

**THE WORLD AT WAR**



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SAVAGE**

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# I

If it had been possible for Theodore Savage to place on record for those who came after him the story of his life and experiences, he would have been the first to admit that the interest of the record lay in circumstance and not in himself. From beginning to end he was much what surroundings made of him; in his youth the product of a public school, Wadham and the Civil Service; in maturity and age a toiler with his hands in the company of men who lived brutishly. In his twenties, no doubt, he was frequently bored by his clerking duties and the routine of the Distribution Office; later on there were seasons when all that was best in him cried out against confinement in a life that had no aspiration; but neither boredom nor resentment ever drove him to revolt or set him to the moulding of circumstance. If he was destined to live as a local tradition and superman of legend, the honour was not gained by his talents or personal achievements; he had to thank for it an excellent constitution, bequeathed him by his parents, certain traces of refinement in manner and speech and the fears of very ignorant men.

When the Distribution Office—like his Hepplewhite furniture, his colour-prints and his English glass—was with yesterday's seven thousand years, it is more than possible that Theodore Savage, looking back on his youth, saw existence, till he neared the age of thirty, as a stream of scarcely ruffled content. Sitting crouched to the fire in the sweat-laden air of his cabin or humped idly on a hillside in the dusk of summer evening, it may well have seemed, when his thoughts strayed backwards, that the young man who once was impossibly himself was a being whom care

did not touch. What he saw with the eye of his mind and memory was a neat young Mr. Savage who was valeted in comfortable chambers and who worked, without urgency, for limited hours, in a room that looked on Whitehall. Who in his plentiful leisure gained a minor reputation on the golf-links! Who frequented studios, bought—now and then—a picture and collected English glass and bits of furniture. Who was passably good-looking, in an ordinary way, had a thoughtful taste in socks and ties and was careful of his hands as a woman.... So—through the vista of years and the veil of contrast—Theodore may have seen his young manhood; and in time, perhaps, it was difficult for a coarse-fingered labourer, dependent for his bread on the moods of nature, to sympathize greatly with the troubles of neat Mr. Savage or think of him as subject to the major afflictions of humanity.

All the same, he would spend long hours in communion with his vanished self; striving at times to trace resemblances between the bearded, roughened features that a fishing-pool reflected and the smooth-chinned civil servant with brushed hair and white collar whom he followed in thought through his work, his amusements, his love-making and the trivial details of existence.... And imagining, sometimes, the years and the happenings that might have been if his age, like his youth, had been soaped and collared, routined by his breeding and his office; if gods and men had not run amuck in frenzy and his sons had been born of a woman who lived delicately—playing Chopin of an evening to young Mr. Savage and giving him cream in his tea?...

Even if life in his Civil Service days was not all that it shone through the years of contrast, Theodore Savage could have had very little of hardship to complain of in the days when he added to a certain amount of private income a salary earned by the duties of the unexacting billet which

a family interest had secured for him. If he had no particular vocation for the bureaucratic life—if good painting delighted, and official documents bored him—he had sufficient common sense to understand that it is given to most of us, with sufficient application, to master the intricacies of official documents, while only to few is it given to master an art. After a phase of abortive experiment in his college days he had realized—fortunately—that his swift and instinctive pleasure in beauty had in it no creative element; whereupon he settled down, early and easily, into the life and habits of the amateur... There remained with him to the end of his days an impression of a young man living pleasantly, somewhat fastidiously; pursuing his hobbies, indulging his tastes, on the whole without much damage to himself or to others affected; acting decently according to his code and, when he fell in love and out of it, falling not too grossly or disastrously. If he had a grievance against his work at the Distribution Office, it was no more serious than this: it took much time, certain hours every day, from the interests that counted in his life. And against that grievance, no doubt, he set the ameliorating fact that his private means unaided would hardly have supported his way of existence, his many pleasant interests and himself; it was his civil servant's salary that had furnished his rooms in accordance with his taste and made possible the purchase of his treasured Fragonard and his bell-toned Georgian wine-glasses.... The bearded toiler, through a mist of years, watched a young man dawdling, without fear of the future, through a world of daily comforts that to his sons would seem fantastic, the creation of legend or of dream.

