A Modern Utopia

By

H. G. Wells

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book is in all probability the last of a series of writings, of which--disregarding certain earlier disconnected essays--my Anticipations was the beginning. Originally I intended Anticipations to be my sole digression from my art or trade (or what you will) of an imaginative writer. I wrote that book in order to clear up the muddle in my own mind about innumerable social and political questions, questions I could not keep out of my work, which it distressed me to touch upon in a stupid haphazard way, and which no one, so far as I knew, had handled in a manner to satisfy my needs. But Anticipations did not achieve its end. I have a slow constructive hesitating sort of mind, and when I emerged from that undertaking I found I had still most of my questions to state and solve. In Mankind in the Making, therefore, I tried to review the social organisation in a different way, to consider it as an educational process instead of dealing with it as a thing with a future history, and if I made this second book even less satisfactory from a literary standpoint than the former (and this is my opinion), I blundered, I think, more edifyingly--at least from the point of view of my own instruction. I ventured upon several themes with a greater frankness than I had used in Anticipations, and came out of that second effort guilty of much rash writing, but with a considerable development of formed opinion. In many matters I had shaped out at last a certain personal certitude, upon which I feel I shall go for the rest of my days. In this present book I have

tried to settle accounts with a number of issues left over or opened up by its two predecessors, to correct them in some particulars, and to give the general picture of a Utopia that has grown up in my mind during the course of these speculations as a state of affairs at once possible and more desirable than the world in which I live. But this book has brought me back to imaginative writing again. In its two predecessors the treatment of social organisation had been purely objective; here my intention has been a little wider and deeper, in that I have tried to present not simply an ideal, but an ideal in reaction with two personalities. Moreover, since this may be the last book of the kind I shall ever publish, I have written into it as well as I can the heretical metaphysical scepticism upon which all my thinking rests, and I have inserted certain sections reflecting upon the established methods of sociological and economic science....

The last four words will not attract the butterfly reader, I know. I have done my best to make the whole of this book as lucid and entertaining as its matter permits, because I want it read by as many people as possible, but I do not promise anything but rage and confusion to him who proposes to glance through my pages just to see if I agree with him, or to begin in the middle, or to read without a constantly alert attention. If you are not already a little interested and open-minded with regard to social and political questions, and a little exercised in self-examination, you will find neither interest nor pleasure here. If your mind is "made up" upon

such issues your time will be wasted on these pages. And even if you are a willing reader you may require a little patience for the peculiar method I have this time adopted.

That method assumes an air of haphazard, but it is not so careless as it seems. I believe it to be--even now that I am through with the book--the best way to a sort of lucid vagueness which has always been my intention in this matter. I tried over several beginnings of a Utopian book before I adopted this. I rejected from the outset the form of the argumentative essay, the form which appeals most readily to what is called the "serious" reader, the reader who is often no more than the solemnly impatient parasite of great questions. He likes everything in hard, heavy lines, black and white, yes and no, because he does not understand how much there is that cannot be presented at all in that way; wherever there is any effect of obliquity, of incommensurables, wherever there is any levity or humour or difficulty of multiplex presentation, he refuses attention. Mentally he seems to be built up upon an invincible assumption that the Spirit of Creation cannot count beyond two, he deals only in alternatives. Such readers I have resolved not to attempt to please here. Even if I presented all my tri-clinic crystals as systems of cubes----! Indeed I felt it would not be worth doing. But having rejected the "serious" essay as a form, I was still greatly exercised, I spent some vacillating months, over the scheme of this book. I tried first a recognised method of viewing questions from divergent points that has always attracted me

and which I have never succeeded in using, the discussion novel, after the fashion of Peacock's (and Mr. Mallock's) development of the ancient dialogue; but this encumbered me with unnecessary characters and the inevitable complication of intrigue among them, and I abandoned it. After that I tried to cast the thing into a shape resembling a little the double personality of Boswell's Johnson, a sort of interplay between monologue and commentator; but that too, although it got nearer to the quality I sought, finally failed. Then I hesitated over what one might call "hard narrative." It will be evident to the experienced reader that by omitting certain speculative and metaphysical elements and by elaborating incident, this book might have been reduced to a straightforward story. But I did not want to omit as much on this occasion. I do not see why I should always pander to the vulgar appetite for stark stories. And in short, I made it this. I explain all this in order to make it clear to the reader that, however queer this book appears at the first examination, it is the outcome of trial and deliberation, it is intended to be as it is. I am aiming throughout at a sort of shot-silk texture between philosophical discussion on the one hand and imaginative narrative on the other.

