

Olaf Stapledon: The Man Behind the Works

by Sam Moskowitz

WHEN AN AUTHOR WHO HAS ACHIEVED SOME DEGREE of greatness dies, and a summing-up is in order, the magnitude of his achievement is always enhanced if it can be shown that critics failed to acknowledge his virtues during the years he sought to attain a reputation. No one who has seen Olaf Stapledon's meticulously organized scrapbooks, still extant in the home of his final years, built on Simon's Field along Mill Hey Lane in Caldby, West Kirby, Wirral, England, could ever make that claim. The literally hundreds of notices, from virtually every newspaper-and book-reviewing medium in the English-speaking world, especially of the early titles *Last and First Men*, *Odd John*, and *Star Maker*, must be read to be believed. Many are of extraordinary length, often written by critics whose names are still recognizable and command respect.

Stapledon's works are imaginative, deeply philosophical, and involved with sociological and political problems; mind-staggering concepts flood their pages in torrential cascade. They challenge the understanding of the average reader constantly. Yet the critics and reviewers, perhaps incredibly, seem to have read them thoroughly, comprehended them fully, and been immensely impressed. Review after review pays homage to the author's universe-expanding imagination, to the importance of his philosophical approach, to his social understanding, and to his skill at melding these things together into works that are outstanding examples of the science fiction art. Some reviewers call him a genius—and in no casual manner. Unfavorable notices are rare. If critical recognition is a valid mark of literary success, Stapledon may be said to have reached the apex early.

There seems little question that it was because of these reviews that Olaf Stapledon decided to become a full-time writer and to use income from a family inheritance to maintain himself through most of his life from 1932 on. At no time did the proceeds from his published works even begin to pay his living costs, but he understandably decided he had found his metier and that the advantages in this career outweighed the disadvantages.

With the outbreak of World War II, paper shortages curtailed the size of the editions of Stapledon's works and diverted public attention from the type of books he was writing. Two titles appeared in 1939: the two volume Pelican *Philosophy and Living: New Hope for Britain*, completed earlier and now published with a "Postscript Preface on the War," which acknowledged that some of the contents were already being superseded by current events; and *Saints and Revolutionaries*, one of the "I Believe" series published by William Heinemann. In the war years that followed there was also *Beyond the Isms*, a Searchlight paperback printed in 1942; *Darkness and the Light*, a sort of *Last and First Men* in a minor key the same year; and in 1944, *Sirius*, possibly Stapledon's finest sustained piece of writing. Although it did not appear till 1946, *Death into Life* was undoubtedly also written during the war years.

As a result of those limited editions (none of which was published outside England until after the war—if at all), the fact that several were topical (and therefore became outdated quickly), as well as the more limited appeal of nonfiction titles, the quantity, quality and length of the reviews they received diminished considerably. There was, however, some acknowledgment of the brilliance of *Sirius*, the best of his wartime writings.

Despite this, Stapledon's reputation in England continued to grow, and the magnitude of his intelligence and imagination was widely recognized. After his death the philosophical world that had been the essence of his life, and to whose journals he had frequently contributed, promptly

proceeded to forget him. Indeed, I cannot find a single major history of philosophy written in England after World War II that grants him so much as a footnote.

His influence on the science fiction world, on the other hand, has been profound and self-perpetuating. The concept of galactic empires reflected in the works of E.E. Smith, A.E. Van Vogt, Isaac Asimov, and even television scripts of *Star Trek*, derive directly from *Last and First Men*. Alien symbiotic life, engineered changes in the human form, ecology, overpopulation, longevity, the history of future civilizations, and the telling of a story of other worlds from a philosophical rather than an action approach—these are but a few of Stapledon's major thematic contributions to the science fiction that followed him.

Therefore, it was not unexpected, when he flew to America on March 23, 1949, to participate in the Communist-inspired Cultural and Scientific Conference for Peace, that there would be science fiction enthusiasts like myself eager to hear him. In the company of men for whom time has not diminished my appellation "contemptible," he had little to say in this conference, apparently being used as window dressing to lend the gathering a note of respectability. While in this country Stapledon managed to spend one evening at the Hydra Club, a social group of professional science fiction writers, but was unable to accept an invitation to a meeting of the Eastern Science Fiction Association.

In the next decade relatively little attention was paid to Stapledon except for the issuance of the collection *To the End of Time* (1953), edited by Basil Davenport. This is a handsome omnibus volume of some 400,000 words comprising five major works: *Last and First Men*, *Star Maker*, *Odd John*, *Sirius* and *The Flames*, the second, fourth and last being printed in the United States for the first time. Because of the incredible flood of science fiction that was appearing that year, however, the book failed to create a new stir of interest in Stapledon.

Here we must pause to note the specific (and possibly surprising) fact that aside from book reviews, fewer than a dozen articles which by any stretch of the imagination could be called important had been written about the man in all this time. It was not until a decade after his death that the first comprehensive critical appraisal, my own "Olaf Stapledon: Cosmic Philosopher," finally appeared. While researching this work, I became acutely aware that more information about him was needed than was available from secondary sources. Any author whose main thrust is philosophical and humanistic can have his work evaluated best in context with his own background and personality.

In April, 1976, I visited his wife Agnes, as well as Wolfgang Brueck, a man who lived for years in the Stapledon household virtually as an adopted son. The insights they supplied, together with information available from other sources, make it possible to present a fuller picture of the life, family, personality and motivations of Olaf Stapledon and to attach more relevant meanings to declarations in his works.

The family has a most distinguished genealogy, with origins traced back to the early fourteenth century (the name was then spelled "Stapeldon"). These are found in the Diocese of Exeter Episcopal Register, specifically the book *Register of Walter de Stapeldon, Bishop of Exeter*, compiled by the Rev. F.C. Hingeston Randolph, M.A. of Oxford, rector of Ringmore and Prebendary of Exeter, published in London by George Bell and Sons in 1892. In his introduction Randolph informs us that ". . . Bishop Stapeldon was one of the foremost statesmen of his day, and advisor of King Edward the Second." Among the services he performed for the king was a special diplomatic trip to France. It is believed that Exeter College, which originally was called "Stapeldone Halle," was named in the Bishop's memory. Randolph's book also contains a list of all subscribers and the number of copies each one received. Among them was William Stapledon

of Lakenham, Lando Hall, near Bideford (two copies). The comprehensive record of the Stapledon family tree remains in the hands of Agnes Stapledon.

William Olaf Stapledon was born May 10, 1886, in Wallasey (now Merseyside), Cheshire, England. This is not far from Liverpool. His father was William Clibbett Stapledon and his mother Emmeline Miller Stapledon. The grandfather was founder of William Stapledon and Sons, an agency with offices in Port Said and in Suez, which supplied water and coal to ships passing through the Suez Canal. It was the job of Olaf's father to see that they did so safely. Alfred Holt and Co. of Liverpool, owners of the Blue Funnel Line, were impressed by his experience and competence in maritime matters and invited him to join their firm's head office in a high managerial position.

The first six years of Olaf's childhood were spent at Port Said, although his mother had returned to England to give birth, which proved an extremely difficult one. As a result, Olaf was rather a lonely child. His closest friend was Rip, a rough-haired terrier which he never forgot and whose literary echo undoubtedly sounds in some of the animals in Stapledon's books.

He got along extremely well with his father, who was a great educator and who had a fine library of classical literature. Many volumes in this were passed on to Olaf and are still in the possession of Agnes Stapledon. He did not get along as well with his mother, who was extraordinarily possessive and fearful for his welfare, though by nature she was a kind and gentle person. Like her husband she also had literary interests; her idol was John Ruskin, with whom she corresponded extensively.

