

ANTIC HAY

BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

Introduction by LEWIS GANNETT

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Henry Huxley, best known today as the grandfather of Aldous Huxley, was a great battler for science and against religion in his day, but he was a good Victorian when it came to morals. The most ardent churchmen were never able to locate a flaw in Thomas' moral armor. So, reversing the heathen procedure of attributing immorality to one's enemy's ancestors, they blamed his progeny.

"Morality in Professor Huxley, I can well believe," the Rev. W. S. Lilly wrote in 1886, "is strong enough to hold its own. But will it be strong enough in Professor Huxley's grandchildren?"

Aldous was not born in 1886. But as soon as this lanky grandson of the great Victorian grew old enough to beat a typewriter, he began proving that the Rev. Mr. Lilly's doubts were right. Intellectually, at least; for all I know, Aldous's personal morals may be as dully impeccable as his distinguished grandpa's. But in a series of brilliant novels—we must call them "novels" for want of a better word—he has been, and still is, engaged in destroying whatever was left of the prestige of Victorian ideals—morals, beauty, love included. In "Antic Hay" he tosses science out of the window too.

Here is the supreme negativism of the post-war age. I do not know whether men will re-read

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"Antic Hay" for pleasure a century hence; but they will return to it and to "Point Counter Point" to retaste the bitterness of the post-war decade. A flavor boiled down and concentrated in Aldous Huxley as in no other writer of the period.

Aldous Huxley apparently read Forel, Freud and Krafft-Ebing in his cradle. Unfortunately for himself, he not only read their studies in abnormal psychology, as so many of his parrot-minded contemporaries did; he reflected on them. He looked about him and listened to the often brilliant conversations of that great English society into which he was born; and their ideas seemed to him no more than so many barren leaves, lovely and stemless, fluttering to an equally barren earth. Within him still burned something of the savage zeal of his grandfather, but he could no longer release his bile in diatribes against the church, or find a new holy grail in science. He had too much intelligence—after all, he began to write in the post-war decade—to accept his grandfather's happy faith that mankind, with the aid of science, was moving forever onward and upward (whatever those words might mean). So he has been letting out his pent-up passion in a series of as magnificently bitter, as subtly ruinous, novels as can be found anywhere in the pages of literature.

"I am interested in everything," says Gumbriel, Jr., in "Antic Hay." "Which comes to the same thing," Gumbriel, Sr., replies, "as being interested in nothing."

The truth about the universe, Thomas Henry Huxley devoutly believed, would free the human spirit. "Facts, theories, the truth about the uni-

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verse—what good are these?" asks Aldous. "Teach them to understand—why, it only confuses them."

Thomas Henry Huxley could still on occasion indulge in dreams. Today, says Aldous's young Gumbriel, "the word 'dream' is inadmissible.... Now, the word merely connotes Freud." And when, in "Antic Hay," a young man comes asking for the key to the absolute, he means that he wants the absolute alcohol, to pickle a foetus.

Love? A mere biological passion, fundamentally the same whatever the values of the unknown and slightly varying personal equations—so Professor Shearwater in "Antic Hay," declares. But one woman laughs, and Shearwater's satisfaction in his perfect wife (a silent girl, a model of non-existence, who never interrupts) is gone. Love comes to seem a physiological insult to intelligence. The old faith in perfect love as something somehow attainable, is lost; chastity is no longer a great virtue, continence an ideal; this is the age of Mr. Boldero, who plans his advertisements with care, well knowing that "there are few who would not rather be taken in adultery than in provincialism."

Art an ideal? Art, as Mr. Lypiatt points out, is merely "a protest against the horrible inclemency of life.... Can an artist do anything if he's happy?"

