

THE AMERICAN LODESTONE

World War II brought an end to a brief flurry in the publication of "future fiction in Britain," according to I. F. Clarke's study. From a peak of nearly thirty books a year in 1934 and 1935, the number of books published plummeted from just over fifteen a year in 1938 and 1939 to five in 1940 and, except for a brief jump to eleven in 1943, remained in that vicinity until 1947.

British SF and fantasy magazines were launched in 1937 and 1938, but *Tales of Wonder* published only sixteen issues between 1937-42, and *Fantasy* suspended publication with the outbreak of war until a brief revival in 1946-47. Even those stories that got published earned little money. Like U.S. writers but more so, British authors turned to SF part-time and for love, not profit.

To be sure, the publication of SF books in the U.S. was even less promising than in Britain. Except for the science-fantasy adventures of Edgar Rice Burroughs and the occasional non-generic work by Huxley or Stapledon and a brief fling by mainstream publishers in 1938-39, no SF books were published between 1926 and 1945. But SF magazine publication spurred from four at the beginning of 1938 to eighteen by 1940. Even though U.S. entry into the war in late 1941 diverted editors and authors into the war effort and publication dropped, opportunities to publish were plentiful and payment was at the rate of ½ cent to a cent a word, sometimes on acceptance.

This was the period when John Russell Fearn wrote to William F. Temple, "It takes [us] British guys to put it over, huh?" And Mike Ashley added, "There was no doubt that any and every British writer could take America by storm." Many of them did, including Eric Frank Russell and John Wyndham. More

importantly for the history of British SF, perhaps, was the fact that British writers were compelled by publishing circumstances to look to the American magazines and to shape their fiction to American tastes. In many cases, British education or the British literary tradition had developed their writing skills but they were aiming their work at American consumption.

The bigger and better-paying American market also attracted writers who had little to do with the SF magazines. In the 1930s and early 1940s, the general magazines like *Collier's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *American*, *Esquire*, *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and an entire range of women's magazines were publishing substantial amounts of fiction and non-fiction, and paying well, and the book market welcomed fantastic material that avoided the taint of the pulps.

One British writer drawn to the American scene was John Collier (1901-80), who wrote elegant fantasy, suspense, and horror stories, many of them small gems, that were published in the best magazines, often *The New Yorker*. He, like a number of others, moved physically to the U.S. and spent many years in Hollywood as a screenwriter, working on such scripts as *The African Queen*. Many of his stories approached SF by way of their rational tone, and he wrote one post-disaster SF novel, *Tom's A-Cold* (1933). A counterpart in the succeeding generation was Roald Dahl (1916-1990), who spent much of his life in the U.S. but stuck closely to the fantastic vein.

Less well known than either but more central to the SF tradition was Henry Fitzgerald Heard (1889-1971), who wrote under the name of H. F. Heard and Gerald Heard. According to one reference work, he used the initials for his mystery and weird fiction, "Gerald" for his other work, which was largely non-fiction about philosophy, religion, and the Vedantist cult of which he was a disciple.

After taking a degree in history at Cambridge and post-graduate work in philosophy, Heard worked with the Agricultural Cooperative Movement in Ireland and England, lectured at Oxford, served as science commentator for BBC radio for five years, and moved to the U.S. in 1937. He wrote four mystery novels and only two science fantasy novels, *Doppelgangers* (1948) and *The Black Fox* (1950). His contributions to the genre were principally at the short-story length, which he contributed occasionally to SF markets such as the original anthologies and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, but mostly to slick magazines and his own collections, *The Great Fog and Other Weird Tales* (1944) and *The Lost Cavern and Other Tales of the Fantastic* (1948). "The Great Fog" was a throwback to the tradition of the "cosy" English catastrophe with its emphasis on human character.

Heard lived in southern California at the time of his death, the last survivor of the scientist-philosopher group that included George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, and Julian and Aldous Huxley, all occasional writers of SF.

THE GREAT FOG

BY

H. F.

HEARD

The first symptom was a mildew.

