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Signs of the Times

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BY

GEORGE HUCKLESBY,

LONDON.



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- "Watchman, what of the night?" (Isaiah 21. 11).
- "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. . . . The night is far spent, and the day is at hand" (Romans 13. 11, 12).
- "Exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10. 25).

WE are living in solemn and remarkable times; great events big with momentous results are transpiring in the earth. Dark clouds are gathering on the world's horizon, warning of the coming storm, the mutterings of which are already heard. Great changes have taken place in every sphere during the last few years, and even

Greater Changes Seem Probable in the Near Future.

Students of prophecy are unanimous in their opinion that we are in the rapids of the last days, that the coming of the Lord is at our very doors. The belief is gaining ground among thoughtful men that we are on the eve of some stupendous event, that we are fast nearing some great universal crisis.

The words of prophecy and the facts of history form the two hands of Heaven's great time-piece, and as we prayerfully read the former and carefully observe the latter,

we find that those prophetic words are fast becoming historic facts. These two hands have wellnigh met when the hour will strike, and the Father will bid His Son step into "the air" and gather His people home (1 Thess. 4. 16, 17).

When we consider the state of the professing Church, the condition of the world, and view the remarkable movement taking place among the Jews in the light of the prophetic Scriptures, we have clear and conclusive evidence that the coming of the Lord is very near at hand. We behold multiplying signs which cry with clarion note, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh" (Matt. 25. 6). Not that the Christian is to be watching for signs to appear, or to be waiting for events to transpire, he is to be looking for "that blessed hope" (Titus 2. 13), "waiting for God's Son from Heaven" (1 Thess. 1. 10). At the same time we cannot close our eyes to these great events which are taking place on every hand. They tell the watchman on Zion's walls that "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand." As we look at Christendom, or what is usually termed

I. THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

to-day, we see the long foretold "falling away" (2 Thess. 2. 3) taking place on every side, and the great Apostasy rapidly developing on every hand. In all directions there is a movement, but it is a movement from God and His Word. In all so-called "Christian lands" men are getting farther from Christ and the Gospel. The result is churches everywhere are bewailing their lack of spiritual power and the great dearth of real conversions in their midst. The prayer meeting is given up, and the popular entertainment

takes its place. The bazaar is substituted for the Bible reading, and the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon usurps the place of the diligent searching of the Scriptures. The Church is seeking the patronage of the world in trying to cater for the crowd. Instead of the Church converting the world, we see the world is fast absorbing the Church.

In all this we detect a fulfilment of the Lord's prophetic utterances in Matthew 13 in which He portrays the Kingdom of Heaven during the absence of the King. In the parable of the sower we see

Opposition

on the part of the enemy seeking to destroy the good seed sown. In the parable of the wheat and tares he is seen changing his tactics, and by

Imitation

of the true he endeavours to rob the Lord of the Harvest as he scatters broadcast "the darnel" (a spurious wheat) with the true corn. By his wiles and machinations he is seen in the parable of the mustard tree uniting the real and the unreal. The

Amalgamation

of the two is seen in the fact that the very birds which sought to devour the seed in the first parable now find a dwelling-place in the branches of the wide-spreading tree. Then follows the final state as set forth in the parable of the leaven.

Corruption

characterising all. The woman secretly hides the leaven in the three measures of meal which works silently, but

only too effectually, until the whole becomes leavened. The leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees was insidiously mixed with the doctrines of grace, and soon the leaven of false doctrine and of evil practice became only too manifest, and is patent to our gaze in nominal Christianity to-day.

Again, in that great prophecy uttered by the Lord Jesus on Mount Olivet, as recorded in Matthew 24. 25, we read of "love decreasing" and of "iniquity increasing." While a sceptical world outside sneeringly asks "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3. 4), the false and worldly Church inside says "My Lord delayeth His coming" (Matt. 24. 48). They cannot altogether deny it, but they seek to delay it, and they are soon found eating and drinking with the drunken, and smiting with the tongue and with the pen those who seek to withstand them. The natural sequence is seen in the following parable of the ten virgins, "they all slumbered and slept," both wise and foolish.

