

## The Mark Gable Foundation



Léo Szilard

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By

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As soon as I saw the temperature of the rabbit come back to normal, I knew that we had licked the problem. It took twenty-four hours to bring his temperature down to one centigrade, injecting three grains of dorminol every ten minutes during that period. Sleep set in between the third and fourth hour, when the body temperature fell below twenty-six centigrade; and after twenty-four hours, at one centigrade, there was no longer any appreciable metabolic activity. We kept him at that low temperature for one day, after which time, having completed our measurements, we injected metaboline and allowed the temperature to rise to normal within one hour.

There was never any doubt in my mind that once we got this far, and got the temperature down to one centigrade, we could keep the rabbit "asleep" for a week, a year, or one hundred years, just as well as for one day. Nor had I much doubt that if this worked for the rabbit it would work for the dog; and that if it worked for the dog, it would work for man.

I always wanted to see what kind of a place the world will be three hundred years hence. I intended to "withdraw from life" (as we proposed to call the process) as soon as we had perfected the method, and to arrange for being returned to life in 2260. I thought my views and sentiments were sufficiently advanced, and that I had no reason to fear I should be too much behind the times in a world that had advanced a few hundred years beyond the present. I would not have dared, though, to go much beyond three hundred years.

I thought at first that one year should be plenty for perfecting the process as well as for completing the arrangements; and that I should be in statu dormiendi before the year was over. As a matter of fact, it took only six months to get ready; but difficulties of an unforeseen kind arose.

A section of public opinion was strongly opposed to "withdrawal from life," and for a time it looked as though the 86th Congress would pass a law against it. This, fortunately, did not come to pass. The AMA, however, succeeded in obtaining a court injunction against my "withdrawal" on the basis that it was "suicide," and suicide was unlawful. Since a man in statu dormiendi cannot of his own volition return to life - so the brief argued - from the legal point of view he is not living while in that state.

The ensuing legal battle lasted for five years. Finally, Adams, Lynch and Davenport, who handled my case, succeeded in getting the Supreme Court to accept

jurisdiction. The Supreme Court upheld the injunction, with three justices dissenting. Mr. Davenport explained to me that the ruling of the Supreme Court, though on the face of it unfavorable, was in reality a very fortunate thing for me because it removed all obstacles that might have stood in the way of my plans. The ruling of the Supreme Court, so Mr. Davenport explained, established once and for all that a man is not legally living while in *statu dormiendi*. Therefore - so Mr. Davenport said - if I should now decide to act against the advice of his firm, disregard the court injunction and proceed to withdraw from life, no legal action could be taken against me under any statute, until I was returned to life three hundred years hence, at which time my offense would come under the Statute of Limitations.

All arrangements having been completed in secrecy, and having named Adams, Lynch and Davenport as executors of my Estate, I spent my last evening in the twentieth century at a small farewell party given to me by friends. There were about six of us, all old friends of mine; but somehow we did not understand each other very well on this occasion. Most of them seemed to have had the feeling that they were sort of attending my funeral, since they would not see me again alive; whereas, to me, it seemed that it was I who was attending their funeral since none of them would be alive when I woke up.

According to the records, it took about two hours until sleep set in, but I do not remember anything that was said after the first hour.

The next thing I remember was the prick of a needle, and when I opened my eyes, I saw a nurse with a hypodermic syringe in one hand and a microphone in the other. "Would you mind speaking into the microphone, please?" - she said, holding it at a comfortable distance from my face. "We owe you an apology, as well as an explanation," said a well-dressed young man standing near my bed, and holding a microphone in his hand. "I am Mr. Rosenblatt from Adams, Lynch, Davenport, Rosenblatt and Giannini," - he said - "For reasons of a legal nature we deemed it advisable to return you to life, but if you wish to complete the three hundred years, which appears to be your goal, we hope we shall be able to make the necessary arrangements within one month. At least we shall try our best to do so."

"Now, before you say anything, let me explain to you that the gentleman sitting next to me is Mr. McClintock, the Mayor of the city - a democrat of course. Subject to your approval, we have agreed that he give you an interview which will be televised. The proceeds will go to the Senile Degeneration Research Fund. The broadcasting companies understand, of course, that it is up to you to agree to this arrangement, and they have an alternate program ready which can be substituted if you should object. If you agree, however, we shall go on the air in one minute.

Naturally, the broadcasting companies are anxious to catch your first responses rather than have something rehearsed put on the air. I am certain you will appreciate their point of view."

"Before I answer this," I said, "would you mind telling me how long I have been asleep?" "I should have told you this before," he said, "you were out ninety years." "Then," I said, after a moment's reflection, "I have no friends left from whom to keep any secrets. I have no objection to the broadcast."

