



The Patriot of the Planet

BY GILBERT K. CHESTERTON



TOUCHING the later work of Mr. H. G. Wells, there is a reflection that must have occurred to many of his readers, though it seems hardly to have been noticed by many, if any, of his critics. His first fantastic books may well throw a light, if a somewhat lurid light, on his last serious books. One of his recent and most serious books, "The Salvaging of Civilization," is an eloquent and effective plea for a world state, or single international nation. It suggests that we should feel a patriotism for the whole planet. And this should surely remind the reader of those noble nightmares in which Mr. Wells once imagined the defense of the whole planet against the monsters of another planet. It is certainly an irony that the man who has ended with the notion of the peace of the world should have begun with the notion of the "War of the Worlds." And it is certainly a symbol that the first of the strange stars with which we can be conceived as coming into contact is a star that bears the name of Mars. The monsters of Mr. Wells's were certainly martial as well as Martian. And though Mr. Wells would now probably repudiate the moral, I really believe that he had then found the method. There would be a much stronger motive for this planetary patriotism in the thing he invented as a fancy than in anything he adduces as a fact.

If he really wishes us to extend our political loyalty to the whole human race and our political frontiers to the whole terrestrial globe, there is no doubt about the practical thing which he ought to do. Let him merely introduce some three-legged giants from Mars; let him arrange for a real visit from those monsters with their tripods, like goblins stalking about on stilts, a mere trifle for a man of his talents. Then I will promise him that we shall all feel the solidarity of the human race, and even possibly something of the sanctity of the earth that is their mother; and so far as that is concerned, I shall rejoice with him heartily. But it may well be doubted whether most men will vividly imagine the earth unless they imagine something beyond the earth. It may well be doubted whether they will really conceive the world at all so long as they conceive the world as the universe.

There is one man who might really restore that sense of the central monarchy of man for which Mr. Wells makes a moving appeal, and he is the man in the moon. Some would indeed suggest that Mr. Wells himself is rather like the man in the moon; that he has something of his pallid abstraction, something of his almost inhuman detachment. But I have never agreed with this criticism of his literary personality. It seems to me the very reverse of merely rigid and mathemati-

cal and mechanically efficient. It strikes me as rather especially sympathetic, sensitive, and slightly irritable. As the politician described decimal points as damned little dots, I suppose it is possible that the little dots with which Mr. Wells's suggestive impressionist sentences so often tail off and fade away should be mistaken for the mathematical exactitude of decimals. But he does not mean them for decimal points, but only for damned little dots. Hence I do not compare the author himself to the man in the moon; but I think it in accordance with his own original imaginative instinct to say that a man in the moon would really remind us of the sacred supremacy of a man on the earth. If once that pale, but luminous, being began to extend his silver scepter over our earth, I think we should all resist and refuse to be moonstruck. Nor should I say, as many would, that Mr. Wells resembles the man in the moon as described in the nursery rhyme in the fact that he came down too soon, or, in other words, is in advance of his age. It would be truer to say that he came down too late. It is a curious fact that the nearest that the world ever came to the world state of Mr. Wells was in the Roman Empire, and there, when he has got it, he does not like it.

In the artistic sense, at least, I cannot help wishing the thing were one of the old romances instead of one of the new pamphlets or lectures. I wish the artistic energy which described the adventure of the first men in the moon were occupied with the militant defiance of the last men on the earth. Taken in that sense, as an allegorical picture or poem, there would be nothing but nobility in the vision of the

patriots of a planet. And there would be a splendid playground for the fancy in such planetary patriotism. I like to imagine what might be made of the banners and uniforms of the *orbis terrarum*, and whether they would be green for the vegetation or blue for the sea. Perhaps the soldiers of the human nation would be clad in some earthly red to represent the clay from which came the giant limbs of Adam. Perhaps, as some regiments bore the badge of a skull and cross-bones, the uniforms would be barred, as with the ribs of skeletons, to represent the dignity of the vertebrates. Perhaps our pride and pomp would repose rather on our being bipeds, which would seem natural enough if we were fighting against tripods. In that case we should carry a sort of cloven pennon into battle, and die about the banner of the sacred trousers.

