

## Wells Made Me a World Citizen

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*Address to the H.G. Wells Society at its Annual General Meeting, Conway Hall, London, 26 April 1986.*

Herbert George Wells was a mystic, but a pragmatic one. Like so many mystics he was concerned with the significance of life in the universe, and especially with the function of our planet Earth. As a consequence he sought to see things whole, as 'work in progress', learning from the past and speculating about the future.

As a boy, very keen on history and archaeology, I avidly bought Wells's *Outline of History* when it was published in fortnightly parts. Here was the story of mankind in the round, as a design into which there fitted numerous colourful elements. We were not dealing in virtual isolation with the development and influence of particular states. There was no flag waving or superior race contentions, no assumption that might is right.

This position attracted me greatly, and opened up not only an enticing field of inquiry relating to the past but also of the exercise of the imagination about what might still be in store. Was there some purpose in history which was working itself out? How and in what ways could one co-operate with that purpose? What were the obstacles to be overcome in human relationships? What forces of nature had to be enlisted in the process by invention and discovery?

Such questions were buzzing around in the mind of Herbert Wells and were given expression in many of his works of fiction. And there was always a sinister aspect to be recognised. Man's great adventure was perilous, beset with the problems and the intrusion of hostile elements, both natural forces and human forces.

We had seemed to come at the brink of disaster with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The Peace edifices erected by Man after the First World War of 1914-1918 had proved to be brittle and flimsy. There had been great hopes of the League of Nations, but it was found to be totally inadequate when faced with the religio-political ambitions of aggressive powers which were utterly ruthless.

The critical state of human affairs had been in evidence for a number of years before the events of 1939, and this had led many to offer their own solutions. I had felt that a forum was needed for the ventilation of current proposals and interpretations, and for this purpose I created in London the Peace Book Company. This had brought me for the first time in personal contact with Wells. One of our publications was a book by Dr Edvard Benes, Ex-President of Czechoslovakia, entitled *Building a New Europe*, and to this H.G. Wells contributed an Introduction.

As I understood him, Wells was individualistic in his own personality. He was afraid of the impersonality of collectivism whether of the Right or Left. This was very understandable and came out in books like *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *The Time Machine* and *All Aboard for Ararat*. He saw the Machine Age as contributing to collectivist power which was soulless and aggressive, and it was the rights of the individual which he wanted to stress. The individual should have a new freedom

and a new dignity, but at the same time the breadth of vision and association of the world citizen.

This led Wells at the beginning of the Second World War to intervene in a correspondence which was being conducted in the *Times* newspaper by a number of eminent individuals on the theme of what should be the Peace and War Aims. He was not theoretically against Collectivism *per se*; but he wanted to see it doing what it was quite incapable of doing, to offer complete freedom to the individual to play a full and active part in the social scheme.

I quote here from Wells's first letter to the *Times* dated Sept. 26, 1939:

"The League of Nations, we can all admit now, was a poor and ineffective outcome of that revolutionary proposal to banish armed conflict from the world and inaugurate a new life for mankind. It was too conservative of existing things, half-hearted, diplomatic. And since, as more and more of us are beginning to realize now, there can be no more peace or safety on earth without a profound reconstruction of the methods of human living, the Great War did not so much come to an end as smoulder through two decades, the Fatuous Twenties and the Frightened Thirties, to flare up again now. Now at a level of greater tension, increased violence and destructiveness and more universal suffering, we are back to something very like 1914, and the decisive question before our species is whether this time it will set its face resolutely towards the drastic remoulding of ideas and relationships, that world revolution, which it has shirked for a quarter of a century."

He went on:

"If that revolution is to be brought off successfully and give a renewed lease of human happiness and effort, it is to be brought off only by the fullest, most ruthless discussion of every aspect and possibility of the present situation. Nobody and no group of people knows enough for this immense reorganization, and unless we can have a full and fearless public intercourse of minds open to all the world, our present enemies included, we shall never be able to establish a guiding system of ideas upon which a new world order can rest."

This is where Wells was asking much too much, a meeting of individual minds, not an assembly of representatives of Sovereign States. The outcome of the War was the fallaciously termed United Nations, a four-Power domination of the world scene described as the League of Nations with teeth in it, nowadays very blunted with age and neglect.

Wells clarified his position in a further letter to the *Times* on 25 October 1939 with his new Declaration of Rights, human rights. This was concentrated entirely on the individual and entirely ignored any Rights or Asserted Rights of the State. Wells simply stood aside from State ideological positions with their control over the position of individual members. But it was with such ideological positions, especially those of Fascism, Communism and State Shintoism, that the individual was now confronted.