Very few people have ever looked carefully at such "molds"; indeed, only a specialized branch of botanists knows about them. Nor is this knowledge—except rarely—of much use. Every now and then a low growth of this sort may attack a big cash crop. Then the mycologists, whose lifework is to study these spore growths, are called in by the growers. These botanists can sometimes find another mold which will eat its fellow. That closes the matter. The balance of life, which had been slightly upset, has been righted. It is not a matter of any general interest.

This particular mildew did not seem to have even that special importance. It did not, apparently, do any damage to the trees on which it grew. Indeed, most fruit growers never noticed it. The botanists found it themselves; no one called their attention to it. It was simply a form of spore growth different in its growth rate from any previously recorded. It did not seem to

do any harm to any other form of life. But it did do amazingly well for itself. It was not a new plant, but a plant with quite a new power of growth.

It was this fact which puzzled the botanists, or rather that special branch of the botanists, the mycologists. That was why they finally called in the meteorologists. They asked for "another opinion," as baffled doctors say. What made the mycologists choose the meteorologists for consultation was this: Here was a mildew which spread faster than any other mold had ever been known to grow. It flourished in places where such mildews had been thought incapable of growing. But there seemed to be no botanical change either in the mold or in the plants it grew on. Therefore the cause must be climatic: only a weather change could account for the unprecedented growth.

The meteorologists saw the force of this argument. They became interested at once. The first thing to do, they said, was to study the mildew, not as a plant, but as a machine, an indicator. "You know," said Sersen the weatherman to Charles the botanist (they had been made colleagues for the duration of the study), "the astronomers have a thing called a thermocouple that will tell the heat of a summer day on the equator of Mars. Well, here is a little gadget I've made. It's almost as sensitive to damp as the thermocouple is to heat."

Sersen spent some time rigging it up and then "balancing" it, as he called it. "Find the normal humidity and then see how much the damp at a particular spot exceeds that." But he went on fiddling about far longer than Charles thought an expert who was handling his own gadget should. He was evidently puzzled. And after a while he confessed that he was.

"Queer, very queer," said Sersen. "Of course, I expected to get a good record of humidity around the mold itself. As you say, it can't grow without that: it wouldn't be here unless the extra damp was here too. But, look here," he said, pointing to a needle that quivered near a high number on a scale. "That is the humidity actually around the mold itself—what we might expect, if a trifle high. That's not the surprise. It's *this*." He had swung the whole instrument on its tripod until it pointed a foot or more from the mold; for the tree they were studying was a newly attacked one and, as far as Charles had been able to discover, had on it only this single specimen of the mildew.

Charles looked at the needle. It remained hovering about the high figure it had first chosen. "Well?" he queried.

"Don't you see?" urged Sersen. "This odd high humidity is present not only around the mold itself but for more than a foot beyond."

"I don't see much to that."

"I see two things," snapped Sersen; "one's odd; the other's damned odd. The odd one anyone not blind would see. The other one is perhaps too big to be seen until one can stand well back."

"Sorry to be stupid," said Charles, a gentle-spoken but close-minded little fellow; "we botanists are small-scale men."

"Sorry to be a snapper," apologized Sersen. "But, as I suppose you've guessed, I'm startled. I've got a queer feeling that we're on the track of something big, yes, and something maybe moving pretty fast. The first odd thing isn't a complete surprise: it's that you botanists have shown us what could turn out to be a meteorological instrument more delicate and more accurate than any we have been able to make. Perhaps we ought to have been on the outlook for some such find. After all, living things are always the most sensitive detectors—can always beat mechanical instruments when they want to. You know about the mitogenetic rays given out by breeding seeds. Those rays can be recorded only by yeast cells—which multiply rapidly when exposed to the rays, thus giving an indication of their range and strength."

"Umph," said Charles. Sersen's illustration had been unfortunate, for Charles belonged to that majority of conservative botanists to whom the mitogenetic radiation was mere moonshine.

Sersen, again vexed, went on: "Well, whether you accept them or not, I still maintain that here we have a superdetector. This mildew can notice an increase in humidity long before any of our instruments. There's proof that something has changed in the climate. This mold is the first to know about it—and to profit by it. I prophesy it will soon be over the whole world."