The enemy's opiates had been indulged in, and the world's cradle had been enjoyed, thus the great adversary succeeded in rocking all to sleep. The true saints soon grew weary of watching for their Lord, and tired of waiting for His return, and so settled down upon their lees, and sought for ease and glory where Christ their Lord is not.

The apostle Paul foresaw the dark clouds gathering on the Church's horizon as he bade farewell to the saints at Ephesus, forewarning his hearers of the sad condition of things which would set in after his departure, and commending them to the unchanging God and to His immutable Word. Writing to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, he plainly predicts a grievous departure from the faith (1 Tim. 4. 1), and in his second letter clearly describes the terrible outcome of this fearful departure which is so apparent in our midst. Men have turned away from the faith and are turned unto fables. Romanism, Rationalism, and Spiritualism are doing their blighting, blasting work. Higher Criticism and New Theologianism are withering up true Spiritualism, and sowing broadcast the seeds of Indifferentism and Carnalism. Campbellism, Russellism, Eddyism, and other modern isms are all paving the way for the Antichrist to bring in

The Final Stage of the Apostasy.

Intellect is worshipped, man is deified, and the Eternal God is humanised. Earth is exalted and Heaven is neglected. The Word of God is brought to the bar of human reason and condemned as fallible and faulty. The miraculous is denied. The virgin birth of our Lord is simply ridiculed; His vicarious death is scornfully rejected; His victorious resurrection is insidiously explained away; and the great verity of eternal judgment is ruled out of court and unhesitatingly denied.

God's verities are set aside for man's vanities. Divine revelation is supplanted by human tradition. Thus the foundation truths are impiously attacked and daringly undermined; old paths are willingly forsaken; ancient landmarks are ruthlessly removed, and God is politely bowed out of His own creation. And all these things are found among those who nominally profess the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The "falling away" has set in; the final Apostasy is rapidly developing. Men are being prepared to receive Satan's lie and to worship his masterpiece, which will be set up at the end of the age (Rev. 13).

The same solemn testimony is given by Peter in his Second Epistle, and by Jude in the letter which immediately precedes the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is also further emphasised by the Holy Spirit in the last letters to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2 and 3). He "whose eyes are as a flame of fire" still walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. His omniscient gaze sees beneath the surface, and He discovers the professing Church leaving her first love. He declares what the result of this will really be. That "desirable" thing seen at Ephesus drifts into that "detestable" thing seen at Laodicea, which the Lord will spew out of His mouth.

This dark picture of a corrupt Christianity is again brought before us in deeper shades and in yet darker colours in Revelation 17. 18. That which professes to be the Chaste Bride of a Holy Christ is described as "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth." She is represented as a shameless woman, the great whore, sustained by and guiding the scarlet-coloured beast, drunken with the blood of saints, intoxicating kings and nations with the wine of her fornications, corrupt and corrupting all around. No wonder that John "marvelled with great astonishment" to see her in her true character and to read her past history. She is found to be the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. In her is found "the

blood of all the saints," from Abel downwards. Here, then, we behold God's prophetic picture of the

Full Blown Apostasy

which will meet its righteous doom at the hands of God. We see things around fast drifting in this direction.

Men are devising means to bring about a "universal religion," an "ideal Christianity." This is to embrace Romanism and Protestantism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism, Theosophy and New Theology—all are to be amalgamated into one vast religious system.

This is "the Church of the future" of which men are dreaming, and which will one day be brought about under the direction and decree of the man of sin, when the image is set up, and the proclamation goes forth "that all that dwell" upon the earth shall worship the beast "(Rev. 13.8).

As we look upon

II. THE WORLDLY WORLD,

what evident signs are seen of its approaching crisis! Our Lord's words are being verified before our eyes: "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be" (Luke 17. 26). There is to be a striking parallelism between the end of that dispensation and the close of the present age. The antediluvian age closed with human apostasy and with divine judgment.