Ruskin—through his mother—appears to be one of the major influences in Olaf's adolescent life. Ruskin, the son of wealthy parents, established himself early as an outstanding poet and eventually became one of the leading art authorities and social critics of the nineteenth century. He was ahead of his time in supporting national education, condemning industry for wasting natural resources and polluting the land, in battling for old-age pensions and championing the organizing of labor. He also advocated the return to a simpler, less artificial life, and this aspect of his philosophy attracted a sincere and adoring cult. Emmeline Stapledon was so firmly convinced of Ruskin's belief that old handicrafts be kept alive⁶ that she procured a spinning wheel. Her cousins supported this enthusiasm and made a pilgrimage to Brantwood, on Coniston Water, where Ruskin lived. Ruskin's works were always at hand and discussion of them was perpetual in the household, so it is easy to understand Olaf's advocacy for the cause of the working man and his enthusiasm for socialism in general.

While Emmeline imbued her son with social science, William emphasized the rudiments of the natural sciences. The boy absorbed enough of both to create that remarkable combination of philosophy, sociology and science whose balance elevates his writings to their level of greatness.

Olaf's agnosticism also derived from his parents. His father apparently subscribed to no sect at all, so any direct religious influence would therefore have had to come from his mother. She was a Unitarian. Unitarianism is an offshoot of Protestantism which rejects the Trinity and the divinity of Christ and believes—like the Jews—that God is a single being. Unitarians do, however, accept the teachings of Christ, emphasizing his ethics and morality. They stress the importance of character and are known for their tolerance of other religions.

In his mature years Stapledon denied that he was a Christian, although the increasing strain of mysticism in his work from the 1940's on indicated a deep-rooted sense of religiosity. In *The Opening of the Eyes* his position is that of a "disbeliever in God," because of the hopelessness of finding any final answers through man acquired knowledge. He also seems to espouse clearly a higher temporal sphere of existence:

Thus seemingly the scientific temper itself is being forced to conceive that the intricate universe of our extant science is but a province within an ampler, stranger universe. And so we are surely compelled to take seriously once more the thought that this world of time and space is but the threshold to another world. We, who formerly . . . rejected all wild rumours of the unseen reality, must now, it seems, earnestly attend to those who claim access to that sphere, assuring us that all souls are destined to pass over to it.

Olaf Stapledon had six years of elementary education at Abbotsholme, a progressive boarding school located in Uttoxeter, Derbyshire. The founder of the school was Dr. Cecil Reddie, who believed that certain young people should be educated for leadership and responsibility. Olaf performed extremely well there, but one of the things he most clearly remembered about his stay was acquiring a first-hand knowledge of how to wash sheep.

His higher education was acquired at Balliol College, Oxford, where he earned both B.A. and M.A. degrees in history, completing these before the onset of World War I (it was not until after the war that he received his Ph.D. from the University of Liverpool). His grades at Oxford were middling. During that period he attained his full physical growth of five feet, eight inches and 140 pounds weight, a weight that seldom varied for the rest of his life. He was muscular and rowed in the college eight.

If we can accept *A Man Divided* as autobiographical, we may infer that Stapledon's first amatory experiences occurred at Oxford. In this book he expresses the view that the protagonist, Victor, knew intellectually that sexual prudery was wrong but was emotionally bound up with it. Victor talks of his experiences at school with two women, one of them older than himself. Looking back on these liaisons from the perspective of age he is convinced that Freud was wrong and that there may have been more value in Victorian standards than he was willing at the time to acknowledge. Victor finds his experiences to be satisfying physically but otherwise sterile, and he did not continue or resume these relationships.

The foregoing is a prelude to stating that there is much discussion of sex and sexual mores in Stapledon's novels. Today, when readers are accustomed to accept the raunchiest material without blinking, it is easy to overlook the fact that for their time the cast of all his works is unusually candid and direct. Sexual customs of his fictional civilizations are described just as fully as their science, art and philosophy. Incest is strongly implied in *Odd John*. The plot of *Sirius* pivots on the sexual relationship between a woman and a dog with human intelligence. Wife-lending occurs in *Last Men in London*. When Stapledon's characters describe their sexual education, it is not unreasonable to wonder how much of the author's own experience is being recounted. Freudian analysis aside, the sex in Stapledon's fiction adds rather than detracts, lending another dimension of richness to his best works.

After Olaf left Oxford, his father got him a job with the Blue Funnel Line of Liverpool, where he performed various minor managerial duties without enthusiasm. It was his father's hope that he would make a good showing and eventually inherit his own excellent, well-paying position. Olaf liked ships but not the paperwork that went with them. At one point he could not account for 20 pounds of petty cash, which may have been a factor in his eventual leaving.

Following this, he accepted a position as Master at Manchester Grammar School. His favorite teaching technique was setting up events in history like plays and having his class act them out. The noise and activity of this got on the nerves of other instructors, and the job lasted only a year. For short periods after this he worked for William Stapledon and Sons in Port Said, running a motorboat to reach and board ships to see if they needed coal before or after their canal passage. (The firm was still in business when Egypt closed the canal after the 1967 war with Israel, in the control of a cousin.) Olaf's family—particularly his mother—did not want him away from home and discouraged his Port Said efforts. They were also happy when a hoped-for position at the University of Wales fell through.

While working at both the Blue Funnel Line and the Manchester Grammar School, Stapledon had lectured evenings in the Liverpool area at the Workers Educational Association on literature, psychology and industrial history. These lectures frequently stressed left-wing views, for he was deeply immersed in socialist philosophy at the time. It is probable that such views met with criticism from Stapledon's employers. In *A Man Divided* his character Victor runs into continuous and severe trouble of that sort, too, and tells of arguments with his influential father about it. Not improbably, Olaf Stapledon's chief difficulty in obtaining a permanent academic post was his politics. This was to be true his entire life. He was frequently hired for night extension courses, never a full-time appointment.

He rationalized this in *A Man Divided* by terming himself only a "second-rate academic," and does the same in *Last Men in London*, where an influential father gets him a post—as if a man with his accumulated knowledge and ability to write, speak and organize his thoughts were inferior to the majority of tenured professors.

Although he was involved with socialist groups and contributed some articles to leftist journals, Stapledon's earliest literary aspirations were poetic. His first book was *Latter-Day Psalms*, published in 1914 by Henry Young and Sons, Ltd., of Liverpool. It is believed that Olaf's father paid for its publication; he was a good customer of Young, who owned a Liverpool bookshop. Of the 500 copies believed to have been printed, the large majority are said to have been lost when the business went up in flames as a result of German bomb action during World War I.

There are strong notes of atheism, social revolution and the plight of the working man in this rare book of blank verse. There are also two antiwar poems, possibly showing that it appeared after the war began, and certainly showing that Stapledon's pacificism did not (as has been suggested) stem from his own war experiences, which occurred later. We find here, as well, material that is strikingly similar to that in his final work, *The Opening of the Eyes*. In the first poem in *Latter Day Psalms*, "The City," Stapledon says, "I went into the city to see if there be God." He sees a distraught, harried people, some of them half-starved, with death facing them. "The men and women were loathsome, for they had forgotten love." He continues: "I said in my pride, 'If there be God, he shall be no God of mine. I will go my way, and live according as my soul wills.'" Then, in the poem immediately following, "Spirit," he sees the lights of the city tremble, the heavens' beauty, and "her murmur was music." Some spirit within him seemed to say that there was a God. "But I looked upon the city and rejected comfort, saying, 'Surely thou only art God who dwellest in my heart. And thou rulest the stars.'"

The Opening of the Eyes, forty years later, shows Stapledon wrestling with the same dilemma.

Is this perhaps hell's most exquisite refinement, that one should be haunted by the ever-present ghost of a disbelieved God?

No! For there is a blacker hell, not of privation but of present horror. The vacuum itself is hell, the dumb and frightful presence of sheer nothingness. It is all around. It creeps into the soul. It licks and loosens and dissolves the firmest tissues of the soul. . .

I chose after much heart-searching, vain heart-searching; for you, my divine hallucination, have fallen silent in my heart. And so at last I chose with a shrug of the shoulders.