"But your second discovery, or supposition?" Charles had no use for prophecy. These weathermen, he thought; well, after all, they aren't quite scientists, so one mustn't blame them, one supposes, for liking forecasts—forecasting is quite unscientific.

Charles was a courteous man, but Sersen was sensitive. "Well," he said defensively, "that's nothing but supposition." And yet, he thought to himself as he packed up his instrument, if it is true it may mean such a change that botany will be blasted and meteorology completely mystified. His small private joke relieved his temper. By the time they returned to headquarters he and Charles were friendly enough. They agreed to make a joint report which would stick severely to the facts.

Meanwhile, botanists everywhere were observing and recording the spreading of the mildew. Before long, they began to get its drift. It was spreading from a center, spreading like a huge ripple from where a stone has been flung into a

lake. The center, there could be no doubt, was eastern Europe. Spain, Britain, and North Africa showed the same "high incidence." France showed an even higher one. The spread of the mold could be watched just as well in North or South America. Such and such a percentage of shrubs and trees was attacked on the Atlantic coasts; a proportionately lower percentage on the Pacific coasts; but everywhere the incidence was rising. On every sector of the vast and widening circle, America, Africa, India, the mildew was advancing rapidly.

Sersen continued his own research on the mold itself, on the "field of humidity" around each plant. He next made a number of calculations correlating the rapid rate of dispersal, the average increase of infestation of all vegetation by the mold, and the degree of humidity which must result. Then, having checked and counterchecked, at last he was ready to read his paper and give his conclusions at a joint meeting of the plant men and the weathermen.

Just before Sersen went up to the platform, he turned to Charles. "I'm ready now to face the music," he said, "because I believe we are up against something which makes scientific respectability nonsense. We've got to throw caution aside and tell the world."

"That's serious," said Charles cautiously. "It's damned serious," said Sersen, and went up the steps to the rostrum.

When he came down, the audience was serious too; for a moment, as serious as he. He had begun by showing the world map with its spreading, dated lines showing where the mildew in its present profusion had reached; showing also where, in a couple of months, the two sides of the ripple would meet. Soon, almost every tree and shrub throughout the world would be infested, and, of course, the number of molds per tree and bush would increase. That was interesting and queer, but of no popular concern. The molds still remained harmless to their tree hosts and to animal life—indeed, some insects seemed rather happy about the botanical change. As far, then, as the change was only a change in mildew reproduction there was no cause for much concern, still less for alarm. The mold had gone ahead, because it was the first to benefit from some otherwise undetectable change in climate. The natural expectation would, then, be that insects, the host plants, or some other species of mold would in turn advance and so readjust the disturbed balance of nature.

But that was only the first part of Sersen's lecture. At that phrase, "balance of nature," he paused. He turned from the world map with its charting of the mold's growth. For a moment he glanced at another set of statistical charts; then he seemed to change his mind and touched the buzzer. The lights went

out, and the beam from the stereopticon shot down through the darkened hall. The lighted screen showed a tree; on its branches and trunk a number of red crosses had been marked. Around each cross was a large circle, so large that some of the circles intersected.

"Gentlemen," said Sersen, "this is the discovery that really matters. Until now, perhaps unwisely, I have hesitated to communicate it. That the mold spreads, you know. That it is particularly sensitive to some otherwise undetected change in the weather, you know. Now, you must know a third fact about it—it is a weather *creator*. Literally, it can brew a climate of its own.

"I have proved that in each of these circles—and I am sure they are spreading circles—the mold is going far to create its own peculiar atmosphere—a curiously high and stable humidity. The statistically arranged readings which I have prepared, and which I have here, permit, I believe, of no other conclusion. I would also add that I believe we can see why this has happened. It is now clear what permitted this unprecedented change to get under way. We have pulled the trigger that has fired this mine. No doubt the mold first began to increase because a slight change in humidity helped it. But now it is—how shall I put it—cooperating. It is *making the humidity increase*.

