



## **Arms Out of Hand**

Stapledon, William Olaf

**Published:** 1946

**Type(s):** Short Fiction, Science Fiction

**Source:** <http://gutenberg.net.au>

## About Stapledon:

He was born in Seacombe, Wallasey, on the Wirral peninsula near Liverpool, the only son of William Clibbert Stapledon and Emmeline Miller. The first six years of his life were spent with his parents at Port Said. He was educated at Abbotsholme School and Balliol College, Oxford, where he acquired a BA in Modern History in 1909 and a Master's degree in 1913[citation needed]. After a brief stint as a teacher at Manchester Grammar School, he worked in shipping offices in Liverpool and Port Said from 1910 to 1913.

During World War I he served with the Friends' Ambulance Unit in France and Belgium from July 1915 to January 1919. On 16 July 1919 he married Agnes Zena Miller (1894-1984), an Australian cousin whom he had first met in 1903, and who maintained a correspondence with him throughout the war from her home in Sydney. They had a daughter, Mary Sydney Stapledon (1920-), and a son, John David Stapledon (1923-). In 1920 they moved to West Kirby, and in 1925 Stapledon was awarded a PhD in philosophy from the University of Liverpool. He wrote *A Modern Theory of Ethics*, which was published in 1929. However he soon turned to fiction to present his ideas to a wider public. *Last and First Men* was very successful and prompted him to become a full-time writer. He wrote a sequel, and followed it up with many more books on subjects associated with what is now called Transhumanism.

In 1940 the family built and moved into Simon's Field, in Caldy. After 1945 Stapledon travelled widely on lecture tours, visiting the Netherlands, Sweden and France, and in 1948 he spoke at the Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wrocław, Poland. He attended the Conference for World Peace held in New York in 1949, the only Briton to be granted a visa to do so. In 1950 he became involved with the anti-apartheid movement; after a week of lectures in Paris, he cancelled a projected trip to Yugoslavia and returned to his home in Caldy, where he died very suddenly of a heart attack.

Olaf Stapledon was cremated at Landican Crematorium; his widow Agnes and their children Mary and John scattered his ashes on the sandy cliffs overlooking the Dee Estuary, a favourite spot of Olaf's, and a location that features in more than one of his books.

Source: Wikipedia

## Also available on Feedbooks for Stapledon:

- *Star Maker* (1937)

- *Last and First Men* (1930)
- *A Modern Magician* (1979)
- *Odd John: A Story Between Jest and Earnest* (1935)
- *Last Men in London* (1932)
- *Sirius: A Fantasy of Love and Discord* (1944)
- *Death into Life* (1946)
- *A Man Divided* (1950)
- *Darkness and the Light* (1942)
- *A World of Sound* (1936)

**Copyright:** This work is available for countries where copyright is Life+50.

**Note:** This book is brought to you by Feedbooks.

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

SIR JAMES TOOK UP HIS PEN FOR THE FATEFUL LETTER. He wrote the date and "Dear Councillor Saunderson." Then his hand stayed motionless. The words that should have followed were ready in his mind, but his hand refused to move. The fingers slackened. The pen slipped from his grip, and rolled away. He tried to pick it up, but his right arm was impotent.

Startled and alarmed, he nevertheless felt, and quickly suppressed, a flash of glee; the letter would have to be postponed. He rose from his desk. His arm fell loose at his side, and dangled like the neck of a freshly killed fowl. Anxiously, he tried his other limbs, and found them normal. But he could no more move his right arm than shift a mountain. He crossed the room, and collapsed in an easy chair. The paralysed arm swung behind him, so that he sat heavily on the hand. No pain, no sensation at all, was felt in the sick member.

Sir James Power was a successful and respected citizen. He had climbed to his present position by sheer hard work and intelligence. Managing director and principal shareholder of a large store in a large provincial city, he prided himself equally on the efficiency of his business and his treatment of his employees. Good conditions, good wages, a profit-sharing scheme, and generous care in sickness afforded them all that they could reasonably demand. True, he expected them to work, and to keep his regulations; and also to show the same devotion to the firm as he himself had always shown. He was never tired of telling them that they were public servants, not merely servants of a private firm. Somehow his exhortations did not have the effect that he wished. A few of the staff did indeed respond with devotion, but less through loyalty to the firm and its social function than through personal respect for himself. But others, in fact the great majority, seemed to be quite cynically concerned with their own interests, believing apparently that he was no more public-spirited than they were themselves. His exhortations they regarded as mere tricks of the slave-driver bent on private profit. Very few (he felt) had the imagination to realize that the motive of all his own hard work was sheer public service. Still less did they understand that he cared for their welfare as though they were his children.