It was that blind and happy lack of all fear of the future that lent interest to the toiler's watching; knowing what he knew of the years that lay ahead, there was something of grim and dramatic humour in the sight of himself—yea,

Theodore Savage, the broken-nailed, unshorn—arrayed of a morning in a flowered silk dressing-gown or shirt-fronted for an evening at the opera.... As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be—that, so it seemed to him in later years, had been the real, if unspoken, motto of the world wherein he had his being in the days of his unruffled content....

Of the last few weeks in the world that was and ever should be he recalled, on the whole, very little of great hurrying and public events; it was the personal, intimate scenes that stood out and remained to a line and a detail. His first meeting with Phillida Rathbone, for instance, and the chance interview with her father that led to it: he could see himself standing by Rathbone's desk in the Distribution Office, see the bowl between his fingers, held to the light—see its very shape and conventional pattern of raised flowers.

Rathbone—John Rathbone—was his chief in his Distribution days; a square-jawed, formidable, permanent official who was held in awe by underlings and Ministers, and himself was subject, most contentedly subject, to a daughter, the ruler of his household. Her taste in art and decoration was not her father's, but, for all the bewilderment it caused him, he strove to gratify it loyally; and for Phillida's twenty-third birthday he had chosen expensively, on his way to the office, at the shop of a dealer in antiquities. Swept on the spate of the dealer's eloquence he had been pleased for the moment with his find—a flowered bowl, reputed Chelsea; it was not until half an hour later that he remembered uneasily his daughter's firm warnings against unaided traffic with the miscreants who deal in curios. With the memory uncomfortable doubts assailed him, while previous experiments came thronging unpleasantly to mind—the fiasco of the so-called Bartolozzi print and the equally lamentable business of the so-called

Chippendale settee.... He drew his purchase from its paper wrapping, set it down on the table and stared at it. The process brought no enlightenment and he was still wrestling with uncomfortable doubts when Theodore Savage knocked and came in with a draft report for approval.

The worry born of ignorance faded out of Rathbone's face as he coned the document and amended its clauses with swift pencilled notes in the margin; he was back with the solidities he knew and could make sense of, and superfluous gimcracks for the moment had ceased to exist. It was Savage who unwittingly recalled their existence and importance; when his chief, at the end of his corrections, looked up, the younger man was eyeing the troublesome gimcrack with a meditative interest that reminded Rathbone of his daughter's manner when she contemplated similar rubbish.

"Know anything about old china?" he inquired—an outward and somewhat excessive indifference concealing an inward anxiety.

"Not much," said Theodore modestly; but, taking the query as request for an opinion, his hand went out to the bowl.

"What do you make of it?" asked Rathbone, still blatantly indifferent. "I picked it up this morning—for my daughter. Supposed to be Chelsea—should you say it was?"

If the answer had been in the negative the private acquaintance between chief and subordinate would probably have made no further progress; no man, even when he makes use of it, is grateful for the superior knowledge in a junior that convicts him to his face of gullibility. As it was, the verdict was favourable and Rathbone, in the relief of finding that he had not blundered, grew suddenly friendly—to the point of a dinner invitation;

which was given, in part, as instinctive thanks for restored self-esteem, in part because it might interest Phillida to meet a young man who took gimcracks as gravely as herself. The invitation, as a matter of course, was accepted; and three days later Savage met Phillida Rathbone.

“I’ve asked a young fellow you’re sure to get on with”—so Rathbone had informed his daughter; who, thereupon, as later she confessed to Theodore, had made up her mind to be bored. She threw away her prejudice swiftly when she found the new acquaintance talked music with intelligence—she herself had music in her brain as well as in her finger-tips—while he from the beginning was attracted by a daintiness of manner and movement that puzzled him in Rathbone’s daughter.... From that first night he must have been drawn to her, since the evening remained to him clear in every detail; always in the hollow of a glowing fire he could summon up Phillida, himself and Rathbone, sitting, the three of them, round the table with its silver and tall roses.... In the centre a branching cluster of roses—all yellow, like Phillida’s dress.... Rathbone, for the most part, good-naturedly silent, Phillida and himself talking swiftly.... In shaded light and a solid, pleasant comfort; ordinary comfort, which he took for granted as an element of daily life, but which yet was the heritage of many generations, the product of long centuries of striving and cunning invention.... Later, in the drawing-room, the girl made music—and he saw himself listening from his corner of the sofa with a cigarette, unlit, between his fingers. Above all it was her quality of daintiness that pleased him; she was a porcelain girl, with something of the grace that he associated with the eighteenth century....