H. G. WELLS.

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THE OWNER OF THE VOICE

There are works, and this is one of them, that are best begun with a portrait of the author. And here, indeed, because of a very natural misunderstanding this is the only course to take. Throughout these papers sounds a note, a distinctive and personal note, a note that tends at times towards stridency; and all that is not, as these words are, in Italics, is in one Voice. Now, this Voice, and this is the peculiarity of the matter, is not to be taken as the Voice of the ostensible author who fathers these pages. You have to clear your mind of any preconceptions in that respect. The Owner of the Voice you must figure to yourself as a whitish plump man, a little under the middle size and age, with such blue eyes as many Irishmen have, and agile in his movements and with a slight tonsorial baldness--a penny might cover it--of the crown. His front is convex. He droops at times like most of us, but for the greater part he bears himself as valiantly as a sparrow. Occasionally his hand flies out with a fluttering gesture of illustration. And his Voice (which is our medium henceforth) is an unattractive tenor that becomes at times aggressive. Him you must imagine as sitting at a table reading a manuscript about Utopias, a manuscript he holds in two hands that are just a little fat at the wrist. The curtain rises upon him so.

But afterwards, if the devices of this declining art of literature

prevail, you will go with him through curious and interesting experiences. Yet, ever and again, you will find him back at that little table, the manuscript in his hand, and the expansion of his ratiocinations about Utopia conscientiously resumed. The entertainment before you is neither the set drama of the work of fiction you are accustomed to read, nor the set lecturing of the essay you are accustomed to evade, but a hybrid of these two. If you figure this owner of the Voice as sitting, a little nervously, a little modestly, on a stage, with table, glass of water and all complete, and myself as the intrusive chairman insisting with a bland ruthlessness upon his "few words" of introduction before he recedes into the wings, and if furthermore you figure a sheet behind our friend on which moving pictures intermittently appear, and if finally you suppose his subject to be the story of the adventure of his soul among Utopian inquiries, you will be prepared for some at least of the difficulties of this unworthy but unusual work.

But over against this writer here presented, there is also another earthly person in the book, who gathers himself together into a distinct personality only after a preliminary complication with the reader. This person is spoken of as the botanist, and he is a leaner, rather taller, graver and much less garrulous man. His face is weakly handsome and done in tones of grey, he is fairish and grey-eyed, and you would suspect him of dyspepsia. It is a justifiable suspicion. Men of this type, the chairman remarks with a sudden intrusion of exposition, are romantic with a shadow of

meanness, they seek at once to conceal and shape their sensuous cravings beneath egregious sentimentalities, they get into mighty tangles and troubles with women, and he has had his troubles. You will hear of them, for that is the quality of his type. He gets no personal expression in this book, the Voice is always that other's, but you gather much of the matter and something of the manner of his interpolations from the asides and the tenour of the Voice.

So much by way of portraiture is necessary to present the explorers of the Modern Utopia, which will unfold itself as a background to these two enquiring figures. The image of a cinematograph entertainment is the one to grasp. There will be an effect of these two people going to and fro in front of the circle of a rather defective lantern, which sometimes jams and sometimes gets out of focus, but which does occasionally succeed in displaying on a screen a momentary moving picture of Utopian conditions. Occasionally the picture goes out altogether, the Voice argues and argues, and the footlights return, and then you find yourself listening again to the rather too plump little man at his table laboriously enunciating propositions, upon whom the curtain rises now.