A nightmare world, a bitter generation unable to trust any gospel, with faith in nothing, somehow striding through darkness with a laugh on its lips and no faith that there will ever be a dawn. Aldous Huxley gives it its most perfect expression. The only concession he makes is that tepid reflection of Gumbriel's:

"Man's greatest strength lies in his capacity for

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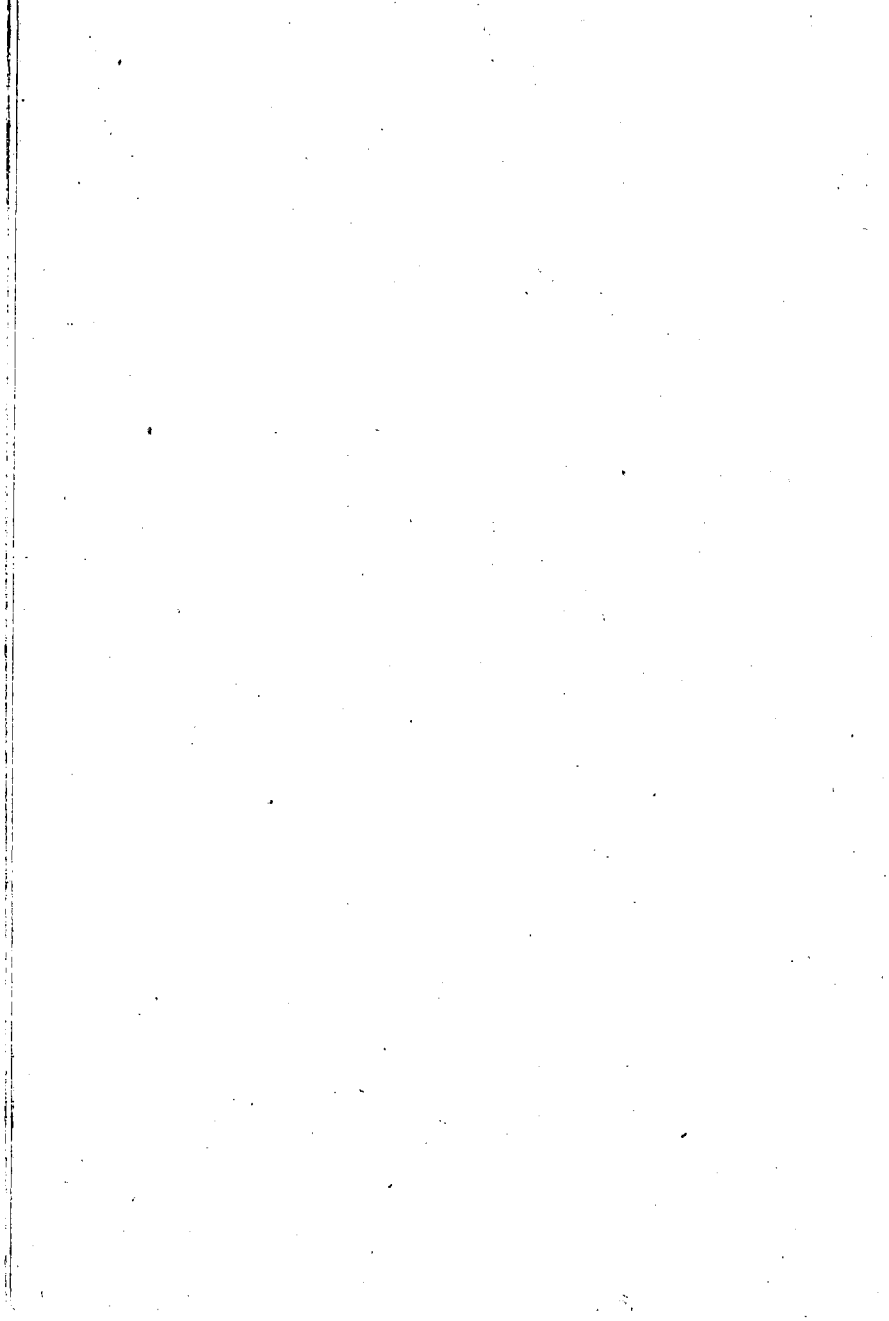
irrelevance. In the midst of pestilences, wars and famines, he builds cathedrals; and a slave, he can think the irrelevant and unsuitable thoughts of a free man. The spirit is slave to fever and beating blood, at the mercy of an obscure and tyrannous misfortune. But, irrelevantly, it elects to dance in triple measure—a mounting skip, a patter of descending feet.”