There were Ten Clauses in Wells's Declaration, which he desired should be "the fundamental law for mankind throughout the whole world." I will quote here only three of them, numbers 4, 5, and 6. My Company, of course, published the whole correspondence in December 1939.

"[Clause 4] That although he [a man] is subject to the free criticism of his fellows, he shall have adequate protection from any lying or misrepresentation that may distress or injure him. All registration and records about citizens shall be open to their personal and private inspection. There shall be no secret dossiers in any administrative department. All dossiers shall be accessible to the man concerned and subject to verification and correction at his challenge. A dossier is merely a memorandum; it cannot be used as evidence without proper confirmation.

(5) That he may engage freely in any lawful occupation, earning such pay as he need for his work and the increment it makes to the common welfare may justify. That he is entitled to demand employment and to a free choice when there is any variety of employment open to him. He may suggest employment for himself and have his claim publicly considered.

(6) That he may move freely about the world at his own expense. That his private house or apartment or reasonably limited garden enclosure is his castle, which may be entered only with his consent, but that he shall have the right to roam over any kind of country, moorland, mountain, farm, great garden or what not, where his presence will not be destructive of its special use nor dangerous to himself, nor seriously inconvenient to his fellow-citizens."

It was all very neat and tidy, but totally without capacity for realisation in our composite and authoritarian world. It ignored the need for a series of changes, for a process, to come into operation in relation to ideological and international affairs before such Rights were to any extent feasible.

In the first place where on Earth was the nation or political party with the concern to put such a programme into operation through the machinery of government, as an example that others might later be ready to follow? And how would it be connected with a world impact?

As I saw it, Man was denied the capacity to make a substantial move forward without the existence of an advance-guard of a united world which realistically could test the feasibility of such human rights for a sufficient period.

This meant creating something other than the United Nations, something that as yet had merely a nebulous existence, and which in a governmental form did not exist at all.

There was at the beginning of the Second World War a movement by the name of World Citizens, seeking to reflect in a committed manner the concept of World Citizenship. I was in close contact with all the World Peace and Unity activities of the time, and it was very evident to me that the movements for promoting an

integral relationship between sovereign states, such as European Unity or World Federalism, were the least likely to succeed in the near future. Consequently there could be no universal guarantees of the rights of the individual such as Wells proposed.

It came home to me that what ought to be emerging was a collective commitment of pledged world citizens to a national enterprise of their own as the experimental forerunner of that United World which the advances of science were making more and more imperative. The moral standards of mankind throughout the ages have been continually promoted by the example of sage and saintly individuals. Would it not be appropriate therefore that an exemplary nation, especially one with universal human sympathies, should be the means of exhibiting an ideal of nationhood worthy of imitation? Something of the kind was projected in the Bible in the concept of a Holy Nation.

Not only did mankind need the exemplification of the ideal of nationhood: it needed to see it in terms of service instead of domination, and it needed to have it exhibited in a form which reflected World Unity in miniature. Individual world citizens all over the world could jointly commit themselves to such an enterprise.

I promoted the idea of a Commonwealth of World Citizens, acting as Servant-Nation to all the nations. At the end of the war this began to take shape, and by 1956 had reached the point of Constitution. This took place at a General Assembly of the citizens in the Temple of Health and Peace at Cardiff, Wales, headquarters of the United Nations in Wales. Our Constitution as a nation was duly adopted in the presence of various foreign diplomats. It had a Preamble and a set of principles. I will quote here from the opening of the Preamble:

"Believing that in due time the peoples of the world shall be united for their common good and well-being, and that there shall be peace throughout the Earth: We men and women of different lands, races and nationalities, see clearly that it is now required to some part of mankind to give social and political expression to such unity, as an example and incentive to our fellows, and as a means of promoting a true and universal comradeship."

The text continued:

"We take courage to attempt, however fallibly and imperfectly, to establish at the level of government within the world of nations an Agency universal in its scope, impartial in its relations, defenceless in terms of armed force, designed exclusively for the well-being of all peoples without distinction."

In due course this Commonwealth of World Citizens received the collective title which it bears to this day, that of the Mondcvitan Republic, Mondcvitan deriving from Esperanto for World Citizen. Its accomplishments in the field of international diplomacy have been considerable, though hardly known at all by the general public.

