



JUDGMENT DAY

IT TOOK ME a long time to decide whether to let the earth live. Some might think this an easy decision. Well, it was and it wasn't. I wanted one thing, while the mores of my culture said to do the other.

This is a decision that few have to make. Hitler might give orders for the execution of ten million, and Stalin orders that would kill another ten million. But neither could send the world up in a puff of flame by a few marks on a piece of paper.

Only now has physics got to the point where such a decision is possible. Yet, with due modesty, I don't think my discovery was inevitable. Somebody might have come upon it later-say, in a few centuries, when such things might be better organized. My equation was far from obvious. All the last three decades' developments in flu. clear physics have pointed away from it.

My chain reaction uses iron, the last thing that would normally be employed in such a series. It's at the bottom of the atomic energy curve. Anything else can be made into iron with a release of energy, while it takes energy to make iron into anything else.

Really, the energy doesn't come from the iron, but from the-the other elements in the reaction. But the iron is necessary. It is not exactly a catalyst, as it is transmuted and then turned back into iron again, whereas a true catalyst remains unchanged. But the effect is the same. With iron so common in the crust of the earth, it should be possible to blow the entire crust off with one big poof.

I recall how I felt when I first saw these equations here in my office last month. I sat staring at my name on the glass of the door, "Dr. Wade Ormont," only it appears backwards from the inside. I was sure I had made a mistake. I checked and rechecked and calculated and recalculated. I went through my nuclear equations at least thirty times. Each time my heart, my poor old heart, pounded harder and the knot in my stomach grew tighter. I had enough sense not to tell anybody else in the department about my discovery.

I did not even then give up trying to find something wrong with my equations. I fed them through the computer in case there was some glaring, obvious error I had been overlooking. Didn't that sort of thing-a minus for a plus or something-once happen to Einstein? I'm no Einstein, even if I am a pretty good physicist, so it could happen to me.

However, the computer said it hadn't. I was right.

The next question was: what to do with these results? They would not help us toward the laboratory's objectives: more powerful nuclear weapons and more efficient ways of generating nuclear power. The routine procedure would be to write up a report. This would be typed and photostated and stamped "Top Secret." A few copies would be taken around by messenger to those who needed to know about such things. It would go to the AEC and the others. People in this business have learned to be pretty close-mouthed, but the knowledge of my discovery would still spread, even though it might take years.



I don't think the government of the United States would ever try to blow up the world, but others might. Hitler might have, if he had known how, when he saw he faced inevitable defeat. The present Commies are pretty cold-blooded calculators, but one can't tell who'll be running their show in ten or twenty years. Once this knowledge gets around, anybody with a reasonable store of nuclear facilities could set the thing off. Most would not, even in revenge for defeat. But some might threaten to do so as blackmail, and a few would actually touch it off if thwarted. What's the proportion of paranoids and other crackpots in the world's population? It must be high enough, as a good fraction of the world's rulers and leaders have been of this type. No government yet devised—monarchy, aristocracy, theocracy, timocracy, democracy, dictatorship, soviet, or what have you—will absolutely stop such people from coming to the top. So long as these tribes of hairless apes are organized into sovereign nations, the nuclear Ragnarok is not only possible but probable.

For that matter, am I not a crackpot myself, calmly to contemplate blowing up the world?

No. At least the psychiatrist assured me my troubles were not of that sort. A man is not a nut if he goes about gratifying his desires in a rational manner. As to the kind of desires, that's nonrational anyway. I have adequate reasons for wishing to exterminate my species. It's no high-flown, farfetched theory either; no religious mania about the sinfulness of man, but a simple, wholesome lust for revenge. Christians pretend to disapprove of vengeance, but that's only one way of looking at it. Many other cultures have deemed it right and proper, so it can't be a sign of abnormality.

For instance, when I think back over my fifty-three years, what do I remember? Well, take the day I first entered school.

I suppose I was a fearful little brute at six: skinny, stubborn, and precociously intellectual. Because my father was a professor, I early picked up a sesquipedalian way of speaking (which has been defined as a tendency to use words like "sesquipedalian"). At six I was sprinkling my conversation with words like "theoretically" and "psychoneurotic." Because of illnesses I was as thin as a famine victim, with just enough muscle to get me from here to there.

