is just our own vast mysterious welter, with some of the blackest shadows gone, with a clearer illumination, and a more conscious and intelligent will. Irrelevance is not irrelevant to such a scheme, and our blond-haired friend is exactly just where he ought to be here.

Still----

Section 3

I ceased to listen to the argumentation of my botanist with this apostle of Nature. The botanist, in his scientific way, was, I believe, defending the learned professions. (He thinks and argues like drawing on squared paper.) It struck me as transiently remarkable that a man who could not be induced to forget himself and his personal troubles on coming into a whole new world, who could waste our first evening in Utopia upon a paltry egotistical love story, should presently become quite heated and impersonal in the discussion of scientific professionalism. He was--absorbed. I can't attempt to explain these vivid spots and blind spots in the imaginations of sane men; there they are!

"You say," said the botanist, with a prevalent index finger, and the resolute deliberation of a big siege gun being lugged into action over rough ground by a number of inexperienced men, "you prefer a natural death to an artificial life. But what is your definition (stress) of artificial? ..."

And after lunch too! I ceased to listen, flicked the end of my cigarette ash over the green trellis of the arbour, stretched my legs with a fine restfulness, leant back, and gave my mind to the

fields and houses that lay adown the valley.

What I saw interwove with fragmentary things our garrulous friend had said, and with the trend of my own speculations....

The high road, with its tramways and its avenues on either side, ran in a bold curve, and with one great loop of descent, down the opposite side of the valley, and below crossed again on a beautiful viaduct, and dipped into an arcade in the side of the Bristenstock. Our inn stood out boldly, high above the level this took. The houses clustered in their collegiate groups over by the high road, and near the subordinate way that ran almost vertically below us and past us and up towards the valley of the Meien Reuss. There were one or two Utopians cutting and packing the flowery mountain grass in the carefully levelled and irrigated meadows by means of swift, light machines that ran on things like feet and seemed to devour the herbage, and there were many children and a woman or so, going to and fro among the houses near at hand. I guessed a central building towards the high road must be the school from which these children were coming. I noted the health and cleanliness of these young heirs of Utopia as they passed below.

The pervading quality of the whole scene was a sane order, the deliberate solution of problems, a progressive intention steadily achieving itself, and the aspect that particularly occupied me was the incongruity of this with our blond-haired friend.

On the one hand here was a state of affairs that implied a power of will, an organising and controlling force, the co-operation of a great number of vigorous people to establish and sustain its progress, and on the other this creature of pose and vanity, with his restless wit, his perpetual giggle at his own cleverness, his manifest incapacity for comprehensive co-operation.

Now, had I come upon a hopeless incompatibility? Was this the reductio ad absurdum of my vision, and must it even as I sat there fade, dissolve, and vanish before my eyes?

There was no denying our blond friend. If this Utopia is indeed to parallel our earth, man for man--and I see no other reasonable choice to that--there must be this sort of person and kindred sorts of persons in great abundance. The desire and gift to see life whole is not the lot of the great majority of men, the service of truth is the privilege of the elect, and these clever fools who choke the avenues of the world of thought, who stick at no inconsistency, who oppose, obstruct, confuse, will find only the freer scope amidst Utopian freedoms.

(They argued on, these two, as I worried my brains with riddles. It was like a fight between a cock sparrow and a tortoise; they both went on in their own way, regardless of each other's proceedings. The encounter had an air of being extremely lively, and the moments

of contact were few. "But you mistake my point," the blond man was saying, disordering his hair--which had become unruffled in the preoccupation of dispute--with a hasty movement of his hand, "you don't appreciate the position I take up.")

"Ugh!" said I privately, and lighted another cigarette and went away into my own thoughts with that.

The position he takes up! That's the way of your intellectual fool, the Universe over. He takes up a position, and he's going to be the most brilliant, delightful, engaging and invincible of gay delicious creatures defending that position you can possibly imagine. And even when the case is not so bad as that, there still remains the quality. We "take up our positions," silly little contentious creatures that we are, we will not see the right in one another, we will not patiently state and restate, and honestly accommodate and plan, and so we remain at sixes and sevens. We've all a touch of Gladstone in us, and try to the last moment to deny we have made a turn. And so our poor broken-springed world jolts athwart its trackless destiny. Try to win into line with some fellow weakling, and see the little host of suspicions, aggressions, misrepresentations, your approach will stir--like summer flies on a high road--the way he will try to score a point and claim you as a convert to what he has always said, his fear lest the point should be scored to you.

It is not only such gross and palpable cases as our blond and

tenoring friend. I could find the thing negligible were it only that. But when one sees the same thread woven into men who are leaders, men who sway vast multitudes, who are indeed great and powerful men; when one sees how unfair they can be, how unteachable, the great blind areas in their eyes also, their want of generosity, then one's doubts gather like mists across this Utopian valley, its vistas pale, its people become unsubstantial phantoms, all its order and its happiness dim and recede....

If we are to have any Utopia at all, we must have a clear common purpose, and a great and steadfast movement of will to override all these incurably egotistical dissentients. Something is needed wide and deep enough to float the worst of egotisms away. The world is not to be made right by acclamation and in a day, and then for ever more trusted to run alone. It is manifest this Utopia could not come about by chance and anarchy, but by co-ordinated effort and a community of design, and to tell of just land laws and wise government, a wisely balanced economic system, and wise social arrangements without telling how it was brought about, and how it is sustained against the vanity and self-indulgence, the moody fluctuations and uncertain imaginations, the heat and aptitude for partisanship that lurk, even when they do not flourish, in the texture of every man alive, is to build a palace without either door or staircase.

I had not this in mind when I began.

