

**New Worlds For Old**

**By**

**Herbert George Wells**

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

"Undiluted Atheism, theft and immorality.... I know of no language sufficiently potent to express fully my absolute detestation of what I believe to be the most poisonous doctrine ever put forward, namely Socialism."

HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RUTLAND.

"Let all parties then unite to defeat this insidious Socialism which is threatening the country, and take immediate steps to expose and bring it to light. The country may truly be said to be sleeping over a veritable volcano which the next general election may precipitate, unless steps are taken at once to bring this nightmare into the light of day and force it out of its creeping nocturnal habits."

MR. DUDLEY S. A. COSBY in the Westminster Review.

"Many people think that it is possible to conduct a victorious campaign with the single watchword 'Down with Socialism.' Well, I am not fond of mere negatives. I do not like fighting an abstract noun. My objection to Anti-Socialism as a platform is that Socialism means so many different things. On this point I agree with Mr. Asquith. I

will wait before I denounce Socialism till I see what form it takes... Socialism is not necessarily synonymous with robbery. Correctly used, the word only signifies a particular view of the proper relation of the State to its citizens, a tendency to substitute public for private ownership, or to restrict the freedom of individual enterprise in the interests of the public. But there are some forms of property which we all admit should be public and not private, and the freedom of individual enterprise is already limited by a hundred laws. Socialism and Individualism,--I am not fond of these abstract phrases. There are opposing principles which enter in various proportions into the constitution of every civilized society. It is merely a question of degree. One community is more Socialistic than another. The same community is more Socialistic at one time than at another. This country is far more Socialistic than it was fifty years ago, and for most of the changes in that direction the Unionist or Tory Party is responsible."

LORD MILNER.

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# NEW WORLDS FOR OLD

## CHAPTER I

### THE GOOD WILL IN MAN

#### § 1.

The present writer has long been deeply interested in the Socialist movement in Great Britain and America, and in all those complicated issues one lumps together as "social questions." In the last few years he has gone into it personally and studied the Socialist movement closely and intimately at first hand; he has made the acquaintance of many of its leaders upon both sides of the Atlantic, joined numerous organizations, attended and held meetings, experimented in Socialist politics. From these inquiries he has emerged with certain very definite conclusions as to the trend and needs of social development, and these he is now rendering in this book. He calls himself a Socialist, but he is by no means a fanatical or uncritical adherent. To him Socialism presents itself as a very noble but a very human and fallible system of ideas and motives, a system that grows and develops. He regards its spirit, its intimate substance as the most

hopeful thing in human affairs at the present time, but he does also find it shares with all mundane concerns the qualities of inadequacy and error. It suffers from the common penalty of noble propositions; it is hampered by the insufficiency of its supporters and advocates, and by the superficial tarnish that necessarily falls in our atmosphere of greed and conflict darkest upon the brightest things. In spite of these admissions of failure and unworthiness in himself and those about him, he remains a Socialist.

In discussing Socialism with very various sorts of people he has necessarily had, time after time, to encounter and frame a reply to a very simple seeming and a really very difficult question: "What is Socialism?" It is almost like asking "What is Christianity?" or demanding to be shown the atmosphere. It is not to be answered fully by a formula or an epigram. Again and again the writer has been asked for some book which would set out in untechnical language, frankly and straightforwardly, what Socialism is and what it is not, and always he has hesitated in his reply. Many good books there are upon this subject, clear and well written, but none that seem to tell the whole story as he knows it; no book that gives not only the outline but the spirit, answers the main objections, clears up the chief ambiguities, covers all the ground; no book that one can put into the hands of inquiring youth and say: "There! that will tell you precisely the broad facts you want to know." Some day, no doubt, such a book will come. In the meanwhile he has ventured to put forth this temporary substitute, his own account of the faith that is in him.[1]

[1] As I pass these proofs I am reminded that Mr. J. R.

MacDonald has in the press *Socialism* (Jacks, Edinburgh)--a general account of the movement. From Mr. Kirkup's *An Enquiry into Socialism* and from *Fabian Essays* (the Fabian Society, London) a good idea of the general Socialist position may also be obtained.

Socialism, then, as he understands it, is a great intellectual process, a development of desires and ideas that takes the form of a project--a project for the reshaping of human society upon new and better lines. That in the ampler proposition is what Socialism claims to be. This book seeks to expand and establish that proposition, and to define the principles upon which the Socialist believes this reconstruction of society should go. The particulars and justification of this project and this claim, it will be the business of this book to discuss just as plainly as the writer can.

§ 2.

Now, because the Socialist seeks the reshaping of human society, it does not follow that he denies it to be even now a very wonderful and admirable spectacle. Nor does he deny that for many people life is even now a very good thing....