God's solemn warning to the world of its approaching judgment was ignored then, even as the warning of its impending doom is ridiculed to-day. The gracious provision which God made for them in that day to escape the

deluge was despised, even so we find a corresponding state of things in this day. The theory of such a catastrophe would be probably viewed by them as "Noah's fad," and the ark he built would be referred to as "Noah's folly."

The whole thing was contrary to reason and religion, for God is "a God of love and pity." The theory of such an event was diametrically opposed to the laws of nature. Science was against it—it would not and could not be. They thus gave themselves up to eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. These things were legitimate in their place, and right in themselves as ordained by God, but wrong in the way they were being used by them. God was shut out of it all.

There was no recognition of God, and no regard for the things of eternity. The things of time bounded their vision, they were engrossed with the passing and the perishing, and neglected that which was paramount and eternal. Blinded by unbelief, living in sin, steeped in self-gratification, and intoxicated with self-glorification, the judgment took them unawares, and there was no escape.

Again our Lord says: "As it was in the days of Lot, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (Luke 17. 28). We are told by the prophet that pride, luxurious living, lasciviousness and licentiousness marked those days which transformed the cities of the plain into a terrible plague-spot on God's fair earth which He had to purify with fire from Heaven. They too were self-centred, not wishing to retain God in their thoughts, wherefore God gave them over to judgment. So shall it be with this present thoughtless age and godless generation.

Think how the Name of God is being dishonoured and blasphemed and His Day desecrated. God's claim from men of one day in seven is altogether disregarded by the many. All kinds of Sunday entertainments and amusements abound, which tend to keep men and women from thinking of what is due to God, or considering their latter end. Sunday leagues are formed, Sunday bands are engaged, the cinema is crowded, and the concert is eagerly sought after. The Lord's day is made the special time for recreation and pleasure. The football field, the tennis court, the croquet and the golf links are unblushingly freground, quented. Excursions by road, rail, and river are lavishly advertised and greatly patronised. No marvel we have to mourn over depleted churches, empty chapels, sparsely attended halls, and indifference increasing on every hand.

Young and old have neither time nor taste for spiritual things or eternal matters. The Club usurps the place of the Church, and the Hotel rivals with the Home. Lives are blasted, divorce courts are crowded, and family life is broken up. And shall not God, the Judge of all the earth, visit men for these things? Verily, I say unto you, "He will." There is now a sinning world and a silent God, but ere long "our God shall come, and will not keep silence." He will break the silence of ages and speak in solemn wrath and righteous indignation (Psa. 50. 3).

What unrest and uncertainty marks

III. THE COMMERCIAL WORLD!

Who can be trusted? In what can we place confidence? Men are making haste to be rich. At all costs they must

make money. By fraud or force, by cutting down or crushing under, by grinding or by gambling, they are determined to amass wealth. The golden image is worshipped, and gold becomes the god of many. The "mighty dollar" forms the silver shrine of the modern "Diana," which is greedily sought after and tenaciously held.

Large companies are floated having prominent names on their prospectuses, promising high interest and quick returns, and so deceiving the innocent and beguiling the unwary. Newspapers soon report "A Big Swindle," "A Gigantic Fraud." Men are ruined, widows sigh, and orphans cry. The bitter wail ascends unto the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and the crushed and broken-hearted are exhorted to "be patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5. 4-7). As the Righteous Judge, our Lord will one day right these wrongs, and repay vengeance to all those who have so cruelly robbed and wantonly ruined the poor and the needy (Rom. 12. 19).