Thomas Henry Huxley little knew how much he was pulling down along with the citadels of religious orthodoxy. His grandson, standing among the ruins, with no faith to rebuild anything, with only a tremendous, passionate determination to believe in no illusion, to face truth naked though the sight blind and sear him, is the mouthpiece of a lost age, the age of the “modern temper.” It may be that the critics of another age will look back on him as one of the great destroyers, without whose work the new visions would have been impossible. And they may wonder, perhaps, why we found him so “gay” and so amusing.

LEWIS GANNETT.

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A N T I C H A Y



ANTIC HAY

CHAPTER I

GUMBRIL, Theodore Gumbriel Junior, B. A. Oxon, sat in his oaken stall on the north side of the School Chapel and wondered, as he listened through the uneasy silence of half a thousand school-boys to the First Lesson, pondered, as he looked up at the vast window opposite, all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth century glass, speculated in his rapid and rambling way about the existence and the nature of God.

Standing in front of the spread brass eagle and fortified in his convictions by the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy (for this first Sunday of term was the fifth after Easter), the Reverend Pelvey could speak of these things with an enviable certainty. "Hear, O Israel," he was booming out over the top of the portentous Book: "the Lord our God is one Lord."

One Lord; Mr. Pelvey knew; he had studied theology. But if theology and theosophy, then why not theography and theometry, why not theognomy, theotrophy, theotomy, theogamy? Why not theophysics and theo-chemistry? Why not that ingenious toy, the theotrope or wheel of gods? Why not a monumental theodrome?

In the great window opposite, young David stood

like a cock, crowing on the dunghill of a tumbled giant. From the middle of Goliath's forehead there issued, like a narwhal's budding horn, a curious excrescence. Was it the embedded pebble? Or perhaps the giant's married life.

"... with all thine heart," declaimed the Reverend Pelvey, "and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

No, but seriously, Gumbriel reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought—that was all right. But God as truth, God as $2+2=4$ —that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds? And could it be that the Rev. Pelvey, M. A., foghornning away from behind the imperial bird, could it be that he had an answer and a clue? That was hardly believable. Particularly if one knew Mr. Pelvey personally. And Gumbriel did.

"And these words which I command thee this day," retorted Mr. Pelvey, "shall be in thine heart."

Or in the heart, or in the head? Reply, Mr. Pelvey, reply. Gumbriel jumped between the horns of the dilemma and voted for other organs.

"And thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Diligently to thy children . . . Gumbriel remembered his own childhood; they had not been very diligently taught to him. "Beetles, black beetles"—his father had a really passionate feeling about the

clergy. Mumbo-jumberry was another of his favourite words. An atheist and an anti-clerical of the strict old school he was. Not that in any case, he gave himself much time to think about these things; he was too busy being an unsuccessful architect. As for Gumbriel's mother her diligence had not been dogmatic. She had just been diligently good, that was all. Good; good? It was a word people only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humourousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them, like earwigs? I glory in the name of earwig. Gumbriel made a mental gesture and inwardly declaimed. But good in any case, there was no getting out of that, good she had been. Not nice, not merely *molto simpatica*—how charmingly and effectively these foreign tags assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some other name!—but good. You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her . . . And that feeling, was that less real and valid than two plus two?

The Reverend Pelvey had nothing to reply. He was reading with a holy gusto of "houses full of all good things which thou fillest not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not."

She had been good and she had died when he was still a boy; died—but he hadn't been told that till much later—of creeping and devouring pain. Malignant disease—oh, *caro nome!*

"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God," said Mr. Pelvey.

Even when the ulcers are benign; thou shalt fear. He had travelled up from school to see her, just

before she died. He hadn't known that she was going to die, but when he entered her room, when he saw her lying so weakly in the bed, he had suddenly began to cry, uncontrollably. All the fortitude, the laughter even, had been hers. And she had spoken to him. A few words only; but they had contained all the wisdom he needed to live by. She had told him what he was, and what he should try to be, and how to be it. And crying, still crying, he had promised that he would try.

"And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes," said Mr. Pelvey, "for our good always, that he might preserve us alive as it is at this day."

And had he kept his promise, Gumbriel wondered, had he preserved himself alive?

"Here endeth the First Lesson." Mr. Pelvey retreated from the eagle and the organ presaged the coming Te Deum.