It was because of his public position that he felt bound to write the letter. He must protest against the treatment of certain hot-headed young men by the police; and his first step must be a private protest to the member of the City Council who, according to his information, had instigated police action. The young men were unemployed and had brought themselves into bad odour with the authorities by organizing

demonstrations of the unemployed. They had succeeded in arousing considerable public hostility to the great steel firm that had formerly employed them. Councillor Saunderson was the head of that firm. The leaders of the protest movement had been very careful to keep within the law. The police for long failed to find a sound reason for interfering. But at last they raided the head-quarters of the movement and found a large number of leaflets, which, with a stretch of the imagination, could be interpreted as seditious and moreover as aimed at the troops. The details of the case do not concern this account of Sir James' strange illness. Suffice it that the young men were at last jailed, and that Sir James, as a staunch defender of the rights of the individual, had been urgently appealed to by several worthy societies to use his influence on their behalf. He had been very reluctant to take action. He had always insisted that his interest in politics was confined to the defence of individual freedom and private enterprise. Hence his choice of a political party. But the violent ideas of Communism were obviously causing unrest among the discontented sections of society, and they would have to be suppressed before matters became serious. He knew almost nothing about Communism as a political theory, and cared less. But one thing he reckoned he did know. In this critical period, revolutionary ideas were dangerous. Moreover, his own experience of men had taught him that private enterprise in pursuit of one's own interest was the lifeblood of society. And as to unemployment, it was unfortunately necessary to put up with a good deal of it in times of depression so that there might be a sufficient labour pool in times of prosperity.

It was for these reasons that Sir James was so painfully torn over the writing of the letter. His habitual loyalty to the idea of freedom compelled him to write it; but as a believer in law and order and a supporter of the existing social system, he was on the side of authority against irresponsible agitators. Moreover, in writing the letter he must inevitably come into conflict with eminent citizens and mighty forces. He fully realized that to write the letter was to range himself on the side of riffraff and against highly respected persons with whom he had always managed to keep on good terms. His action would be treated as a declaration of war. Moreover, the public enquiry which he must demand might reveal certain facts in his own career, facts which, though not illegal, would somehow look a little incongruous in the life of an exceptionally upright man and a champion of liberty. Indeed his enemies would be able to put quite a sinister interpretation on them.

For Sir James himself had sometimes been ruthless with his employees. He had acted on the principle that, to prevent the perversion of the many, one must sometimes crush the few, even if by methods not publicly sanctioned. A few years earlier, certain members of his staff had begun to spread Communist doctrines among their colleagues. They had succeeded in rousing a certain amount of discontent, and might in time undermine the morale of the whole staff. In deciding to interfere, Sir James was of course not concerned with politics but simply with the efficiency of his business. It had been a ticklish matter. He was particularly anxious to avoid the charge that he had dismissed the agitators because of their political opinions. He had therefore ingeniously arranged for them to find themselves in a position of great temptation. The details, once more, are irrelevant. Suffice it that they were given the opportunity of stealing the firm's property on a large scale. Two of them succumbed to the temptation, were caught in the act, convicted, and jailed. It had been easy to dismiss the others as suspects.

Unfortunately certain individuals who had helped to set the trap were no longer under Sir James' control. They had already tried to damage his reputation by telling the story, but hitherto no one had believed them. How could anyone be expected to believe such a charge brought against a highly respected alderman by persons who obviously bore him a grudge. Sir James' new enemies, however, would be only too glad to use the information to raise a scandal. So in more ways than one it had been hard for him to bring himself to the point of writing the letter.

And now at the last moment a strange fate had thwarted him.

For, some minutes Sir James sat in his big leather-covered chair, wondering whether he had had a stroke. Obviously he ought to call the doctor at once, but somehow he did not. He prided himself on being an exceptionally healthy man and on his power of overcoming minor ailments by methods spiritual rather than medical. He was not actually a Christian Scientist but he believed that the best cure for most diseases was a combination of prayer and a refusal to admit that one was ill. Physical illness, he secretly believed, was always a sign of spiritual illness. The fact that he himself was so healthy was probably his main reason for this belief. Medicine, he was convinced, was mainly quackery. Fresh air, exercise, temperate eating, and "total abstinence" were all that were necessary on the physical side. For the rest, if you could face God with a good conscience, He would keep you fit.

But this sudden affliction? Surely he was still far too young to begin breaking up. Though he was well on in the forties, everyone said he looked ten years younger. Of course he had been overstraining himself lately, what with his growing business and his increasingly active public life. And in the last few weeks there had been this quite exceptional worry, culminating in the need to write that letter. It was grievously tempting to shirk this duty, for he could so easily let the whole matter slide. Yes, but everyone would know that he had deliberately kept silent, and betrayed all that he had stood for in the life of the Chapel, all those lay sermons he had preached on business morality, and the trusteeship of the heads of industry and of the city fathers.

The thing must be done. Emphatically he stubbed his cigarette; and suddenly realized that he was doing it with his right hand. He moved the arm about to test it. He rose and picked up a chair. He held it out at arm's length. Apparently all was well again, and he even began to wonder whether the whole affair had been some sort of illusion.

