

**THE OUTLINE OF H. G.
WELLS, THE SUPERMAN
IN THE STREET**

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The outline of H. G. Wells, the superman in the street by Sidney Dark

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H. G. WELLS



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THE SUPERMAN IN THE STREET

BY
SIDNEY DARK

LONDON
LEONARD PARSONS
DEVONSHIRE STREET

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THE OUTLINE OF H. G. WELLS

CHAPTER ONE

A SHORT, stocky man with a scrubby moustache and a high-pitched voice; a man nearer sixty than fifty, but looking considerably younger; a man whose like you can see a thousand times a day in every city street. Such, superficially, is H. G. Wells whom Anatole France has recently described—and accurately described—as the greatest intellectual force in the English-speaking world.

The weakness of most supermen is their unlikeness to their fellows, and this unlikeness is often quite as obvious physically as it is mentally and morally. You cannot meet Bernard Shaw without realising at once that he is not as other men. There is something strange and unusual about him. You guess at once that he eats differently and drinks differently, thinks differently and dreams differently from the rest of us. The aspirations of such a man, his admonitions and his doctrines, are intensely interesting, but their

importance to the world is limited by his detachment from his fellows.

Intellectually, of course, H. G. Wells is immensely superior to the common rut of men. He is a born leader and inspirer of men, but—this is the point of outstanding importance—he remains a man of like passions with ourselves. Shaw and most of the intellectuals belong to a class apart. They generally recognise their separation from the rut, and glory in it. The intellectual habitually stands at the street corners and thanks God that he is not as other men. The glory of Bunyan and Charles Dickens is that they stood at the street corners and thanked God that they were as other men. Wells has many affinities with Dickens. He does not possess Dickens's glorious humour. He has never been able to realise that even in mean streets life may have its thrills. But he belongs essentially, as Dickens belonged, to the English lower middle class. He is an articulate man of the people. This is the fact that gives him his peculiar importance in the modern world.

Arnold Bennett springs from the same class. But there is a vast spiritual difference between the two men. Bennett writes with composure. Wells writes with enthusiasm. Bennett is a critic. Wells is a crusader.

Bennett is a conscious literary artist who has been vastly influenced by the great French masters. Wells uses his pen to "bash away at the minxes." His genius compels the world to listen to him, and the world listens the more attentively because his is not the voice of a visitor from Mars, but of a superman in the street.

H. G. Wells was born in 1866. He has himself written the story of his early years.

I was born in that queer indefinite class that we call in England the middle class. I am not a bit aristocratic: I do not know any of my ancestors beyond my grandparents, and about them I do not know very much, because I am the youngest son of my father and mother, and their parents were all dead before I was born.

My mother was the daughter of an innkeeper at a place named Midhurst, who supplied post-horses to the coaches before the railways came; my father was the son of the head gardener of Lord de Lisle at Penshurst Castle, in Kent. They had various changes of fortune and position; for most of his life my father kept a little shop in a suburb of London, and eked out his resources by playing a game called cricket, which is not only a pastime but a show which people will pay to see, and which, therefore, affords a living for professional players. His shop was unsuccessful; and my mother, who had once been a lady's maid, became, when I was twelve years old, housekeeper in a large country house.

I, too, was destined to be a shopkeeper. I left school at thirteen for that purpose. I was apprenticed first to a chemist, and, that proving

unsatisfactory, to a draper. But after a year or so it became evident to me that the facilities for higher education that were and still are constantly increasing in England offered me better chances in life than a shop and comparative illiteracy could do ; and so I struggled for and got various grants and scholarships that enabled me to study and to take a degree in science and some mediocre honours in the new and now great and growing University of London.

After I had graduated I taught biology for two or three years and then became a journalist, partly because it is a more remunerative profession in England than teaching, but partly also because I had always taken the keenest interest in writing English. Some little kink in my mind had always made the writing of prose very interesting to me.

I began first to write literary articles, criticisms, and so forth, and presently short imaginative stories in which I made use of the teeming suggestion of modern science. There is a considerable demand for this sort of fiction in Great Britain and America, and my first book, *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, attracted considerable attention, and with two of its successors, *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*, gave me a sufficient popularity to enable me to devote myself exclusively, and with a certain sense of security, to purely literary work.

This is a strikingly candid autobiography. To it there is little to be added except that, at the beginning of his literary career, Wells was one of the many distinguished young writers who received priceless help and encouragement from William Ernest Henley.