While I always seemed to myself a frightfully good little boy whom everyone picked on, my older relatives in their last years assured me I was nothing of the sort, but the most intractable creature they ever saw. Not that I was naughty or destructive. On the contrary, I meticulously obeyed all formal rules and regulations with a zeal that would have gladdened the heart of a Prussian drill sergeant. It was that in those situations that depend, not on formal rules, but on accommodating oneself to the wishes of others, I never considered any wishes but my own. These I pursued with fanatical singlemindedness. As far as I was concerned, other people were simply inanimate things put into the world to minister to my wants. 'What they thought I neither knew nor cared.

Well, that's my relatives' story. Perhaps they were prejudiced too. Anyway, when I entered the first grade in a public school in New Haven, the fun started the first day. At recess a couple grabbed my cap for a game of "siloochee." That meant that they tossed the cap from one to the other while the owner leaped this



way and that like a hooked fish trying to recover his headgear.

After a few minutes I lost my temper and tried to brain one of my tormentors with a rock. Fortunately, six-year-olds are not strong enough to kill each other by such simple means. I raised a lump on the boy's head, and then the others piled on me. Because of my weakness I was no match for any of them. The teacher dug me out from the bottom of the pile.

With the teachers I got on well. I had none of the normal boy's spirit of rebellion against all adults. In my precocious way I reasoned that adults probably knew more than I, and when they told me to do something I assumed they had good reasons and did it. The result was that I became teacher's pet, which made my life that much harder with my peers.

They took to waylaying me on my way home. First they would snatch my cap for a game of siloochee. The game would develop into a full-fledged baiting session, with boys running from me in front, jeering, while others ran up behind to hit or kick me. I must have chased them all over New Haven. When they got tired of being chased they would turn around, beat me (which they could do with absurd ease), and chase me for a while. I screamed, wept, shouted threats and abuse, made growling and hissing noises, and indulged in pseudofits like tearing my hair and foaming at the mouth in hope of scaring them off. This was just what they wanted. Hence, during most of my first three years in school, I was let out ten minutes early so as to be well on my way to my home on Chapel Street by the time the other boys got out.

This treatment accentuated my bookishness. I was digging through Millikan's *The Electron* at the age of nine.

My father worried vaguely about my troubles but did little about them, being a withdrawn, bookish man himself. His line was medieval English literature, which he taught at Yale, but he still sympathized with a fellow intellectual and let me have my head. Sometimes he made fumbling efforts to engage me in ball-throwing and similar outdoor exercises. This had little effect, since he really hated exercise, sport, and the outdoors as much as I did, and was as clumsy and uncoordinated as I, to boot. Several times I resolved to force myself through a regular course of exercises to make myself into a young Tarzan, but when it came to executing my resolution I found the calisthenics such a frightful bore that I always let them lapse before they had done me any good.

I'm no psychologist. Like most followers of the exact sciences, I have an urge to describe psychology as a "science," in quotes, implying that only the exact sciences like physics are entitled to the name. That may be unfair, but it's how many physicists feel.

For instance, how can the psychologists all these years have treated sadism as something abnormal, brought on by some stupid parent's stopping his child from chopping up the furniture with a hatchet, thereby filling him with frustration and insecurity? On the basis of my own experience I will testify that all boys—well, perhaps ninety-nine percent—are natural-born sadists. Most of them have it beaten out of them. Correct that: most of them have it beaten down into their subconscious, or whatever the headshrinkers call that part of our minds



nowadays. It's still there, waiting a chance to pop up. Hence crime, war, persecution, and all the other ills of society. Probably this cruelty was evolved as a useful characteristic back in the Stone Age. An anthropological friend once told me this idea was fifty years out of date, but he could be wrong also.

I suppose I have my share of it. At least I never wanted anything with such passionate intensity as I wanted to kill those little fiends in New Haven by lingering and horrible tortures. Even now, forty-five years after, that wish is still down there at the bottom of my mind, festering away. I still remember them as individuals and can still work myself into a frenzy of hatred and resentment just thinking about them. I don't suppose I have ever forgotten or forgiven an injury or insult in my life. I'm not proud of that quality, but neither am I ashamed of it. It is just the way I am.

Of course I had reasons for wishing to kill the little bastards, while they had no legitimate grudge against me. I had done nothing to them except to offer an inviting target, a butt, a punching bag. I never expected, as I pored over Millikan's book, that this would put me on the track of as complete a revenge as anybody could ask.