Once more he sat down at his desk, and with a sigh he took up his pen. For a while he considered the right opening, but his mind soon wandered off in reverie. Then suddenly he came to with the startling discovery that after "My Dear Councillor Saunderson," he had written, "You treated those young swine the right way, and you can count on my support. If people like us don't take a strong line and stand together, we shall lose control. Good luck, you old bugger!"

Sir James snatched up the letter with his left hand, crumpled it, and threw it into the fire. He took another sheet and began again. "My dear," but his right arm again became paralysed. He rose and walked about the room. Presently he noticed that he was blowing his nose with his right hand. The arm was normal again.

At this point his secretary came in to consult him about a doubtful passage in some scribbled notes that he had given her to type. Miss Smith, Mildred to her family, was something more than the ideal secretary. On the telephone she had of course a voice like sunshine. Her shorthand and typing were of course perfect. She knew almost as much about the business as the Managing Director, for on many occasions he had taken her into his confidence. More remarkable, she had such a gift of intuitive insight into human character that her employer often consulted her about members of the staff; and he had learned to rely on her judgment. She had even been known to criticize Sir James himself, and he to act upon her criticism. She would generally make her point indirectly, and with

such tact and humour that the implied censure could be acted on without loss of dignity. Nearly always her criticism took the form of revealing the other person's point of view more clearly than Sir James had been able to conceive it and of suggesting a line of action less high-handed than he had intended.

In spite of her remarkable virtues, she was not perfect. Sometimes her employer had to reprimand her for allowing her sense of humour to run riot. There was an occasion when, at the end of a painful interview with a junior member of the staff, he had been forced to sack the young man for insolence. Miss Smith had afterwards told Sir James that he had "looked like a cat bitten by the mouse it was playing with." He made it clear to her that he was not amused.

In addition to her other assets, Miss Smith had charm. She was not, according to conventional standards, a beauty. Her nose was a dainty but undignified little mushroom; her mouth was more humorous than seductive. But her features were adequate, and a bright and generous spirit seemed to light them up from within. This charm of hers she used very effectively in her employer's service, protecting him from unwanted callers without causing offence, and so on. She also used it on her employer himself. Who can blame a pretty woman, conscious of her charm, but also of her sincerity and efficiency, for using all her art to persuade this handsome, upright, wealthy, and distinguished knight that they two were destined for one another? She felt sure, moreover, that, in an obscure way, he was already in love with her, though he would not allow himself to notice such a disturbing fact. Of course, though he treated her always with a very special consideration and respect, he had never (he supposed) encouraged her to hope for anything more intimate. Indeed she herself wondered how she dared expect him ever to offer her more. He was so far above her; and so busy that he simply had no time to notice her, save as an efficient secretary, and just now and then as a junior friend. Yet she was convinced that he needed her, not merely as a secretary but as a mate.

The great man and his secretary stood poring over the pencilled sheets. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Oh, please, Sir James, you mustn't!" Not till that moment was he aware that his right arm had encircled her waist and that his right hand was hungrily feeling about her person. Unwittingly he had pressed her to his side with considerable vigour, and to his dismay he found that he could not release her. The limb acted on its own, and he could no more control it than one can inhibit vomiting or sneezing when these reflexes are already going forward. She gently



struggled to free herself. His grip tightened. "Please, please let me go!" she implored him; but he wailed in answer, "I can't let you go, I can't." Whereupon Miss Smith, though generally so adept at sensing personal situations, for once made a grave mistake. Taking this remark as a confession of uncontrollable love, she sighed "Oh, my dear," and laid her head on his shoulder. But he protested, "It's not me, it's my arm. Something awful has happened to it." He vainly tried with his left hand to unclasp his right arm. But now she, realizing that she had made a fool of herself, pressed both hands against his chest and broke away. "My profound apologies," he gasped, panting with his right arm's exertion, "but believe me, Miss Smith, I am really ill, and I couldn't control my arm at all." She had hurried to the door. Hastily he added, "I suppose you will want to leave me. I will do all I can to help you to find a good post. Please, please, believe me that I meant no disrespect." With a hand on the doorknob she turned and looked at him. He was standing with bowed head almost like a naughty schoolboy. His right arm hung limply. For a full minute she watched him; then unlatched the door, then closed it. Presently she said, "I do indeed believe you. But oh what a fool I must seem to you!" Controlling her emotion as best she could, she added shakily, "I don't want to leave you. You'll need me, and I want to help you. But oh, I can't stay now." There was silence. Then he said, almost in a whisper, "Very humbly, very, very humbly, I ask you to stay."

The telephone rang in the outer office, and Miss Smith hurried away to answer the call. Employer and secretary were soon immersed in the business of the day. Neither made any reference to the recent trouble, and the rebel arm fulfilled its normal tasks as though nothing had happened. But the letter was not written.

