

## SCIENCE AND THE WORLD MIND

Science and the World Mind. By H. G. Wells. (The New Europe Publishing Co., Ltd., London), 1942. Pp. 63. Price 1sh.

MR. H. G. WELLS was born in 1866, which makes him 76 in 1942. He writes as vigorously to-day as he did forty years ago. In the pamphlet "Science and the World Mind", which was presented to a Conference organised by the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in London in September 1941, he repeats, and acknowledges that he repeats, certain statements about the world and mankind that he has made over and over again within recent years. Yet even the reader who is familiar with Wellsian ideas is not bored; on the contrary, the argument seems to gather force with each repetition. A man who is told by his doctor that he will be dead in six months unless he changes his manner of life may be truculent and incredulous, but will scarcely dismiss the warning with a yawn.

Mr. Wells' world picture is deeply coloured by biological concepts. The gist of the pamphlet is approximately as follows:—

*Homo sapiens* is a species belonging to the order of primates. So far, biologically speaking, the family Hominidæ included in that order has not been very successful; five of its six known genera or species are extinct and there may be several other species represented to-day only by scattered teeth and jaw-bones in Upper Pliocene or Lower Pleistocene deposits. "The record of the past", remarks Mr. Wells, "is on the whole against the idea of any survival whatever for the human strain. In the past, dominant orders, groups and species have generally vanished from the earth at the very crest of their domination. It is an old-fashioned ecological misconception that they have been competed out of existence. They have simply failed to adapt."

Man is failing to adapt. He cannot control the forces he himself has brought into being. He has abolished distance, he has made it possible for events to be known simultaneously throughout the world. With his knowledge and technical skill he can make the world produce abundance for all, or, alternatively, he can produce (and is producing) enough explosives to blast himself out of existence. In face of the possibilities of progress or destruction which confront

him, he cannot rid himself of habits of mind appropriate enough in the days when the horse provided the most rapid means of locomotion and the spear was the most lethal weapon. If he does not adapt himself to changing conditions, and that quickly, he may "become one or a series of degenerating sub-human species, or end altogether".

What does the adaptation of *Homo sapiens* to the new environment which science has created involve? Mr. Wells enumerates a number of necessary adjustments: Federal control of the air and international transport; federal conservation of world resources; a Declaration of Human Rights which will ensure for every man participation in these resources. But all these, he says, are impossible without the creation of an enlarged and instructed "world mind". This in turn demands the dissemination of education and knowledge on a tremendous scale, and a universal language. Mr. Wells considers Basic English the most promising world language, but all existing languages are unsatisfactory. The words we use don't really mean what we think they mean—language as we know it is a blunt and inefficient instrument. As an example of a misleading and confusing word he somewhat unexpectedly instances the word "science" itself. Ask a dozen people what it means and you will get a dozen widely varying replies.

This formidable programme of adjustment is obviously out of tune with existing realities—an "impracticable dream". "But I tell you", says Mr. Wells, "that if you do not share in this dreaming, if you will not, in the dwindling time that remains to us, do your utmost to realise this dreaming, then, instead of your going out to make a dream come real, fresh nightmares will overtake you and yours and all you care for. . . . . Our children and our children's children will pay bitterly, in ignominy, in privation, in straitened, unwholesome lives and general brutalisation, as Nature, without haste and without delay, after her manner, wipes them out".

The biological approach adopted by Mr. Wells is unquestionably open to criticism. Experience shows that we must be cautious in applying biological analogies to human affairs. The apostles of cut-throat



capitalism found justification in the works of Darwin. The chief inspiration of the Nazis is a false biological hypothesis—that of the superiority of a non-existent Nordic race. The fact that the Deinosaurs and Deinotheria failed to adapt and were extinguished does not really presage the imminent extinction of *Homo sapiens*. Man is an unusual animal, capable, unlike the *Diplodocus*, of envisaging his own extinction. The new environment to which he has to adjust himself is created by his own inventive faculty and not by cosmic forces. Rapid advance to super-civilization or degradation to sub-human levels, in accordance with the hopes and fears of Mr. Wells' impatient mind, both seem improbable. But there is no doubt that this view of man as a precariously adapted and momentarily dominant species, not automatically destined for survival and dominance, is important and provocative. Seen against that background, many of our behaviour-patterns, patriotic attitudes and religious and mystical convictions become sheer nonsense.

In this pamphlet, as in many of his other writings, Mr. Wells appeals to scientists to take the lead in creating a "world mind" which will be ready to accept bold schemes of federation, economic adjustment and educational development. He has, perhaps, somewhat exaggerated views about the

wisdom and influence of scientific workers. But a study of "Nature" and other scientific periodicals shows that some of the leaders of scientific thought are in fact thrashing out ideas for the creation of a more sensible world. Recently the editor of an English monthly rebuked "Nature" for its growing tendency to discuss such matters; it was becoming, he said, a political journal. Scientific workers should stick to their technical work. An obvious reply is that unless we succeed in ordering our affairs more successfully, scientific work may become impossible and its achievements cease to be of practical benefit to humanity.

Mr. Wells is a provocative and often an irritating writer, at once too hopeful and too pessimistic. We can agree with him that our species is passing through a period of danger and that the greatest and perhaps the only hope for ordered progress lies in "adaptation" of the type he describes. We can also agree that scientific workers can play a prominent part in creating an enlarged and more lucid "world mind". At the same time, we must realise that the creation of a better world, after the war has been won, will be a complicated and tremendous task, beset with disappointment. That is all the more reason why it should be faced with boldness and enthusiasm.

W. R. A.

## THE GEOLOGICAL, MINING AND METALLURGICAL SOCIETY OF INDIA

THE Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Society was held on Saturday, 22nd August 1942, in the Mathematics Hall, Central College, Bangalore. Pradhana-siromani Rajamantrapravina N. Madhava Rau, Esq., B.A., B.L., Dewan of Mysore, was the "Chief Guest". After Tea, Mr. S. Lakshmana Rao, Local Secretary (in the absence of Mr. N. N. Chatterjee, the Hon. Secretary of the Society), presented the Annual Report for the Session 1941-42. There was a marked increase in the membership of the Society during the year, there being 3 Honorary Fellows, 193 Ordinary Fellows, and 45 Associates at the close of the Session. Eleven Ordinary General Meetings were held at which a number of papers were read and discussed. With a view to encourage the study of Geology and allied subjects, the Society has decided to

award this year three Silver Medals to the best papers on Geology, Mining, and Metallurgy, to be submitted by the Student-Associates of the Society from all over India. The proceedings of the several scientific meetings organised by the Society were, as usual, published in the *Quarterly Journal*, of which five parts were issued in the course of the year.

After the reading of the Report, Mr. B. Rama Rao (Director of Geology in Mysore), President of the Society, delivered his Presidential Address on "Mineral Deposits of Mysore". Mysore, he said, contains deposits of more than forty different types of useful minerals including the metalliferous ores, non-metallic minerals, rare earth minerals, and the gem stones. The principal metalliferous ores found in the State are those of gold, iron, manganese, chromium