Think also of the fearful tension that exists between employers and employees. Matters are being strained between master and man to a most dangerous degree, both in this land and in other countries. The conflict between capital and labour is getting more bitter. Combinations are confronted by combinations in fierce array. Capitalist Trusts and Trade Unions oppose each other menacingly. Confederations and Combines threaten to swamp the small tradesman, and ruin the man of small capital. Badges and buttons are being multiplied and flauntingly exhibited, thus preparing the way for "the mark of the beast" to be introduced, when a state of universal "boycotting" will be

established by the Antichrist, Satan's "coming man." The proclamation will then go forth that "no man shall buy or sell save he that hath the mark, or the name, of the beast, or the number of his name" (Rev. 13. 17). Verily, coming events do indeed cast their shadows before them in this case. Yet, alas! men perceive it not, because the god of this age hath blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4. 4).

Ferment and fear are the marked features of

IV. THE POLITICAL WORLD.

The arena of politics is full of disquietude and lawlessness. Clamour and confusion are rampant everywhere. What a bitter party spirit is manifested. What "Babel" sounds are heard amid the strife of tongues. Leader denounces leader; party decrys party. Government for the people and by the people is the cry of the many. Democracy is opposed to Monarchy. The masses combat the classes. The cry becomes more and more distinct: "Down with the Throne, and down with the Crown, and stand for the rights of the people." The prophet Daniel's Pictorial Prophecy is being realised most vividly as the days go by.

The various metals of which the vast image was composed deteriorate. The head of gold has passed away; the shoulders of silver are no more; the thighs of brass have disappeared; and now in its final stage we see the feet composed "part of iron and part of clay." Never was

The Cry of Democracy

so conspicuous as in the opening years of this twentieth century. The tide of democratic lawlessness is rising

higher every year, defying all authority. Its gathering forces are ready to sweep away all human bounds and barriers. The socialistic spirit of revolution is gaining strength in every land, in the various forms of Socialism, Communism, Nihilism, Anarchism, and Anti-Christianism, and it is fast preparing to strike its effective blow against all authority.

The gentler sex are clamouring for a place in public matters, and to be on a par with the man. Home is deserted, family life is neglected, the law is defied, and reckless conduct and satanic acts are taking the place of "that meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3. 4), and which wields such a mighty influence among men.

Then as we look at

V. THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD,

how full of meaning are the prophet's words: "Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12. 4). By science and engineering skill time and space are being annihilated, delays and dangers are being reduced to a minimum. The telephone has linked up cities, the telegraph has joined countries, express trains and swift ocean steamers have united continents, gigantic railway schemes and costly canals are ere long to bring together all nations, cablegrams and wireless messages keep the world in touch. Never was there such a day! Never were there such inventions! Man has belted the globe with electricity, and he is putting bit and bridle on the forces of nature so as to govern air, earth, and sea.

Sovereigns and Statesmen Perplexed. 15

What signs, too, of the approaching end of the age are manifested among the nations of the earth or

VI. THE INTERNATIONAL WORLD.

How our Lord's words, recorded in Luke 21. 25-27, are being rapidly and manifestly fulfilled: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations with perplexity. The sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon earth: for the powers of Heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." The Lord thus clearly foretells "distress among the nations of the earth."

To-day we behold the sea of national unrest, both at home and abroad, and hear the roaring of the swelling waves of lawlessness. Nations are instraits and difficulties. Sovereigns are perplexed at the present state of things, and statesmen are at their wit's end to know how to control the ever-increasing force of

"The Will of the People."

In all circles are seen "men's hearts failing them for fear." A state of grave anxiety and of dark foreboding exists in every sphere of society. Peace is advocated, arbitration urgently recommended by philanthropists and peace propagandists without effect. Universal peace is the goal of potentates and of politicians, yet war on a gigantic scale is being prepared for, although it is universally dreaded. Huge armies are increased, and powerful fleets are

European armaments. What is the meaning of all these deadly engines of war being multiplied? What the result of every effort to arrest the constant progress of militarism? What do all these mutterings and murmurings of depression and distress mean as they rise from every land? Surely they are omens of the final, deadly struggle.

Look at the difficulties of "the submerged tenth," the ever-increasing army of the unemployed, of the helpless masses of poverty and suffering in our large cities and overcrowded towns.

