

A 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Tribute to Chauncey Starr

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One night a couple of weeks ago in New York I was dodging traffic crossing Broadway and mentioned to a friend that I would soon deliver a tribute to Dr. Starr in Palo Alto. "Dr. Starr," she said, and then, suddenly inspired, pointed up at the heavens and declared, "It's obvious how to begin, you should get his astrological chart." I flinched, in fact, almost became a highway statistic.

Reaching the far curb and grasping more tightly our bag of hot-and-sour soup, Buddha's Delight, and salt-and pepper shrimp, I explained, his name is Starr and he does live in California, but I don't think he would enjoy hearing how his life was determined by the positions of the planets in 1912. "Well," she said, "you are always saying history matters. At least look in the newspapers around the time he was born." Now that seemed altogether more rational and fun.

What did I learn? Henry Ford's new Model T was selling like hotcakes. Ford was being lauded as the most original manufacturer of the time for his introduction of the assembly line, integration of raw material production into his operations, and not least good pay for workers. Ford paid his workers enough to own their own product.

On the science side, a Swedish physicist named Nils Dalen was awarded the Nobel Prize for inventing automatic gas regulators for lighthouses and sea buoys.

A chemist named Funk coined the term vitamin for a class of substances powerful for health and growth far out of proportion to their amount.

Cracker Jacks added a prize to each package.

And on April 15<sup>th</sup>, the supposedly unsinkable Titanic failed on its maiden voyage, after striking an iceberg. 1500 people perished.

Soon I had a vision of the baby Chauncey in Newark surrounded by animated new Americans arguing about politics, economics, and technology. All the issues were there.

What conversations the Titanic must have stirred about scale in technology, about engineering design, about risk.

What arguments Ford must have caused about systems approaches, and of course about societal benefits and their distribution, about industrial concentration. Samuel Insull and his electric empire were in the news too by the way.

I can see Chauncey munching on his Cracker Jacks, studying his surprise prize, maybe a small model airplane, and chuckling at the Nobel Committee's interest in lighthouses, and deciding, vitamins, we can introduce vitamins into America's industries.

On this happy occasion of Chauncey's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, I would like to pay tribute to all the vitamins Chauncey has invented and fed to America and the world, most especially Vitamin E for Electricity, and for EPRI, its most powerful formulation.

I do this on behalf of Chauncey's multitude of East Coast friends and admirers and the many institutions that Chauncey has invigorated, not least our own Program for the Human Environment at The Rockefeller University.

To Chauncey and Vitamin E!