

**In The Fourth Year**

**By**

**H.G. Wells**

## PREFACE

In the latter half of 1914 a few of us were writing that this war was a "War of Ideas." A phrase, "The War to end War," got into circulation, amidst much sceptical comment. It was a phrase powerful enough to sway many men, essentially pacifists, towards taking an active part in the war against German imperialism, but it was a phrase whose chief content was its aspiration. People were already writing in those early days of disarmament and of the abolition of the armament industry throughout the world; they realized fully the element of industrial belligerency behind the shining armour of imperialism, and they denounced the "Krupp-Kaiser" alliance. But against such writing and such thought we had to count, in those days, great and powerful realities. Even to those who expressed these ideas there lay visibly upon them the shadow of impracticability; they were very "advanced" ideas in 1914, very Utopian. Against them was an unbroken mass of mental habit and public tradition. While we talked of this "war to end war," the diplomatists of the Powers allied against Germany were busily spinning a disastrous web of greedy secret treaties, were answering aggression by schemes of aggression, were seeing in the treacherous violence of Germany only the justification for countervailing evil acts. To them it was only another war for "ascendancy." That was three years and a half ago, and since then this "war of ideas" has gone on to a phase few of us had dared hope for in those opening days. The Russian revolution put a match to that pile of secret treaties and indeed to all the imperialist plans of the Allies; in the end it will burn them all. The greatest of the Western Allies is

now the United States of America, and the Americans have come into this war simply for an idea. Three years and a half ago a few of us were saying this was a war against the idea of imperialism, not German imperialism merely, but British and French and Russian imperialism, and we were saying this not because it was so, but because we hoped to see it become so. To-day we can say so, because now it is so.

In those days, moreover, we said this is the "war to end war," and we still did not know clearly how. We thought in terms of treaties and alliances. It is largely the detachment and practical genius of the great English-speaking nation across the Atlantic that has carried the world on beyond and replaced that phrase by the phrase, "The League of Nations," a phrase suggesting plainly the organization of a sufficient instrument by which war may be ended for ever. In 1913 talk of a World League of Nations would have seemed, to the extremest pitch, "Utopian." To-day the project has an air not only of being so practicable, but of being so urgent and necessary and so manifestly the sane thing before mankind that not to be busied upon it, not to be making it more widely known and better understood, not to be working out its problems and bringing it about, is to be living outside of the contemporary life of the world. For a book upon any other subject at the present time some apology may be necessary, but a book upon this subject is as natural a thing to produce now as a pair of skates in winter when the ice begins to bear.

All we writers find ourselves engaged perforce in some part or other of a world-wide propaganda of this the most creative and hopeful of

political ideas that has ever dawned upon the consciousness of mankind. With no concerted plan we feel called upon to serve it. And in no connection would one so like to think oneself un-original as in this connection. It would be a dismaying thing to realize that one were writing anything here which was not the possible thought of great multitudes of other people, and capable of becoming the common thought of mankind. One writes in such a book as this not to express oneself but to swell a chorus. The idea of the League of Nations is so great a one that it may well override the pretensions and command the allegiance of kings; much more does it claim the self-subjugation of the journalistic writer. Our innumerable books upon this great edifice of a World Peace do not constitute a scramble for attention, but an attempt to express in every variety of phrase and aspect this one system of ideas which now possesses us all. In the same way the elementary facts and ideas of the science of chemistry might conceivably be put completely and fully into one text-book, but, as a matter of fact, it is far more convenient to tell that same story over in a thousand different forms, in a text-book for boys here, for a different sort or class of boy there, for adult students, for reference, for people expert in mathematics, for people unused to the scientific method, and so on. For the last year the writer has been doing what he can--and a number of other writers have been doing what they can--to bring about a united declaration of all the Atlantic Allies in favour of a League of Nations, and to define the necessary nature of that League. He has, in the course of this work, written a series of articles upon the League and upon the necessary sacrifices of preconceptions that the idea involves in the London press. He has also been trying to clear his own mind upon the real

meaning of that ambiguous word "democracy," for which the League is to make the world "safe." The bulk of this book is made up of these discussions. For a very considerable number of readers, it may be well to admit here, it can have no possible interest; they will have come at these questions themselves from different angles and they will have long since got to their own conclusions. But there may be others whose angle of approach may be similar to the writer's, who may have asked some or most of the questions he has had to ask, and who may be actively interested in the answers and the working out of the answers he has made to these questions. For them this book is printed.

H. G. WELLS.

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It is a dangerous thing to recommend specific books out of so large and various a literature as the "League of Nations" idea has already produced, but the reader who wishes to reach beyond the range of this book, or who does not like its tone and method, will probably find something to meet his needs and tastes better in Marburg's "League of Nations," a straightforward account of the American side of the movement by the former United States Minister in Belgium, on the one hand, or in the concluding parts of Mr. Fayle's "Great Settlement" (1915), a frankly sceptical treatment from the British Imperialist point of view, on the other. An illuminating discussion, advocating peace treaties rather than a league, is Sir Walter Phillimore's "Three Centuries of Treaties." Two excellent books from America, that chance to be on my table, are Mr.

Goldsmith's "League to Enforce Peace" and "A World in Ferment" by President Nicholas Murray Butler. Mater's "Société des Nations" (Didier) is an able presentation of a French point of view. Brailsford's "A League of Nations" is already a classic of the movement in England, and a very full and thorough book; and Hobson's "Towards International Government" is a very sympathetic contribution from the English liberal left; but the reader must understand that these two writers seem disposed to welcome a peace with an unrevolutionized Germany, an idea to which, in common with most British people, I am bitterly opposed. Walsh's "World Rebuilt" is a good exhortation, and Mugge's "Parliament of Man" is fresh and sane and able. The omnivorous reader will find good sense and quaint English in Judge Mejdell's "Jus Gentium," published in English by Olsen's of Christiania. There is an active League of Nations Society in Dublin, as well as the London and Washington ones, publishing pamphlets and conducting propaganda. All these books and pamphlets I have named happen to lie upon my study table as I write, but I have made no systematic effort to get together literature upon the subject, and probably there are just as many books as good of which I have never even heard. There must, I am sure, be statements of the League of Nations idea forthcoming from various religious standpoints, but I do not know any sufficiently well to recommend them. It is incredible that neither the Roman Catholic Church, the English Episcopal Church, nor any Nonconformist body has made any effort as an organization to forward this essentially religious end of peace on earth. And also there must be German writings upon this same topic. I mention these diverse sources not in order to present a bibliography, but because I should be sorry to have the reader think that this little

book pretends to state the case rather than a case for the League of Nations.