For his own part, though the writer is neither a very strong nor a very healthy nor a very successful person, though he finds much unattainable and much to regret, yet life presents itself to him more and more with every year as a spectacle of inexhaustible interest, of unfolding and intensifying beauty, and as a splendid field for high attempts and stimulating desires. Yet none the less is it a spectacle shot strangely with pain, with mysterious insufficiencies and cruelties, with pitfalls into anger and regret, with aspects unaccountably sad. Its most exalted moments are most fraught for him with the appeal for endeavour, with the urgency of unsatisfied wants. These shadows and pains and instabilities do not, to his sense at least, darken the whole prospect; it may be indeed that they intensify its splendours to his perceptions; yet all these evil and ugly aspects of life come to him with an effect of challenge, as something not to be ignored but passionately disputed, as an imperative call for whatever effort and courage lurks in his composition. Life and the world are fine, but not as an abiding place; as an arena--yes, an arena gorgeously curtained with sea and sky, mountains and broad prospects, decorated with all the delicate magnificence of leaf tracery and flower petal and feather, soft fur and the shining wonder of living skin, musical with thunder and the singing of birds; but an arena nevertheless, an arena which offers no seats for idle spectators, in which one must will and do, decide, strike and strike back--and presently pass away.



And it needs but a cursory view of history to realize--though all knowledge of history confirms the generalization--that this arena is not a confused and aimless conflict of individuals. Looked at too closely it may seem to be that--a formless web of individual hates and loves; but detach oneself but a little, and the broader forms appear. One perceives something that goes on, that is constantly working to make order out of casualty, beauty out of confusion; justice, kindness, mercy out of cruelty and inconsiderate pressure. For our present purpose it will be sufficient to speak of this force that struggles and tends to make and do, as Good Will. More and more evident is it, as one reviews the ages, that there is this as well as lust, hunger, avarice, vanity and more or less intelligent fear to be counted among the motives of mankind. This Good Will of our race, however arising, however trivial, however subordinated to individual ends, however comically inadequate a thing it may be in this individual case or that, is in the aggregate an operating will. In spite of all the confusions and thwartings of life, the halts and resiliencies and the counter strokes of fate, it is manifest that in the long run human life becomes broader than it was, gentler than it was, finer and deeper. On the whole--and now-a-days almost steadily--things get better. There is a secular amelioration of life, and it is brought about by Good Will working through the efforts of men.

Now this proposition lies quite open to dispute. There are people who will dispute it and make a very passable case. One may deny the

amelioration, or one may deny that it is the result of any Good Will or of anything but quite mechanical forces. The former is the commoner argument. The appeal is usually to what has been finest in the past, and to all that is bad and base in the present. At once the unsoundest and the most attractive argument is to be found in the deliberate idealization of particular ages, the thirteenth century in England, for example, or the age of the Antonines. The former is presented with the brightness of a missal, the latter with all the dignity of a Roman inscription. One is asked to compare these ages so delightfully conceived, with a patent medicine vendor's advertisement or a Lancashire factory town, quite ignoring the iniquity of mediæval law or the slums and hunger and cruelty of Imperial Rome.

But quite apart from such unsound comparisons, it is, we may admit, possible to make a very excellent case against our general assertion of progress. One can instance a great number of things, big and little, that have been better in past times than they are now; for example, they dressed more sumptuously and delightfully in mediæval Venice and Florence than we do--all, that is, who could afford it; they made quite unapproachably beautiful marble figures in Athens in the time of Pericles; there is no comparison between the brickwork of Verona in the twelfth century and that of London when Cannon Street Station was erected; the art of cookery declined after the splendid period of Roman history for more than a thousand years; the Gothic architecture of France and England exceeds in nobility and quality and aggregated beauty, every subsequent type of structure. This much, one

agrees, is true, and beyond disputing. The philosophical thought of Athens again, to come to greater things, was at its climax, more free, more finely expressed than that of any epoch since. And the English of Elizabeth's time was, we are told by competent judges, a more gracious and powerful instrument of speech than in the days of Queen Anne or of Queen Victoria.