You will appreciate that it is not my aim today to bring our activities particularly to your attention. During the present year we shall be making our character and

function more generally known to the world at large. What I have wished to bring before you is Wells's concept of the future which engaged my very close attention. He was what used to be called a Functional Federalist, concerned not with the control of the world by States, but with the common needs of mankind provided for by appropriate World Agencies. He wrote of this in his book called *Phoenix*, and I quote:

'It is totally unnecessary to think of any world government or world 'Super-state' in a reconstructed world. There will never be a parliament of Man; a President of the Earth. The sovereign-government pattern does not apply to a unified world at peace.' He continued: "The legal form in which the new world order will arise will be as a system of federally co-operative world authorities with powers delegated to them by the existing governments. The governments can go on existing, giving their consent and benediction to the new administrations they have authorized ... As the new methods get into working order the national governments will vanish, softly and unobtrusively, from the lay-out of the world."

I can understand what Wells conceived would progressively happen, that the Specialised Agencies of the UN would acquire increasing authority, until ultimately they took the place of the state-governments which had been responsible for creating them.

Here, it seems to me, that Wells allowed himself to do some wishful thinking. He could not allow himself to contemplate the prolonged continuance of sovereign-governments. He also insufficiently, because of his faith in the individual, allowed for the prolonged influence of collective ideologies, and their engagement in a power struggle. He hated dictatorships even when they were at the level of Morlocks. But he did glimpse something consequential of what would have to happen. He apprehended the essential need for a body of human pioneers who would offer mankind an incentive and an example.

Wells postulated the emergence of a new élite who would engage in what he described as an *Open Conspiracy* on behalf of mankind. It sounds rather cloak and dagger, but that was only a literary dramatisation. He saw those involved finding each other round the world. They would be drawn together by their common purpose and convictions. He insisted that the élite would need to have minds that were crystal clear. As he expressed this in *Phoenix*: "A man's mind must be liberated before he can conceive the idea of setting men free." There must be nothing wishy-washy about the Open Conspirators.

Using Noah's Ark as a parable in *All Aboard for Ararat*, Wells makes his modern Noah say,

"We who must be at the heart of it all, must plainly achieve such a devotion as mankind has never known before, because plainly such devotion as righteous men have displayed in times past has not been enough to save us from this present disaster. Not only such a devotion, but such a clearheadedness. There's the rub. We must give ourselves,

mind, body and soul ... The men of the new Ark must be of the utmost clearheadedness; of one mind ... The new age has to be an age of liberal opinion, but not of loose opinion."

Wells was boyishly eager in his anticipations, which was no grave fault, and therefore inclined to conceive that the stature of an ultimate future was more immediately obtainable. He should have apprehended that the first true world citizens would largely be unlikely looking fledglings, with none of the apparent beauty that we should desire in them, uncertain in their movements, and exhibiting only very slowly and gradually their distinctive qualities. The first generations of world citizens would make many mistakes, continually disappointing both themselves and mankind. Unless they themselves should realize this and understand this they would often despair. The new road would be no easier to travel than those which preceded it.

We would have to accept that employment of the close-collective was not going to be abandoned, especially in an age that was becoming increasingly mechanised. But it did not have to be soulless and inhuman. It could be conditioned and brought under the influence of feeling, feeling representing the highest human stature of service, benevolence, affection and mutual responsibility. Caring people must set the example, but now it must be translated into collective expression. The human ideal of nationhood could provide the means of expression, one that could have fulfilment in a planetary context. Wells did not sufficiently clarify the organic relationship of the components of the new World Order. In what capacity did they belong together? The natural associations were family, tribe, and even race. There were human extensions to nation and religion and political system. Of all of them it was the nation which allowed for unity in maximum diversity. History had even converted this into an ideal, in the Biblical concept of an exemplary nation, which would be at the service of all the others.

Wells offered a goal to be attained by the human species; but he had not sufficiently specified how and by what means it was to be reached. There may have been too many calls on his imagination for him to unite himself to one which was consistent and clear cut. But he could and did reach out to us an enticing and beckoning hand.

Wells was concerned that clear-headed individuals should come together for the function that was required of them. But he did not dwell either on how they should arise and perform, or on how their conclusions would receive the assent and implementation of Sovereign States. He had a sense of urgency, as so many did at the end of World War Two, and this tended, I feel, and, indeed, he felt it too, to pressure him into being more precise than was realistically practicable. As he wrote in *The Common Sense of War and Peace*:

"To achieve a progressive world organization as speedily as possible, before extinction overtakes us, is, therefore, the primary problem about which Mr Everyman – you and I – has to get his mind clear now. Everything rests on our ability to solve that, not merely world peace, but the survival of our species in its present form."

The only feasible method, as he claimed, was by a universal assent to the new Declaration of the Rights of Man.