Somewhere in the Modern Utopia there must be adequate men, men the very antithesis of our friend, capable of self-devotion, of intentional courage, of honest thought, and steady endeavour. There must be a literature to embody their common idea, of which this Modern Utopia is merely the material form; there must be some organisation, however slight, to keep them in touch one with the other.

Who will these men be? Will they be a caste? a race? an organisation in the nature of a Church? ... And there came into my mind the words of our acquaintance, that he was not one of these "voluntary noblemen."

At first that phrase struck me as being merely queer, and then I began to realise certain possibilities that were wrapped up in it.

The animus of our chance friend, at any rate, went to suggest that here was his antithesis. Evidently what he is not, will be the class to contain what is needed here. Evidently.

Section 4

I was recalled from my meditations by the hand of the blond-haired

man upon my arm.

I looked up to discover the botanist had gone into the inn.

The blond-haired man was for a moment almost stripped of pose.

"I say," he said. "Weren't you listening to me?"

"No," I said bluntly.

His surprise was manifest. But by an effort he recalled what he had meant to say.

"Your friend," he said, "has been telling me, in spite of my sustained interruptions, a most incredible story."

I wondered how the botanist managed to get it in. "About that woman?" I said.

"About a man and a woman who hate each other and can't get away from each other."

"I know," I said.

"It sounds absurd."

"It is."

"Why can't they get away? What is there to keep them together? It's ridiculous. I----"

"Quite."

"He would tell it to me."

"It's his way."

"He interrupted me. And there's no point in it. Is he----" he hesitated, "mad?"

"There's a whole world of people mad with him," I answered after a pause.

The perplexed expression of the blond-haired man intensified. It is vain to deny that he enlarged the scope of his inquiry, visibly if not verbally. "Dear me!" he said, and took up something he had nearly forgotten. "And you found yourselves suddenly on a mountain side? ... I thought you were joking."

I turned round upon him with a sudden access of earnestness. At least I meant my manner to be earnest, but to him it may have seemed wild.

"You," I said, "are an original sort of man. Do not be alarmed. Perhaps you will understand.... We were not joking."

"But, my dear fellow!"

"I mean it! We come from an inferior world! Like this, but out of order."

"No world could be more out of order----"

"You play at that and have your fun. But there's no limit to the extent to which a world of men may get out of gear. In our world----"

He nodded, but his eye had ceased to be friendly.

"Men die of starvation; people die by the hundred thousand needlessly and painfully; men and women are lashed together to make hell for each other; children are born--abominably, and reared in cruelty and folly; there is a thing called war, a horror of blood and vileness. The whole thing seems to me at times a cruel and wasteful wilderness of muddle. You in this decent world have no means of understanding----"

"No?" he said, and would have begun, but I went on too quickly.

"No! When I see you dandering through this excellent and hopeful world, objecting, obstructing, and breaking the law, displaying your wit on science and order, on the men who toil so ingloriously to swell and use the knowledge that is salvation, this salvation for which our poor world cries to heaven----"

"You don't mean to say," he said, "that you really come from some other world where things are different and worse?"

"I do."

"And you want to talk to me about it instead of listening to me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, nonsense!" he said abruptly. "You can't do it--really. I can assure you this present world touches the nadir of imbecility. You and your friend, with his love for the lady who's so mysteriously tied--you're romancing! People could not possibly do such things. It's--if you'll excuse me--ridiculous. He began--he would begin. A most tiresome story--simply bore me down. We'd been talking very agreeably before that, or rather I had, about the absurdity of marriage laws, the interference with a free and natural life, and so on, and suddenly he burst like a dam. No!" He paused. "It's really

impossible. You behave perfectly well for a time, and then you begin to interrupt.... And such a childish story, too!"

He spun round upon his chair, got up, glanced at me over his shoulder, and walked out of the arbour. He stepped aside hastily to avoid too close an approach to the returning botanist. "Impossible," I heard him say. He was evidently deeply aggrieved by us. I saw him presently a little way off in the garden, talking to the landlord of our inn, and looking towards us as he talked--they both looked towards us--and after that, without the ceremony of a farewell, he disappeared, and we saw him no more. We waited for him a little while, and then I expounded the situation to the botanist....

"We are going to have a very considerable amount of trouble explaining ourselves," I said in conclusion. "We are here by an act of the imagination, and that is just one of those metaphysical operations that are so difficult to make credible. We are, by the standard of bearing and clothing I remark about us, unattractive in dress and deportment. We have nothing to produce to explain our presence here, no bit of a flying machine or a space travelling sphere or any of the apparatus customary on these occasions. We have no means beyond a dwindling amount of small change out of a gold coin, upon which I suppose in ethics and the law some native Utopian had a better claim. We may already have got ourselves into trouble with the authorities with that confounded number of yours!"

"You did one too!"

"All the more bother, perhaps, when the thing is brought home to us. There's no need for recriminations. The thing of moment is that we find ourselves in the position--not to put too fine a point upon it--of tramps in this admirable world. The question of all others of importance to us at present is what do they do with their tramps? Because sooner or later, and the balance of probability seems to incline to sooner, whatever they do with their tramps that they will do with us."

"Unless we can get some work."

"Exactly--unless we can get some work."

"Get work!"

The botanist leant forward on his arms and looked out of the arbour with an expression of despondent discovery. "I say," he remarked; "this is a strange world--quite strange and new. I'm only beginning to realise just what it means for us. The mountains there are the same, the old Bristenstock and all the rest of it; but these houses, you know, and that roadway, and the costumes, and that machine that is licking up the grass there--only...."

He sought expression. "Who knows what will come in sight round the

bend of the valley there? Who knows what may happen to us anywhere? We don't know who rules over us even ... we don't know that!"

"No," I echoed, "we don't know that."