Either I ride forward on the fiction of your existence, and attempt a deed more formidable, with consequences more far-reaching and more painful; or I choose freedom, discard my illusion of you, and slink back into my lair of safety, but of desolation...

And to go back is to betray only an illusion.

Yet I choose to go forward. [But only "on the fiction of your existence."]

Writing poetry interested Stapledon all his life, though this interest seemed to grow less as he grew older. Poetry is found in all his works, and it ennobles them powerfully. Poems by Stapledon have appeared in a number of publications, including *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse, Comment and Criticism*. This British magazine was edited between 1917 and 1930 by another master of science fiction, S. Fowler Wright. (Stapledon's acquaintance with Wright suggests that the two men were familiar with each other's science fiction.) Wright included poems by Stapledon in two of his anthologies, *Poets of Merseyside* (1923) and *Voices on the Winds* (1924). A sheaf of unpublished Stapledon poetry still exists.

Olaf Stapledon married Agnes Zena Miller, a first cousin from Australia, on July 16, 1919, at Friends Meeting House, a Quaker establishment at Reigate, Surrey. Agnes, the oldest of four children, was born in New Zealand on May 25, 1894, the daughter of Frank Edward and Margaret Barnard Miller. Frank was a brother of Olaf's mother, Margaret the daughter of Charles Barnard, headmaster of a Quaker school in Yorkshire. Both parents were British emigres.

Frank Miller was employed by Booth and Co. of Sydney, an Australian firm that exported animal skins to England. In the course of business he visited England every few years, and on most of these visits his wife and family accompanied him. Agnes made four such trips, the third of these, in 1902, when she was only eight. It was on this occasion that she was first aware of Olaf, then sixteen. She remembers her dominating impression was of his extraordinary kindness. Despite the fact that their age difference gave them little in common, he made a special effort to see that her stay was pleasant and spent a great deal of time showing her about. She visited England again when she was fourteen, and found Olaf as considerate and thoughtful as on the earlier visit.

Prior to World War I, the family sent her to Europe for a year to study French, German and music. These were deemed proper for the education of a young woman at that time, but Agnes regretted afterward that she had not obtained a more serious academic training at some place like Sydney University. When the war broke out she was in France, and her speedy return to Australia in the company of a New Zealand cousin was considered advisable. While in Europe she had had the opportunity to see Olaf on a number of occasions, this time as an attractive young lady of seventeen and eighteen. As one may well imagine, his attention became less of a kindly chore.

The engagement and the marriage itself were arranged by letter, with the harmonious agreement of all concerned. After the marriage the couple went to live with Stapledon's parents, who had a large and beautiful home in Caldby. The possessiveness of Olaf's mother proved a trial and they moved to nearby lodgings. Olaf's father solved the problem by buying them a house at 7 Grosvenor Avenue, West Kirby, where the two lived from 1920 to 1940.

Olaf engaged in extensive lecture tours for the Workers Education Association, which was a primary source of income, though it meant he had to travel to nearby communities a great deal. A girl, Mary Sydney Stapledon, was born May 31, 1920, and a boy, John David Stapledon, on November 6, 1923. Not unexpectedly, Olaf proved to be a wonderful father. He was an easy person to live with and would help the children with their problems and later with their studies. Because he had a high degree of manual dexterity, as well as a great interest in things nautical, he engaged in making model boats which he convinced himself were for the children's pleasure. He was a fast eater and would bolt his food, shove aside his plate, and fall to assembling these model boats at the table while everyone else was still eating. All were happy and no one was bored. The neighbors' children were also beneficiaries of this nautical ingenuity.

Through the 1920's he gave many extramural lectures and taught university extension courses in psychology and industrial history. He also began to contribute articles on sociology, psychology and philosophy to a variety of journals. The serious books on his shelves accumulated, and he began to form his own philosophical theories. By late 1928 these became sufficiently firm that he was willing to challenge one of the leading philosophers of the day, Alfred North Whitehead, at that time professor at Harvard University.

In his essay "The Location of Physical Objects" Stapledon offered an interpretation and then a refutation of certain of Whitehead's theories.

...Professor Whitehead insists that nature *is* that which we experience in sense-perception. All that anyone really does experience in sense-perception is in physical nature—somehow. And though we may infer from our sense-experience to unperceived and even unperceivable features of nature, these features must ever be of the same stuff as those which we perceive. Of that which is "behind the veil of perception" we know nothing. Indeed, to regard our sensed field as a veil, hiding something other than itself, is to pose an unreal problem.

In introducing his comments Stapledon stated that Whitehead's writings were "Perhaps more pregnant than lucid and consistent." In this article he proves himself guilty of the same fault. Aside from the difficulty of following the thread of Stapledon's own argument, it is sometimes nearly impossible to determine what he is attributing to Whitehead and what to himself, or even to be certain which parts of Whitehead's position he is for and which against. What Stapledon appears to be saying is that nothing is what it seems to be, that even the most definite objects may be subject to illusion. An object may not be hard, for instance, simply because it offers resistance to pressure. It may not be round because we perceive it to be circular. It is not in a definite place because physical "evidence" appears to locate it there. He concludes:

An event, if you mean by an event a mere position or volume in a space-time system, obviously is simply located. But such a mere locality is highly abstract. If you mean a factor in the substantial activity which is nature, having passage, contributing character to the universe and prehending it, the event is not simply located. Its location and shape is an abstract from it.

The Journal of Philosophical Studies was a good forum, for among its contributors were names as internationally renowned as Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell and Harold Laski. However, Olaf Stapledon was not destined to spend much more time tilting with other philosophers. Following the publication of his next book, *A Modern Theory of Ethics* (Methuen, 1929), which had only a very small circulation and made little impact, he found a new avenue of expression. This was fiction. The result was *Last and First Men*, published by Methuen of London on October 23, 1930. Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, Inc., probably anticipating their own early publication of an American edition, took out an *ad interim* copyright on the book in 1930. The American edition was published March 23, 1931; it contains a brief foreword by the author not found in the British edition. Here Stapledon admits: "I have imagined the triumph of the cruder sort of Americanism over all that is best and most promising in American culture. May this not occur in the real world!" The firm of Cape and Smith was noted for the quality of its authors, having been one of the first publishers of William Faulkner and having on their lists such names as D.H. Lawrence, Robert Graves, Sigmund Freud and Evelyn Waugh, and their books commanded careful attention.

The book sold better in England than in the United States (going into four printings), but the reviews by some of the most important literary critics in the United States were nothing short of superlative. There seems little question that the reviews of *Last and First Men* determined the future direction of Stapledon's life. He would become a full-time writer and a lecturer part-time. He was fortunate inasmuch as he did not have to depend on his writing for a livelihood.

How did he conceive *Last and First Men*? In a later interview he said: "The general plan of the book came to me in a flash as I was watching seals from the cliffs of Anglesea. Afterwards, I simply pumped my scientific friends for all the information I needed and settled down to write the story from the viewpoint of a man living in the distant future." These friends were, of course, professors at the University of Liverpool.

While there is no reason to doubt that the idea of *writing* the book was born as Stapledon said, the format of the narrative was probably influenced by other sources. I should like to suggest several titles that by subject matter and availability may well fall into this category.

The earliest of these is Edgar Allan Poe's *Eureka* (1848). This scientific, philosophical and mystical work is frequently ignored as an insane aberration of Poe's final descent into drunkenness, near madness, and death. Reading it requires intense concentration and is anything but good entertainment. Stapledon, accustomed to the numbing boredom of many philosophical works, would have had the patience to read it carefully.