But this new Declaration was not the Code of Hamurabi or the Law of Moses. It did not spring from divine inspiration. It had no authority concerned with its implementation. It was a statement of a moral responsibility; but realistically it was nothing more. Inwardly, I believe, Wells knew this, and consequently he did his utmost to avoid being pushed into the role of New Age Leader. He confined himself to the expression of a Hope without commitment as to the manner in which the Hope should be fulfilled. Yet he insisted that it was entirely practicable. He wrote, in *The Common Sense of War and Peace*,

"The backbone of my hope for a new world is this possibility of a world-wide coalescence of all the scattered forces of creation and protest in the human heart, into one consciously revolutionary movement based on the declared rights of man. It is an entirely practical proposal. All over the democracies of the world now we can call into being this uniform opposition, inspired by a common idea of world unity."

I feel that this was a partial self-deception on Wells's part. And its only justification was what amounted to a spiritual faith deep down in his own consciousness. At the very beginning of the book I have just quoted Wells stated:

"I have never thought, much less have I asserted, that progress was inevitable, though numerous people chose to fancy that about me. I have always maintained that by a strenuous effort mankind *might* defeat the impartial destructiveness of nature, but I have always insisted that only by incessant hard thinking and a better co-ordination of man's immense but dispersed powers of self-sacrifice and heroism was such a victory possible."

So there could be no guarantee. It could be touch-and-go. That was the Wells of Common Sense.

But there was a man of faith behind the man of common sense. Wells did not care to put this forward on his own behalf. He wanted to be thought of as governed by reason and intelligence. But the inside man was not like that. And looking into his eyes one could be conscious of the mystic. It was this Wells to whom I was drawn and who every now and again peeped out through the creations of his mind.

I would remind you of his book *The Wonderful Visit* in which an angel strays into our world, and finally grasps its significance. I quote:

"For a moment the Angel stood staring. Then in a flash he saw it all, saw this grim little world of battle and cruelty, transfigured in a splendour that outshone Angelic Land, suffused suddenly and insupportably glorious with the wonderful light of Love and Self-sacrifice."

Ladies and Gentlemen, those attributes of Love and Self-sacrifice are printed with a capital L and a capital S.

## H.G. Wells Gives a Speech to the British Science Fiction Convention at the Metropole Hotel, Birmingham, 1987

Patrick Parrinder

### ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, at this point in the programme we were to have heard an address by Ian Watson. The truth is that we are not sure quite *who* the next speaker is. He certainly looks rather like Ian Watson, but he claims to be an even more famous science-fiction writer who is generally supposed to have died in 1946. *Presumably he arrived here by time machine*. Our opinion is that he is an impostor, but since he begged to be allowed to speak to you, we agreed to let him fill in the time until the real Mr Watson shows up. I hope that at least you will give him a hearing ... He certainly has an incredible story to tell.

(The gentleman who appears on stage is breathless, visibly irritated, his squeaky voice betraying mental agitation. Smart, unspecifically old-fashioned dress – suit, waistcoat, a flower in his buttonhole. He has some trouble with the microphone. But after a few minutes he begins to warm to the oddity of the situation and its possible advantages – the chief one, in his eyes, being the presence of a large, captive, presumably sympathetic audience. His voice takes a more confident tone, his eyes have sometimes a visionary and faraway look, sometimes a mischievous gleam. A unique opportunity has presented itself, to this man who was always a pedagogue at heart ... to give the unsuspecting youth of 1987 a piece of his mind. But to do justice to the contents of his capacious mind he would need far more time than the organisers seem to have allotted him ...)

### MR H.G. WELLS

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to make it quite plain that I am here under false pretences, and against my will. I have been given a few minutes to explain my presence here this morning, though I must tell you that it is as much of a surprise to me as it undoubtedly is to you. First of all, I am not the person that you may mistakenly think I am. I am not Mr Ian Watson, even though just at present I seem to be the inhabitant of his body. Mr Ian Watson is, I am told, a science-fiction writer, with a certain admiration for some rather trifling books I once wrote. Whether his admiration will survive this experiment in which he and I have become so curiously entangled, I cannot say. As I am the present inhabitant of Mr Watson's body, he, I can only suppose, is currently making free with mine. Mr Watson, I have been told, bears a certain physical resemblance to me in my sprightlier and younger days. But I must assure you that the brain that is speaking to you from inside this body is not his. It is mine.

I am trying to outline these confusing matters to you as clearly as possible. When I left home this morning, I distinctly remember the date. It was 19 April, 1932. I was being driven in a hired limousine, and with me in my briefcase was the speech I intended to give at a weekend conference run by the younger members of the Fabian Society. These conferences are rather jolly affairs, as they tend to attract a number of intelligent young men and pretty and intelligent young women. On the whole I