

# The Origin of the World Action for Unemployed

## CHAPTER I. OUR WORLD.

**Editor's Note:** Many Clarion readers, particularly in outlying districts, have written us asking if it is not possible to print an article now and then devoted to the instruction of young people. It seems that the young people are interested in nature studies and the older people find it difficult to meet the needs of the case. We therefore propose to print some selections from "The Origin of the World," by R. McMillan. (Publishers: Watts & Co., London). It should be noted that the essays are not supposed to be strictly scientific and technically exact treatises. Their writing was suggested to the author through questions asked by children, and he set to write "a simple book about the origin of the world." The author's "Preliminary" sets forth his intentions and tells how he came to entertain them.

There was a Greek named Aristotle who lived some centuries B.C. He said that man was a "hunter of the truth." When you asked your grandfather as to the origin of the world, I felt as if you were also a "hunter of the truth." Very few people have time to hunt for anything except the material things that perish. When you manifest a desire to know how the world began, I am filled with the desire to tell you, and the first thing I have to do is to ask if you have any idea of what the world is. Do you know how large it is? Or how pitifully small it is? Very few people know, or care; but I feel that the generation which is growing up is much more intelligent than the one that is going out. The world is never the same for two years together—no, nor for two minutes, or two seconds. It is always changing. Life is forever sweeping and flowing, never resting or pausing, but always and ever changing:—

Linked like a river

By ripples following ripples, fast or slow—

The same, yet not the same—from far-off fountain

To where its waters flow  
Into the seas.

Life and the world flow on together, living their little span and then ceasing to be. But the world lives so much longer than we do that we think it is eternal, and before you can understand how brief is the time that the world will last you will have to change all your ideas about time and space, and life and death, and being and becoming. It seems odd to say this to one so young, but I am not going to "talk down" to you as if you were a baby. I am going to tell you what I know, and if you do not understand it today you will understand it tomorrow, or later still. You will never learn by clinging to simple things, so I am going to tell you, as clearly as I am able, how the world began.

All that I have to say to you is published in great books, which are read by the world's scholars in England and America, and in all civilized countries; but they are not taught in our schools, because, I suppose, children are too young to understand them, or they are too poor to be interested in them, or they are too stupid. None of these reasons appeal to me at all, for I think that poor people ought to get the chance to learn just as well as the rich, and children ought to be taught the truth, whatever the consequences are.

When you stand in a paddock on a starry night, and look up to the great wide sky, you think that the stars are very small and very far away. You feel that this world is the big, solid, enduring place, and the stars are tiny specks of fire in the sky. Perhaps you have learned to sing, as I did when very small:—

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are;  
Up above the world so high,  
Like a diamond in the sky.

But the stars are not small! They are large, very large, as big as our sun, and every star you see in the sky is a sun! It is the stars that are so large, and we that are small. Do you see what that means?

You have to alter all your ideas, and it is not easy to do that, is it? This world is not very large, and the stars are. But they are so very far away that they look small. Our sun looks very large to us, but that is because it is so close. If we were as close to some of the other stars as we are to our own sun, we would soon burn up.

Shall I tell you how far away our sun is from Australia? It is over 92,000,000 miles. That is so very, very far that we cannot realize how far it is. You cannot think what a million means; and yet the sun is nearly ninety-three million miles from the earth, and if you look at it in the morning or the evening it looks no bigger than a cart-wheel. From the sun we get all our heat and light, life and power; and if the sun failed to rise, all life on earth would cease. Life itself, as Winwood Reade says, "is bottled sunshine, and earth is the sleek-footed butler who draws the cork."

Our great big sun is one million, three hundred thousand times bigger than the earth; and that is so big that it makes our world seem but a tiny baby compared with it. You have never been around the world, so you will think this world is very large; but that is only by comparison.

From Australia to London is about 13,000 miles (the figure varies with the part of Australia you measure from, of course), but the distance to the sun is about 93,000,000 miles. This world is very large compared with a ball of worsted, but compared with the sun it is very small. All the same, our sun is very small compared with some suns. Sir David Gill, the great astronomer, says that the star Canopus—and you can see lots of stars like Canopus in our hemisphere—is a million and a half times brighter than our sun. That is, Canopus is so much brighter than our sun that it must be immensely larger. And when you see Canopus in the dark blue of the sky it looks like Sirius, or one of the other stars that you can see any night. Our "great big sun" is only a little star-baby if you compare it with Canopus.