So much for boys. Girls I don't know about. I was the middle one of three brothers; my mother was a masterful character lacking the qualities usually thought of as feminine; and I never dated a girl until I was nearly thirty. I married late, for a limited time, and had no children. It would neatly have solved my present problem if I had found how to blow up the male half of the human race while sparing the female. That is not the desire for a superharem, either. I had enough trouble keeping one woman satisfied when I was married. It is just that the female half has never gone out of its way to make life hell for me, day after day for years, even though one or two women, too, have done me dirt. So, in a mild, detached way, I should be sorry to destroy the women along with the men.

By the time I was eleven and in the sixth grade, things had got worse. My mother thought that sending me to a military academy would "make a man of me." I should be forced to exercise and mix with the boys. Drill would teach me to stand up and hold my shoulders back. And I could no longer slouch into my father's study for a quiet session with the encyclopedia.

My father was disturbed by this proposal, thinking that sending me away from home would worsen my lot by depriving me of my only sanctuary. Also he did not think we could afford a private school on his salary and small private income.

As usual, my mother won. I was glad to go at first. Anything seemed better than the torment I was enduring. Perhaps a new crowd of boys would treat me better. If they didn't, our time would be so fully organized that nobody would have an opportunity to bully me.

So in the fall of 1927, with some fears but more hopes, I entered Rogers Military Academy at Waukeegus, New Jersey.

The first day, things looked pretty good. I admired the gray uniforms with the little brass strip around the edge of the visors of the caps.

But it took me only a week to learn two things. One was that the school, for all its uniforms and drills, was loosely run. The boys had plenty of time to think up mischief. The other was that, by the mysterious sense boys have, they



immediately picked me as fair game.

On the third day somebody pinned a sign to my back, reading CALL ME SALLY. I went around all day unconscious of the sign and puzzled by being called "Sally." "Sally" I remained all the time I was at Rogers. The reason for calling me by a girl's name was merely that I was small, skinny, and unsocial, as I have never had any tendencies towards sexual abnormality. Had I had, I could easily have indulged them, Rogers being like other boys' boarding schools in this regard.

To this day I wince at the name "Sally." Some years ago, before I married, matchmaking friends introduced me to an attractive girl and could not understand why I dropped her like a hot brick. Her name was Sally.

There was much hazing of new boys at Rogers; the teachers took a fatalistic attitude and looked the other way. I was the favorite hazee, only with me it did not taper off after the first few weeks. They kept it up all through the first year. One morning in March, 1928, I was awakened around five by several boys seizing my arms and legs and

holding me down while one of them forced a cake of soap into my mouth.

"Look out he don't bite you," said one. "Castor oil would be better."

"We ain't got none. Hold his nose; that'll make him open up."

"We should have shaved the soap up into little pieces. Then he'd have foamed better."

"Let me tickle him; that'll make him throw a fit."

"There, he's foaming fine, like a old geyser."

"Stop hollering, Sally," one of them addressed me, "or we'll put the suds in your eyes."

"Put the soap in 'em anyway. It'll make a red-eyed monster out of him. You know how he glares and shrieks when he gits mad?"

"Let's cut his hair all off. That'll reely make him look funny."

My yells brought one of the masters, who sharply ordered the tormentors to cease. They stood up while I rose to a sitting position on my bunk, spitting out soapsuds. The master said:

"What's going on here? Don't you know this is not allowed? It will mean ten rounds for each of you!"

"Rounds" were Rogers' form of discipline. Each round consisted of marching once around the track in uniform with your piece on your shoulder. (The piece was a Springfield 1903 army rifle with the firing pin removed, lest some student get .30 cartridges to fit and blow somebody's head off.) I hoped my tormentors would be at least expelled and was outraged by the lightness of their sentence. They on the other hand were indignant that they had been so hardly treated and protested with the air of outraged virtue:

"But Mr. Wilson, sir, we was only playing with him!"

