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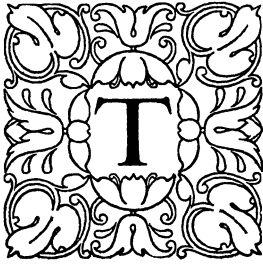
Chapter I

THE ATLANTIC

“In the midst of this sublime and terrible storm, Dame Partington...was seen at the door of her house, with mop and pattens, trundling her mop, squeezing out the sea-water, and vigorously pushing away the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic was roused. Mrs Partington’s spirit was up; but I need not tell you that the contest was unequal. The Atlantic Ocean beat Mrs Partington. She was excellent at a slop, or a puddle, but she should not have meddled with a tempest.”

SYDNEY SMITH, *Speech on the Reform Bill*,
 delivered at Taunton, England, Oct. 12, 1831.

September 25th, 1918

HE present passport is pink, printed on pink paper with little red lines criss-crossing all about it. Gone—and probably gone for ever—are those aristocratic old passports with

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fine lettering on fine paper, down the face of which ran a stream of historic titles which, in the two the Government basely forced me to surrender in exchange for the present pink abomination, began with a Marquisate and trickled through the lower degrees of the peerage until one ended in a Barony or two, and the other fell as low as a Baronetcy. So many historic titles seemed to justify the “We,” which reads a little odd as, “We, Arthur James Balfour.” Each of my old passports was studded over with “visés” and “permissos” and covered over with gorgeous Russian and Turkish stamps and much Cyrillic and Arabic script. These I had to give up in exchange for a common-looking paper marked by a rubber stamp in violet-blue ink, which simply “shouted” at the pink, with the word “seen.”

The older form could be folded up and put away in a pocket-book and forgotten till asked for, the new form is bound up in

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cheap green boards of such a size as to be always intruding on one, no matter how wide one's pockets are. The old passport had the reticence of a gentleman and was content with your signature, the new one clamours for vulgar details about your age and personal appearance, and it gets them.

The difference between passports ancient and modern may be compared with the difference between a clean £5 note, with its crisp, white paper, fine lettering and the romance of its secret signs, and that modern form of "filthy lucre" the current 10s. note.

Thursday, September 26th

We arrived at our Port of Embarkation in a gale and it continued to blow all the night, and all the next day,

Friday, September 27th

during which we wistfully tried to fulfil the divergent and incoherent

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instructions we had severally received from the Minister of Information: and it blew all the night of that day. On

Saturday, September 28th

it blew worse than ever and our pessimist, who is an authority on weather, cheered us up by assuring us that we were embarking at the very worst time of the year and that we should have equinoctial gales the whole way across.

It wasn't so easy to get on board. We stood in a vast, damp, dreary dock in two queues, saloon passengers and steerage passengers, and waited to have our papers inspected. Our inspector was of a slowness beyond words and when at last I was getting near to him I was so angered by a pompous man "on somebody's staff" pushing ahead of all of us and engaging in an interminable conversation with our man, that I deserted

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my class and joined the steerage group and was on board in five minutes. I was a little sorry that I did this as I saw a poor old Jamaican negro “turned down.” Some one had told him that Jamaica was in America and he had, with a fine impartiality, registered on one paper as an American citizen and on another as a British citizen. I wonder what became of him. I suppose I shall never know.

Later in the day I had my revenge on the staff man. He turned out to be a successful writer of the more vacuous forms of *revue*, and he took his art and himself very seriously. After luncheon he changed his tunic and put on a Norfolk jacket so that down to his waist his torso or bust was civilian, whilst below his waist his lower extremities were military. In effecting this exchange something had gone wrong with his braces and all that afternoon and evening he walked about in a stately and haughty way festooned behind with loops

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which recalled the flowery swags of Mantegna's pictures.

Sunday, September 29th

On Sunday morning we moved from the dock into the river and waited till tea-time on its muddy and rubbish-laden waters. The wind had completely dropped and a sabbath-calm and a river-fog lay on everything. All day we waited swinging with the tide until about 5 P.M. when we felt the first delicious thrill of the engine at work. All this day large tenders laden with hundreds and hundreds of American soldiers passed us going up-stream to the City on their way from the troop-ships lying further down near the mouth of the river.

On coming on board on the previous day it became obvious that when not on deck we should be living entirely in artificial light. All windows and port-holes had been made absolutely light-proof and whilst

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the public saloon and state-rooms were brilliantly lit up, no ray of light was allowed to leave them. After dark the decks were quite black and if you groped on to them it was through heavy curtains and blackened doors. The insignificant glow of a cigarette was strictly forbidden and the darkness of the outside was infinitely darker than Cambridge or even Norwich at its worst.

During the morning each passenger was given a Boddy's Life Jacket and at 4 P.M. we were paraded on Deck B and received a card indicating which boat was ours, and to this we went. An officer—who ought to be a University Lecturer—then in one of the clearest, concisest and shortest of speeches told us what we were to do in case there was need to do anything. We were all wearing the life-jackets and I had thought we should feel a little self-conscious, if not ludicrous, but we didn't. It all seemed so natural, and so much in the day's work, that one took it as though one had worn

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such robes for years. These jackets are stuffed with the fibres known commercially as kapok. For the following account of this vegetable product I am indebted to Mr L. H. Dewey of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Washington, whose letter I quote:

The name kapok is a Malay name, applied to a cotton-like down produced in the seed pods of the kapok, or randoe, tree, *Ceiba pentandra*. This tree is native in the West Indies and in many parts of tropical America. It has been widely distributed in the Tropics of both hemispheres and is found on many of the tropical islands. In English-speaking colonies it is usually known as the silk-cotton tree. In Spanish-speaking colonies it is more often known as ceiba, though the name ceiba is often applied to other species of the genus *Ceiba*, and often to some of the species of the genera *Bombax* and *Chorisia*.

The kapok tree was introduced into

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Java at least half a century ago, and it is cultivated there over large plantations in the region of Samarang, and is also grown along the roadsides and borders of fields on many plantations throughout the central part of the island.

During the past ten years systematic efforts have been made to set out kapok trees in plantations, and especially along roadsides, in the Philippines, and more recently in Porto Rico. These newer plantings, however, have not yet reached a stage of commercial importance.

Nearly all of the kapok of commerce hitherto has come from Java, and the greater portion of it has been handled in the markets of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Holland.

Kapok has been used at least fifteen years as the principal material in stuffing life preservers and life belts on the Dutch steamships sailing to the Orient, and also on the North German Lloyd. I think

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that it was used on the English P. & O. Line, but I have never been on those ships and have no definite information on this point. It was used on the other ships not only for life belts and life preservers but also as a stuffing for mattresses and pillows. It is a very good salutary stuffing and serves the purpose quite well, except that it breaks to pieces more quickly than cotton, wool, feathers, or hair.

Kapok has been very thoroughly tested for buoyancy by the Government of Holland. I think that Professor Van Itersen, of the Hoch Schule at Delft either planned or was interested in some of these tests. The results indicated that it was the most buoyant material available for various forms of life preservers. Its buoyancy depends on each individual fibre. These are unicellular hairs with relatively thin walls, practically impervious to moisture, and, except under