Poe presents the concept that the entire universe is God and every living thing part of Him. If there is not a great central body around which our universe revolves, there eventually will be one because contraction into a series of central bodies will take place. Poe believes that the universe had a central origin, and that there were many "big bangs" and many universes. He suggests that life exists on many worlds, the presence of which we might not recognize even if we were to visit them. Most important, Poe maintains that as the universe contracts, all the diverse beings on billions of worlds will gradually lose their sense of personal consciousness and achieve a universal consciousness in a cosmic mind. This last is of course the general theme of the later *Star Maker* and is repeated in many of Stapledon's books, both fiction and nonfiction.

Two later novels of possible influence are William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland* (1908;reprinted 1921) and S. Fowler Wright's *The Amphibians* (1924;expanded into *The World Below*, 1929). The first postulates an *intelligent* central sun in a universe made up of sentient cosmic objects. The latter has a memorable presentation of humanoid creatures who have evolved as far above man as man has above the apes. An actual connection between Wright and Stapledon has already been cited.

Possibly more influential than any of these was "The Last Judgement: A Scientist's Vision of the Future of Man," included in *Possible Worlds and Other Essays* (1927) by J.B.S. Haldane, not included in the American edition. This details a chronological history of the next forty million years, in a very brief, almost synoptic fashion. There are so many concepts and touches that echo *Last and First Men* that a full description of the work seems warranted.

The future history of mankind is being broadcast to children on Venus, forty million years hence. The story starts with the creation of the planets by the passage of another star very near our sun. Evolution on the earth produces man. Civilization appears. Man burns up all the fossil fuels and turns to water, the winds and the sun for energy. Synthetic food is invented. The average lifespan grows to 3,000 years, and the population multiplies. Tidal power becomes the primary source of energy. Parts of the planet are artificially heated, continents are remodeled, and culture reaches a pinnacle of development. As a result of the elimination of natural selection, human evolution ceases.

Civilization eventually begins to stagnate, so by the year eight million the moon is reached by multi-staged rockets. Large metallic sails make it possible to navigate in space by the sun's radiation pressure. Mars is reached before the year ten million, but its inhabitants annihilate the expeditions. Half a million years later the first successful landing is made on Venus.

As the year eighteen million approaches the earth's rotation has slowed and the days and nights are a month long. All icecaps had previously melted, but now new glaciers begin to form. The cold kills most life on the planet other than man. Experiments begin to adapt the human body for existence on Venus, and eventually a new species capable of subsisting on one-tenth the oxygen required on earth is developed. All Venusian life is systematically destroyed, and alterations to make the planet habitable for the new humans are made. These grow greatly in mental power and evolve two new senses, one of which places each individual in telepathic communication with every other, creating a communal brain and consciousness which cannot be blocked by the individual. The other sense permits the individual to receive, selectively, messages involving art, music, literature, and philosophy.

This evolution is so swift that those in the last expedition from earth to land on Venus cannot mate successfully with the altered humans. A completely new species has been created. By the year thirty-six million gravitational shearing forces disintegrate the moon, and its fragments form a ring around the earth like Saturn's. The heat generated is so great that mankind has to retreat to caverns beneath the planet's surface. After the ring has stabilized earth is recolonized.

Finally it is proposed to settle the planet Jupiter, and breeding begins to create a stumpy, dwarfed human race of immense physical strength. If this is successful, attempts will then be made to colonize the outer planets. It is also foreseen that within 250 million years the solar system will pass into a region of space where stars are far denser, and efforts can be made to populate inhabitable planets there, even though trips as long as 100,000 years would be needed. The prognostication ends with the sentence: "And there are other galaxies."

In an epilogue, Haldane states that man must work not only for individual happiness but for the good of the community and, by extension, the race; he must plan cosmically, millions of years into the future. Despite its vast scope, "The Last Judgement" runs to less than 7,000 words.

Haldane was already a scientist of renown, having made and being destined yet to make major contributions to the science of genetics. To the general public he was even better known as a controversial popularizer of science with leftist leanings. His penchant for science fiction never left him. He enjoyed *Last and First Men* and wrote its author, "Where have you been hiding all this time?" As late as 1958 he sent a letter of enthusiastic praise to Fred Hoyle for the latter's novel *The Black Cloud*, being particularly delighted with its realistic presentation of scientists and the concept of intelligent clouds.

Once convinced of his true calling, Olaf Stapledon began to reduce his intensive lecturing and special classes to provide ample time for writing. This meant he would be in the house and underfoot even more than previously. Fortunately for his wife he proved to be one of the most amiable of men, unflaggingly even-tempered, rarely raising his voice, and seemingly interested in everything, whether related to his work or not. Visitors were welcome and treated with courtesy. Olaf also had the knack of perceiving their personal concerns and involving himself with them. He was not only considerate of his family but of virtually everyone he met.

Agnes Stapledon had a wide variety of her own interests, including the community, the schools, and local activities. She found her husband always ready to hear details of these, evaluate problems seriously, and offer suggestions. Inevitably this resulted in a high degree of amiable reciprocity on her part. Olaf used her for a sounding board for his ideas, and her assistance in the final revision of his manuscripts helped them attain their polished clarity. A part of this involved checking spelling, which she has said was not one of her husband's strong points. After his death it was she who transcribed the notes for *The Opening of the Eyes*, with their many difficult-to-decipher abbreviations, wrote the dedication to the work, and attended to all other details preceding publication.

Olaf's good sense of humor helped their relationship. He enjoyed good-natured jokes and entered into the spirit of fun on every occasion. His health was always good, which undoubtedly contributed to his even disposition. For all his easy-going casualness, however, he was extremely systematic in almost everything he did—as is proved, for example, by the extraordinary completeness of his scrapbooks. He could never be called an absent-minded professor.

Evidence of his devotion as a parent is still in his home. Wedged in a wall of books, many of them inherited from his father, is a little volume titled *Verses for Mary and David*. These are Olaf's original (and extremely well-written) rhymes for his children, hand-lettered and illustrated by him in color. Through a good part of his life Stapledon dabbled in painting. At one time he even joined an art class in London. One result of this, his painting of a harvested cornfield, still hangs in the Stapledon home. It shows a good color sense and a style that lies between realism and impressionism. Some readers will be surprised to learn that he did the cover jacket for the English edition of his book *Odd John*. The original is in crayon in shades of pink, blue and black and is quite striking as a visualization of the protagonist of the novel.

A catalog of the books in his home would have to be made to help determine what he may have read. These are present in literally every room, since his wife was an avid reader with an intellectual curiosity of her own. Serious philosophical volumes are there in great concentration. A cursory examination also reveals George Du Maurier's *Peter Ibbetson*, David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Areturus*, *Erewhon Revisited* by Samuel Butler, the 1929 edition of *The Purple Cloud* of M.P. Shiel and H.G. Wells' *The World of William Clissold*. (Stapledon, incidentally, had a short correspondence with H.G. Wells, which included a discussion of science fiction films.) This library leaves us no reason to doubt his assertion that he could not remember ever having read a science fiction magazine up to the time of writing *Star Maker*. However, he did admit to having read books by Verne, Wells, and—shockingly for some who might like it otherwise—Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Most of Stapledon's papers (which are willed to the University of Liverpool) his wife wisely insists on retaining until her death. "What is the sense of visiting the home of Olaf Stapledon if the soul and spirit have been removed?" she asks. "People who have some regard, some love, some feeling for his work can secure small satisfaction in seeing just the physical walls and furniture of his rooms. But to find his library, scrapbooks, diaries and papers actually still in place is something else again. The real essence of the man remains.

The nature of some of the serious works he read and which are in his library is shown in the bibliography of his second book of philosophy, *Waking World*, published by Methuen in 1934. These are categorized under the following headings: To-Day and the World-Aim, Human Personality, Art, Science, History, Philosophy, and Religion. It is of particular interest to note that Haldane's *Possible Worlds* is cited. The preface to *Waking World* reveals that Stapledon could accept criticism and was willing to rewrite when necessary, for he twice refers to a rejected earlier version of the book and credits five people for helping him revise it into acceptable shape: these included his wife Agnes; E.V. Rieu, a long-time friend and an editor at Methuen; and Professor L.C. Martin of Liverpool University.