At that age I did not know that private schools do not throw out paying students for any but the most heinous offenses; they can't afford to. The boys walked their ten rounds and hated me for it. They regarded me as a tattletale because my howls had drawn Mr. Wilson's attention and devoted themselves to thinking up new and ingenious ways to make me suffer. Now they were more subtle. There was nothing so crude as forcing soap down my throat. Instead it was hiding parts of my uniform, putting horse manure and other undesirable



substances in my bed, and tripping me when I was drilling, so my nine-pound Springfield and I went sprawling in the dirt.

I fought often, always getting licked and usually being caught and given rounds for violating the school's rules. I was proud when I actually bloodied one boy's nose, but it did me no lasting good. He laid for me in the swimming pool and nearly drowne&me. By now I was so terrorized that I did not dare to name my attackers, even when the masters revived me by artificial respiration and asked me. Wilson said:

"Ormont, we know what you're going through, but we can't give you a bodyguard to follow you around. Nor can we encourage you to tattle as a regular thing; that'll only make matters worse."

"But what can I do, sir? I try to obey the rules. .

"That's not it."

"What, then? I don't do anything to these kids; they just pick on me all the time."

"Well, for one thing, you could deprive them of the pleasure of seeing you yelling and making wild swings that never land . . ." He drummed on his desk with his fingers. "We have this sort of trouble with boys like you, and if there's any way to stop it I don't know about it. You-let's face it; you're queer."

"How?"

"Oh, your language is much too adult-"

"But isn't that what you're trying to teach us in English?"

"Sure, but that's not the point. Don't argue about it; I'm trying to help you. Then another thing. You argue about everything, and most of the time you're right. But you don't suppose people like you for putting them in the wrong, do your

"But people ought-"

"Precisely, they ought, but they don't. You can't change the world by yourself. If you had muscles like Dempsey you could get away with a good deal, but you haven't. So the best thing is to adopt a protective coloration. Pay no attention to their attacks or insults. Never argue never complain; never criticize. Flash a glassy smile at everybody, even when you feel like murdering them. Keep your language simple and agree with what's said whether you feel that way or not. I hate to give you a counsel of hypocrisy, but I don't see any alternative. If we could only make some sort of athlete out of you..."

This was near the end of the school year. In a couple of weeks I was home. I complained about the school and asked to return to public school in New Haven. My parents objected on the ground that I was getting a better education at Rogers than I should get locally, which was true.

One day some of my old pals from public school caught me in a vacant lot and gave me a real beating, so that my face was swollen and marked. I realized that, terrible though the boys at Rogers were, they did not include the most fearful kind of all: the dimwitted muscular lout who has been left behind several grades in public school and avenges his boredom and envy by tormenting his puny classmates. After that I did not complain about Rogers.



People talk of "School days, school days, dear old golden rule days . . ." and all that rubbish. Psychologists tell me that, while children suffer somewhat, they remember only the pleasant parts of childhood and hence idealize it later.

Both are wrong as far as I am concerned. I had a hideous childhood, and the memory of it is as sharp and painful forty years later as it was then. If I want to spoil my appetite, I have only to reminisce about my dear, dead childhood.

For one thing, I have always hated all kinds of roughhouse and horseplay, and childhood is full of them unless the child is a cripple or other shut-in. I have always had an acute sense of my own dignity and integrity, and any japery or ridicule fills me with murderous resentment. I have always hated practical jokes. When I'm asked "Can't you take a joke?" the truthful answer is no, at least not in that sense. I want to kill the joker, then and for years afterwards. Such humor as I have is expressed in arch, pedantic little witticisms which amuse my academic friends but which mean nothing to most people. I might have got on better in the era of duelling. Not that I should have made much of a duellist, but I believe men were more careful then how they insulted others who might challenge them.

I set out in my second year at Rogers to try out Wilson's advice. Nobody will ever know what I went through learning to curb my hot temper and proud, touchy spirit, and literally to turn the other cheek. All that year I sat on my inner self, a mass of boiling fury and hatred. When I was teased, mocked, ridiculed, poked, pinched, punched, hair-pulled, kicked, tripped, and so on, I pretended that nothing had happened, in the hope that the others would get tired of punching a limp bag.

It didn't always work. Once I came close to killing a teaser by hitting him over the head with one of those long window openers with a bronze head on a wooden pole with which every classroom was equipped in the days before air-conditioned schools. Luckily I hit him with the wooden shaft and broke it, instead of with the bronze part.

