

# I'm Scared

... because a struggle against the barrier of time is already taking place; time is breaking down. I think it's important that you should know about it

By JACK FINNEY

I'M VERY badly scared, not so much for myself—I'm a gray-haired man of sixty-six, after all—but for you and everyone else who has not yet lived out his life. For I believe that certain dangerous things have recently begun to happen in the world. They are noticed here and there, idly discussed, then dismissed and forgotten. Yet I am convinced that unless these occurrences are recognized for what they are, the world will be plunged into a nightmare. Judge for yourself.

One evening last winter I came home from a chess club to which I belong. I'm a widower; I live alone in a small but comfortable three-room apartment overlooking lower Fifth Avenue. It was still fairly early, and I switched on a lamp beside my leather easy chair, picked up a murder mystery I'd been reading, and turned on the radio; I did not, I'm sorry to say, notice which station it was tuned to.

The tubes warmed, and the music of an accordion—faint at first, then louder—came from the loud-speaker. Since it was good music for reading, I adjusted the volume control and began to read.

Now, I want to be absolutely factual and accurate about this, and I do not claim that I paid close attention to the radio. But I do know that presently the music stopped and an audience applauded. Then a man's voice, chuckling and pleased with the applause, said, "All right, all right," but the applause continued for several more seconds. During that time the voice once more chuckled appreciatively, then firmly repeated, "All right," and the applause died down. "That was Alec Somebody-or-other," the radio voice said, and I went back to my book.

But I soon became aware of this middle-aged voice again; perhaps a change of tone as he turned to a new subject caught my attention. "And now, Miss Ruth Greeley," he was saying, "of Trenton, New Jersey. Miss Greeley is a pianist; that right?" A girl's voice, timid and barely audible, said, "That's right, Major Bowes." The man's voice—and now I recognized his familiar singsong delivery—said, "And what are you going to play?" The girl replied, "La Paloma." The man repeated it after her, as an announcement: "La Paloma." There was a pause, then an introductory chord sounded from a piano, and I resumed my reading.

As the girl played, I was half aware that her style was mechanical, her rhythm defective; perhaps she was nervous. Then my attention was fully aroused once more by a gong which sounded suddenly. For a few notes more the girl continued to play falteringly, not sure what to do. The gong sounded jarringly again, the playing abruptly stopped and there was a restless murmur from the audience. "All right, all right," said the now familiar voice, and I realized I'd been expecting this, knowing it would say just that. The audience quieted, and the voice began, "Now—"

The radio went dead. For the smallest fraction of a second no sound issued from it but its own mechanical hum. Then a completely different program came from the loud-speaker; the recorded voices of Bing Crosby and his son were singing the concluding bars of Sam's Song, a favorite of mine. So I returned once more to my reading, wondering vaguely what had happened to the other program, but not actually thinking about it until I finished my book and began to get ready for bed.

Then, undressing in my bedroom, I remembered that Major Bowes was dead. Years had passed, half a decade, since that dry chuckle and familiar, "All right, all right," had been heard in the nation's living rooms.

WELL, what does one do when the apparently impossible occurs? It simply made a good story to tell friends, and more than once I was asked if I'd recently heard Moran and Mack, a pair of radio comedians popular some twenty-five years ago, or Floyd Gibbons, an old-time news broadcaster. And there were other joking references to my crystal radio set.

But one man—this was at a lodge meeting the following Thursday—listened to my story with utter seriousness, and when I had finished he told me a queer little story of his own. He is a thoughtful, intelligent man, and as I listened I was not frightened, but puzzled at what seemed to be a connecting link, a common denominator, between this story and the odd behavior of my radio. The following day, since I am retired and have plenty of time, I took the trouble of making a two-hour train trip to Connecticut in order to verify the story at firsthand. I took detailed notes, and the (Continued on page 78)

ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID STONE MARTIN



"This guy shows up in the middle of the street, gawking at the cars and signs like he'd never seen any of them before"

*David Stone Martin*

# ADVISING THE BIG

Peace after World War I left much of Europe in chaos. Transportation broke down, typhus broke out, the Reds spread dissension. So Allied leaders turned to the Food Administrator for help

By HERBERT HOOVER

## VI

**A**MERICANS have always thought of "relief" and "rehabilitation" in terms of the case-worker methods of our city charities. On the contrary, the relief and rehabilitation work which I directed in Europe immediately after the first World War was akin to a gigantic and constantly shifting jigsaw puzzle.