As soon as the announcer finished with his somewhat lengthy introduction, the Mayor came in: "As Chairman of the Senile Degeneration Research Fund, I wish to express my thanks to you for having graciously consented to this interview. Senile degeneration is one of our most important diseases. One in eight die of senile degeneration, and more than half of those who reach the age of 105. Given ample funds for research, we cannot fail to discover the causes of this disease, and once the cause of the disease is known it will be possible to find a cure. But I know that I should not monopolize the air; there must be many things that you would want to know about our society. Please feel free to ask anything you like."

"Why was I returned to life?" I asked. "I am certain" - the Mayor said - "Messrs. Adams, Lynch, Davenport, Rosenblatt and Giannini will want to give you a detailed explanation of that. It was their decision, and I have no doubt that it was a wise one in the circumstances. I am not a lawyer, but I can tell you something about the political background of their decision. Politics - that is my field."

"I wonder whether you realize how much trouble your process of 'withdrawal from life' has caused the Government. For a few years only few persons followed your example, mostly political scientists and anthropologists. But then, all of a sudden, it became quite a fad. People withdrew just to spite their wives and husbands. And I regret to say that many Catholics who could not obtain a divorce chose this method for surviving their husbands or wives, to become widowed and to remarry, until this practice was finally stopped in 2001 by the Papal Bull 'Somnus Naturae Repugnans.'"

"The Church did not interfere, of course, with the legitimate uses of the process. Throughout the latter part of the century doctors encouraged patients who suffered from cancer, and certain other incurable diseases, to withdraw from life, in the hope that a cure would be found in the years to come, and that they could then be returned to life and cured. There were legal complications, of course, particularly in the case of wealthy patients. Often, their heirs raised objections on the ground that withdrawal from life was not yet an entirely safe process; and equally often the heirs demanded that they too should be permitted to withdraw from life for an equal period of time, so that the natural sequence of the generations be left undisturbed.

There are about one million cancer patients at present in statu dormiendi, and half a million of their heirs." "Then cancer is still not a curable disease?" I asked.

"No," the Mayor said, "but with all the funds which are now available it can take at the most a few years until that problem is solved."

"The most important, even though a somewhat controversial application of your process," the Mayor continued, "came about twenty-five years ago. That was when the present great Depression started. It came as a result of seventy-five years of Republican mismanagement. Today, we have a Democratic President and a Democratic Congress; but this is the first Democratic President since Truman, and the first Democratic Congress since the 79th."

"As more and more of the Southern states began to vote Republican, our party was hopelessly outvoted, until gradually its voting strength began to rise again; and today, with a Democratic majority solidly established, we have nothing to fear from coming elections."

"So finally there is a truly progressive party in the United States?" I asked. "Yes," the Mayor said, "we regard ourselves as progressives. We have the support of the Catholic Church, and eighty percent of the voters are Catholics." "What brought about such mass conversions?" I asked. "There were no mass conversions," the Mayor said, "and we would not want any. Families of Polish, Irish and Italian stock, having a stronger belief in the American way of life than some of the older immigrant stocks, have always given birth to more children; and so today we have a solid Catholic majority."

"Now that the Democratic party is established in office, we are going to fight the Depression by the proper economic methods. As I said before, there was a Republican administration in office when the Depression hit us twenty-five years ago. In the first year of that Depression unemployment rose to ten million. Things looked pretty bad. There was no Public Works Program or Unemployment Relief, but Congress passed a Law - the Withdrawal Act of 2025 - authorizing the use of federal funds for enabling any unemployed who so desired to withdraw from life for the duration of the Depression. Those unemployed who availed themselves of this offer had to authorize the Government to return them to life when the Government deemed that the labor market required such a measure."

"Seven out of ten million unemployed availed themselves of this offer by the end of the first year, in spite of the opposition of the Church. The next year unemployment was up another seven million, out of which five million were withdrawn from life. This went on and on, and by the time our Party got into office, two years ago, there were twenty-five million withdrawn from life, with federal support."

"Our first act in office was to make withdrawals from life unlawful; and the second was to institute a Public Works Program." "What does your Public Works Program consist of?" I asked. "Housing," the Mayor said. "Is there a housing shortage?" I asked. "No," the Mayor said, "with twenty-five million unemployed in statu dormiendi there is, of course, no housing shortage."

"And will you now return these twenty-five million unemployed to life?" I asked. "Only very gradually," the Mayor replied. "The majority of the sleepers are non-Catholics and it would upset the political balance if they were returned to life all at once. Besides," he added, "operating the refrigerator plants of the public dormitories for twenty-five million sleepers is part of our Public Works Program."