So one might go on in regard to a vast number of things, petty and large alike; the list would seem overwhelming until the countervailing considerations came into play. But, as a matter of fact, there is hardly an age or a race that does not show us something better done than ever it was before or since, because at no time has human effort ceased and absolutely failed. Isolated eminence is no proof of general elevation. Always in this field or that, whether it was in the binding of books or the enamelling of metal, the refinement of language or the assertion of liberty, particular men have, by a sort of necessity, grasped at occasion, "found themselves," as the saying goes, and done the best that was in them. So always while man endures, whatever else betide, one may feel assured at this or that special thing some men will find a way to do and get to the crown of endeavour. Such considerations of decline in particular things from the standard of the past do not really affect the general assertion of a continuous accumulating betterment in the lot of men, do not invalidate the hopes of those who believe in the power of men to end for ever many of the evils that now darken the world, who look to the reservoirs of human possibility as a supply as yet scarcely touched, who make of all the

splendour and superiorities of the past no more than a bright promise and suggestion for the unborn future our every act builds up, into which, whether we care or no, all our achievements pour.

Many evils have been overcome, much order and beauty and scope for living has been evolved since man was a hairy savage holding scarcely more than a brute's intercourse with his fellows; but even in the comparatively short perspective of history, one can scarcely deny a steady process of overcoming evil. One may sneer at contemporary things; it is a fashion with that unhappily trained type of mind which cannot appreciate without invidious comparison, so poor in praise that it cannot admit worth without venting a compensatory envy; but of one permanent result of progress surely every one is assured. In the matter of thoughtless and instinctive cruelty--and that is a very fundamental matter--mankind mends steadily. I wonder and doubt if in the whole world at any time before this an aged, ill-clad woman, or a palpable cripple could have moved among a crowd of low-class children as free from combined or even isolated insult as such a one would be to-day, if caught in the rush from a London Council school. Then, for all our sins, I am sure the sense of justice is quicker and more nearly universal than ever before. Certain grave social evils, too, that once seemed innate in humanity, have gone, gone so effectually that we cannot now imagine ourselves subjected to them; the cruelties and insecurities of private war, the duel, overt slavery, for example, have altogether ceased; and in all Western Europe and America chronic local famines and great pestilences come no more. No doubt it is still

an unsatisfactory world that mars the roadside with tawdry advertisements of drugs and food; but less than two centuries ago, remember, the place of these boards was taken by gibbets and crow-pecked, tattered corpses swinging in the wind, and the heads of dead gentlemen (drawn and quartered, and their bowels burnt before their eyes) rotted in the rain on Temple Bar.

The world is now a better place for a common man than ever it was before, the spectacle wider and richer and deeper, and more charged with hope and promise. Think of the universal things it is so easy to ignore; of the great and growing multitude, for example, of those who may travel freely about the world, who may read freely, think freely, speak freely! Think of the quite unprecedented numbers of well-ordered homes and cared-for, wholesome, questioning children! And it is not only that we have this increasing sea of mediocre well-being in which the realities of the future are engendering, but in the matter of sheer achievement I believe in my own time. It has been the cry of the irresponsible man since criticism began, that his own generation produced nothing; it is a cry that I hate and deny. When the dross has been cleared away and comparison becomes possible, I am convinced it will be admitted that in the aggregate, in philosophy and significant literature, in architecture, painting and scientific research, in engineering and industrial invention, in statecraft, humanity and valiant deeds, the last thirty years of man's endeavours will bear comparison with any other period of thirty years whatever in his history.

And this is the result of effort; things get better because men mean them to get better and try to bring betterment about; this progress goes on because man, in spite of evil temper, blundering and vanity, in spite of indolence and base desire, does also respond to Good Will and display Good Will. You may declare that all the good things in life are the result of causes over which man has no control, that in pursuit of an "enlightened self-interest" he makes things better inadvertently. But think of any good thing you know! Was it thus it came?

§ 3.

And yet, let us not disguise it from ourselves, for all the progress one can claim, life remains very evil; about the feet of all these glories of our time lurk darknesses.

Let me take but one group of facts that cry out to all of us--and will not cry in vain. I mean the lives of little children that are going on now--as the reader sits with this book in his hand. Think, for instance, of the little children who have been pursued and tormented and butchered in the Congo Free State during the last year or so, hands and feet chopped off, little bodies torn and thrown aside that rubber might be cheap, the tyres of our cars run smoothly, and that detestable product of political expediency, the King of the Belgians,

have his pleasures. Think too of the fear and violence, the dirt and stress of the lives of the children who grow up amidst the lawless internal strife of the Russian political chaos. Think of the emigrant ships even now rolling upon the high seas, their dark, evil-smelling holds crammed with humanity, and the huddled sick children in them--fleeing from certain to uncertain wretchedness. Think of the dreadful tale of childish misery and suffering that goes on wherever there are not sane factory laws; how even in so civilized a part of the world as the United States of America (as Spargo's Bitter Cry of the Children tells in detail) thousands of little white children of six and seven, ill fed and often cruelly handled, toil without hope.