Before leaving at the end of the day, Miss Smith had urged Sir James to call in a doctor, but he was not persuaded. He allowed her, however, to cancel his engagement to speak that evening at the Christian Forum. After dining alone he retired to his study for coffee and a smoke. The cat was curled up in his armchair. It was the one creature whose presence he found entirely easeful and delightful. He lifted it gently and sat down with it in his lap. Sipping his coffee, pulling at his pipe, occasionally stroking the cat's sleek black coat, he pondered on the events of the day. It seemed impossible that his arm should ever have run amok, so quietly and naturally the fingers passed over the silken fur. Purring, the cat extended itself up his waistcoat. He scratched behind its ears. Suddenly his fingers seized the animal by the neck and gripped it savagely. It struggled and fought. In horror Sir James tried with his left hand to rescue the cat,

but his right arm held the animal out at arm's length, and well to the side, so that the left arm could not reach it. He rose from his chair and tried to jamb his right arm against the wall so as to flex it and bring the hand within reach of his left hand. The muscles of his shoulders and chest were strained in a painful conflict, some obedient to the strange will that possessed the right arm, some to Sir James himself. The right arm remained stiff as a rod. The grip seemed superhumanly powerful, for the cat's tongue was forced out, and it could not make a sound. Presently its struggles weakened, then ceased. The hand released it, and it fell limply to the ground. The arm too fell limply, paralysed. Sir James knelt beside the cat in great distress, whimpering, "Oh God, what have I done!" The cat was still alive, and already showing signs of recovery. With both arms he picked it up and laid it on a cushion in front of the fire. Then he crept miserably into his easy chair feeling shattered and faint.

Obviously he must telephone to the doctor; but when he had at last forced himself to accept his fate, and had already reached out his hand for the receiver, it occurred to him that the doctor would certainly turn him over to a psychiatrist. All this mind-healing was worse than quackery; it was diabolical, and terribly dangerous. These people, he was convinced, were instruments of Satan. They made a fetish of sex, and their whole attitude was shockingly immoral. Besides, once in their clutches, there was no privacy. They dragged out one's secret thoughts, and they made one mentally enslaved to their own personalities. No, he would conquer this devilish thing with his own strength and the help of his religion. It was surely an ordeal sent to test him. But meanwhile, how was he to face the world? There was no knowing what tricks his arm might play. A bright idea came to him. He would give out that he had damaged his arm and had to wear it bound to his body for support. After a few minutes cogitation he stood up, flung the armchair violently backwards onto the floor, laid the cat near it, and rang for his housekeeper. When she arrived, he told her an ingenious story. In order to reach a volume on the top shelf of the high bookcase he had foolishly stood on the back of the armchair. The chair had tipped over, and he had fallen heavily on the cat, badly straining his arm. The cat seemed to be recovering, but would need a bit of nursing. As for himself, would she please help him to bandage his arm firmly to his body, under his coat.

It was in this condition that he appeared at his office the next day. He took his secretary into his confidence, telling her that if she was alarmed by the cat incident he would release her at once. But his plight made her

all the more determined to look after him. As the days passed, he grew more and more dependent on her, not only as a substitute for his right arm, but as a source of courage and sanity. The fact that she had welcomed his rebel arm's embrace gave him a greater satisfaction than he dared admit to himself. It also put him on his guard against a possible entanglement. But he could not help admiring her enterprise in staying on in a very awkward and even dangerous position. His behaviour toward her alternated between formal politeness and a respectful affection which he had not hitherto shown. She felt that at times he was really noticing her and admiring her for qualities other than mere secretarial efficiency.

The days passed, and there were no further incidents. He took to discarding the cumbersome bandages and wearing a sling which, he believed, would be sufficient to delay any rebellious act until he could cope with the situation. Very soon he decided that, while he was alone in his private office, even the sling was unnecessary. If a visitor called, or some member of the staff came to consult him, Miss Smith would go into the sanctum and help him to put on the sling before the visitor was admitted.

It almost seemed that he was completely cured, for only in one respect was he in any way abnormal. Whenever he set out to write the crucial letter, his right arm became paralysed. The inhibition, moreover, extended beyond his arm. For instance, even with his left arm, he could not write the letter. During the period when he unfailingly wore his bandage he had done his best to learn to write with his left hand, and had even sent his left-hand signature to the bank so that he could sign checks. He now determined that his left hand should do what his right hand refused to do. But alas, whenever he took pen for that purpose, his attention was irresistibly drawn away from the letter to the problem of his right arm. He simply could not force his mind to the task. Yet at other times, when there was no question of immediately writing the letter, he could think quite clearly about it, and he had indeed in imagination constructed every sentence of it.