After half an hour that was sheer content to Theodore she broke off from her playing to sit on the arm of her father’s chair and ruffle his grey hair caressingly.



“Old man, does my noise on the piano prevent you from reading your paper?”

Whereat Rathbone laughed and returned the caress; and Phillida explained, for the visitor’s benefit, that the poor dear didn’t know one tune from another and must have been bored beyond measure—by piano noises since they came upstairs and nothing but music-talk at dinner.

“I believe we’ve driven him to the Montagu divorce case,” she announced, looking over his shoulder. “‘Housemaid cross-examined—the Colonel’s visits.’ Daddy, have you fallen to that?”

“No, minx,” he rebuked her, “I haven’t. I’m not troubling to wade through the housemaid’s evidence for the very good reason that it’s quite unnecessary. I shall hear all about it from you.”

“That’s a nasty one,” Phillida commented, rubbing her cheek against her father’s. She turned the paper idly, reading out the headlines. “‘American elections—Surprises at Newmarket—Bank Rate’—There doesn’t seem much news except the housemaid and the colonel, does there?”

Rathbone laughed as he pinched her cheek and pointed—to a headline here and a headline there, to a cloud that was not yet the size of a man’s hand.

“It depends on what you call news. It seems to have escaped you that we’ve just had a Budget. That matters to those of us who keep expensive daughters. And, little as the subject may interest you, I gather from the size of his type, that the editor attaches some importance to the fact that the Court of Arbitration has decided against the Karthanian claim. That, of course, compared to a housemaid in the witness-box is——”

“Ponderous,” she finished and laughed across at Theodore. “Important, no doubt, but ponderous—the Court of Arbitration always is. That’s why I skipped it.” ... Then,

carelessly interested, and running her eye down the columns of the newspaper, she supposed the decision was final and those noisy little Karthanians would have to be quiet at last. Rathbone shrugged his shoulders and hoped so.

“But they’ll have to, won’t they?” said Phillida. “Give me a match, Daddy—There’s no higher authority than the Court of Arbitration, is there?”

“If,” Rathbone suggested as he held a light to her cigarette, “if your newspaper reading were not limited to scandals and chiffons, you might have noticed that your noisy little friends in the East have declared with their customary vehemence that in no circumstances whatever will they accept an adverse verdict—not even from the Court of Arbitration.”

“But they’ll have to, won’t they?” Phillida repeated placidly. “I mean—they can’t go against everybody else. Against the League.”

She tried to blow a smoke-ring with conspicuous ill-success, and Theodore, watching her from his corner of the sofa—intent on her profile against the light—heard Rathbone explaining that “against everybody else” was hardly the way to put it, since the Federal Council was not a happy family at present. There was very little doubt that Karthania was being encouraged to make trouble—and none at all that there would be difference of opinion on the subject of punitive action.... Phillida, with an arm round her father’s neck, was divided between international politics and an endeavour to make the perfect ring—now throwing in a question anent the constitution and dissensions of the League, now rounding her mouth for a failure—while Theodore, on the sofa, leaned his head upon his hand that he might shade his eyes and watch her without seeming to watch.... He listened to Rathbone—and did not listen; and that, as he realized later, had been so far his attitude to

interests in the mass. The realities of his life were immediate and personal—with, in the background, dim interests in the mass that were vaguely distasteful as politics. A collective game played with noisy idealism and flaring abuse, which served as copy to the makers of newspapers and gave rise at intervals to excited conversation and argument....

What was real, and only real while Rathbone talked, was the delicate poise of Phillida's head, the decorative line of Phillida's body, his pleasure in the sight of her, his comfort in a well-ordered room; these things were realities, tangible or æsthetic, in whose company a man, if he were so inclined, might discuss academically an Eastern imbroglio and the growing tendency to revolt against the centralized authority of the League. Between life, as he grasped it, and public affairs there was no visible, essential connection. The Karthanian imbroglio, as he strolled to his chambers, was an item in the make-up of a newspaper, the subject of a recent conversation; it was the rhythm of Phillida's music that danced in his brain as a living and insistent reality. That, and not the stirrings of uneasy nations, kept him wakeful till long after midnight.