"There has probably been present, these past few years, one of those small increases in atmospheric humidity which occur periodically. In itself, it would have made no difference to our lives and, indeed, would have passed unperceived. But it was at this meteorological moment that European scientists began to succeed in making a new kind of quick-growing mold which could create fats. It is, perhaps, the most remarkable of all the war efforts; perhaps the most powerful of all the new defensive weapons—against a human enemy. But in regard to the extra-human world in which we live it may prove as dangerous as a naked flame in a mine chamber filled with firedamp. For, need I remind you, molds are spore-reproducing growths. Fungus is by far the strongest form of life. It breeds incessantly and will grow under conditions no other form of life will endure. When you play with spore life you may at any moment let loose something the sheer power of which makes dynamite look like a damp squib. I believe what man has now done is precisely that—he has let the genie out of its bottle, and we may find ourselves utterly helpless before it."

Sersen paused. The lights came on. Dr. Charles rose and caught the chairman's eye. Dr. Charles begged to state on behalf of the botanical world that he hoped Dr. Sersen's dramatic remarks would not be taken gravely by the press or the public. Dr. Sersen had spoken of matters botanical. Dr. Charles wished to say that he and his colleagues had had the mildew under protracted observation. He could declare categorically that it was not dangerous.

Sersen had not left the platform. He strode back to the rostrum. "I am not speaking as a botanist," he exclaimed, "I am speaking as a meteorologist. I have told you of what I am sure—the balance of life has been upset. You take for granted that the only balance is life against life, animal against animal, vegetable against vegetable. You were right to call in a weatherman, but that's of no use unless you understand what he is telling you."

The audience shifted offensively in its seats. It wasn't scientific to be as urgent as all that. Besides, hadn't Charles said there was no danger? But what was their queer guest now saying?

"I know, every meteorologist knows, that this nature-balance is far vaster and more delicately poised than you choose to suspect. All life is balanced against its environment. Cyclones are brought on, climate can change, a glacial age can begin as the result of atmospheric alterations far too small for the layman to notice. In our atmosphere, that wonderful veil and web under which we are sheltered and in which we grow, we have a condition of extraordinary delicacy. The right—or rather the precisely wrong—catalytic agent can send the whole thing suddenly into quite another arrangement, one which can well be desperately awkward for man. It has taken an amazing balance of forces to allow human beings to live. That's the balance you've upset. Look out."

He studied his audience. There they sat, complacent, assured, only a little upset that an overexcitable colleague should be behaving unscientifically—hysterically, almost. Suddenly, with a shock of despair, Sersen realized that it was no use hoping to stir these learned experts. These were the actual minds which had patiently, persistently, purblindly worked the very changes which must bring the house down on their heads. They'd never asked, never wished to ask, what might be the general and ultimate effects of their burrowing. We're just another sort of termite, thought Sersen, as he looked down on the rows of plump faces and dull-ivory-colored pates. We tunnel away trying to turn everything into "consumable goods" until suddenly the whole structure of things collapses round us.

He left the rostrum, submitted to polite thanks, and went home. A week later his botanical hosts had ceased even to talk about his strange manners. Hardly anyone else heard of his speech.

The first report of trouble—or rumor rather (for such natural-history notes were far too trivial to get into the battle-crammed papers)—came from orchard growers in deep valleys. Then fruit growers began to gossip when the Imperial Valley, hot and dry as hell, began to report much the same thing. It was seen at

night at the start and cleared off in the day; so it seemed no more than an odd, inconsequent little phenomenon. But if you went out at full moon you did see a queer sight. Every tree seemed to have a sort of iridescent envelope, a small white cloud or silver shroud all its own.

Of course, soon after that, the date growers had something to howl about. The dates wouldn't stand for damp—and each silver shroud was, for the tree about which it hung, a vapor bath. But the date growers, all the other growers decided, were done for anyway; they'd have made a howl in any case when the new Colorado water made the irrigation plans complete. The increase in humidity would inevitably spoil their crop when the valley became one great oasis.

The botanists didn't want to look into the matter again. Botanically, it was uninteresting. The inquiry had been officially closed. But the phenomenon continued to be noticed farther and farther afield.

