

**AN OUTLINE OF  
WELLS: THE SUPERMAN  
IN THE STREET**

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An Outline of Wells: The Superman in the Street by Sidney Dark

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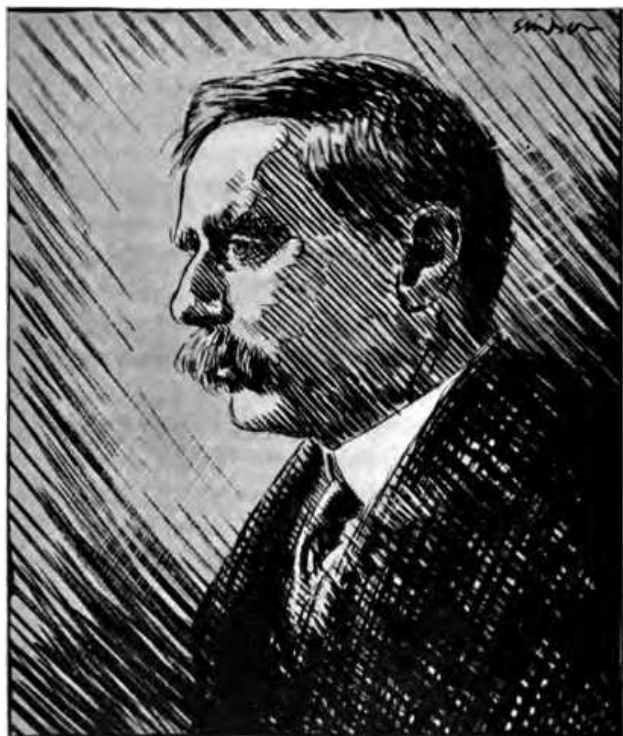
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## **An Outline of Wells**



H. G. WELLS

From a Drawing by J. Simpson  
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# An Outline of Wells

The Superman in the Street

By

**Sidney Dark**

*Editor of John O'London's Weekly*

With an Introduction by

**Heywood Brown**

**G. P. Putnam's Sons**  
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## AN AMERICAN FOREWORD

FOR years I longed to meet Wells, but in somewhat the same way that I longed to go up in an aeroplane. The possibility that terror might kill the fun was always in my mind. When he came to America he proved to be less awe-inspiring than even a little army with banners. Fortunately, he was somewhat whittled down by the fact that his mission was journalism. After all we were both newspaper men. The executives of "The Morning World" referred to him as "our junior reporter" and he accepted the title with an air which was whimsical and yet a little proud. Still, even as a cub reporter Wells remained somewhat too dazzling for my comfort. "This is Mr. Wells," said Herbert Swope as he swung around a corner of the office labyrinth towing his latest contributor. All the copyreaders on our paper are bigger than Wells and the executive editor can give him three octaves handicap any evening and roar him down, but to me



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his journalistic job could not hide the magnificent and disconcerting fact that this was the man who had done a history of Mr. Polly and, later, of the world. I felt a little sorry that my distant ancestors, in accordance with the Wellsian plan, had contrived to crawl up out of the ooze and begin a simple life upon the beaches. My line should have remained under water until I was more callous to the presence of celebrities. I could not forget that Wells had practically flicked Cleopatra out of history with a little finger, stooped low to look at Cæsar, and thumbed his nose at Napoleon. And so I bowed and ran back to the private office which I share with four other men.

These reminiscences are not entirely irrelevant because among other things Wells has a fundamental geniality and common humanity. This may not be altogether necessary to the man of genius but it is distinctive. In proof of his possession of these qualities I offer in evidence the fact that a week later I was boldly asking, "Mr. Wells, who are the five greatest living writers in England?" or some other question equally foolish and statistical. And he answered. It was about that time that I sat and heard another newspaper man from the "World" (an exalted one but no matter) cut into the middle of an

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answer which Wells was making to some Japanese and take up the burden of talk by remarking, "I think Mr. Wells means to say—" He proceeded to amplify and clarify the words of his junior reporter. There were no casualties. Possibly Wells has no liking for the rôle of the great man. He never played it here during the Arms Conference.

Sidney Dark in his "Outline of Wells" develops the importance of the likeness of Wells to his fellows. It is one of the chief points to be made in rebuttal against those critics who insist that here is merely another demonstration of a messianic complex. Wells has never swept down into the world from any mountain top ready with revelation. He preaches from no higher level than a curbstone. The rest of us can hop up and follow his suggestions if we choose.

I am inclined to agree with Sidney Dark that Wells is not all artist. As in the career of Shaw there has been a constant bickering in his soul between the artist and the propagandist. In the last ten years not very much of his work seems to have been inspired merely by a disposition to kick up his heels. That is what I mean by art. The feud between it and propaganda is inevitable and practically irreconcilable. But a time has come

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when it is worth while to pause and consider which is the more important. For centuries mankind has assumed, without thinking, that the person with something to say must of necessity yield place to the man intent only upon musical interludes. "I'm a fiddler" has seemed sufficient answer from any idle bystander in a burning world. It isn't enough. When civilisation crumbles art goes with it. Society must be far more stable than it is to-day before the sheer stylist can lord it over the rest of his fellows.

In granting that Wells is not all artist, I do not mean that his literary work is any the less engrossing. "Joan and Peter" ought to shake all America out of its present educational traditions and yet the book provides one of the most engrossing stories which I know. Cain's heresy is the orthodoxy of the simon pure artist. He must steadfastly decline the job of being his brother's keeper. The artist of Gomorrah went right on with his sculpture, his poetry, or his painting heedless and indifferent to civic conditions. When the doom came it did not pass his door.

Wells is no neutral. Even in his novels he becomes a passionate partisan. He strengthens the arm and the arguments of the right characters