He had similarly credited all these three, and in addition Gerald Heard, in the preface to his second work of fiction, *Last Men in London*. (Heard was to become an important writer of detective stories and science fiction.) This book, originally published by Methuen on October 27, 1932, was reissued at a lower price in 1934; the printings were small, and copies soon became difficult to find. Perhaps the fact that more than half of it was devoted to the origins, execution, and aftermath of World War I, told by a Briton from a British viewpoint to a people who had lost millions of men and no longer constituted the dominant world power, gave it a certain narrow appeal.

I say this because, judged by today's standards, *Last Men in London* is at best a dull work. Only the device of telling the story through the observation of an inhabitant of Neptune, two billion years in the future, gives it any claim to being science fiction. It was certainly disappointing to those who marveled at the unparalleled scope of *Last and First Men* and then found themselves focusing on just a few years of man's history. There was some outstanding imaginative material about the Neptunian world in the early and last chapters, but those between were outdated before they appeared.

We find the method which was the entire thrust of *A Man Divided* utilized here for the first time. Doltish man bumbles along, has rare flashes of insight that give him an unusually perceptive view of the human condition, and then lapses back into his customary mindless behavior. This supplements the ability of the protagonist to enter the minds of others and see events briefly from their viewpoints. All this is brought about through the agency of the last human race on the planet Neptune, which is exploring and influencing the past. Its motive is to give those it contacts a clearer perspective of their world, themselves, and their potentialities. Yet, as the book ends, Stapledon tells us that these Last Men are already in their own decline and are descending into a final period of mental and physical degeneration. Man is being advised, then, by a being that may no longer be his superior. Why listen to a recital of the causes, meaning, and results of World War I from one who may be no less confused than his readers?

Interestingly, however, *Last Men in London* does furnish us a sort of prelude to Stapledon's *Odd John*. This is in the form of the mentally superior youngster Humpty, who theorizes that he is the first of a superior, if not entirely different, race of humans. He is convinced he must either lead the human race or destroy it and create a new species. Humpty, who has a grotesque physique, dies without achieving his aim, but the protagonist of the story, Paul, feels that he was a mutant with the capability of raising mankind to a new level.

Considering that it was a patchwork of odds and ends rather than a unified work, *Last Men in London* received more critical acclaim than it deserved. Reviews were chiefly confined to England, for there was not to be an American printing of the book for forty years. Nevertheless, there is one chapter of considerable interest for the insight it gives into Stapledon's four years in the Friends Quaker Ambulance Corps. His introduction acknowledges this: "The last section of the chapter on the war, though it makes use to some extent of personal experience, is none the less fiction." The action in this chapter is undoubtedly fiction in great part, but the detailed description of the Corps' origin, the type of people in it, and the general nature of its work is unquestionably authentic.

Stapledon tells how the Corps was formed by Quakers, who are by religion pacifists, as an acceptable alternative to conscription into the army. To this corps came, in addition, those pretending to be pacifists and those ineligible for conscription who would have preferred combat. The pervasive guilt of some who were part of the unit and the ambivalent attitude of the populace, which treated its members as either contemptible cowards or as men doing much good, are comprehensively and sympathetically treated.

The army regarded the Friends Quaker Ambulance Corps as an unnecessary appendage, and its members were not trusted in combat areas. They conveyed wounded men and did whatever else they could well behind the battle lines. There were often long periods of inaction during which the men of their own volition cleaned and polished the equipment to standards beyond anything the army would have expected. During some of the great battles, when casualties were enormous, the efficiency and tireless action of the corps won grudging approval from the French unit to which it was attached. Members were outfitted in officer-type uniforms with large red crosses on the arms, and although the ethical question was raised as to whether this made them part of the military, they generally accepted all discipline, issue, methodology, and honors meted

out. Because they did not flaunt their pacifism and merged as much as permitted with the war effort, they experienced comparatively little discrimination, although throughout the war and afterward many carried grave personal doubts as to whether they had evaded combat duty out of actual conviction or cowardice.

In 1932 Olaf Stapledon's father died. His mother was to die three years later. Their only heir was Olaf, who commemorated their memory by bequeathing a large tract of woods near his home on Caldys Hill to the public as a park. It is known to this day as Stapledon Wood. I have already mentioned that an inheritance was Stapledon's chief source of income for the rest of his life. This is revealed quite candidly by Stapledon himself:

...I live chiefly on dividends and other ill-gotten gains, even while I proclaim that the system on which I live must go. But live I must, or *will*; and so must, or *shall*, my family; and as amply as needed for their development in personality. Having failed to earn enough by honest toil (toil there has been, but of a sort that society does not see fit to recompense adequately), I fall back with due thankfulness on dividends, until such time as the community has the sense to take to itself the ownership of the means of production, and to afford me some less disreputable source of income.

Odd John (Methuen, 1935) is about a human mutation with superior mental faculties and his own standards of morality. It can be considered Stapledon's first novel. The number, length and praise of its reviews—so fulsome and extensive that examination is needed for full comprehension—exceeded even those for *Last and First Men*. *Odd John* was easier for the public to read and understand and promptly secured publication in an American edition (Dutton, 1936). Considering the economic situation of the period, both editions could be judged successful. A working man in modest circumstances might conceivably have survived for a year on the proceeds. The book's popularity was lasting and it became the author's most frequently reprinted work. It indicated clearly that Stapledon was not only an imaginative storyteller, but that he had the potential for becoming a top-drawer novelist stylistically as well. To his detriment, he either did not recognize or disdained to exploit this talent.

Then, in 1937, Methuen issued *Star Maker*. This was an incredible imaginative achievement. Treating the two-billion-year history of the human race in *Last and First Men* as just one small event, Stapledon goes on to tell the history of the *universe*. Although the work was not printed in the United States for another 16 years, it was internationally acclaimed as a truly cosmic literary feat. It elicited an unbelievable outpouring of long, erudite, understanding, and appreciative reviews.

It was at this time that Stapledon made initial contact with the world of science fiction magazines and writers. Eric Frank Russell, who had begun to promote rocketry as a member of the British Interplanetary Society in 1935, had just sold his first story, "The Saga of Pelican West," to *Astounding Stories* (February, 1937). Russell lived in Liverpool, of which West Kirby was a suburb. Stapledon had sent a letter of inquiry to the society (which he eventually joined), and this letter had been read by Russell. He then visited Stapledon, bringing with him copies of the first science fiction magazines Stapledon had ever seen.

Now Russell was also a contributor to one of the early British science fiction magazines, *Tales of Wonder*, whose first issue appeared in June, 1937. The editor of that magazine was Walter Gillings. Quite possibly through Russell, Gillings arranged an interview with Stapledon which was published, together with a review of *Star Maker*, in his fan magazine *Scientifiction*. In this interview Stapledon is described as "a slender, youthful looking man (despite his 51 years), dressed in a sports jacket, grey flannel trousers and an open-necked shirt. With his thick blonde hair parted at one side, and his fresh features, he did not look a day older than 27." Stapledon gave Gillings his reaction to the science fiction magazines Russell had lent him:

...I was very surprised to find that so much work of this kind was being done. My impression was that the stories varied greatly in quality. Some were only superficially scientific, while others contained very striking ideas vividly treated.

On the whole, I felt the human side was terribly crude, particularly the love interest. Also, there seemed to me far too much padding in most of them, in proportion to the genuine imaginative interest.

In his introduction to *Star Maker*, Stapledon says:

"At a moment when Europe is in danger of a catastrophe worse than 1914, a book like this may be condemned as a distraction from the desperately urgent defense of civilization against modern barbarism." Admitting that a crisis in human affairs does exist, he still classes himself "with some of those 'intellectuals' who declare that they have no useful contribution to make to the struggle, and therefore had better not dabble in it," feeling his most useful service will be indirect.