How quickly can the form of all present governments be overthrown, and a vast continental revolution take place. In what a short time can the whole map of Europe be changed and the Ten Kingdoms set up, as most assuredly they will be (Rev. 13. 17). European nations are armed to the teeth and ready to fly at each others throat in deadly strife at the least provocation. King and Kaiser, Czar and Sultan, Princes and Presidents are crying, "Peace, peace," and yet we see each Government competing for the mastery in Dreadnoughts and Destroyers, in Submarines and Military Aeroplanes, and all other fearful weapons of warfare by sea and by land.

What does all this mean? Why this enormous activity?

Whither are We Drifting?

We see Japan leaping suddenly to the front. Hoary China has awakened from a sleep of centuries and is recasting its form of government. Ancient Persia has been aroused from the slumber of ages and is adopting Western ideas.

Things are rapidly shaping for the great final struggle between the Eastern and the Western worlds. Armageddon looms in the near future, when Palestine will be the battle-field of the world, and the valley of Jehoshaphat become the "Waterloo" of all nations.

Then as we raise our eyes and behold

VII. THE JEWISH PEOPLE,

how many and how manifest the signs that the sands of the hour-glass of this age are wellnigh run out. Our Lord foretold that Palestine was "to be trodden under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21. 24). That land which is still called "their land" has been for wellnigh nineteen hundred years under the heel of the Gentile powers. The Romans, the Saracens, the Crusaders, and the Turks have held it from that time to this. But now we see the Jews returning to that land as never before from the time of their dispersion. Centuries before they were scattered God had said by the prophet Amos, "I will bring again the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink of the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their own land, and they shall be no more pulled up out of their land, which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (Amos 9. 14). God is preserving that people for that land, and He is reserving that land for that people. To-day we behold "the fig-tree putting forth her tender shoots," a proof that Israel's summer time of national blessing is near at hand.

The Valley of Vision

is full of life and activity, a remarkable movement is going on among the hitherto "dry bones" of the house of Israel. Never was there such a movement made among that people during the last eighteen hundred years. The last twenty years have witnessed what the past eighteen centuries have not seen.

The Jewish people once more making a great effort to re-establish themselves as a nation on the earth. Fifty years ago a Jew was not allowed to live within the walls of Jerusalem, but to-day there are over fifty thousand Jews residing in the city. The Jewish Colonisation Society has been steadily and actively engaged in sending these people back to the land of their fathers, and now there are over fifty thousand Jews dwelling in Palestine, busily engaged tilling the soil. A modern railway runs into Jerusalem, and a contract has recently been signed to construct an electric tramway system within the walls of the Holy City.

New ports have had to be opened up in order to cope with the rising tide of immigration. Steamers bringing Jewish emigrants are continually arriving. A little while ago land in Palestine could not be owned by a Jew. But to-day that restriction is removed, the Jews own large tracts of the country, and the value of the land has been quadrupled.

Jewish colonies have been formed in order to cultivate the land, and many acres are now under cultivation. One colony alone has planted over three hundred thousand fruit trees. Millions of young vines have been ordered from other countries, and are now flourishing in Palestine. and will soon cover its hills with beauty and fill its valleys with fruit.

The Latter Rain,

which for centuries had been withheld, has returned during recent years, so that the once "desolate land" is rapidly becoming "a fruitful field." The desolation and barrenness of ages is passing away. The rainfall for the ten years, 1861-1870, was twenty-one inches; during the next ten years it increased to twenty-four inches; the following ten years it rose to twenty-eight inches; and during the last ten years it has risen to twenty-nine inches.

Surely the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel's covenant-keeping God, has not forgotten His promise or departed from His purpose, but is once more returning to that people and beginning to bless their land. Zionism is becoming a power in the earth, and has to be reckoned with among the nations. Its motto is: "Palestine for the Jews, and the Jews for Palestine." Other sites have been offered to them to colonise, but these have been all refused—it must be Palestine. This movement has for its object the sending back of this people as a united nation to their own land.