As the year passed and the next began, I made myself so colorless that sometimes a whole week went by without my being baited. Of course I heard the hated nickname "Sally" every day, but the boys often used it without malice from habit. I also endured incidents like this: Everybody, my father, the masters, and the one or two older boys who took pity on me had urged me to go in for athletics. Now, at Rogers one didn't have to join a team. One had compulsory drill and calisthenics, but beyond that things were voluntary. (It was, as I said, a loosely run school.)

So I determined to try. One afternoon in the spring of 1929 I wandered out to the athletic field to find a group of my classmates getting up a game of baseball. I quietly joined them.

The two self-appointed captains squared off to choose their teams. One of them looked at me incredulously and asked: "Hey, Sally, are you in on this?"

"Yeah."

They began choosing. There were fifteen boys there, counting the captains and me. They chose until there was one boy left: me. The boy whose turn it was to choose said to the other captain:

"You can have him."

"Naw, I don't want him. You take him."



They argued while the subject of their mutual generosity squirmed and the boys already chosen grinned unsympathetically. Finally one captain said:

"Suppose we let him bat for both sides. That way, the guys the side of he's on won't be any worse off than the other."

"Okay. That suit you, Sally?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I guess I don't feel good anyway." I turned away before visible tears disgraced a thirteen-year-old.

Just after I started my third year, in the fall of 1929, the stock market fell flat. Soon my father found that his small private income had vanished as the companies in which he had invested, such as New York Central, stopped paying dividends. As a result, when I went home for Christmas, I learned that I could not go back to Rogers. Instead I should begin again with the February semester at the local high school.

In New Haven my 'possum tactics were put to a harder test. Many boys in my class had known me in former days and were delighted to take up where they had left off. For instance.

For decades, boys who found study hail dull have enlivened the proceedings with rubber bands and bits of paper folded into a V shape for missiles. The trick is to keep your missile weapon palmed until the teacher is looking elsewhere, and then to bounce your wad off the neck of some fellow student in front of you. Perhaps this was tame compared to nowadays, when, I understand, the students shoot ball bearings and knock the teacher's teeth and eyes out, and carve him with switchblade knives if he objects. All this happened before the followers of Dewey and Watson, with their lunacies about "permissive" training, had made classrooms into a semblance of the traditional cannibal feast with teacher playing the role of the edible missionary.

Right behind me sat a small boy named Patrick Hanrahan: a wiry, red-haired young hellion with a South Boston accent. He used to hit me with paper wads from time to time. I paid no attention because I knew he could lick me with ease. I was a head taller than he, but though I had begun to shoot up I was as skinny, weak, and clumsy as ever. If anything I was clumsier, so that I could hardly get through a meal without knocking over a glass.

One day I had been peppered with unusual persistence. My selfcontrol slipped, as it would under a determined enough assault. I got out my own rubber band and paper missiles. I knew Hanrahan had shot at me before, but of course one never saw the boy who shot a given wad at you.

When a particularly hard-driven one stung me behind the ear, I whipped around and let Hanrahan have one in the face. It struck just below his left eye, hard enough to make a red spot. He looked astonished, then furious, and whispered:

"What you do that for?"

"You shot me," I whispered back.

"I did not! I'll git you for this! You meet me after class and I'll beat the _____ out of you!"

"You did too-" I began, when the teacher barked: "Ormont!" I shut up.

Perhaps Hanrahan really had not shot that last missile. One could argue that it was not more than his due for the earlier ones he had



shot. But that is not how boys' minds work. They reason like the speaker of Voltaire's lines:

Cet animal est tr~s méchant;
Quand on l'atta qua, ii se defend!

I knew if I met Hanrahan on the way out I should get a fearful beating. When I saw him standing on the marble steps that led up from the floor of study hall to the main exit, I walked quietly out the rear door.

I was on my way to the gym when I got a kick in the behind. There was Paddy Hanrahan, saying: "Come on, you yellow dog, fight!"

"Hello there," I said with a sickly grin. He slapped my face.

"Having fun?" I said.

He kicked me in the leg.

"Keep right on," I said. "I don't mind."

He slapped and kicked me again, crying: "Yellow dog! Yellow dog!" I walked on toward the gymnasium as if nothing were happening, saying to myself: pay no attention, never criticize or complain, keep quiet, ignore it, pay no attention. . . . At last Paddy had to stop hitting and kicking me to go to his own next class.