This is quite understandable in view of his strong pacifist leanings, which he epitomized three years later:

...I suggest that *if* a nation is attacked and invaded by a foreign nation, it would be well advised not to defend itself, but to meet invasion with nonresistance... The foreign army would enter the country; no army, no air force would oppose them. They would occupy the seat of government; no one would prevent them, but none of their decrees would be obeyed. Many of those who refused to carry out the instructions of the invaders would, of course, be shot. There would be much brutality on the part of the exasperated "conquerors." But you cannot in cold blood shoot a whole people.

Stapledon was sadly, naively wrong, as Hitler proved by the extermination of six million Jews. It is interesting to ask what relationships with Jews Stapledon had up to this time. The only specific attitudes we have to go on are those expressed in his books, and these seem stereotypical. For example:

...The Jews were treated with a . . . combination of honour and contempt . . . they retained the fiction, if not strictly the fact, of racial integrity. They were still outcasts, though indispensable and powerful.... The Jews had made themselves invaluable in the financial organization of the world state, having far outstripped the other races because they alone had preserved a furtive respect for pure intelligence. . . . In them it was called satanic cunning, and they were held to be embodiments of the powers of evil... Thus in time the Jews had made something like a "corner in intelligence. This precious commodity they used largely for their own purposes; for two thousand years of persecution had long ago rendered them permanently tribalistic, subconsciously if not consciously. . . . Though capable to some extent of criticizing the practical means by which ends should be realized, they were by now wholly incapable of criticizing the major ends which had dominated their race for thousands of years. In them intelligence had become wholly subservient to tribalism. There was thus some excuse for the universal hate and even physical repulsion with which they were regarded; for they alone had failed to make the one great advance, from tribalism to a cosmopolitanism which in other races was no longer merely theoretical.

Statements far more denigrating of Jews had been appearing in works by science fiction writers as prominent as Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and M.P. Shiel, whose titles, with racism intact, had even been published by Jewish firms. What difference did it make? At the time it was as natural as breathing, even among writers, and few people thought anything of it.

But Olaf Stapledon was destined to be confronted with an extraordinary moment of truth. In the year 1939 he was a full-time member of the University of Liverpool staff, a temporary replacement for an ill faculty member. The dean called the faculty together and informed them that the Germans were planning the futures of Jews in Austria as well as Germany, and that an effort would be made to save six Jewish students from Vienna. Despite the fact that their examinations were only a few months off, some had been told that they would not be permitted to finish, and they were desperately trying to save themselves by leaving the country. Were there volunteers to put up these students for a few weeks?

Stapledon volunteered. A girl refugee from Vienna who was already staying with the family of Prof. Simey of Liverpool University happened to be a friend of one of those students, Wolfgang Brueck, and suggested his name. Actually Brueck was not a Jew by religion, but because his grandparents had been Jewish the Technische Hochschule of Vienna had informed him he would not be permitted to finish. Brueck's parents had been born Jewish but had been converted to Lutheranism. His mother had died while he was still a child, but his father, a civil engineer, had been sent to a concentration camp. (Miraculously he survived, remaining in Austria after the war was over.)

Brueck arrived at Stapledon's home in March, 1939. Stapledon, meanwhile, had posted a bond to guarantee that he would not become a ward of the community. While Brueck was happy in having escaped Nazi tyranny, his feeling of relief was tempered by concern for other members of his family who were still at the mercy of the Nazis. He had a smattering of school English, enough to make himself understood. He was 24 years old, a small man with a diffident manner. Adjusting to Stapledon's own children proved no problem; he hit it off well with them from the start. Mary, who was then eighteen, was at home, and Brueck described her as intellectual, kind-hearted, and highly feminine. The fifteen-year-old John was away at boarding school. On his return Brueck found him less talkative but a charming and good-natured chap.

Brueck confirmed information from other sources on Stapledon. "You could talk to him about anything," he said. "Somehow he always seemed interested. His sense of humor was excellent—in fact, there was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes most of the time. It didn't matter whether you wanted to discuss an intellectual subject or merely engage in idle banter, he seemed to adjust his mood to the situation. As to his relationship with his family—and now I speak factually and not out of personal friendship—it was of an unusual order. He got along superbly with his wife Agnes. They took walks together, swam together, and she took a great interest in his work and he in hers. His relationship with his children was excellent. He talked to them like adults and equals, not down to them. He never shouted at them.

"I regard Agnes Stapledon as my mother. My own died while I was still very young, and when I arrived in the Stapledon household I was alone and bewildered. I was treated as a member of the family, virtually became a foster son.

"When I came to England, Olaf was building a new home on a site he had selected in Simon's Field. It was about 100 yards off the nearest road and reached by a rough lane and drive. It faced the ocean and was set on several acres of land. In due course I was assisting him digging the tough, virgin ground, a job which gave me great satisfaction."

By British standards this house is large. It has a good-sized kitchen and an adjacent storage pantry almost as large. While these are fully equipped, I should not describe them as modern. The extremely commodious dining and living rooms, which adjoin each other, are unusual for their extensive picture windows; these occupy two sides of the dining room and the entire length of the living room, and face the sea. A downstairs hall runs the entire length of the house. The garage is attached, as in most homes built today.

On the second floor a series of bedrooms runs the length of the house. Some of these have sinks with hot and cold running water. At one end of the house, over the dining room, is a small-to-medium-sized chamber that served as Stapledon's workroom. There are large picture windows on two sides, and on the others are his research library, scrapbooks, diaries, notebooks, files and manuscripts still in place. A colored portrait of him hangs in the room, and another is in the hall outside the door. Brueck recalls that Stapledon worked in that room every morning.

Brueck asserts that Stapledon, unlike some authors who use people around them as a sounding-board for their ideas, rarely spoke to him about work in progress. "It was almost as though it were a separate business he was engaged in, which he felt should not intrude on social or family matters," he said.

Stapledon attended the cinema, enjoyed going to concerts and ballets, and particularly liked the theater. He enjoyed cigarettes after meals but did not appear to be a heavy smoker.

He believed in regular physical activity. He liked to hike and to swim in the sea. His other activities included mountain-climbing and tennis. When Brueck first arrived the two played tennis daily Olaf used to remark laughingly that he particularly enjoyed these games because Brueck was the only opponent he could beat. These games ceased when England entered the war; this was apparently Stapledon's symbolic renunciation of any frivolous pleasure until the Nazis were defeated.

Although he had professed a rather naive sort of pacifism, even after Hitler came to power, Stapledon had an "opening of the eyes" as the Nazi juggernaut swept over Europe and threatened the continued existence of England as a free nation. "As far as Adolf Hitler was concerned," Brueck states with personal emphasis, "I can assure you that Olaf Stapledon put aside pacifism."

Brueck's problems were not over merely because the Stapledon family had taken him in. After the war broke out he was classed as an enemy alien. In 1940 he was shipped to Canada, first to an internment camp in northern Ontario and then later to a camp at Farnham in Quebec. He was released in 1941 and he volunteered for the army, eventually joining the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at York. While the war was in progress he finally managed to get his degree in engineering from the University of Liverpool, in 1942.

Meanwhile Stapledon's son, John David, had gone to Abbotsholme and then spent one year at the Royal College of Music. He was in the navy four years during World War II as a radar operator on destroyers in the Mediterranean. One ship was sunk under him, and he was among the lucky third of its men who were not killed or drowned. After this harrowing experience he was transferred to a rest camp at a radar station on Aetna, Sicily. It was at this camp that he met his future wife Sarina Tetto, a Sicilian girl who worked there. After the war he accepted army training on the War Agricultural Committee, and this led to his becoming a market gardener on land Olaf bought for him at Heswall, a short distance from West Kirby. As a hobby John originally played the oboe, but now concentrates on the English concertina as a Morris Dance musician, also leading and providing band music for gatherings of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. He is also a composer of original tunes.

