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DOCUMENT A

E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops" (1909), *Collected Short Stories*, Edition Penguin Classics, 1954, pp.115-118.

'I am not well.'

Immediately an enormous apparatus fell on to her out of the ceiling, a thermometer was automatically inserted between her lips, a stethoscope was automatically laid upon her heart. She lay powerless. Cool pads soothed her forehead. Kuno had telegraphed to her doctor.

5 So the human passions still blundered up and down in the Machine. Vashti drank the medicine that the doctor projected into her mouth, and the machinery retired into the ceiling. The voice of Kuno was heard asking how she felt.

'Better.' Then with irritation: 'But why do you not come to me instead?'

'Because I cannot leave this place.'

10 'Why?'

'Because, any moment, something tremendous may happen.'

'Have you been on the surface of the earth yet?'

'Not yet.'

'Then what is it?'

15 'I will not tell you through the machine.'

She resumed her life.

20 But she thought of Kuno as a baby, his birth, his removal to the public nurseries, her one visit to him there, his visits to her – visits which stopped when the Machine had assigned him a room on the other side of the earth. 'Parents, duties of,' said the book of the Machine, 'cease at the moment of birth. P. 422327483.' True, but there was something special about Kuno – indeed there had been something special about all her children – and, after all, she must brave the journey if he desired it. And 'something tremendous might happen'. What did that mean? The nonsense of a youthful man, no doubt, but she must go. Again she pressed the unfamiliar button, again the wall swung back, and

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25 she saw the tunnel that curved out of sight. Claspings the Book, she rose, tottered on to the platform, and summoned the car. Her room closed behind her: the journey to the northern hemisphere had begun.

30 Of course it was perfectly easy. The car approached and in it she found arm-chairs exactly like her own. When she signalled, it stopped, and she tottered into the lift. One other passenger was in the lift, the first fellow creature she had seen face to face for months. Few travelled in these days, for, thanks to the advance of science, the earth was exactly alike all over. Rapid intercourse, from which the previous civilization had hoped so much, had ended by defeating itself. What was the good of going to Pekin when it was just like Shrewsbury? Why return to Shrewsbury when it would be just like Pekin? Men seldom moved their bodies; all unrest was concentrated in the soul.

35 The air-ship service was a relic from the former age. It was kept up, because it was easier to keep it up than to stop it or to diminish it, but it now far exceeded the wants of the population. Vessel after vessel would rise from the vomitories of Rye or of Christchurch (I use the antique names), would sail into the crowded sky, and would draw up at the wharves of the south – empty. So nicely adjusted was the system, so independent of meteorology, that the sky, whether calm or cloudy, resembled a vast kaleidoscope whereon the same patterns periodically recurred. The ship on 40 which Vashti sailed started now at sunset, now at dawn. But always, as it passed above Rheims, it would neighbour the ship that served between Helsingfors and the Brazils, and, every third time it surmounted the Alps, the fleet of Palermo would cross its track behind. Night and day, wind and storm, tide and earthquake, impeded man no longer. He had harnessed Leviathan. All the old literature, with its praise of Nature and its fear of Nature, rang false as the prattle of a child.

45 Yet as Vashti saw the vast flank of the ship, stained with exposure to the outer air, her horror of direct experience returned. It was not quite like the air-ship in the cinematophote. For one thing it smelt – not strongly or unpleasantly, but it did smell, and with her eyes shut she should have known that a new thing was close to her. Then she had to walk to it from the lift, had to submit to glances from the other passengers. The man in front dropped his Book – no great matter, but it disquieted 50 them all. In the rooms, if the Book was dropped, the floor raised it mechanically, but the gangway to the air-ship was not so prepared, and the sacred volume lay motionless. They stopped – the thing was unforeseen – and the man, instead of picking up his property, felt the muscles of his arm to see how they had failed him. Then someone actually said with direct utterance: 'We shall be late' – and they trooped on board, Vashti treading on the pages as she did so.

55 Inside, her anxiety increased. The arrangements were old-fashioned and rough. There was even a female attendant, to whom she would have to announce her wants during the voyage. Of course a revolving platform ran the length of the boat, but she was expected to walk from it to her cabin. Some cabins were better than others, and she did not get the best. She thought the attendant had been unfair, and spasms of rage shook her. The glass valves had closed, she could not go back. 60 She saw, at the end of the vestibule, the lift in which she had ascended going quietly up and down, empty. Beneath those corridors of shining tiles were rooms, tier below tier, reaching far into the

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earth, and in each room there sat a human being, eating, or sleeping, or producing ideas. And buried deep in the hive was her own room. Vashti was afraid.

