

protect their families. This, I must remind you, was my feeling at the time. Later, I discovered how wrong I was.

'I continued, and because I could walk better than the people of the future, I found myself alone for the first time. At the top of the hill I found a seat of a yellow metal that I didn't recognise. I sat down on it and looked at the wide view of our world under the sunset of that long day. It was as beautiful as I have ever seen. The west was burning gold, mixed with some purple and red. Below was the valley of the Thames, in which the river lay like a line of shining metal.'

'As I watched, I began to try to understand the things I had seen. (Afterwards I realised I had only learned half the truth.) It seemed to me that people were now past their best. The sunset made me think about the sunset of our people. For the first time I began to understand an odd result of the social changes we are trying to make at the moment. Strength comes because we need to be strong; weakness comes when we feel safe. The work of improving the conditions of life, of making life safer and safer, had continued until nothing more could be done. The result was what I saw!'

'The science of our time has attacked only a few human diseases, but it moves forwards. Farming today is still at an early stage. We improve our plants and animals very slowly – a new and better apple, a prettier and larger flower, a cow that gives more milk. One day the whole world will be better organised, and better.'

'I knew that this change had been made, and made well, in the space of time across which my machine had jumped. The air was free of unpleasant insects, the earth was free of useless plants. Everywhere there were fruits and sweet and pleasant flowers. Beautiful birds flew here and there. And I saw no diseases during my stay.'

'Social changes, too, had been made. I saw people living in fine

buildings, beautifully dressed, but I hadn't yet found them doing any work. There were no signs of economic activity. The shop, the advertisement, buying and selling – all of these things are so important to us, and all of them were gone. It was natural in the evening that I had the idea of a social heaven.'

'But this change in conditions has to produce changes in people. What is the cause of human intelligence and energy? Difficulties make people strong and clever and help them to work together. And the family, with its protective love and selfishness, is there for the care of children. The love of parents helps to keep the young out of danger. Now, where were these dangers?'

'I thought of the physical smallness of the people, their low intelligence and those big ruined buildings. It strengthened my belief that humans, who had always fought against nature, had finally won – because after the fight comes quietness. People had been strong, energetic and intelligent, and had used this energy to change their living conditions. And now they too had changed because of the new conditions.'

'No doubt the beauty of the buildings was the result of the last waves of the now purposeless energy of people. After that, they began to lead quieter lives. Even artistic activity would finally disappear – had almost disappeared in the time I saw. The people liked to cover themselves in flowers, to dance and to sing in the sunlight. That was all they did.'

'As I stood there in the growing dark, I thought that I had understood the whole secret of these pleasant people. Possibly their population control had worked too well, and their numbers had fallen instead of staying the same. That would explain the empty ruins. My explanation was very simple, and believable enough – as most wrong ideas are!'