Mary Stapledon earned an M.D. degree and became a general practitioner. She married an Indian doctor named Shenai and had two children, both boys. She had met Shenai in a bookshop and been attracted by their mutual enthusiasm for medicine. They are no longer together.

As the war progressed, Stapledon continued to produce books of interest. *Darkness and the Light*, published by Methuen in 1942, offers two possible futures for the world in the manner of *Last and First Men*. The author's introduction warns the reader not to take this "worlds of if" theme too seriously:

...Neither of the two futures which I imagine for mankind is in the least likely to happen. Historical prediction is doomed always to fail. The most sophisticated sociologist, let alone a writer of fiction, is scarcely a more trustworthy prophet than Old Moore. Certainly I, who entirely failed to foresee the advent of fascism, cannot lay claim to describe the next phase of European change.

But this book is not concerned to prophesy. It seeks merely to give a symbolic expression to two dispositions now in conflict in the world. For lack of better words I call them the will for darkness and the will for light.

Stapledon's prediction that the book would be poor prophecy was itself prophetic. *Darkness and the Light* did not even foretell accurately the course or ending of the war; nevertheless, it is a fascinating volume to read. Because much of its content was so rapidly outdated, and possibly also because it appeared with a severely plain dust wrapper, the book went quickly out of print. It became one of the author's rarest titles, avidly searched for by collectors until it was reprinted in this country by the Hyperion Press in 1974.

Up until this point, Methuen had been Stapledon's primary publisher, except for works written to order for Penguin (*Philosophy and Living*), Heinemann (*Saints and Revolutionaries*), and Secker and Warburg (*Beyond the Isms*). It was logical, then, that when his new novel *Sirius* was completed, he would submit it to his old friend at Methuen, E.V. Rieu. But this time he received an unexpected reaction. He was told that because of the theme of the novel—a sheep dog whose brain is upgraded to be on a par with a human, engaging in sex acts with a girl—the house regretfully could not consider publishing it, though they would welcome future works with fewer provocative situations. Stapledon put the book in the hands of agents Hughes Massey, Ltd., who placed it with Secker and Warburg, his previous publisher of *Beyond the Isms*. In terms of storyline and quality of writing, this is not only Stapledon's best work but one of the greatest masterpieces of science fiction. Along with *Odd John*, it furnishes undeniable proof that had Stapledon selected a few more of the dozens of striking concepts which other science fiction writers were always so ready to borrow from him and developed them with the same deep focus and intensity, he would be in contention as one of the literary masters of the twentieth century as well as one of the great literary thinkers. There was much less emphasis on books in the newspapers and periodicals of England than before World War II, but the reviews *Sirius* received, although short, had the same tone of those given his earlier books. Despite wartime shortages of paper, the book did appear in a second edition.

Death into Life, a more mystical handling of the theme in *Darkness and the Light*, appeared from Methuen following the war's end in 1945. It indicated that Stapledon was attempting to deal with an area that could not be probed by material evidence alone. The war is over, and the spirits of all those killed attempt to make sense of it. There are long segments where Stapledon marches into future history as in *Last and First Men* and *Darkness and the Light*, but mysticism is omnipresent, almost as if he had given up attempting to solve the philosophic riddle by means of logic.

In 1946 Stapledon tried to analyze the "far reaching transformation of morals and manners" which were a consequence of the war period and to predict where they might lead. In a slim book *Youth and Tomorrow* (St. Botolph Publishing Co.) he ends with the chapter "Man Among the Stars," which shows what an infinitesimal speck we are in the great panoply of myriad and probably inhabited worlds. Finally he arrives at the core of his argument:

Bearing all these considerations in mind, we must surely feel that the practical crisis confronting the human species today is probably no mere meaningless accident. More probably it represents a phase through which all the worlds of self-conscious and other-conscious beings must pass when they reach our stage of development. This thought may give our human crisis an added significance, at least to those who have an inveterate impulse to see their situation in relation to the whole of things.

The Flames: A Fantasy, published by Secker and Warburg in 1947, is Stapledon's return to pure science fiction. In this 25,000-word novella a group of intelligent beings from the sun are thrown off in a mass of fluid matter. As this cools, they are sealed into a kind of hibernation within the solid rocks that form. When one of these rocks is thrown into a fire, the solar being is

revived, and it contacts a man nearby. It attempts to persuade him telepathically that mankind should create a permanently radioactive zone so that all hibernating solar flames may revive and flourish. In exchange for this, the flames will guide earthmen from serious errors in the progress of their development and reveal many secrets of nature to speed that development. Fearing that they will take control of mankind instead, however, the man not only resists them mentally but travels around the world putting out blast furnaces where flames may be living. Locked up in an insane asylum, he is on the verge of being used as their tool when he dies.

This story contains a review of Stapledon's former ideas culminating in the cosmic mind, and I said of it on its appearance:

...as the book concludes we find Stapledon still testing his failure, briefly pursuing the closed circle that has led him from God back to God in a vain attempt to circumvent the predicament, and shaking his head in bafflement. The truth is . . . that he has reached the limits of his imagination, and is forced to retreat to outlining in greater detail portions of his overall concept. . . . He needs to be reminded that there are countless good stories which have outlived inadequate philosophies.

Diplomatic relations between Russia and the United States, which had been steadily deteriorating since the end of the war, became severely strained when a blockade of all land access to Berlin was put into effect by East Germany on April 1, 1948. The purpose was twofold: to force the incorporation of West Berlin into East Germany and to test the will of the West. The United States responded with an airlift of supplies to West Berlin. If the Russians attempted to shoot down the planes there would be war, and it appeared that conventional weapons would not suffice. Truman implied that the atomic bomb would be used.

As 1949 opened the United States still had a monopoly on nuclear weapons. Russia was conducting a crash program to build its own atomic bomb and the United States intelligence knew it. There was a touch of fright in diplomatic maneuvers as a consequence. There were occasional voices here saying that we should drop the bomb on Russia before she was in a position to threaten us with her own. In science fiction circles, men as intelligent, educated, and well-known as Dr. Thomas S. Gardner and Dr. Langley A. Searles stated that pragmatically this was the rational (if horrifying) course to follow, though it was morally unjustifiable.

The decision of the National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions to sponsor a Cultural and Scientific Conference for Peace can now be viewed as part of the diplomacy of the atomic bomb. It was proposed at the Wroclaw Congress. It was sponsored by Communists, Communist-sympathizers, dupes, and fellow-travelers. It was endorsed by Russia, who sent to spearhead it Dmitri Shostakovich, its leading composer, plus scientists and representatives of motion picture and authors' groups.

Well-known figures from many nations converged on New York City, with an estimated 2,800 delegates present at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in the last week of March, 1949. Many prominent Americans had been recruited to "front" for the cause, including chairman Dr. Harlow Shapley, Paul Robeson, Lillian Heilman, Arthur Miller, Henry Wallace, Langston Hughes, and a list of names that did not stop short of Albert Einstein as a "member-at-large." Many who permitted themselves or their names to be used doubtless reasoned, "After all, why shouldn't a council on arts and sciences promote peace?"

But the conference was puzzling and annoying to the American man in the street, who felt that strained international relations were due entirely to the Russians. After all, our State Department had just issued a white paper listing the repeated refusals of the Soviet Union to exchange students or information or to engage in cultural activities. With the advantage of hindsight, we can see that Russia, fearing imminent attack by the United States, might have been stalling for time by spotlighting peace until she could become a nuclear power and deal from strength; or,

even more likely, was justifying developing a bomb at all—when reports of the first Russian explosion appeared, she could claim it was her only alternative to risking destruction.