Gumbriel hoisted himself to his feet; the folds of his B.A. gown billowed nobly about him as he rose. He sighed and shook his head with the gesture of one who tries to shake off a fly or an importunate thought. When the time came for singing, he sang. On the opposite side of the chapel two boys were grinning and whispering to one another behind their lifted Prayer Books. Gumbriel frowned at them ferociously. The two boys caught his eye and their faces at once took on an expression of sickly piety; they began to sing with unction. They were two ugly, stupid-looking louts, who ought to have been apprenticed years ago to some useful trade. Instead of which they were wasting their own and their teachers' and their more intelligent comrades' time in trying, quite vainly, to acquire an elegant literary

education. The minds of dogs, Gumbрил reflected, do not benefit by being treated as though they were the minds of men.

"Oh Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us."

Gumbрил shrugged his shoulders and looked round the chapel at the faces of the boys. Lord indeed have mercy upon us. He was disturbed to find the sentiment echoed on a somewhat different note in the Second Lesson which was drawn from the twenty-third chapter of St. Luke. "Father, forgive them," said Mr. Pelvey in his unvaryingly juicy voice; "for they know not what they do." Ah, but suppose one did know what one was doing? Suppose one knew only too well? And of course one always did know. One was not a fool.

But this was all nonsense, all nonsense. One must think of something better than this. What a comfort it would be, for example, if one could bring air cushions into chapel! These polished oaken stalls were devilishly hard; they were meant for stout and lusty pedagogues not for bony starvelings like himself. An air cushion, a delicious pneu.

"Here endeth," boomed Mr. Pelvey, closing his book on the back of the German eagle.

As if by magic, Dr. Jolly was ready at the organ with the *Benedictus*. It was positively a relief to stand again; this oak was adamant. But air-cushions, alas, would be too bad an example for the boys. Hardy young Spartans! it was an essential part of their education that they should listen to the word of revelation without pneumatic easement. No, air cushions wouldn't do. The real remedy, it suddenly flashed across his mind, would be trousers

with pneumatic seats. For all occasions; not merely for church going.

The organ blew a thin Puritan-preacher's note through one of its hundred nostrils. "I believe . . ." With a noise like the breaking of a wave, five hundred turned towards the East. The view of David and Goliath was exchanged for a Crucifixion in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty. "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." No, no, Gumbriel preferred to look at the grooved stonework rushing smoothly up on either side of the great East window towards the vaulted roof; preferred to reflect, like the dutiful son of an architect he was, that Perpendicular at its best—and its best is its largest—is the finest sort of English Gothic. At its worst and smallest, as in most of the colleges of Oxford, it is mean, petty, and, but for a certain picturesqueness, almost wholly disgusting. He felt like a lecturer: next slide, please. "And the life everlasting. Amen." Like an oboe, Mr. Pelvey intoned: "The Lord be with you."

For prayer, Gumbriel reflected, there would be Dunlop knees. Still, in the days when he had made a habit of praying, they hadn't been necessary. "Our Father . . ." The words were the same as they were in the old days; but Mr. Pelvey's method of reciting them made them sound rather different. Her dresses, when he had leaned his forehead against her knee to say those words—those words, good Lord! that Mr. Pelvey was oboeing out of existence—were always black in the evenings, and of silk, and smelt of orris root. And when she was dying, she had said to him: "Remember the

Parable of the Sower, and the seeds that fell in shallow ground." No, no. Amen, decidedly. "O Lord, show thy mercy upon us," chanted oboe Pelvey, and Gumbril trombone responded, profoundly and grotesquely: "And grant us thy salvation." No, the knees were obviously less important, except for people like revivalists and housemaids, than the seat. Sedentary are commoner than genuflectory professions. One would introduce little flat rubber bladders between two layers of cloth. At the upper end, hidden when one wore a coat, would be a tube with a valve: like a hollow tail. Blow it up—and there would be perfect comfort even for the boniest, even on rock. How did the Greeks stand marble benches in their theatres?

The moment had now come for the Hymn. This being the first Sunday of the Summer term, they sang that special hymn, written by the Headmaster, with music by Dr. Jolly, on purpose to be sung on the first Sundays of terms. The organ quietly sketched out the tune. Simple it was, uplifting and manly.

One, two, three, four; one, two THREE—4.