## II

While Theodore Savage paid his court to Phillida Rathbone, the Karthanian decision was the subject of more than conversation; diplomatists and statesmen were busy while he drifted into love and dreamed through the sudden rumours that excited his fellows at the office. In London, for the most part, journalism was guarded and reticent, the threat of secession at first hardly mentioned; but in nations and languages that favoured secession the press was voicing the popular cry with enthusiasm that grew daily more heated. Through conflicting rumour this at least was clear: at the next meeting of the Council of the League its authority would be tested to the uttermost, since the measure of independent action demanded by the malcontent members would amount to a denial of the federal principle, to secession in fact if not in name.... Reaction against central and unified authority was not a phenomenon of yesterday; it had been gathering its strength through years of racial friction, finding an adherent in every community that considered itself aggrieved by a decision of the Council or award of the Court of Arbitration, and for years it had taxed the ingenuity of the majority of the Council to avoid open breach and defiance.

Before open breach and its consequences, both sides had so far manoeuvred, hesitated, compromised; it had been left to a minor, a very minor, state, to rush in where others feared to tread. The flat refusal of a heady, half-civilized little democracy to accept the unfavourable verdict of the Court of Arbitration was the spark that might fire a powder-barrel; its frothy demonstrations, ridiculous in

themselves, appealed to the combative instinct in others, to race-hatreds, old herding feuds and jealousies. These found vent in answering demonstrations, outbursts of popular sympathy in states not immediately affected; the noisy rebel was hailed as a martyr and pioneer of freedom, and became the pretext for resistance to the Council's oppression. There was no doubt of the extent of the re-grouping movement of the nations, of the stirrings of a widespread combativeness which denounced Federation as a system whereby dominant interests and races exploited their weaker rivals. With the meeting of the Council would come the inevitable clash of interests; the summons to the offending member of the League to retreat from its impossible position, and—in case of continued defiance—the proposal to take punitive action. That proposal, to all seeming, must bring about a crisis; those members of the League who had encouraged the rebel in defiance would hardly consent to co-operate in punitive measures; and refusal—withdrawal of their military contingents—would mean virtual secession and denial of majority rule. If collective excitement and anger ran high, it might mean even more than secession; there were possibilities—first hinted at, later discussed without subterfuge—of actual and armed opposition should the Council attempt to enforce its decree and authority... Humanity, once more, was gathering into herds and growing sharply conscious alike of division and comradeship.

It was some time before Theodore was even touched by the herding instinct and spirit; apart, in a delicate world of his own, he concerned himself even less than usual with the wider interests of politics. By his fellows in the Distribution Office he was known as an incurable optimist; even when the cloud had spread rapidly and darkened he saw "strained relations" through the eyes of a lover, and his mind, busied elsewhere, refused to dwell anxiously on

“incidents” and “disquieting possibilities.” They intruded clumsily on his delicate world and, so soon as might be, he thrust them behind him and slipped back to the seclusion that belonged to himself and a woman. All his life, thought and impulse, for the time being, was a negation, a refusal of the idea of strife and destruction; in his happy egoism he planned to make and build—a home and a lifetime of content.

Now and again, and in spite of his reluctance, his veil of happy egoism was brushed aside—some chance word or incident forcing him to look upon the menace. There was the evening in Vallance’s rooms, for instance—where the talk settled down to the political crisis, and Holt, the long journalist, turned sharply on Vallance, who supposed we were drifting into war.

“That’s nonsense, Vallance! Nonsense! It’s impossible—unthinkable!”

“Unpleasant, if you like,” said Vallance; “but not impossible. At least—it never has been.”

“That’s no reason,” Holt retorted; “we’re not living yesterday. There’ll be no war, and I’ll tell you why: because the men who will have to start it—daren’t!” He had a penetrating voice which he raised when excited, so that other talk died down and the room was filled with his argument. Politicians, he insisted, might bluff and use threats—menace with a bogey, shake a weapon they dared not use—but they would stop short at threats, manoeuvre for position and retreat. Let loose modern science, mechanics and chemistry, they could not—there was a limit to human insanity, if only because there was a limit to the endurance of the soldier. Unless you supposed that all politicians were congenital idiots or criminal lunatics out to make holocausts. What was happening at present was manoeuvring pure and simple; neither side caring to prejudice its case by open admission that appeal to force

was unthinkable, each side hoping that the other would be the first to make the admission, each side trotting out the dummy soldiers that were only for show, and would soon be put back in their boxes.... War, he repeated, was unthinkable....