Into this unreal, phantasmagorical situation intruded the presence of Olaf Stapledon. Outside of England he was known only to a few thousand science fiction readers. The reason he was considered at all was because the British government refused visas to every other celebrity who expressed a desire to be a delegate. (Louis Golding, famed British poet and novelist, had been turned down and Stapledon was his alternate.) He was invited out of desperate need for the Communist movement to show that there were prominent men in England, closest ally of the United States, who would stand up and talk against its "warlike" behavior.

In his younger days, as has already been stated, Stapledon participated in revolutionary movements, and his books repeatedly advocate replacing capitalism with a more advanced type of government. The flame of pacifism also still burned in him, and though he may have suspected the conference might not be all it seemed, he probably felt that any effort at peace was better than none. British authorities did not make it easy for him. There was scarcely a book he had ever written which did not directly or implicitly espouse aspects of Marxism. He had given pro-Marxist statements in talks and in classrooms. What may have been in his favor was that he had been a pacifist in World War I, and his books powerfully support that philosophy. Clearly, his espousal of pacifism was sincere. Another factor was that Stapledon was not a name of consequence to the outside world; his statements would not have the impact of a celebrity's. Even so, before he was granted a visa Stapledon endured so intensive an official grilling that he was quite disconcerted by the time he told his wife he would be going. Withal, he had to pay all costs of the trip out of his own pocket.

He landed in the United States on March 24th and was stunned to learn that being the only British delegate to get a visa had made him notorious. He was now a symbol, not just a person. He appeared in all the group photographs and was prominently spotlighted in *Life* magazine's April 4th issue, both speaking at the podium and in conversation with a fellow delegate. His entire twelve-day sojourn was a whirlwind of activity. "I have been desperately rushed, and indeed have not had a spare half hour to deal with my correspondence," he wrote me in a letter March 30th, "and am wondering whether I can survive the wild rush of American life until I leave for England on Monday!"

I was able to see him, though not meet him, on March 28th, when he participated in the tour stop at Newark, NJ. In Russia, the government had ruled that no American diplomat could travel outside the Greater Moscow area. Reciprocating, the United States refused to permit Russian delegates to leave New York City. That meant that Shostakovich and many other big guns of the conference could not travel to Newark, just a few miles away. Despite that, it was easy to see on a smaller scale just what Stapledon had been experiencing. A thousand people on the streets and sidewalks waited to watch the delegates enter the Mosque Theater. There were marching pickets from veterans' groups of every denomination in addition to a large bloc of Ukrainians, all carrying signs.

The program itself was an interminable harangue against our State Department and the Catholic Church. No one spoke in favor of either, not even the Catholic priests on the peace circuit. This went on for three hours with a pause only to take up a collection to help pay expenses of the conference. Stapledon was one of the very last speakers. He moved stiffly forward in response to the introduction of Millard Lampell (author of the script for the movie *A Walk in the Sun*), who concluded by saying, "The author of that magnificent fantasy, *Last and First Men*, Dr. Stapledon, has told me that the reason he is speaking here today is because he does not want to be the last man in the world."

Stapledon denied being either a Communist or a Christian, "Though I am, however, a Socialist, as are the majority of my countrymen." He considered the American attitude toward the conference very immature, and cited a British cabby who in driving him to the airport said, "Tell those Yanks to stop putting it over on us." He was very worried about the adamancy and belligerence of the United States, feeling it could lead to war. To the Russians he suggested that the triumph of their system might be much further off than they dreamed. He ended with the plea, "For God's sake, let's get together!" Stapledon's performance was weak, and when I wrote him as much he replied that he had been extremely tired, and not at his best.

When Stapledon landed in England, the Associated Press quoted him as saying, "I was amazed to see great excitement and worry in the United States about the prospects for a forthcoming conflict. There may be a war at any moment."

In September, 1949, the USSR tested its first atom bomb; we no longer had a monopoly on the weapon. At the end of that month the Berlin blockade was terminated, ostensibly because the billions of tons of food, fuel, and supplies flown into the city made it a futile exercise, but most probably because Russia no longer needed to prove itself. It, too, had atomic weapons.

Stapledon had been taken and he knew it. He had permitted himself to be used in the name of peace, but he had also been abused. He had listened to the meaningless diatribes of his fellows. He noted that not since the first day of the conference, when Norman Cousins of *The Saturday Review of Literature* spoke against it, had anyone been permitted on the rostrum who might do the same. He knew the Marxist philosophy of the end justifying the means and did not agree with it. This event marked Stapledon's complete break from the Communist movement as a vocal supporter. The schism was reflected in his very next book, *A Man Divided*, where the protagonist has become the "British Lenin," stumping for the cause. In the end, however, he decides to disengage himself from Communism, and gives his reason:

"The turning point," he said, "was when they expected me to write articles in the local press to the effect that the organization of the unemployed was entirely spontaneous, and not inspired by the Communists... When I protested, they replied that it really didn't matter lying, even to personal friends, if it was for the Revolution... We had many long and heated arguments, in which they simply insisted that the Revolution justified any means whatever... In the end I said I wouldn't do the job, and if they persuaded someone else to do it, I would publish the truth."

The same thought is found in *The Opening of the Eyes*: "If one must reject the comrades, it is not because they work for a world-wide revolution. For in the world today revolution, a painful social change, is the only hope. But what sort of revolution do the comrades desire, and by what means do they work for it?"

Not long after his return to England Stapledon met his longtime friend E.V. Rieu in London. Rieu describes the meeting in these words: "He had reached the goal of his thinking; he had come to terms with reality; and comprehension had been added to acceptance. There was a note of serenity in his bearing which it is a pleasure to remember, now that he is gone."

Agnes Stapledon regrets now ever having let those passages remain in the introduction, but at the time she had no inkling that posthumous interest in her husband would reach its present intensity. "It is much too simple and too final," she says. "I hope that Olaf was actually as serene in his thinking as Rieu believed him to be—but if he was serene I don't believe it was because 'comprehension had been added to acceptance.' I believe, rather, that he came to terms with reality by preparing himself to surrender the struggle to comprehend and agreeing to accept the reality unquestioningly whatever it might turn out to be. Did he actually renounce Communism and Socialism? He had never been a member of the Communist party, but he continued to admire some things about the Communist philosophy, just as he continued to detest some

attitudes and actions of the party members. He never abandoned the socialist ideal in which he included all that was best in Communism, but equally he was openly critical of the Socialist party. He was too modest a man ever to believe that he had the final word to pronounce either for anyone else or for himself. But I think his 'acceptance' was open-minded—therefore serene and at peace."

Wolfgang Brueck met Stapledon in London for the last time about three weeks before his death. Brueck then had a job in London, and joined Olaf, Agnes, and Mary for a meal at a Polish restaurant near Victoria Station. The four had a very pleasant evening and parted at Tottenham Court Road. Stapledon ate relatively little meat. He enjoyed vegetables and they constituted a good part of his diet. At the time of that last meeting Brueck remembers that Stapledon looked extremely fit and showed not the slightest indication of that shortness of breath which is sometimes an advance indicator of circulatory problems.

On September 5, 1950, Olaf Stapledon chopped wood. He felt more tired than usual, and Agnes persuaded him to lie down on the couch in the study. She went to Heswell that afternoon to visit her son.

On a September 6th the two were joined at supper by Agnes' mother, who was staying with them at the time. Olaf had little appetite and ate scarcely anything. After the meal he carried a tray of dishes into the kitchen. He put the tray down on a cupboard and collapsed, falling backward and hitting his head as he fell. He was dead before the family could do anything to assist him. The cause of death was later given as a coronary arterial occlusion. Deposits had built up, culminating in the attack that ended his life.

Brueck received a telegram from John the next day, informing him of the tragedy. Agnes retained her surface calm, but two days later, when Brueck visited her, she finally broke down and cried, remembering an old Australian aborigine saying: "If a strong gale blows in the evening it takes the souls away." She suffered terribly before time eased the loss.

William Olaf Stapledon's ashes were scattered to the winds on the cliffs of Caldry, near Simon's Field