One, two—and three—and four—and; One, two THREE—4

ONE—2, THREE—4; ONE—2—3—4,

And—ONE—2, THREE—4; ONE—2—3—4.

One two—and three, four; One, two THREE—4.

Five hundred flawed adolescent voices took it up. For good example's sake, Gumbril opened and closed his mouth; noiselessly, however. It was only at the third verse that he gave rein to his uncertain

baritone. He particularly liked the third verse; it marked, in his opinion, the Headmaster's highest poetical achievement.

- (f) For slack hands and (*dim*) idle minds.
- (*mf*) Mischief still the Tempter finds.
- (#) Keep him captive in his lair.

At this point Dr. Jolly enriched his tune with a thick accompaniment in the lower registers, artfully designed to symbolize the depth, the gloom and general repulsiveness of the Tempter's home.

- (#) Keep him captive in his lair.
- (f) Work will bind him. (*dim.*) Work is (pp) prayer.

Work, thought Gumbril, work. Lord, how passionately he disliked work! Let Austin have his swink to him reserved. Ah, if only one had work of one's own, proper work, decent work—not forced upon one by the griping of one's belly! Amen! Dr. Jolly blew the two sumptuous jets of reverence into the air; Gumbril accompanied them with all his heart. Amen, indeed.

Gumbril sat down again. It might be convenient, he thought, to have the tail so long that one could blow up one's trousers while one actually had them on. In which case, it would have to be coiled round the waist like a belt; or looped up, perhaps, and fastened to a clip on one's braces.

"The nineteenth chapter of The Acts of the Apostles, part of the thirty-fourth verse." The Headmaster's loud, harsh voice broke violently out

from the pulpit. "All with one voice for the space of about two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Gumbril composed himself as comfortably as he could on his oaken seat. It was going to be one of the Headmaster's real swingeing sermons. Great is Diana. And Venus? Ah, these seats, these seats!

Gumbril did not attend evening chapel. He stayed at home in his lodgings to correct the sixty-three Holiday Task Papers which had fallen to his share. They lay, thick piles of them, on the floor beside his chair: sixty-three answers to ten questions about the Italian Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, of all subjects! It had been one of the Headmaster's caprices. He had called a special masters' meeting at the end of last term to tell them all about the Risorgimento. It was his latest discovery.

"The Risorgimento, gentlemen, is the most important event in modern European history." And he had banged the table, he had looked defiantly round the room in search of contradictors.

But nobody had contradicted him. Nobody ever did; they all knew better. For the Headmaster was as fierce as he was capricious. He was for ever discovering something new. Two terms ago it had been singeing; after the hair-cut and before the shampoo, there must be singeing.

"The hair, gentlemen, is a tube. If you cut it and leave the end unsealed, the water will get in and rot the tube. Hence the importance of singeing, gentlemen. Singeing seals the tube. I shall address the boys about it after chapel to-morrow morning; and I trust that all housemasters"—and he had

glared around him from under his savage eyebrows—"will see that their boys get themselves regularly singed after cutting."

For weeks afterwards every boy trailed behind him a faint and nauseating whiff of burning, as though he were fresh from hell. And now it was the Risorgimento. One of these days, Gumbriel reflected, it would be birth control, or the decimal system, or rational dress.

He picked up the nearest batch of papers. The printed questions were pinned to the topmost of them.

"Give a brief account of the character and career of Pope Pius IX, *with dates wherever possible.*"

Gumbriel leaned back in his chair and thought of his own character, with dates. 1896: the first serious and conscious and deliberate lie. Did you break that vase, Theodore? No, mother. It lay on his conscience for nearly a month, eating deeper and deeper. Then he had confessed the truth. Or rather he had not confessed; that was too difficult. He led the conversation, very subtly, as he thought, round through the non-malleability of glass, through breakages in general, to this particular broken vase; he practically forced his mother to repeat her question. And then, with a burst of tears, he had answered, yes. It had always been difficult for him to say things directly, point-blank. His mother had told him, when she was dying . . . No, no; not that.

In 1898 or 1899—oh, these dates!—he had made a pact with his little cousin, Molly, that she should let him see her with no clothes on, if he would do the same by her. She had fulfilled her part of the