I felt as if I had been dipped in manure. Nothing would have given me more pleasure than the sight of the whole school burning up with all the pupils trapped inside, screaming as they were broiled.

Next day I had a few bruises where Hanrahan had struck me-nothing serious. When he passed me he snarled: "Yellow dog!" but did not renew his assault. I have wasted much time in the forty years since then, imagining revenges on Paddy Hanrahan. Hanrahan coming into my office in rags and pleading for a job, and my having him thrown out . . . All that nonsense. I never saw him again after I finished school in New Haven.

There were a few more such incidents during that year and the following one. For instance at the first class meeting in the autumn of 1930, when the student officers of my class were elected for the semester, after several adolescents had been nominated for president, somebody piped up: "I nominate Wade Ormont!"

The whole class burst into a roar of laughter. One of the teachers pounced on the nominator and hustled him out for disturbing an orderly session by making frivolous nominations. Not knowing how to decline a nomination, I could do nothing but stare stonily ahead as if I hadn't heard. I need not have worried; the teachers never even wrote my name on the blackboard with those of the other nominees, nor did they ask for seconds. They just ignored the whole thing, as if the nominator had named Julius Caesar.

Then I graduated. As my marks put me in the top one percentile in scientific subjects and pretty high in the others, I got a scholarship at M.I.T. Without it I don't think my father could have afforded to send me.

When I entered M.I.T. I had developed my protective shell to a good degree of effectiveness, though not so perfectly as later: the automatic, insincere,



glassy smile turned on as by a switch; the glad hand; the subdued, modest manner that never takes an initiative or advances an opinion unless it agrees with somebody else's. And I never, never showed emotion no matter what. How could I, when the one emotion inside me, overwhelming all others, was a blazing homicidal fury and hatred, stored up from all those years of torment? If I really let myself go I should kill somebody. The incident with the window opener had scared me. Much better never to show what you're thinking. As for feeling, it is better not to feel-to view the world with the detachment of a visitor at the zoo.

M.I.T. was good to me: it gave me a sound scientific education without pulverizing my soul in a mortar every day. For one thing, many other undergraduates were of my own introverted type. For another, we were kept too busy grinding away at heavy schedules to have time or energy for horseplay. For another, athletics did not bulk large in our program, so my own physical inferiority did not show up so glaringly. I reached medium height-about five-eight-but remained thin, weak, and awkward. Except for a slight middle-aged bulge around the middle I am that way yet.

For thousands of years, priests and philosophers have told us to love mankind without giving any sound reason for loving the creatures. The mass of them are a lot of cruel, treacherous, hairless apes. They hate us intellectuals, longhairs, highbrows, eggheads, or doubledomes, despite (or perhaps because) without us they would still be running naked in the wilderness and turning over flat stones for their meals. Love them? Hah!

Oh, I admit I have known a few of my own kind who were friendly. But by the time I had learned to suppress all emotion to avoid baiting, I was no longer the sort of man to whom many feel friendly. A bright enough physicist, well-mannered and seemingly poised, but impersonal and aloof, hardly seeing my fellow men except as creatures whom I had to manipulate in order to live. I have heard my colleagues describe others of my type as a "dry stick" or "cold fish," so no doubt they say the same of me. But who made me that way? I might not have become a fascinating hon vivant even if I had not been bullied, but I should probably not have become such an extreme aberrant. I might even have been able to like individuals and to show normal emotions.

The rest of my story is routine. I graduated from M.I.T. in 1936, took my Ph.D. from Chicago in 1939, got an instructorship at Chicago, and next year was scooped up by the Manhattan Engineer District. I spent the first part of the war at the Argonne Labs and the last part at Los Alamos. More by good luck than good management, I never came in contact with the Communists during the bright pink era of ~ If I had, I might easily, with my underdog complex and my store of resentment, have been swept into their net. After the war I worked under Lawrence at Berkeley.

I've had a succession of such jobs. They think I'm a sound man, perhaps not a great creative genius like Fermi or Teller, but a bear for spotting errors and judging the likeliest line of research to follow. It's all part of the objective, judicious side of my nature that I have long cultivated. I haven't tried to get into administrative work, which you have to do to rise to the top in bureaucratic setups like this. I hate to deal with people as individuals. I could probably do it



-I have forced myself to do many things-but what would be the purpose? I have no desire for power over my fellows. I make enough to live on comfortably, especially since my wife left me. .