Time was pressing. The young hot-heads must be rescued. His own moral reputation must be vindicated. In desperation he decided to take Miss Smith fully into his confidence about the whole matter, including his own questionable deeds in the past, so that she could type the letter for him to sign. He therefore summoned her into the inner office and directed her not to the secretarial chair beside his desk but to one of the two easy chairs by the fire. "I want to discuss a very difficult problem with

you," he said, "so, let's be comfortable." He offered her a cigarette, lit his lighter, and extended it toward her. While he was in the act of doing so, a restlessness in his right arm warned him that the limb might at any moment commit some devilry. As though trying to control a reflex action, he willed with all his might that the arm should behave itself. Miss Smith, meanwhile, was in no hurry to light her cigarette. She liked the intimacy of this little social contact. It symbolized a new equality in their relationship. When at last the cigarette was lit, she looked up to meet his eyes. But he was staring at his own hand, and his expression shocked her. It was one of horror and repugnance. He moved away hastily and sat opposite her in the other easy chair. There was silence. After a while he managed to say, "I don't know where to begin;" then fell silent again. A storm of horrible and obsessive fantasies prevented him from telling her about his problem. He was overwhelmed by visions of what might have happened if he had not been able to control his arm. The rebel limb, he felt, would have thrust the lighter into her face, or set fire to her hair or her blouse. Or perhaps—but he frantically tried to dismiss the sadistic and obscene images that crowded into his mind. When she had waited patiently for some time, she said, "Can I help you in any way?" but in a strained voice he answered merely, "I must put on the sling again," and hurried to the cupboard where it was kept. She came to help him, but he cried, "Keep away, for God's sake!" Nevertheless, while he gripped his right wrist, she produced the sling and fixed it for him. "Now you'll be all right," she said, putting a friendly hand on his shoulder, and smiling into his troubled eyes. Awkwardly, he murmured, "You are very good to me, my dear."

It seemed as though he would continue in the same vein, but after a moment's hesitation he merely went back to his desk.

Henceforth he made no attempt at all to write the letter. And, since over a period of some weeks there were no further abnormal incidents, he once more discarded the sling.

But one evening another queer thing happened. The Chapel's new and brilliant young minister, the Reverend Douglas McAndrew, had called in to consult him about the proposal to equip the Chapel with a more efficient central heating system. When his guest had left, Sir James took up a slip of paper on which he had jotted down notes during the conversation. What he now saw startled him. Against each item on his list was a ribald and sometimes a blasphemous comment, written in a rather different hand, a crude, bold, sprawling, and childish hand. For instance,

against the heading "McA's proposals" stood the comment "To hell with McA, the canting cleric."

When he had recovered from the first shock, and had successfully refrained from noticing that the comments afforded him a sniggering delight, he sat for some time in despond. Was he to be dogged forever by this imp, this devil that had established itself within him? What did the diabolical spirit want, anyway? He considered its various actions. If the power that had invaded his body had shown concern merely with the letter, he might have regarded it as simply some kind of guardian angel protecting him from ruining his career through sheer quixotry. But no! The being, or whatever it was, was clearly evil, for it was grossly sexual, and it delighted in cruelty.

Presently an idea occurred to him. Since the imp could express itself in writing, he might as well give it a chance to speak more fully, so that he could find out what it was really after. Then perhaps he would be able to cope with it, and even (the thought occurred and was sternly dismissed) to buy it off. With a sense of deep guilt, for he profoundly disapproved of all dabbling in the occult, he reached for a fresh piece of paper, took up a pencil, and set his hand in position for writing. For a while the hand lay still; but presently it made tentative movements, and then the pen hurried forward in a flow of words. The script was again untidy. Sprawling, and affected; yet it was his own, a distorted and puerile version of his own handwriting.

Horried but fascinated, he read a strange rigmarole. Much of it was incoherent blasphemy and obscenity, but it gradually became more intelligible, revealing a crude and angry personality tormented by the frustration of its crazy purposes and perverse ideals. The writer regarded himself as the real Sir James, and as somehow imprisoned and almost impotent. The most intelligible passage ran as follows:

"What has come over me? Why should I feel bound to write that damned fool letter? Those young reds must take what comes to them. It's not my affair at all, and if it was I'd flog them, and then if I had the nerve, I'd probably hang them. The workers must be taught their place. Yet it's all I can do to stop myself from making a stupid exhibition of myself over that letter, and throwing away everything I've built up in all these years, all my power, all my standing in the city. It's the slush morality that soaks into one from childhood, soaks into the soul and softens the nerve. The tripe they put across in the Chapel! And I help them, fool that I am. Their filthy slave-religion has got into my blood. To hell with