The thing seemed then to reach a sort of saturation point. A new sort of precipitation took place. The cloud around each tree and bush, which now could be seen even during the day, would, at a certain moment, put out feeler-like wisps and join up with the other spreading and swelling ground clouds stretching out from the neighboring trees. Sersen, who had thrown up his official job just to keep track of this thing, described that critical night when, with a grim prophetic pleasure, he saw his forecast fulfilled before his eyes. His last moldering papers have remained just decipherable for his great-grandchildren.

"I stood," he said, "on a rock promontory south of Salton Sea. The full moon was rising behind me and lighted the entire Valley. I could see the orchards glistening, each tree surrounded by its own cloud. It was like a gargantuan dew; each dew-globule tree-size. And then, as I watched, just like a great tide, an obliterating flood of whiteness spread over everything. The globules ran into one another, until I was looking down on a solid sea of curd-white, far denser than mist or fog. It looked as firm, beautiful, and dead as the high moon which looked down on it. 'A new Deluge,' I said to myself. 'May I not ask who has been right? Did I not foretell its coming and did not I say that man had brought it on his own head?'"

Certainly Sersen had been justified. For, the morning after his vigil, when the sun rose, the Fog did not. It lay undisturbed, level, dazzling white as a sheet of snow-covered ice, throwing back into space every ray of heat that fell on it. The air immediately above it was crystal clear. The valley was submerged under an element that looked solid enough to be walked on. The change was evidently so complete because it was a double one, a sudden reciprocal process. All the

damp had been gathered below the Fog's surface, a surface as distinct as the surface of water. Conversely, all the cloud, mist, and aqueous vapor in the air above the Fog was evidently drained out of it by this new, dense atmosphere. It was as though the old atmosphere had been milk. The mold acted as a kind of rennet, and so, instead of milk, here remained only this hard curd and the clear whey. The sky above the Fog was not so much the deepest of blues—it was almost a livid black; the sun in it was an intense, harsh white and most of the big stars were visible throughout the day. So, outside the Fog it was desperately cold. At night it was agonizingly so. Under that cold the Fog lay packed dense like a frozen drift of snow.

Beneath the surface of the Fog, conditions were even stranger. Passing into it was like going suddenly into night. All lights had to be kept on all day. But they were not much use. As in a bad old-fashioned fog, but now to a far worse degree, the lights would not penetrate the air. For instance, the rays of a car's headlights formed a three-foot cone, the base of which looked like a circular patch of light thrown on an opaque white screen. It was possible to move about in the Fog, but only at a slow walking pace—otherwise you kept running into things. It was a matter of groping about, with objects suddenly looming up at you—the kind of world in which a severe myopic case must live if he loses his spectacles.

Soon, of course, people began to notice with dismay the Fog's effect on crops and gardens, on houses and goods. Nothing was ever again dry. Objects did not become saturated, but they were, if at all absorbent, thoroughly damp. Paper molded, wood rotted, iron rusted. But concrete, glass, pottery, all stoneware and ceramics remained unaffected. Cloth, too, served adequately, provided the wearer could stand its never being dry.

The first thought in the areas which had been first attacked was, naturally, to move out. But the Fog moved too. Every night some big valley area suddenly "went over." The tree fog around each tree would billow outward, join up with all its fellows, and so make a solid front and surface. Then came the turn for each fog-submerged valley, each fog-lake, to link with those adjacent to it. The general level of these lakes then rose. Instead of there being, as until now, large flooded areas of lowland, but still, in the main, areas of clear upland, this order was now reversed. The mountain ranges had become strings of islands which emerged from a shining ocean that covered the whole earth's surface, right up to the six-thousand-foot level.

Any further hope of air travel was extinguished. In the Fog, lack of visibility, of course, made it impossible. Above the Fog, you could see to the earth's edge:

the horizons, cleared of every modulation of mist, seemed so close that you would have thought you could have touched them with your hand. As far as sight was concerned, above the Fog, near and far seemed one. But even if men could have lived in that thin air and "unscreened" light, no plane could be sustained by it.

Sea travel was hardly more open. True, the surface of the oceans lay under the Fog-blanket, as still as the water, a thousand fathoms down. But on that oily surface—that utterly featureless desert of motionless water—peering man, only a few yards from the shore, completely lost his way. Neither sun nor stars ever again appeared over the sea to give him his bearings. So man soon abandoned the sea beyond the closest in-shore shallows. Even if he could have seen his way over the ocean, he could not have taken it. There was never a breath of wind to fill a sail, and the fumes from any steamship or motorboat would have hung around the vessel and would have almost suffocated the crew.