“Man,” said a voice behind Theodore, “does much that is unthinkable!”

Theodore turned that he might look at the speaker—Markham, something in the scientific line, who had sat in silence, with a pipe between his lips, till he dropped out his slow remark.

“Your mistake,” he went on, “lies in taking these people—statesmen, politicians—for free agents, and in thinking they have only one fear. Look at Meyer’s speech this morning—that’s significant. He has been moderate so far, a restraining influence; now he breathes fire and throws in his lot with the extremists. What do you make of that?”

“Merely,” said Holt, “that Meyer has lost his head.”

“In which happy state,” suggested Vallance, “the impossible and unthinkable mayn’t frighten him.”

“That’s one explanation,” said Markham. “The other is that he is divided between his two fears—the fear of war and the fear of his democracy, which, being in a quarrelsome and restless mood, would break him if he flinched and applauds him to the echo when he blusters. And, maybe, at the moment, his fear of being broken is greater than his fear of the impossible—at any rate the threat is closer.... The man himself may be reasonable—even now—but he is the instrument of instinctive emotion. Almost any man, taken by himself, is reasonable—and, being reasonable, cautious. Meyer can think, just as well as you and I, so long as he stands outside a crowd; but neither you nor I, nor Meyer, can think when we are one with

thousands and our minds are absorbed into a jelly of impulse and emotion.”

“I like your phrase about jelly,” said Vallance. “It has an odd picturesqueness. Your argument itself—or, rather, your assertion—strikes me as a bit sweeping.”

“All the same,” Markham nodded, “it’s worth thinking over... Man in the mass, as a crowd, can only feel; there is no such thing as a mass-mind or intellect—only mass desires and emotions. That is what I mean by saying that Meyer—whatever his intelligence or sanity—is the instrument of instinctive emotion... And instinctive emotion, Holt—until it has been hurt—is damnably and owlshly courageous. It isn’t clever enough to be afraid; not even of red murder—or starvation by the million—or the latest thing in gas or high explosive. Stir it up enough and it’ll run on ’em—as the lemmings run to the sea.”

Holt snorted something that sounded like “Rot!” and Vallance, sprawling an arm along the mantelpiece, asked, “Another of your numerous theories?”

“If you like,” Markham assented, “but it’s a theory deduced from hard facts... It’s a fact, isn’t it, that no politician takes a crowd into his confidence until he wants to make a fight of it? It’s a fact, isn’t it, that no movements in mass are creative or constructive—that simultaneous action, simultaneous thought, always is and must be destructive? Set what we call the People in motion and something has got to be broken. The crowd-life is still at the elementary, the animal stage; it has not yet acquired the human power of construction ... and the crowd, the people, democracy—whatever you like to call it—has been stirring in the last few years; getting conscious again, getting active, looking round for something to break ... which means that the politician is faced once more with the necessity of giving it something to break. Naturally he prefers that the breakage should take place in the distance



—and, League or no League, the eternal and obvious resource is War ... which was not too risky when fought with swords and muskets, but now—as Holt says—is impossible. Being a bit of a chemist, I’m sure Holt is right; but I’m also sure that man, as a herd, does not think. Further, I am doubtful if man, as a herd, ever finds out what is impossible except through the painful process of breaking his head against it.”

“I’m a child in politics,” said Vallance, “and I may be dense—but I’m afraid it isn’t entirely clear to me whether your views are advanced or grossly and shamelessly reactionary?”

“Neither,” said Markham, “or both—you can take your choice. I have every sympathy with the people, the multitude; it’s hard lines that it can only achieve destruction—just because there is so much of it, because it isn’t smaller. But I also sympathize with the politician in his efforts to control the destructive impulse of the multitude. And, finally—in view of that progress of science of which Holt has reminded us, and of which I know a little myself—I’m exceedingly sorry for us all.”

Someone from across the room asked: “You make it war, then?”