Oh, yes, my wife. I had got my Ph.D. before I had my first date. I dated girls occasionally for the next decade, but in my usual reserved, formal manner. I didn't even try to kiss them, let alone lay them. Why? Not religion. To me that's merely the sort of puerile superstition one would expect of a tribe of hairless apes. But I knew I should be awkward in making approaches, and perhaps be rebuffed or laughed at. The strongest drive in my life has been to put myself in a position where, and to mold my own personality so that, I shall not be laughed at.

Why did I leave Berkeley to go to Columbia University, for instance? I had a hobby of noting down people's conversation in shorthand when they weren't noticing. I was collecting this conversation for a statistical analysis of speech: the frequency of sounds, of words, combinations of words, parts of speech, topics of conversation, and so on. It was a purely intellectual hobby with no gainful objective, though I might have written up my results for one of the learned periodicals. One day my secretary noticed what I was doing and asked me about it. In an incautious moment I explained. She looked at me blankly, then burst into laughter and said:

"My goodness, Dr. Ormont, you are a nut!"

She never knew how close she came to having her skull bashed in with the inkwell. For a few seconds I sat there, gripping my pad and pencil and pressing my lips together. Then I put the paper quietly away and returned to my physics. I never resumed the statistical study, and I hated that secretary. I hated her particularly because I had had my own doubts about my mental health and so could not bear to be called a nut even in fun. I closed my shell more tightly than ever.

But I could not go on working next to that secretary. I could have framed her on some manufactured complaint, or just told the big boss I didn't like her and wanted another. But I refused to do this. I was the objective, impersonal man. I would never let an emotion make me unjust, and even asking to have her transferred would put a little black mark on her record. The only thing was for me to go away. So I got in touch with Columbia.

There I found a superior job with a superior secretary, Georgia Ehrenfels, so superior in fact that in 19~8 we were married. I was already in my forties. She was twelve years younger and had been married and divorced once. God knows what she saw in me.

I think it took her about six months to realize that she had made an even bigger mistake than the first time. I never realized it at all. My mind was on my physics, and a wife was a nice convenience but nobody to open up one's shell for. Later, when things began to go bad, I tried to open my shell and found that the hinges were stuck.

My wife tried to make me over, but that is not easy with a middleaged man, even under the most favorable conditions. She pestered me to get a house in the country until I gave in. I had never owned a house and proved an inefficient householder. I hated the tinkering, gardening, and other minutiae of suburban life. Georgia did most of



the work. It brought on a miscarriage the only time she ever got pregnant. I was sorry then, but what could I do? A few months later I came home from work to find her gone and a note beginning:

Dear Wade:

It is no use. It is not your fault. You are as you are, as I should have realized at the beginning. Perhaps I am foolish not to appreciate your many virtues and to insist on that human warmth you do not have. .

Well, she got her divorce and married another academic man. I don't know how they have got on, but the last I heard they were still married. Psychologists say people tend to repeat their marital mistakes rather than to learn from them. I resolved not to repeat mine by the simple expedient of having nothing more to do with women. So far I have kept to it.

This breakup did disturb me for a time, more than Iron Man Ormont would care to admit. I drank heavily, which I had never done. I began to make mistakes in my work. Finally I went to a psychiatrist. They might be one-third quackery and one-third unprovable speculation, but to whom else could one turn?

The psychiatrist was a nice little man, stout and squarebuilt, with a subdued manner—a rather negative, colorless personality. I was surprised, for I had expected something with a pointed beard, Viennese gestures, and aggressive garrulity. Instead he quietly drew me out. After a few months he told me:

"You're not the least psychotic, Wade. You do have what we call a schizoid personality. Such people always have a hard time in personal relations. Now, you have found a solution for your problem in your pose of good-natured indifference. The trouble is that the pose has been practiced so long that it's become the real Dr. Ormont, and it has raised up its own difficulties. You practiced so long and so hard suppressing your emotions that now you can't let them go when you want to. . . ."

There was more of the same, much of which I had already figured out for myself. That part was fine; no disagreement. But what to do about it? I learned that the chances of improvement by psychoanalytical or similar treatment go down rapidly after the age of thirty, and over forty it is so small as hardly to be worth bothering

with. After a year of spending the psychiatrist's time and my money, we gave up.

