

"editor, temperamental schoolmaster, disguised historian"—Wells said that he preferred to take refuge in the name of "journalist." "*Men of letters*," he said, "*live first of all for their own time*, and thereafter their value diminishes." Could this strange statement, in part true, be applied to the giants of universal culture—Homer, Michaelangelo, Beethoven, Shakespeare? "Yes," said Mr. Wells, "of these also is this true. *We have our time and pass into the night or the museum of antiquities.*" Humanity's impression of the present, whether reflected in art or music, according to this statement of Wells, is therefore a living mortality, the work of "journalists"—in the literal sense of the word, with its French root "jour" (day).

Referring to Democracy, summarised in the slogan "All human beings are of equal value in the sight of God" or, "One man's money is as good as another's," he compared it with Christianity and Islam, which, he said, restrained the individual by exalting all to an equal level. In politics this principle is seen in the electoral system. In literature we see the rise of Democracy in the 16th Century when Cervantes, scoffing at privilege and class distinction, showed the final futility of chivalrous mastery by placing his wisest words in the mouth of a clown (Sancho Panza).

The End of Democracy

The 20th Century, having seen the culmination of Democracy, was destined also to witness its downfall. "Its end is near," prophesied Wells.

Speaking of the discredit into which the Parliamentary system had fallen throughout the world (the Vote is an instrument of defence, its "utmost power is the peevish dismissal of Governments"), Wells touched upon conditions in Russia, Pekin, and Italy, "*The magic of the electoral system is played out*"—this prophecy was the most arresting part of his lecture.

The world as he depicted it, with its Parliamentary and political life destined to disappear, was faced with the need for re-orientation as regards three problems of vital importance: (1) War, (2) Money, (3) Economic Union. The need for a stable money system of world-wide validity was obviously urgent.

"For eight years we have seen the monies of the world dance up and down while bankers and financiers have performed their mysterious operations." (As was to be expected, the speaker was here loudly applauded—the interval between the two world wars was a time of great financial stress in France).

With this three-headed sphinx confronting Europe, Wells urged upon his hearers the need for a deeper interest in international affairs and the new cosmopolitan thought. He expressed a strong dislike for certain elements of fascism—he was anti-communist and anti-fascist. Youth would play an immense part in the future of Europe, and above all in China, where bands of students were taking possession of the Government. "*The serious minority*," he concluded, "*are the salt of the earth.*"

The subject chosen by Wells was vast—he dealt with it broadly and vigorously, introducing some astonishing prophecies which betrayed the imaginative insight of the creator of *Mr. Britling*, and *The World of William Clissold*. There is probably no English writer of our times who has won, for English literature and thought, higher esteem among the French people than H. G. Wells.



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