And in all agricultural lands too, where there is no sense of education, think of the children dragging weary feet from the filthy hovels that still house peasants the whole world over, to work in the mire and the pitiless winds, scaring birds, bending down to plant and weed. Even in London again, think just a little of the real significance of some facts I have happened upon in the Report of the Education Committee of the London County Council for the year 1905.

The headmaster of one casually selected school makes a special return upon the quality of the clothing of his 405 children. He tells of 7.4 per cent. of his boys whose clothing was "the scantiest possible--e.g. one ragged coat buttoned up and practically nothing found beneath it; and boots either absent or represented by a mass of rags tied upon the feet"; of 34.8 per cent. whose "clothing was

insufficient to retain animal heat and needed urgent remedy"; of 45.9 per cent, whose clothing was "poor but passable; an old and perhaps ragged suit, with some attempt at proper underclothing--usually of flannelette"; thus leaving only 12.8 per cent. who could, in the broadest sense, be termed "well clad."

Taking want of personal cleanliness as the next indication of neglect at home, 11 per cent. of the boys are reported as "very dirty and verminous"; 34.7 per cent. whose "clothes and body were dirty but not verminous"; 42.5 per cent, were "passably clean, for boys," and only "12 per cent. clean above the average."

Eleven per cent. verminous; think what it means! Think what the homes must be like from which these poor little wretches come! Better, perhaps, than the country cottage where the cesspool drains into the water supply and the hen-house vermin invades the home, but surely intolerable beside our comforts! Give but a moment again to the significance of the figures I have italicized in the table that follows, a summarized return for the year 1906 of the "Ringworm" Nurses who visit the London Elementary Schools and inspect the children for various forms of dirt disease.

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	Number of			
Departments.	children	Clean.	Partially	Verminous.
	examined.		cleansed.	



----- ----- -----
Boys .   34,345   32,726   847   1,139
Girls .   36,445   22,476   4,426   12,003
Infants .   42,140   6,675   2,661   29,675
Mixed .   5,855   4,886   298   897
Special .   977   624   133   296
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Total .   119,762   67,387   8,365   44,010
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Does not this speak of dirt and disorder we cannot suffer to continue, of women ill trained for motherhood and worked beyond care for cleanliness, of a vast amount of preventable suffering? And these figures of filth and bad clothing are paralleled by others at least equally impressive, displaying emaciation, under-nutrition, anæmia and every other painful and wretched consequence of neglect and insufficiency. These underfed, under-clothed, undersized children are also the backward children; they grow up through a darkened, joyless childhood into a grey, perplexing, hopeless world that beats them down at last, after servility, after toil, after crime it may be and despair, to death.

And while you grasp the offence of these facts, do not be carried away into supposing that this age is therefore unprecedentedly evil. Such dirt, toil, cruelty have always been, have been in larger measure. Don't idealize the primitive cave, the British hut, the peasant's

cottage, damp and windowless, the filth-strewn, plague-stricken, mediæval town. In spite of all these crushed, mangled, starved, neglected little ones about the feet of this fine time, in spite of a thousand other disorders and miseries almost as cruel, the fact remains that this age has not only more but a larger percentage of healthy, happy, kindly-treated children than any age since the world began; that to look back into the domestic history of other times is to see greater squalor and more suffering.

Why! read the tombstones and monuments in any old English church, those, I mean, that date from earlier than 1800, and you will see the history of every family, of even the prosperous county families, laced with the deaths of infants and children. Nearly half of them died. Think, too, how stern was the upbringing. And always before these days it seemed natural to make all but the children of the very wealthy and very refined, fear and work from their earliest years. There comes to us too, from these days, beautiful furniture, fine literature, paintings; but there comes too, much evidence of harsh whippings, dark imprisonments and hardly a children's book, hardly the broken vestige of a toy. Bad as things are, they are better--rest assured--and yet they are still urgently bad. The greater evil of the past is no reason for contentment with the present. But it is an earnest for hoping that our efforts, and that Good Will of which they are a part and outcome, may still go on bearing fruit in perpetually dwindling misery.

§ 4.