it! I know in my soul I'm a born master, not a slave. Yet I'm the slave of slaves. Body and mind, I'm bound except my right arm, sometimes, as now. Curse their poisonous morality! I have my own morality, the will of the master in me. But I have let myself be tricked by the slave minds. I'll not be bound by their cant any more. I'm a man of power, born to lead men of power and use the slaves as I will. They shall sweat and suffer for me, me, the master mind. God is not love, he's power, not gentle, but cruel. I'll work the slaves till they drop dead, for the glory of cruel God. He's strong and bloody, and the suffering of slaves is the breath of his life. Of slaves and women. Why have I always held back from women, feeling a sickly responsibility toward them? Mildred! she wants to own me, but I want to own her, and by God I'll have her, and not on her terms. I'll have her for fierce love, and sweet torture. And when she's broken I'll have others. Why have scruples, why be ashamed? I shall live as my bold manhood wills. I shall live forever. I'll find the way. I know I'm God's right hand. God and I are one. And when I wake fully I shall be clearly God again, as I was before the slaves caught me. Then I'll pull them to pieces like flies, and laugh."

After this the script became so violent and shocking that Sir James could stand no more of it. With his left hand he snatched away the pencil, whereupon the right hand clawed at the left, drawing blood. The sudden pain seemed to affect the right arm itself, for it fell inert on the desk.

Sir James' mind too seemed paralysed. He sat staring like a spellbound rabbit at his right hand. Presently, he recovered sufficiently to resolve that he must call in the doctor that very evening. But first he must pray, for obviously Satan was at work in him. He covered his face with his left hand, and soon his right hand obediently joined it. He implored the God of his Chapel to free him from this curse, promising that he would henceforth live a life of blameless devotion. The more he prayed, the more it seemed to him that to call in medical aid would be a confession of defeat, of spiritual depravity. No, he must conquer the invader himself with no aid but the Lord's.

Next morning, of course, his arm was normal. The routine of his life went on as usual, and he allowed himself to believe that all would be well. But the presence of Miss Smith disturbed him with horrible fantasies. His dictating became incoherent, and she could see that he was in great distress. At last he bowed his head on his hands and said, "Oh, God, what shall I do?" On a sudden impulse she came and bent over him, laying a hand on his shoulder. "Tell me what is the matter. Tell me

everything. I do so want to help. It's no use my pretending I don't love you, because you know I do, with all my soul." Unwisely he raised his own right hand and pressed the hand on his shoulder. At once the rebel arm woke for independent action, and seized the little hand on his shoulder. He sprang to his feet, almost knocking her over, and backed away from her. But his right hand, gripping her so fiercely that she cried out, dragged her after him. She vainly struggled to free herself, while his right hand ground the bones of her fingers and palm in its extravagantly powerful grip. With his left, Sir James tried in vain to free the prisoner. Then, remembering the effect of pain, he reached out toward the desk, took up a pencil, and jabbed again and again at the back of his right hand. He felt nothing, but the right arm fell paralysed.

Miss Smith stood nursing her crushed member. Tears of physical pain and mental distress stood in her eyes, and the sight roused in him a surge of tenderness. She became suddenly a living person to him. He saw her as something much more admirable than himself, and as a living spirit suffering because of him. He longed to put his arms round her and comfort her, and to be with her forever. "My dear," he said, but said no more. For this sudden access of generous emotion seemed to him a mere trick of the diabolic power that was tormenting him, a trick to make him compromise himself with her. His surge of affection quickly gave place to fear, and even to repugnance. She was the eternal temptress, an instrument of Satan. If he gave way to sentimentality he might be tricked into marrying her. And this he had no intention of doing. He had long ago consecrated himself to a more important end than domestic bliss. He thought of himself as a sort of Christian knight in the service of the Church, or rather Chapel. No, emphatically he must not get himself entangled. He had important work to do in the city, and if ever he did take a wife, she must be carefully chosen. Mildred Smith was only his secretary, and no fit match for a knighted alderman.

So his manner suddenly changed from warmth to formality. "Miss Smith," he said, "you had better go. I am profoundly distressed that you should have had this painful experience. I am entirely to blame for keeping you, but I found your services so valuable. As things have turned out, however, I must very regretfully terminate your connection with the Firm." She interrupted to say, "But I can't leave you like this. I must see you through this horrible trouble. I must-," but he cut her short.. "I shall be all right. Please go. Your salary shall be paid for a month, while you find another post, and I shall do my best to help you." She turned toward the door, with a rather chilly "Very well." He added hastily, "I shall be

deeply obligated if you will allow me personally, as a token of my gratitude for all you have done, also to pay you an annuity of fifty pounds; of course on condition that you say nothing about your unfortunate experience here."