Some significant indications of the progress being made in the Holy Land are given by an accredited authority: "Under the new regime a city government has been elected in Jerusalem, and before being chosen promises were made of water works and a sewage system for the city. Land that was worth a penny a square foot a few years ago cannot now be bought for three shillings; the rise in price being made by the demand for building purposes in the city.

Farm lands that could not be formerly sold are now eagerly purchased. A harbour is being projected at Jaffa, and in some of the farm colonies the American reaping machine can be seen at work."

In all this we have clear and conclusive evidence of the near return of our Lord from Heaven. The eastern sky is growing bright and glorious with the rays of the rising "Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4. 1). By its light we see the day approaching, and we may well "lift up our heads, knowing that our redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21. 28).

Yet with all the marks of gloom, herein is one thing in which all true hearts will rejoice—

The Whole World is Open

to the Messengers of the Cross. Never was there such an evangelistic spirit manifest among the people of God since apostolic days as now. Such missionary enterprise and aggressive Gospel work has not been witnessed since those early times as during the last century. A hundred years ago far more than one-half of the world was closed to the Gospel, but to-day, with the possible exceptions of Afghanistan and Tibet the whole world is open to those who bring glad tidings of peace.

Even from those lands whose frontiers have seldom been crossed by missionaries, many of the natives have come out to their mission hospitals, and have not only received remedies for the body, but have heard of God's great remedy for the soul. Copies of the Scriptures have been given to them to carry back to their own country, as they have returned to tell others of the wonderful things of God which they have both seen and heard.

Thus our Lord's words are fast being fulfilled: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24. 14). Observe, it is not for the conversion of all nations, but for a witness unto them.

In all this we see the last stage of the great supper entered upon (Luke 14. 16). Not only do the streets and lanes of our cities ring with the Gospel message, and the highways and the byways of our country are made to echo with the story of redeeming love and grace, but we see the blood-stained banner of the Cross planted on the islands of the seas and carried to the ends of the earth. Countries which were once inaccessible to the heralds of the Cross have thrown open their doors, and a vast army of godly men and devoted women have obeyed the marching orders of our great Commander: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16. 15). Vast continents have recently been opened to the ambassadors of Christ, and these hitherto unknown regions are being penetrated by the messengers of the King of kings, bearing the invitation to God's great supper of grace.

"The Fulness of the Gentiles"

is thus being speedily gathered in, when the present dispensation will end and the next will begin. Then shall the vail of unbelief be taken from Jewish hearts, the covering of pride and prejudice will be removed from their eyes, and "they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced," mourn for their many sins, welcome Him as their Messiah, and worship Him as their God.

These things are at our very doors. Therefore, "knowing the time," and "seeing the day approaching," it behoves us to gird our loins the tighter, and let our light shine the brighter, so shall we have our Master's smile of approval during the little while of His absence, and then hear His gracious word of commendation at His return: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25. 21).

Perhaps some one may read this who is not a real Christian, "not born again" (John 3. 3, 7). If so, suffer a final word. There is still a seated Christ at God's right hand, and as long as He sits there there is an open door for the sinner to God's great supper. The invitation comes once more to you:

"Come, for All Things are Now Ready."

But when once the Master of the house rises up He will shut to the door, and for all those who will then be shut out there will be nothing "but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10. 27). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16. 31). Do it now, for—

"Day is declining, and the sun is low,
The shadows lengthen, light makes haste to go;
Room, room, still room, O enter, enter now!
How soon that door may close and seal thy doom,
Then the last, low, long cry, 'No room! no room!'
OH, WOEFUL CRY, 'NO ROOM!'"

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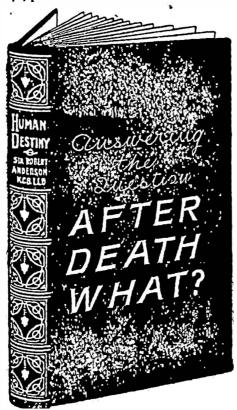
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