In the midst of continent-wide chaos, we had, day by day, to find and buy huge quantities of food in eight countries from over seven seas; to find the cash or credit to do so; to fight for shipping, and to program it to keep the flow of supplies constant to a score of countries; to unload, store, distribute and account for these supplies; to dispute with dumbbells and listen to hourly advice from the well-meaning but uninformed; to conciliate the hurt feelings of our Allies; to co-ordinate supplies with them and the neutrals; to temper the ideas of the military authorities; to rebuild ports, railways, communications and coal resources; to restore jobs; to stiffen weak governments in countries where the frail plant of democracy struggled to survive.

Somehow, our Paris headquarters always seemed mechanical and inhuman. In that converted apartment house at 51 Avenue Montaigne there were 50 offices full of men, mostly in American Army and Navy uniform, working a 112-hour week amid the clatter of typewriters, adding machines and telegraph instruments. There were the walls covered with ocean maps on which, each morning, little flags showed where our hundreds of ships were,

and where they were going. There were the charts of a score of countries, showing their food stocks and what they would need in the next month.

There were no photographs of starving children, no evidences that all this machinery had to do with human suffering, the future of nations, hopes of freedom and prayers for peace.

Yet beyond the dull routine of administration, our fight against famine, pestilence, and political and economic degeneration was made up of a thousand human stories.

Across our reconstruction stage—always against a backdrop of starving and destitute people—marched a sort of unending, formless procession of conspirators, kings, queens, soldiers, revolutionaries, terrorists, and sometimes idealists. There was liberalism, imperialism, Socialism, Communism; wanton execution, murder and suicide; invading armies and falling ministries. There was tragedy—and sometimes comic relief.

No nation had ever before undertaken a mission such as the United States now faced. Many of our Americans were men who in civil life had never dealt with governmental problems. Yet they showed a grasp and a common sense which won respect and personal affection wherever they went. Many of them decided the fate of millions, always to the benefit of those millions. Never was there such an exhibit of the power of the American way of life as these 2,500 inexperienced men displayed.

One aftermath of total war was total railway chaos, especially in the vanquished states. The

Central European railways had been built as consolidated government-owned systems within the old Austrian, German and Russian Empires. Now they were chopped up into 18 systems under as many governments. At the birth of the new states with the Armistice, each government had created a Minister of Railways, whose chief mission was to grab all rolling stock he could lay hands on.

No government would allow cars and locomotives to go over frontiers for fear they would never come back. Some states had too big a share, some too little. Some cities in a given country could not be reached from other parts of the same country without the crossing of new foreign boundaries. All tracks and rolling stock were run-down.

We tackled this problem early in January, 1919, by organizing a Railway Section under Colonel W. G. Atwood, with other Army men who in private life were experienced railway men.

We assigned one man to each of the 18 liberated and enemy governments, and requested each government concerned to allow its cars, and in some cases locomotives, to move over frontiers to the destination of their loads. I undertook to guarantee return of the rolling stock. They all accepted this guarantee; to assure the return, we placed at each frontier crossing an American officer who checked the cars passing in each direction.

Our next move was to get surplus cars and locomotives in one country sold to other countries which were short. Some of these trades were carried out, but the quality of rolling stock delivered



Romania's Queen Marie accused Mr. Hoover of slighting her nation, abused him in a letter



The American Relief Commission for Czechoslovakia, photographed with samples of food donated in U.S. Mr. Hoover established relief and rehabilitation organizations in 28 countries

Collier's for September 15, 1951