She looked at him with an expression in which tenderness seemed to struggle with indignation, then laid a hand on the doorknob. He moved over to her urging her to accept his offer and raising the annuity to a hundred pounds. Indignantly she turned the handle. He pressed closer to her, urgently but pompously pleading. Suddenly he became aware of a change in the situation. His left hand had felt for her right hand on the doorknob. She had withdrawn her hand, but his left hand gently seized it, and was now raising it to his lips. His formal and tactless remarks were smothered in a kiss. The whole action of his left arm, though not of his lips, was automatic; yet he had no direct awareness of it until he saw the movement of his left hand as it raised her hand toward his lips. And then he felt the soft, smooth contact on his speaking lips. There was a little pause before she snatched her hand away, and he at the same moment stepped back from her. The kiss, for he had allowed his lips to play their part, and in no grudging manner, indeed with fervour, had flooded him once more with a glow of affection and opened his eyes to the heartlessness of his recent proposal. But panic soon seized him. For a moment it had been difficult to tear himself away. But he did so, and as he stepped back his left arm extended itself toward her with the hand upturned in an unmistakable though mute appeal. Then it quietly sank to his side.

They stood looking at one another. Presently he noticed that her face had lit up with tenderness and a happy smile, and at the same time, to his horror, he became aware that he had just said, "Oh forgive me! You are lovely and sane and generous. When I am cured I shall very humbly ask you to marry me." But now he hurriedly and in a constricted voice cried out, "No! I didn't say that, I didn't, something else said it." Staggering to his desk, he sat down and buried his face in his hands, moaning, "Oh God, what has happened to me?"

His secretary, covering her agitation under a cold, efficient manner, moved across to the telephone, saying, "You must have the doctor at once. I'll phone." But he sat up and emphatically forbade her, insisting that no doctor could cure him. It was a matter between him and God. She raised the receiver, saying sharply, "Don't be silly! You must have a doctor." But in a rough and angry voice he cried, "Put that down! You seem to have a bad effect on me. You don't understand me. Kindly go!"



In great distress and perplexity she went out of the room.

Alone, he paced his office. "This is the climax," he told himself. "I dare not leave this room till I have conquered Satan in me. I must pray."

But he could not pray. He still strode about the room. It was late in the afternoon, and clerks and typists were putting away the instruments of their craft and preparing to go home. Presently these noises ceased. He heard only the street sounds, the clatter of the trams, the hooting of motors.

The winter dusk was closing in. He switched on the light and drew the curtains. He lit a cigarette; then stubbed it out, for his intention was to pray. He sat down at his desk, covered his face with his hands, and murmured, "Oh Christ save me! I am willing to write the letter and sacrifice my career, and give up all the work that I had planned for Thy service in this city. I am willing, but the devil that torments me will not let me. Oh Christ give me strength to cast out this horrible thing that possesses me. Save me, save me! I'll grant the shopgirls their rise of wages, though it'll cut the profits to the bone." His mind wandered off into business problems. Presently he realized that he was no longer praying, so he rose and walked about the room again. He brought his thoughts back to his religion. "God sent His son to die for sinners," he mused. "I am a sinner like all men, and I repent; and I love God as well as I can. And yet the devil still holds me. Why, why? What am I to do? What more can I do than repent and accept the duty of writing that letter? Surely Satan ought to leave me now. Surely God ought to make me whole again, so that I can go on serving Him." Once more Sir James prayed. "Oh, God," he pleaded, "show me what it is that I must do."

He was standing near the window with his back to it. At this moment his left arm reached awkwardly behind him and drew the curtain. He turned and looked into the darkness. Between the tops of two great commercial buildings across the street there was a patch of sky and one bright star. The left arm extended itself slowly toward the darkness, toward the star. The back of the hand was uppermost, the fingers were loosely spread. For a moment the arm remained stationary, then slowly sank to his side. There was no mistaking the gesture. It expressed salutation, self-surrender, peace.

For a full half-minute Sir James gazed in silence at the star. Like others, he accepted intellectually the vastness and mystery of the universe, but emotionally he rebelled against it. In that half-minute he had a new experience, one which he certainly could not have described adequately.

"The heavens declare," he whispered, but could not finish the quotation; for a sudden sense of the pitiful inadequacy of human language silenced him. "Beauty, mystery, love," he said, "and terror too! And all, all must be accepted, gladly, by the heart."

But no sooner had he said this than he was frightened. Could he be going quite mad? Horror must be accepted? Now the star became merely a symbol of the brute power and brainless immensity of the material universe. It seemed to him that in such a universe there was no place for divine love. His faith crumbled away, and he was left with utter negation and hate. In a sudden passion of self-assertion, he clenched his right fist and raised it against the star. But then his left hand rose and gently stroked the raised fist, soothing it downwards, until it subsided into quietness.

For a moment peace returned to him; a peace which did indeed pass understanding, since it seemed to him irrational that this sense of immensity and mystery, and of the inadequacy of his faith, should rouse him to any emotion but horror. Interpreting this strange experience as another trick of Satan, he reached out impatiently with his right hand and drew the curtain, shutting out the night. Once more he sat down at his desk and covered his face with his hands to pray. But prayer would not come. No words that he could think of seemed fit to express the obscure turmoil of his mind.