"Incidentally," the Mayor said, "whether you yourself come under the Anti-Withdrawal Act of 2048 is a controversial question. Your lawyers felt that you would not want to violate the law of the land, and they tried to get a Court ruling in order to clear you; but the Court refused to take the case because you were not legally alive; finally, your lawyers decided to return you to life so that you may ask the Court for a declaratory judgment. Even though there is little doubt that the Court will rule in your favor, I personally hope that you will find our society so pleasant, and so much more advanced than you would have expected, that you will decide to stay with us in the twenty-first century."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor," the announcer said - "This was beautiful timing. We are off the air," he said to me, thinking I needed more explanation.

"If you feel well enough," - the Mayor turned to me - "I would like to take you home for dinner. It is a small party, four or five guests, my wife and my daughter Betty. The poor girl is broken-hearted. She has just called off her engagement, and I am doing what I can to cheer her up. She is very much in love with the fellow." "If she loves him so much, why did she break with him?" I asked. "All her friends teased her about him because he wears teeth," the Mayor said. "Of course, there is no law against it, it is just not done, that is all."

Something began to dawn upon me at this moment. The nurse, a pretty young girl, had no teeth, Mr. Rosenblatt had no teeth, and the Mayor had no teeth. Teeth seemed to be out of fashion. "I have teeth," I said. "Yes, of course" - the Mayor replied - "and you wear them with dignity. But if you should decide to stay with us you will want to get rid of them. They are not hygenic." "But how would I chew my food, how do you chew your food?" I asked. "Well," - the Mayor said - "we do not eat with our hands. We eat from plates - chewing plates" - he said. "They plug into sockets in the table and chew your food for you. We eat with spoons." "Steaks too?" I asked.

"Yes, everything," - the Mayor said, "but have no fear, we shall have knife and fork for you tonight, and flat plates such as you are accustomed to. My daughter kept them for her fiance."

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"I am sorry that my second daughter will not be with us tonight," the Major said as he was starting his car - "She is in the hospital. In college she is taking mathematics and chemistry. She could have talked to you in your own language." "Nothing seriously wrong, I hope," I said. "Oh, no!" the Mayor said - "just plastic surgery. She will be out in a day or two." "With a new nose?" I asked. "Nothing wrong with her nose," the Mayor said - "As a matter of fact she has Mark Gable's nose." "No," - the Mayor said - "one of these newfangled operations. My wife and I do not approve of it, but this girl, she runs with the smart set. 'Oesophagus By-Pass,' they call it. No longer necessary to watch your diet, you know. Eat as much as you please, and switch it to the by-pass, goes into a rubber container, of course. I tried to talk her out of it but that girl has an answer for everything. 'Father,' she said, 'isn't there a food surplus in the world? If everybody ate twice as much would that not solve the problem?'" "Maybe she is right," I said, remembering with an effort that I always used to side with youth.

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When we sat down at table I looked forward to the steak; I was pretty hungry by that time. But when it was served, after a few fruitless attempts with knife and fork, I had to ask for a chewing plate. "The choice cuts are always especially tough," my hostess explained. "Tell me," I said, "when did people begin to discard their teeth, and why?" "Well," the Mayor said, "it started thirty years ago. Ford's chewing plates have been advertised over television for at least thirty-five years. Once people have chewing plates, what use do they have for teeth? If you think of all the time people used to spend at the dentist's, and for no good purpose at that, you will have to admit we have made progress."

"What became of all the dentists?" I asked. "Many of them have been absorbed by the chewing plate industry," the Mayor explained, "Henry Ford VI gave them preference over all categories of skilled workers. Others turned to other occupations." "Take Mr. Mark Gable, for instance" - the Mayor said, pointing to a man sitting at my right, a man about fifty, and of great personal charm - "He had studied dentistry; today he is one of the most popular 'donors,' and the richest man in the United States." "Oh," - I said - "what is his business?"

"Over one million boys and girls," - the Mayor said - "are his offspring in the United States, and the demand is still increasing." "That must keep you pretty busy,



Mr. Gable," I said, unable to think of anything else to say. Apparently I had put my foot in it. Mrs. Gable blushed, and the Mayor laughed. "Mr. Gable is happily married," the Mayor said. "He donated the seed when he was twenty-four years old. The stock should last indefinitely, although the demand may not. The Surgeon-General has ruled that no seed donated by anyone above twenty-five may be marketed in the United States."

"Has there been legislation about this?" I asked, "giving the Surgeon-General such authority?" "No," the Mayor said, "legislation was blocked by filibuster in the Senate; but the Surgeon-General takes action under the Pure Food and Drug Act." "How can he do that?" I asked. "There was a decision by the Supreme Court thirty years ago," the Mayor said, "that all ponderable substance which is destined to enter through any orifice of the human body comes properly under that Act."