“I make it war. We have had peace for more than a generation, so our periodic blood-letting is already a long time overdue. The League has staved it off for a bit, but it hasn’t changed the human constitution; and the real factor in the Karthanian quarrel—or any other—is the periodic need of the human herd for something to break and for something to break itself against.... Resistance and self-sacrifice—the need of them—the call of the lemming to the sea.... And, perhaps, it’s all the stronger in this generation because this generation has never known war, and does not fear it.”

“Education,” said Holt, addressing the air, “is general and compulsory—has been so for a good many years. The inference being that the records of previous wars—and incidentally of the devastation involved—are not inaccessible to that large proportion of our population which is known as the average man.”

“As printed pages, yes,” Markham agreed. “But what proportion even of a literate population is able to accept the statement of a printed page as if it were a personal experience?”

“As we’re not all fools,” Holt retorted, “I don’t make it war.”

“I hope you’re right, for my own sake,” said Markham good-temperedly. He knocked out his pipe as he spoke and made ready to go—while Theodore looked after him, interested, for the moment, disturbingly... Markham’s unemotional and matter-of-fact acceptance of “periodic blood-letting” made rumour suddenly real, and for the first time Theodore saw the Karthanian imbroglio as more than the substance of telegrams and articles, something human, actual, and alive.... Saw himself, even Phillida, concerned in it—through a medley of confused and threatening shadows.... For the moment he was roused from his self-absorption and thrust into the world that he shared with the common herd of men. He and Phillida were no longer as the gods apart, with their lives to make in Eden; they were little human beings, the sport of a common human destiny.... He remembered how eagerly he caught at Holt’s condemnation of Markham as a crank and Vallance’s next comment on the crisis.

“We had exactly the same scare three—or was it four?—years ago. This is the trouble about Transylvania all over again—just the same alarums and excursions. That fizzled out quietly in a month or six weeks and the chances are that Karthania will fizzle out, too.”

“Of course it will,” Holt declared with emphasis—and proceeded to demolish Markham’s theories. Theodore left before he had finished his argument; as explained dogmatically in Holt’s penetrating voice, the intrigues and dissensions of the Federal Council were once more unreal and frankly boring. The argument satisfied, but no longer interested—and ten minutes after Markham’s departure his thoughts had drifted away from politics to the private world he shared with Phillida Rathbone.

For very delight of it he lingered over his courtship, finding charm in the pretence of uncertainty long after it had ceased to exist. To Phillida also there was pleasure not only in the winning, but in the exquisite game itself; once or twice when Theodore was hovering near avowal, she deferred the inevitable, eluded him with laughter, asked tacitly to play a little longer.... In the end the avowal came suddenly, on the flash and impulse of a moment—when Phillida hesitated over one of his gifts, a print she had admired on the wall of his sitting-room, duly brought the next day for her acceptance.

“No, I oughtn’t to take it—it’s one of your treasures,” she remonstrated.

“If you’d take all I have—and me with it,” he stammered.... That was the crisis of the exquisite game—and pretence of uncertainty was over.

### III

One impression of those first golden hours that stayed with him always was the certainty with which they had dwelt on the details of their common future; he could see Phillida with her hands on his shoulders explaining earnestly that they must live very near to the Dad—the dear old boy had no one but herself and they mustn't let him miss her too much. And when Theodore asked, "You don't think he'll object to me?" Rathbone's disapproval was the only possible cloud—which lifted at Phillida's amused assurance that the old dear wasn't as blind as all that and, having objections, would have voiced them before it was too late.

"You don't suppose he hasn't noticed—just because he hasn't said anything!"... Whereupon Theodore caught at her hands and demanded how long she had noticed?—and they fell to a happy retracing of this step and that in their courtship.

When they heard Rathbone enter she ran down alone, telling Theodore to stay where he was till she called him; returning in five minutes or so, half-tearful and half-smiling, to say the dear old thing was waiting in the library. Then Theodore, in his turn, went down to the library where, red to the ears and stammering platitudes, he shook hands with his future father-in-law—proceeding eventually to details of his financial position and the hope that Rathbone would not insist upon too lengthy an engagement?... The answer was so slow in coming that he repeated his question nervously.

"No," said Rathbone at last, "I don't know that I"—(he laid stress on the pronoun)—"I don't know that I should