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DOCUMENT B

**H. L. Mencken, "The Boons of Civilization", first published in *The American Mercury*, Jan. 1931.
Extract taken from *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, pp.339-341**

5 "What we call progress," said Havelock Ellis, "is the exchange of one nuisance for another nuisance." The thought is so obvious that it must occur now and then even to the secretary of the Greater Zenith Booster League. There may be persons who actually enjoy the sound of the telephone bell, but if they exist I can only say that I have never met them. It is highly probable that the telephone, as it stands today, represents more sheer brain power than any other familiar invention. A truly immense ingenuity has gone into perfecting it, and it is as far beyond its progenitor of 1880 as a battleship is beyond Fulton's *Clermont*. But all the while no one has ever thought of improving the tone of its bell. The sound remains intolerably harsh and shrill, even when efforts are made to damp it. With very little trouble it might be made deep, sonorous and even soothing. But the telephone engineers let it remain as it was at the start, and millions of people suffer under its assault at every hour of the day.

15 The telephone, I believe, is the greatest boon to bores ever invented. It has set their ancient art upon a new level of efficiency and enabled them to penetrate the last strongholds of privacy. All the devices that have been put into service against them have failed. I point, for example, to that of having a private telephone number, not listed in the book. Obviously, there is nothing here to daunt bores of authentic gifts. Obtaining private telephone numbers is of the elemental essence of their craft. Thus the poor victim of their professional passion is beset quite as much as if he had his telephone number limned upon the sky in smoke. But meanwhile his friends forget it at critical moments and he misses much pleasant gossip and many an opportunity for vinous relaxation.

20 It is not only hard to imagine a world without telephones; it becomes downright impossible. They have become as necessary to the human race, at least in the United States, as window glass, newspapers or aspirin. Every now and then one hears of a man who has moved to some remote village to get rid of them, and there proposes to meditate and invite his soul in the manner of the Greek philosophers, but almost always it turns out that his meditations run in the direction of Rosicrucianism, the Single Tax, farm relief, or some other such insanity. I have myself ordered my telephone taken out at least a dozen times, but every time I found urgent use for it before the man arrived, and so had to meet him with excuses and a drink. A telephone bigwig tells me that such orders come in at the rate of scores a day, but that none has ever been executed. I now have two telephones in my house, and am about to put in a third. In the years to come, no doubt, there will be one in every room, as in hotels.

Despite all this, I remain opposed to the telephone theoretically, and continue to damn it. It is a great invention and of vast value to the human race, but I believe it has done me, personally, almost as