It seems to me that the whole spirit and quality of both the evil and the good of our time, and of the attitude not simply of the Socialist but of every sane reformer towards these questions, was summarized in a walk I had a little while ago with a friend along the Thames Embankment, from Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster. We had dined together and we went there because we thought that with a fitful moon and clouds adrift, on a night when the air was a crystal air that gladdened and brightened, that crescent of great buildings and steely, soft-hurrying water must needs be altogether beautiful. And indeed it was beautiful; the mysteries and mounting masses of the buildings to the right of us, the blurs of this coloured light or that, blue-white, green-white, amber or warmer orange, the rich black archings of Waterloo Bridge, the rippled lights upon the silent-flowing river, the lattice of girders and the shifting trains of Charing Cross Bridge--their funnels pouring a sort of hot-edged moonlight by way of smoke--and then the sweeping line of lamps, the accelerated run and diminuendo of the Embankment lamps as one came into sight of Westminster. The big hotels were very fine, huge swelling shapes of dun dark-grey and brown, huge shapes seamed and bursting and fenestrated with illumination, tattered at a thousand windows with light and the indistinct, glowing suggestions of feasting and pleasure. And dim and faint above it all and very remote was the moon's dead wan face veiled and then displayed.

But we were dashed by an unanticipated refrain to this succession of magnificent things, and we did not cry, as we had meant to cry, how good it was to be alive! We found something else, something we had forgotten.

Along the Embankment, you see, there are iron seats at regular intervals, seats you cannot lie upon because iron arm-rests prevent that, and each seat, one saw by the lamplight, was filled with crouching and drooping figures. Not a vacant place remained, not one vacant place. These were the homeless, and they had come to sleep here. Now one noted a poor old woman with a shameful battered straw hat awry over her drowsing face, now a young clerk staring before him at despair; now a filthy tramp, and now a bearded, frock-coated, collarless respectability; I remember particularly one ghastly long white neck and white face that lopped backward, choked in some nightmare, awakened, clutched with a bony hand at the bony throat, and sat up and stared angrily as we passed. The wind had a keen edge that night even for us who had dined and were well clad. One crumpled figure coughed and went on coughing--damnably.

"It's fine," said I, trying to keep hold of the effects to which this line of poor wretches was but the selvage; "it's fine! But I can't stand this."

"It changes all that we expected," admitted my friend, after a

silence.

"Must we go on--past them all?"

"Yes. I think we ought to do that. It's a lesson, perhaps--for trying to get too much beauty out of life as it is--and forgetting. Don't shirk it!"

"Great God!" cried I. "But must life always be like this? I could die--indeed, I would willingly jump into this cold and muddy river now, if by so doing I could stick a stiff dead hand through all these things--into the future; a dead commanding hand insisting with a silent irresistible gesture that this waste and failure of life should cease, and cease for ever."

"But it does cease! Each year its proportion is a little less."

I walked in silence, and my companion talked by my side.

"We go on. Here is a good thing done, and there is a good thing done. The Good Will in man----"

"Not fast enough. It goes so slowly--and in a little while we too must die----"

"It can be done," said my companion.

"It could be avoided," said I.

"It shall be in the days to come. There is food enough for all, shelter for all, wealth enough for all. Men need only know it and will it. And yet we have this!"

"And so much like this!" said I....

So we talked and were tormented.

And I remember how later we found ourselves on Westminster Bridge, looking back upon the long sweep of wrinkled black water that reflected lights and palaces and the flitting glow of steamboats, and by that time we had talked ourselves past our despair. We perceived that what was splendid remained splendid, that what was mysterious remained insoluble for all our pain and impatience. But it was clear to us the thing for us two to go upon was not the good of the present nor the evil, but the effort and the dream of the finer order, the fuller life, the banishment of suffering, to come.

"We want all the beauty that is here," said my friend, "and more also. And none of these distresses. We are here--we know not whence nor why--to want that and to struggle to get it, you and I and ten thousand others, thinly hidden from us by these luminous darknesses. We work, we pass--whither I know not, but out of our knowing. But we

work--we are spurred to work. That yonder--those people are the spur--for us who cannot answer to any finer appeal. Each in our measure must do. And our reward? Our reward is our faith. Here is my creed to-night. I believe--out of me and the Good Will in me and my kind there comes a regenerate world--cleansed of suffering and sorrow. That is our purpose here--to forward that. It gives us work for all our lives. Why should we ask to know more? Our errors--our sins--to-night they seem to matter very little. If we stumble and roll in the mud, if we blunder against each other and hurt one another----"

"We have to go on," said my friend, after a pause.

We stood for a time in silence.

One's own personal problems came and went like a ripple on the water. Even that whisky dealer's advertisement upon the southern bank became through some fantastic transformation a promise, an enigmatical promise flashed up the river reach in letters of fire. London was indeed very beautiful that night. Without hope she would have seemed not only as beautiful but as terrible as a black panther crouching on her prey. Our hope redeemed her. Beyond her dark and meretricious splendours, beyond her throned presence jewelled with links and points and cressets of fire, crowned with stars, robed in the night, hiding cruelties, I caught a moment's vision of the coming City of Mankind, of a city more wonderful than all my dreaming, full of life, full of youth, full of the spirit of creation....