"There was no legislation in this whole field whatsoever," the Mayor continued, "any woman who wishes to bear a child of her own husband is perfectly free to do so. Over fifteen percent of the children are born in this manner; but most wives prefer to select a donor." "How do they make a choice?" I asked. "Oh," the Mayor said, "the magazines are full of their pictures. You can see them on the screen, at home and in the movies. There are fashions, of course. Today, over seventy percent of the 'donated' children are the offspring of the thirty-five most popular donors. Naturally, they are expensive. Today a seed of Mr. Gable will bring \$1000; but you can get seed from very good stock for \$100. Fashions are bound to change; but long after Mr. Gable passes away his Estate will still go on selling his seed to connoisseurs. It is estimated that for several decades his Estate will still take in more than thirty million dollars a year."

"I have earned a very large sum of money" - said Mr. Gable, turning to me, "with very little work. And now I am thinking of setting up a Trust Fund. I want to do something that will really contribute to the happiness of mankind; but it is very difficult to know what to do with money. When Mr. Rosenblatt told me that you would be here tonight I asked the Mayor to invite me. I certainly would value your advice." "Would you intend to do anything for the advancement of science?" I asked. "No," Mark Gable said, "I believe scientific progress is too fast as it is." "I share your feeling about this point," I said with the fervor of conviction, "but then, why not do something about the retardation of scientific progress?" "That I would very much like to do," Mark Gable said, "but how do I go about it?"

"Well," I said, "I think that should not be very difficult. As a matter of fact, I think it would be quite easy. You could set up a Foundation, with an annual endowment of thirty million dollars. Research workers in need of funds could apply for

grants, if they could make out a convincing case. Have ten committees, each composed of twelve scientists, appointed to pass on these applications. Take the most active scientists out of the laboratory and make them members of these committees. And the very best men in the field should be appointed as Chairmen at salaries of \$50,000 each. Also have about twenty prizes of \$100,000 each for the best scientific papers of the year. This is just about all you would have to do. Your lawyers could easily prepare a Charter for the Foundation. As a matter of fact, any of the National Science Foundation Bills which had been introduced in the 79th and 80th Congress could perfectly well serve as a model."

"I think you had better explain to Mr. Gable why this Foundation would in fact retard the progress of science," said a bespectacled young man sitting at the far end of the table, whose name I didn't get at the time of introduction. "It should be obvious" - I said - "First of all, the best scientists would be removed from their laboratories and kept busy on committees passing on applications for funds. Secondly, the scientific workers in need of funds will concentrate on problems which are considered promising and are pretty certain to lead to publishable results. For a few years there may be a great increase in scientific output; but by going after the obvious, pretty soon Science will dry out. Science will become something like a parlor game. Some things will be considered interesting, others will not. There will be fashions. Those who follow the fashion will get grants. Those who won't, will not, and pretty soon they will learn to follow the fashion too."

"Will you stay here with us?" Mark Gable said turning to me, "and help me to set up such a Foundation?" "That I will gladly do, Mr. Gable," - I said - "We should be able to see within a few years whether the scheme works; and I am certain that it will work. A few years I could afford to stay here, and I could then still complete the three hundred years which was my original goal."

"So you would want to go through with your plan rather than live out your life with us?" asked the Mayor. "Frankly, Mr. Mayor," I said, "before Mr. Gable brought up the plan of the Foundation, with science progressing at this rapid rate I was a little scared of being faced with further scientific progress two hundred years hence. But if Mr. Gable succeeds in stopping the progress of science and gives the Art of Living a chance to catch up, two hundred years hence the world should be a liveable place. If Mr. Gable should not go through with his project, however, I would probably prefer to live out my life with you in the twenty-first century."

"How about it, Mr. Mayor?" I said, "will you give me a job if I decide to stay?" "You do not need a job" - the Mayor said - "you do not seem to realize that you are a very famous man." "How does being famous" - I asked - "provide me with a livelihood?"

"In more ways than one" - the Mayor said - "You could become a donor, for instance. Now that over half of our professional men are medical doctors, more and more wives want children with some measure of scientific ability." "But, Mr. Mayor," I said, "I am above twenty-five." "Of course," the Mayor said, "the seed would have to be marketed abroad. The rate of exchange is none too favorable," he continued, "but even so you should be able to earn a comfortable living if you decided to stay." "I do not know, Mr. Mayor," I said, "the idea is a little novel for me; but I suppose I could get accustomed to it." "I am sure you could," said the Mayor.

"And incidentally," the Mayor said, "whenever you decide to get rid of that junk in your mouth, I shall be glad to get an appointment for you with Elihu Smith, the dental extractor. He took care of all of our children." "I appreciate your kindness very much, Mr. Mayor," I said smiling politely and trying to hide a suddenly rising feeling of despair. All my life I have been scared of dentists and dental extractors, and somehow I suddenly became aware of the painful fact that it was not within the power of science to return me to the twentieth century.