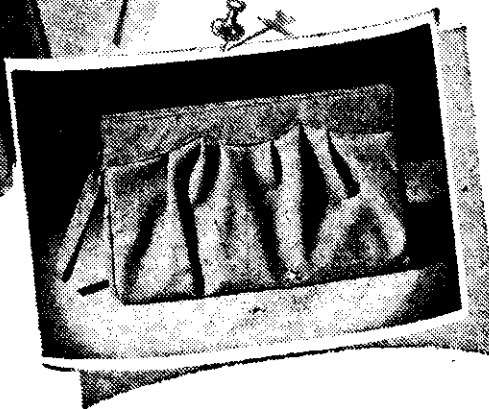




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DEMOCRACY UNDER REVISION

THOUGH H. G. Wells is dead, what he did and said (and of course, wrote) still has news value—even after a lapse of 19 years, as in the case of his Sorbonne lecture in 1927 on the subject of "Democracy Under Revision." This account of the lecture and the lecturer has been written for "The Listener" by a New Zealander who was present on that occasion—UNA D. SCOTT, M.A., Diplome de l'enseignement des professeurs de francais à l'étranger (Sorbonne).

WHILE a student in Paris at the Sorbonne, I received an invitation to hear a lecture on Democracy by H. G. Wells. In London I had heard Shaw, Chesterton, Belloc, and other writers of our day, but as H. G. Wells rarely appeared on public platform, this was an opportunity not to be missed. Wells referred later to this invitation to speak at the Sorbonne as "the highest distinction that was ever likely to fall to him."

The Amphitheatre Richelieu (named after the French cardinal who founded the French Academy) was packed to the doors with students and Parisians eager to hear *le plus intelligent des Anglais*, as Wells had been described by Anatole France.

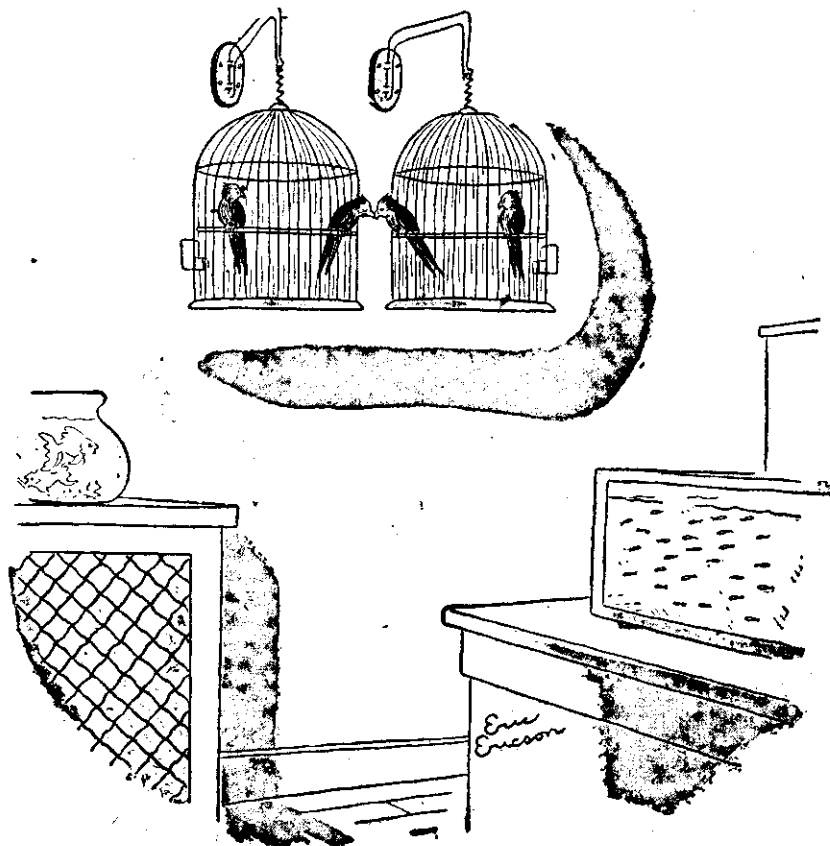
In the chair was M. Ferdinand Brunot, Dean of the Faculté des Lettres, eminent professor at the Sorbonne and well known to University students in New Zealand for his textbooks on French literature; with him sat also M. Louis Cazamian, Professor of History of English civilisation at the Sorbonne. (Another of our professors was M. Lanson, whose stupendous history of French literature has been for many years a textbook in New Zealand University Colleges).

It is always interesting to hear how a Frenchman views an Englishman, and

vice versa. M. Brunot, in a speech which was a brilliant example of French tact and courtesy, paid Wells the tribute of independence of thought, and originality of intellect. He described him as *un esprit fécondateur*. I like that phrase, "quickener of thought." But what seemed to appeal most to M. Brunot was the fact that Wells, he said, was never tied down to one fixed formula or pattern of philosophic doctrine ("*un esprit jamais asservi à une formule figée*").

Having been thus introduced to his audience, Wells rose to speak. He was then, I believe, over 60, though his rubicund complexion made him seem slightly less. His smile was indulgent, kindly, his eyes though small were very alert—the eyes of an imaginative observer of the human comedy. He spoke in English and those who, like myself, expected to hear an orator, may have felt slightly disappointed in the uneven tone and quality of his thin, weak voice, as he began, "This gives me an opportunity of saluting France, custodian of the world's artistic conscience." One soon forgot the tired voice, to marvel at the brilliance of his thoughts and the beauty of our mother tongue awakened feelings of patriotism and even nostalgia in the heart of at least one New Zealander in the audience.

In speaking of the various criticisms which had been showered upon him—



NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, OCTOBER 4