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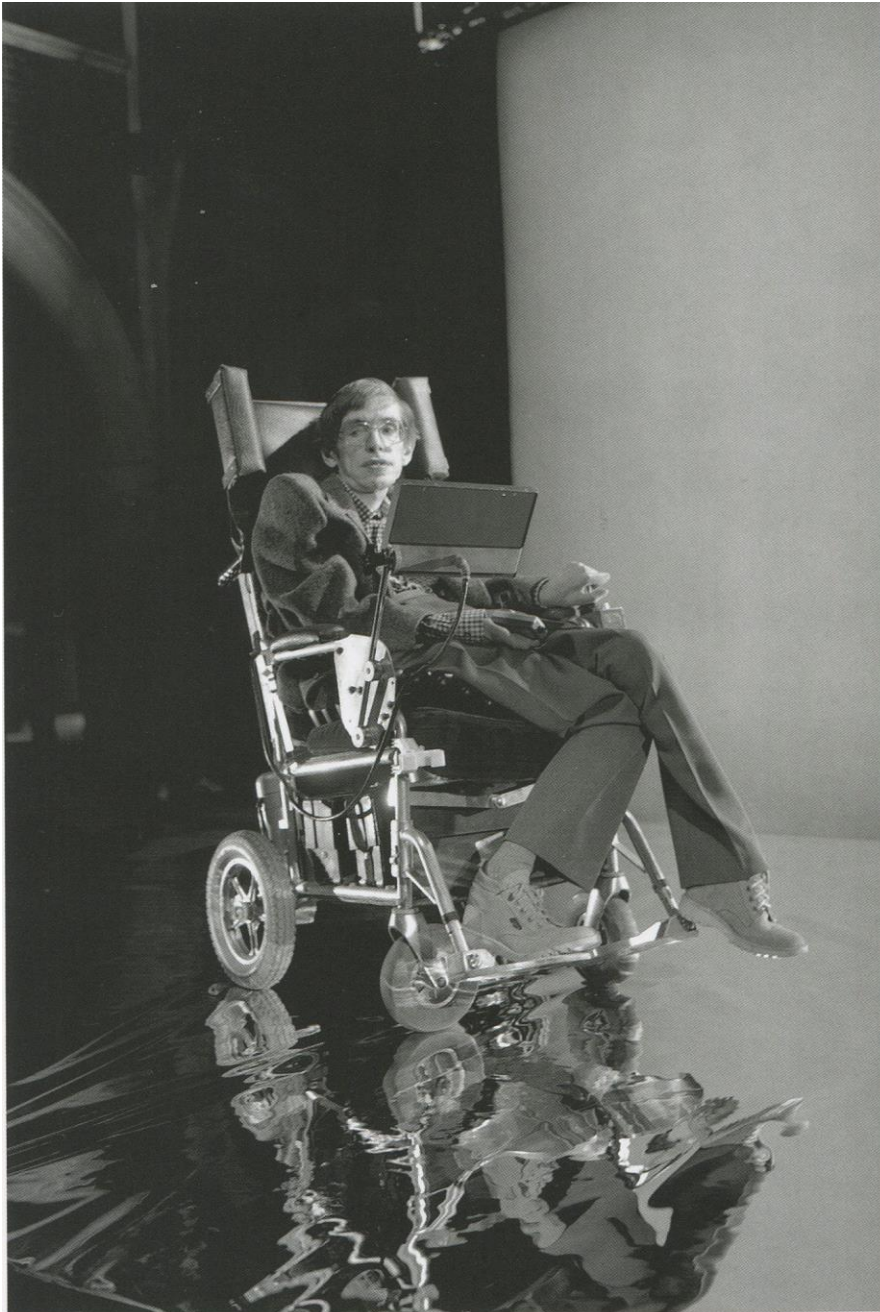
35 much harm as good. How often a single call has blown up my whole evening's work, and so
exacerbated my spirit and diminished my income! I am old enough to remember when telephones
were very rare, and romantic enough to believe that I was happier then. But at worst I get more out
of them than I get out of any of the other current wonders: for example, the radio, the phonograph,
the movie, and the automobile. I am perhaps the first American ever to give up automobiling,
formally and honestly. I sold my car so long ago as 1919, and have never regretted it. When I must
40 move about in a city too large for comfortable walking I employ a taxicab, which is cheaper, safer and
far less trouble than a private car. When I travel further I resort to the Pullman, by long odds the best
conveyance yet invented by man. The radio, I admit, has potentialities, but they will remain in
abeyance so long as the air is laden and debauched by jazz, idiotic harangues by frauds who do not
know what they are talking about, and the horrible garglings of ninth-rate singers. The phonograph is
just as bad, and the movie is ten times worse.

45 Of all the great inventions of modern times the one that has given me most comfort and joy is one
that is seldom heard of, to wit, the thermostat. I was amazed, some time ago, to hear that it was
invented at least a generation ago. I first heard of it during the War of 1914-18, when some kind
friend suggested that I throw out the coal furnace that was making steam in my house and put in a
gas furnace. Naturally enough, I hesitated, for the human mind is so constituted. But the day I finally
50 succumbed must remain ever memorable in my annals, for it saw me move at one leap from an
inferno into a sort of paradise. Everyone will recall how bad the coal was in those heroic days. The
patriotic anthracite men loaded their culm-piles on cars, and sold them to householders all over the
East. Not a furnaceman was in practise in my neighborhood: all of them were working in the
shipyards at \$15 a day. So I had to shovel coal myself, and not only shovel coal, but sift ashes. It was a
55 truly dreadful experience. Worse, my house was always either too hot or too cold. (...)

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DOCUMENT C

David Gamble, *S. Hawking, scientist, Cambridge*, in Will Self and David Gamble, *Perfidious Man*, Edition Viking, 2000, p.135.



Medium: Photograph

Dimensions : 11 x 16,5 cm