

IN THE YEAR TEN THOUSAND.

BY WILLIAM HARBEN.

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A. D. 10,000. An old man, more than six hundred years of age, was walking with a boy through a great museum. The people who were moving around them had beautiful forms, and faces which were indescribably refined and spiritual.

“Father,” said the boy, “you promised to tell me to-day about the Dark Ages. I like to hear how men lived and thought long ago.”

“It is no easy task to make you understand the past,” was the reply. “It is hard to realize that man could have been so ignorant as he was eight thousand years ago, but come with me; I will show you something.”

He led the boy to a cabinet containing a few time-worn books bound in solid gold.

“You have never seen a book,” he said, taking out a large volume and carefully placing it on a silk cushion on a table. “There are only a few in the leading museums of the world. Time was when there were as many books on earth as inhabitants.”

“I cannot understand,” said the boy with a look of perplexity on his intellectual face. “I cannot see what people could have wanted with them; they are not attractive; they seem to be useless.”

The old man smiled. "When I was your age, the subject was too deep for me; but as I grew older and made a close study of the history of the past, the use of books gradually became plain to me. We know that in the year 2000 they were read by the best minds. To make you understand this, I shall first have to explain that eight thousand years ago human beings communicated their thoughts to one another by making sounds with their tongues, and not by mind-reading, as you and I do. To understand me, you have simply to read my thoughts as well as your education will permit; but primitive man knew nothing about thought-intercourse, so he invented speech. Humanity then was divided up in various races, and each race had a separate language. As certain sounds conveyed definite ideas, so did signs and letters; and later, to facilitate the exchange of thought, writing and printing were invented. This book was printed."

The boy leaned forward and examined the pages closely; his young brow clouded. "I cannot understand," he said, "it seems so useless."

The old man put his delicate fingers on the page. "A line of these words may have conveyed a valuable thought to a reader long ago," he said, reflectively. "In fact, this book purports to be a history of the world up to the year 2000. Here are some pictures," he continued, turning the worn leaves carefully. "This is George Washington; this a pope of a church called the Roman Catholic; this is a man named Gladstone, who was a great political leader in England. Pictures then, as you see, were very crude. We have preserved some of the oil paintings made in those days. Art was in its cradle. In producing a

painting of an object, the early artists mixed colored paints and spread them according to taste on stretched canvas or on the walls or windows of buildings. You know that our artists simply throw light and darkness into space in the necessary variations, and the effect is all that could be desired in the way of imitating nature. See that landscape in the alcove before you. The foliage of the trees, the grass, the flowers, the stretch of water, have every appearance of life because the light which produces them is alive.”

The boy looked at the scene admiringly for a few minutes, then bent again over the book. Presently he recoiled from the pictures, a strange look of disgust struggling in his tender features.

“These men have awful faces,” he said. “They are so unlike people living now. The man you call a pope looks like an animal. They all have huge mouths and frightfully heavy jaws. Surely men could not have looked like that.”

“Yes,” the old man replied, gently. “There is no doubt that human beings then bore a nearer resemblance to the lower animals than we now do. In the sculpture and portraits of all ages we can trace a gradual refinement in the appearances of men. The features of the human race to-day are more ideal. Thought has always given form and expression to faces. In those dark days the thoughts of men were not refined. Human beings died of starvation and lack of attention in cities where there were people so wealthy that they could not use their fortunes. And they were so nearly related to the lower animals that they believed in war. George Washington was for several centuries revered by millions of people as a great and good

man; and yet under his leadership thousands of human beings lost their lives in battle.”

The boy’s susceptible face turned white.

“Do you mean that he encouraged men to kill one another?” he asked, bending more closely over the book.

“Yes, but we cannot blame him; he thought he was right. Millions of his countrymen applauded him. A greater warrior than he was a man named Napoleon Bonaparte. Washington fought under the belief that he was doing his country a service in defending it against enemies, but everything in history goes to prove that Bonaparte waged war to gratify a personal ambition to distinguish himself as a hero. Wild animals of the lowest orders were courageous, and would fight one another till they died; and yet the most refined of the human race, eight or nine thousand years ago, prided themselves on the same ferocity of nature. Women, the gentlest half of humanity, honored men more for bold achievements in shedding blood than for any other quality. But murder was not only committed in wars; men in private life killed one another; fathers and mothers were now and then so depraved as to put their own children to death; and the highest tribunals of the world executed murderers without dreaming that it was wrong, erroneously believing that to kill was the only way to prevent killing.”

“Did no one in those days realize that it was horrible?” asked the youth.

“Yes,” answered the father, “as far back as ten thousand years ago there was an humble man, it is said, who was called Jesus Christ. He went from place to place, telling every one he met that the world would be better if men would love one another as themselves.”

“What kind of man was he?” asked the boy, with kindling eyes.

“He was a spiritual genius,” was the earnest reply, “and the greatest that has ever lived.”

“Did he prevent them from killing one another?” asked the youth, with a tender upward glance.

“No, for he himself was killed by men who were too barbarous to understand him. But long after his death his words were remembered. People were not civilized enough to put his teachings into practice, but they were able to see that he was right.”

“After he was killed, did the people not do as he had told them?” asked the youth, after a pause of several minutes.

“It seems not,” was the reply. “They said no human being could live as he had directed. And when he had been dead for several centuries, people began to say that he was the Son of God who had come to earth to show men how to live. Some even believed that he was God himself.”

“Did they believe that he was a person like ourselves?”

The old man reflected for a few minutes, then, looking into the boy’s eager face, he answered: “That subject will be hard for you to understand. I will try to make it plain. To the unformed

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