Retreat upward was cut off. For when the Fog stabilized at six thousand feet, it was no use of thinking of attempting to live above it. Even if the limited areas could have given footing, let alone feeding, to the fugitive populations, no hope lay in that direction. For the cold was now so intense above the Fog that no plant would grow. And, worse, it was soon found, to the cost of those who ventured out there, that through this unscreened air—air which was so thin that it could scarcely be breathed—came also such intense ultraviolet radiations from the sun and outer space that a short exposure to them was fatal.

So the few ranges and plateaus which rose above the six-thousand-foot level stood gaunt as the ribs of a skeleton carcass under the untwinkling stars and the white glaring sun. After a very few exploratory expeditions out into that open, men realized that they must content themselves with a sub-surface life, a new kind of fish existence, nosing about on the floor of a pool which henceforth was to be their whole world. It might be a poor, confined way of living, but above that surface was death. A few explorers returned, but, though fish taken out of water may recover if put back soon enough, every above-the-Fog explorer succumbed from the effect. After a few days the lesions and sores of bad X-ray burning appeared. If, after that, the nervous system did not collapse, the wretched man literally began to fall to pieces.

Underneath the Fog-blanket men painfully, fumblingly worked out a new answer to living. Of course, it had to be done without preparation, so the cost was colossal. All who were liable to rheumatic damage and phthisis died off. Only a hardy few remained. Man had been clever enough to pull down the atmosphere-roof which had hung so loftily over his head, but he never learned

again how to raise a cover as high, spacious, and pleasant as the sky's blue dome. The dividing-out of the air was a final precipitation, a nonreversible change-down toward the final entropy. Man might stay on, but only at the price of being for the rest of his term on earth confined under a thick film of precipitated air. Maybe, even if he had been free and had had the power to move fast and see far, it would have been too great a task for him to have attempted to "raise the air." As he now found himself, pinned under the collapse he had caused, he had not a chance of even beginning to plan such a vast reconstruction.

His job, then, was just to work at making lurking livable. And, within the limits imposed, it was not absolutely impossible. True, all his passion for speed and travel and seeing far and quick, all that had to go. He who had just begun to feel that it was natural to fly, now was confined not even to the pace of a brisk walk but to a crawl. It was a life on the lowest gear. Of course, great numbers died just in the first confusion, when the dark came on, before the permanent change in humidity and light swept off the other many millions who could not adapt themselves. But, after a while, not only men's health but their eyes became adapted to the perpetual dusk. They began to see that the gloom was not pitch-dark. Gradually, increasing numbers learned to be able to go about without lamps. Indeed, they found that they saw better if they cultivated this "nightsight," this ancient part of the eye so long neglected by man when he thought he was master of things. They were greatly helped also by a type of faint phosphorescence, a "cold-light," which (itself probably another mold-mutation) appeared on most surfaces if they were left untouched, and so outlined objects with faint, ghostly highlights.

So, as decentralized life worked itself out, men found that they had enough. War was gone, so that huge social hemorrhage stopped. Money went out of gear, and so that odd stranglehold on goods-exchange was loosed. Men just couldn't waste what they had, so they found they had much more than they thought. For one reason, it wasn't worth hoarding anything, holding back goods, real, edible, and wearable goods, for a rise in price. They rotted. The old medieval epitaph proved itself true in this new dark age: "What I spent I had: what I saved I lost." Altogether, life became more immediate and, what people had never suspected, more real because less diffused. It was no use having a number of things which had been thought to be necessities. Cars? You could not see to travel at more than four miles an hour, and not often at that. Radios? They just struck; either insulation against the damp was never adequate or the electric conditions, the radio-resonant layers of the upper atmosphere, had been completely altered. A wailing static was the only answer to any attempt to re-establish wireless communication.