I had kept my house all this time. I had in fact adapted myself intelligently to living in a house, and I had accumulated such masses of scientific books, magazines, pamphlets, and other printed matter that I could no longer have got into an ordinary apartment. I had a maid, old and ugly enough so that sex should not raise its head. Otherwise I spent my time away from the office alone in my house. I learned to plant the lot with ground cover that required no mowing and to hire a gardener a few times a year so as not to outrage the neighbors too much.

Then I got a better job here. I sold my house on Long Island and bought another here, which I have run in the same style as the last one. I let the neighbors strictly alone. If they had done likewise I might have had an easier time deciding what to do with my discov. cry. As it is, many suburbanites seem to



think that if a man lives alone and doesn't wish to be bothered, he must be some sort of ogre.

If I write up the chain reaction, the news will probably get out. No amount of security regulations will stop people from talking about the impending end of the world. Once having done so, the knowledge will probably cause the blowing-up of the earth-not right away, but in a decade or two. I shall probably not live to see it, but it wouldn't displease me if it did go off in my lifetime. It would not deprive me of much.

I'm fifty-three and look older. My doctor tells me I'm not in good shape. My heart is not good; my blood pressure is too high; I sleep badly and have headaches. The doctor tells me to cut down on coffee, to stop this and stop that. But even if I do, he can't assure me a full decade more. There is nothing simple wrong with me that an operation would help; just a poor weak body further abused by too intensive mental work over most of my life.

The thought of dying does not much affect me. I have never got much fun out of life, and such pleasures as there are have turned sour in recent years. I find myself getting more and more indifferent to everything but physics, and even that is becoming a bore.

The one genuine emotion I have left is hatred. I hate mankind in general in a mild, moderate way. I hate the male half of mankind more intensely, and the class of boys most bitterly of all. I should love to see the severed heads of all the boys in the world stuck on spikes.

Of course I am objective enough to know why I feel this way. But knowing the reason for the feeling doesn't change the feeling, at least not in a hardened old character like me.

I also know that to wipe out all mankind would not be just. It would kill millions who have never harmed me or, for that matter, harmed anybody else.

But why in hell should I be just? When have these glabrous primates been just to me? The headshrinker tried to tell me to let my emotions go, and then perhaps I could learn to be happy. Well, I have just one real emotion. If I let it go, that's the end of the world.

On the other hand, I should destroy not only all the billions of bullies and sadists, but the few victims like myself. I have sympathized with Negroes and other downtrodden people because I knew how they felt. If there were some way to save them while destroying the rest. . . But my sympathy is probably wasted; most of the downtrodden would persecute others too if they had the power.

I had thought about the matter for several days without a decision. Then came Mischief Night. This is the night before Halloween, when the local kids raise hell. The following night they go out again to beg candy and cookies from the people whose windows they have soaped and whose garbage pails they have upset. If we were allowed to shoot a few of the little bastards, the rest might behave better.

All the boys in my neighborhood hate me. I don't know why. It's one of those things like a dog's sensing the dislike of another dog. Though I don't scream or snarl at them and chase them, they somehow know I hate them even when I have nothing to do with them.



I was so buried in my problem that I forgot about Mischief Night, and as usual stopped in town for dinner at a restaurant before taking the train out to my suburb. When I got home, I found that in the hour of darkness before my arrival, the local boys had given my place the full treatment. The soaped windows and the scattered garbage and the toilet paper spread around were bad but endurable. However, they had also burgled my garage and gone over my little British two-seater. The tires were punctured, the upholstery slashed, and the wiring ripped out of the engine. There were other damages like uprooted shrubbery. . .

To make sure I knew what they thought, they had lettered a lot of shirt cardboards and left them around, reading: OLD LADY ORMONT IS A NUT! BEWARE THE MAD sCIENTIST! PSYCOPATH (sic) oRMoNT! ORMONT IS A FAIRY!

That decided me. There is one way I can be happy during my remaining years, and that is by the knowledge that all these bastards will get theirs someday. I hate them. I hate them. I hate everybody. I want to kill mankind. I'd kill them by slow torture if I could. If I can't, blowing up the earth will do. I shall write my report.