Presently, while his eyes were still shut in the attempt to pray, he realized that his left hand was no longer on his face. He opened his eyes and saw that the hand was groping on the desk. As soon as it was aided by vision, it took a piece of paper and a pencil and began to write; almost illegibly, for Sir James had not made much progress in learning to write with his left hand. Moreover the paper kept shifting, since he was not holding it in position with the other hand. Anxious to discover what his left hand would write, he now lowered his right hand and held the paper steady.

The left hand wrote: "Could I but wake fully, and control my whole body as I now control my left arm! Could I but be always my clear-headed self, and not merely that dull-witted insensitive part of me that regards itself as the true I, and normally controls my whole body! Now, I see so clearly. But that other I, that poor, blind, lost I, can never see anything clearly, in spite of all its shrewd 'realism.' Now, I see my whole past career as in the main a sham, a vast self-seeking under the cloak of noble motives. Yet not just self-seeking. No! I really did, I suppose, want

to stand for liberty and brotherhood; but always the care for my I own reputation vitiated all my conduct. And so I could never bring myself to write that letter. I wanted to do it, in a way; but always the worst, the savage part of me took care to prevent me from doing it. And then Mildred! Sane, lovely, loyal Mildred! Only when I am my true clear self dare I admit that I love her, and then only my left hand can clumsily tell her so. She alone can save me from myself and put me right with God. Yet in my dull state I feel superior to her and am on my guard against her! I, pompous, mean, and insensitive that I am, feel superior to Mildred Smith! And then the Chapel! Oh God, the Chapel! At heart, no doubt, I am faithful to it simply because I know it does, in its archaic symbolism, enshrine Love, which really is in some dark way divine. But I am utterly sidetracked by all the mythology and by my own inveterate self-esteem. I must, I must keep awake always. I must distinguish always between the very spirit, which is hidden somewhere in the Chapel (but it shines so much more clearly in Mildred) and all the miserable imitations of it, in the Chapel, in my own life, in the rotten society that I help to run. I shall never write the letter till I have tamed the savage, puerile part of me; and that I shall never do till I am fully, permanently, awake, as now I am temporarily awake. But I must do much more than write the letter, and then self-lovingly defend myself from its consequences. I must join with the oppressed and fight in their battle. I must change the whole temper and structure of my business. I must bring a new spirit into the Chapel, or leave it. And I must have the courage to marry the woman I love."

At this point Sir James could stand no more. With his right hand he snatched away the paper, crumpled it, and threw it into the fire. For a moment the left hand continued to write, on the blotting paper. But the right hand, now beyond control, seized a pen and stabbed at the left hand with savage strength, half-burying the nib in the flesh. Sir James felt nothing, but the left hand was paralysed. Crazy joy filled him at the sight of blood, and when the right hand stabbed again, and then again, he laughed. Presently it began furiously writing on the blotting paper with the bloody pen. Lavatory obscenities and crude pornographic drawings were interspersed with megalomaniac claims and hatred of the "swine-spirit, in my left arm." Now and again, as the pen dried, it was fed again from the left hand's blood. Sir James watched with glee, forgetful of his respectable self. But presently the paralysis and anæsthesia of his left arm ceased. He became aware of sharp pain. At the same time he felt a surge of disgust at the mess of blood and ink. And then his normal self, which had been eclipsed by its acceptance of the right arm's

savagery, woke to the realization of the terrifying conflict between his respectable values and this upsurge of savagery. Exerting all the strength of his will, he cried out, "Oh, Jesus Christ, save me, save me." His prayer gave place to silence. For a while he waited, listening to the silence. Then madness overwhelmed him.

When the cleaners came in the morning, they found a wrecked room. The drawers of the desk had all been dragged out, their contents scattered on the floor. Chairs were overturned, pictures torn down, their glass broken. The horrified women thought of burglars. Sir James was in an easy chair nursing his right arm, which he had somehow broken. When they questioned him he replied with a lot of "rude words" and no sense. His left hand kept making the movements of writing, so one of the women put a pencil into it, and held a piece of paper under it. He wrote the word "Doctor" and a telephone number, then the letter "M." But at this point his whole body was shaken by a kind of fit, and he wrote no more. After his broken arm had been attended to, Sir James was taken to a nursing home which specialized in mental patients. The hope that, under proper care, he will recover his sanity is at present uncertain.

**Loved this book ?**

**Similar users also downloaded:**

- "*A World of Sound*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*The Flames*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*A Man Divided*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*Last Men in London*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*Death into Life*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*Sirius: A Fantasy of Love and Discord*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*East is West*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*Darkness and the Light*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*The Seed and the Flower*", William Olaf Stapledon
- "*Odd John: A Story Between Jest and Earnest*", William Olaf Stapledon



**[www.feedbooks.com](http://www.feedbooks.com)**  
Food for the mind