It was a low-built, small-housed, pedestrian world. Even horses were too dashing; and they were blinder in the Fog than were men. As for your house, you could seldom see more than its front door. Metal was little used. Smelting it was troublesome (the fumes could hardly get away and nearly suffocated everyone within miles of a furnace), and when you got your iron and steel it began rusting at once. Glass knives were used instead. They were very sharp. Men learned again, after tens of thousands of years of neglect, how to flake flints, crystal, and all the silica rocks to make all manner of neat, sharp tools.

Man's one primary need, which had made for nearly all his hoarding, the animal craving to accumulate food stocks, that fear which, since the dawn of civilization, has made his granaries as vast as his fortresses, this need, this enemy, was wiped out by another freak botanical by-product of the Fog. The curious sub-fog climate made an edible fungus grow. It was a sort of manna. It rotted if you stored it. But it grew copiously everywhere, of itself. Indeed, it replaced grass: wherever grass had grown the fungus grew. Eaten raw, it was palatable and highly nutritious—more tasty and more wholesome than when cooked (which was a blessing in itself, since all fires burnt ill and any smoke was offensive in the dense air). Man, like the fishes, lived in a dim but fruitful element.

The mean temperature under the Fog stayed precisely at sixty-seven degrees Fahrenheit, owing, evidently, to some basic balance, like that which keeps the sea below a certain depth always at thirty-six degrees, four degrees above freezing. Men, then, were never cold.

They stayed mainly at home, around their small settlements. What was the use of going about? All you needed and could use was at your door. There was nothing to see—your view was always limited to four feet. There was no use in trying to seize someone else's territory. You all had the same: you all had enough.

Art, too, changed. The art of objects was gone. So a purer, less collectible art took its place. Books would not last; and so memory increased enormously, and men carried their libraries in their heads—a cheaper way and much more convenient. As a result, academic accuracy, the continual quoting of authorities, disappeared. A new epic age resulted. Men in the dusk composed, extemporized, jointly developed great epics, sagas, and choruses, which grew like vast trees, generation after generation, flowering, bearing fruit, putting out new limbs. And, as pristine, bardic poetry returned, it united again with its nursery foster-brother, music. Woodwinds and strings were ruined by the damp. But stone instruments, like those used by the dawn-cultures, returned—giving beautiful, pure notes. An orchestra of jade and marble flutes, lucid gongs, crystal-clear xylophones

grew up. Just as the Arabs, nomads out on the ocean of sand, had had no plastic art, but, instead, a wonderfully aural art of chant and singing verse, so the creative power of the men of the Umbral Epoch swung over from eye to ear. Indeed, the thick air which baffled the eye made fresh avenues and extensions for the ear. Men could hear for miles: their ears grew as keen as a dog's. And with this keenness went subtlety. They appreciated intervals of sound which to the old men of the open air would have been imperceptible. Men lived largely for music and felt they had made a good exchange when they peered at the last moldering shreds of pictorial art.

"Yes," said Sersen's great-grandson, when the shock of the change was over and mankind had accustomed itself to its new conditions, "yes, I suspect we were not fit for the big views, the vast world into which the old men tumbled up. It was all right to give animal men the open. But, once they had got power without vision, then either they had to be shut up or they would have shot and bombed everything off the earth's surface. Why, they were already living in tunnels when the Fog came. And out in the open, men, powerful as never before, nevertheless died by millions, died the way insects used to die in a frost, but died by one another's hands. The plane drove men off the fields. That was the thing, I believe, that made Mind decide we were not fit any longer to be at large. We were going too fast and too high to see what we were actually doing. So then, Mind let man fancy that all he had to do was to make food apart from the fields. That was the Edible Mold, and that led straight, as my great-grandfather saw, to the atmospheric upset, the meteorological revolution. It really was a catalyst, making the well-mixed air, which we had always taken for granted as the only possible atmosphere, divide out into two layers as distinct as water and air. We're safer as we are. Mind knew that, and already we are better for our Fog cure, though it had to be drastic.

"Perhaps, one day, when we have learned enough, the Fog will lift, the old high ceiling will be given back to us. Once more Mind may say: 'Try again. The Second Flood is over. Go forth and replenish the earth, and this time remember that you are all one.' Meanwhile I'm thankful that we are as we are."