Do you understand now what I mean when I say that you have got to change your point of view before you can possibly understand the origin of the world? When I took in hand to tell you how the world began, I felt that I must first tell you what the world is, how small it is, and how insignificant in the universe.

One other thing I must tell you about the size of Canopus before I leave the subject. Suppose you were to drop our world into the sun (which is a great flaming fire), there would be a little flash, and a tiny blaze, and—that would be all! But if you wanted to fill the sun up with world-stuff, it would take a million of our earths to do it. And, in the face of a fact like that, we still think that the tiny little human beings on our mud-ball are important.

If you want to know how big Canopus is, then you must remember that it would hold thousands of our suns. One of the world's great teachers, Carl Snyder, says that to think of human beings in the universe is a very hopeless task. He says: "A microbe upon the surface of a microscopic drop of mist in a fog covering the Atlantic Ocean would not be more hopelessly situated in his endeavours to discover his whereabouts."

Somebody may say that I have no right to tell children such things as these. Nevertheless they are true, and I am never afraid of telling the truth to anybody. The only thing I am afraid of is ignorance.

Next Lesson: "The Depths of the Sky."

### NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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### BY ONE OF THE UNEMPLOYED

"THE time for action is here," or, at least, I have heard so. So are we unemployed here. What is the line of action for the unemployed? There are innumerable possible lines. We could busy ourselves by stealthily repairing to the mountains to there dig immense underground caves for conducting the revolution. We could, with a splendid show of violence and solidarity, seize the churches and pray for work. We could even go on strike and refuse to eat. But I for one am so far back of more recent developments as to suggest that we restrict ourselves to intelligent action.

We unemployed have had sufficient experience of late to direct ourselves to a course of intelligent action. We have gone on parades and been sent away by police. We have sent delegations to City Councils and have been politely put off. We have sent communications to all manner of officials and have been turned down with the utmost discreet sympathy. We have everywhere met the State and have been forced to realize that it is enabled to use power and that we are not; and that therein lies the obstacle to solving our problem. From this must be built our course of intelligent action. We must act so as to acquire the powers of State.

The conquest of power can be achieved only by power. We unemployed together with our fellow-workers must attack and demolish the capitalist State. We must take to ourselves the powers necessary for administering society in our own benefit. But can we accomplish this? Many of us realize the necessity of doing it and want to do it; but we cannot for the simple reason that most of our class do not want to do it, and therefore we cannot do it. What becomes of our projected course of action?

At the convention held at Moscow last year of Red Trade Unions, a resolution was drawn up on Unemployment. In it the convention says to the unemployed of the world: "You were the first to suffer in the struggle—be the advance guard of the attack." How are we unemployed to function as that advance guard? The advance guard must lead the workers in action. Intelligent action can proceed only from knowledge. We unemployed must prepare ourselves to know what to do and how to do it. We must prepare ourselves to permeate that mass of workers who now hold us back from revolt with a desire for revolution. We must steep ourselves deep in the lore of the class-struggle, in the logical viewpoints and philosophy and moral code of our class. We must get clear in our heads the workings of the system we would destroy. We must derive every possible benefit from the experience of our comrades in revolt in the past—the traditions of the Chartists and the revolts of 1848, of the Communards of 1871, of the Russians in 1905 and '17, of the Germans in '18 and Hungarians in '19. We must have at our finger tips a knowledge of what our class is doing the world over. This means study.

The less the organization of our class is for smaller holes in the doughnuts and the more it is far smaller vacancies in our heads, the nearer is our emancipation. With us unemployed the time is here for study, the necessity is here for study, and the duty both to ourselves and to our class is here. For today the logical application of Moscow's injunction is—STUDY.

This leads on to further comment on "action," and the organizations that urge it. If I analyze their philosophy correctly it rests on two postulates. The first is that capitalism is now in the final period of disintegration, that it cannot re-establish itself from the war havoc. The second is that since the historic role of the working class is a revolutionary one, and that since the working class is expending its energy along an untold number of lines to mitigate an equal number of grievances, it is consequently the

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