§ 2

These are pleasing meditations, and I do not mean them to be merely flip-pant, still less to be merely hostile. All criticism of the last work of Mr. Wells must begin with the proposition that his fundamental doctrine of human brotherhood is profound and true, and well worthy to inspire an imaginative art, which need be none the less sincere for being fantastic art. But, indeed, this sense of the sanctity of man, as against the background of what is outside man, is by no means merely a fantastic problem or one involving merely fantastic difficulties. It is not necessary to procure three-legged monsters from Mars in order to raise a question about the supremacy of man on the earth. There are many who raise that question about four-legged monsters who are already on the

earth. There are many animal-lovers who are very near to being animal-worshippers, and whose ethics often involve something rather like human sacrifice to animals. And, curiously enough, these animal-lovers would often be the same social idealists who would be most anxious to assist Mr. Wells to efface frontiers and abolish wars. Nobody believes less in the supremacy of humanity than the humanitarian. He also wishes to abolish frontiers, and he wishes to abolish the frontier between men and monkeys, and possibly between men and Martians. He also wishes to avoid wars, and would probably refuse the challenge of the "War of the Worlds." He would probably be found recommending that the lunar or Martian invaders should be taught only with kindness; he would be discovered being tender to a tripod. In short, I see no reason to suppose that this sort of pacifist would be a planetary patriot or a human patriot any more than any other sort of patriot, or that he would be necessarily loyal to the world state any more than he is to the national state. He would go on with a process which he would call broadening his sympathies, and other people would call betraying his kind.

Nor is the humanitarian eccentric, of course, the only person who could quarrel with a theory based on the dignity or divinity of all men. The principle applies not only to the humanitarian, but to the type which somebody has well defined as the brutalitarian. The brutalitarian will not admit that men are brothers, and will continue to claim the right to treat aborigines as animals. On the ground that black men are brutes, he will make sure that white men shall

be brutes. And he will find quite as much support for his sophistries in science and modern thought as any other skeptic will find for any other kind of skepticism. The brutalitarian can argue as easily from the example of nature as the humanitarian can from the unity of nature. Nor can I see how, on purely rationalistic grounds, the one can be coerced for calling a tiger his brother or the other for making a tiger his model. With this we collide with the whole cosmic question of religion and philosophy, and I doubt whether so colossal a scheme can be made to revolve upon the mere divinity of man without some admitted doctrine about the nature of man, about the original and spiritual status of man. Even the men of a world state, one would imagine, would require something resembling a reason for thinking their own race more sacred than all other animals, or their own star more sacred than all other stars. And here we come again to the necessity of a world church as the only chance for a world state. But this is a larger question, indeed the largest of all questions, and the question I wish to answer first concerns the more combative sort of planetary patriotism, once invoked so vigorously in the "War of the Worlds."

§ 3

It is true of almost anything that he who defends it defines it. Defense involves definition either in conducting a controversy or constructing a fort. The wall round a city is not merely a precaution against the city being destroyed; it is also the process by which the city is created. This is the truth of psychology which really feeds the passion of patriotism, and

even of militant patriotism. The things we love, the things we think beautiful, are things of a certain shape which we recognize. Imagination has very little to do with infinity. Imagination has to do with images. The French decadent poet desired to fall in love with a giantess, but nobody could fall in love with a woman who was too large to be seen. I am not now discussing the proper proportion of this psychological need to other moral and social needs, such as peace and order. I am pointing out that this is the psychological need from which nationalism has sprung, and which the internationalists have to stifle or satisfy. It is *not* mere militarism or blood lust or biological nonsense about man being a fighting animal. It is *not* merely the desire to hate what is outside, but also the desire to make sure that what we love is inside. And it is this that has made a halo of romance round all armed defense. It is not the fort that beautifies the frontier, but rather the frontier that beautifies the fort. War would really have been the vain and vulgar butchery that the pacifists call it but for this beauty and intensity in the idea of independence. A sword is not in itself a fairy-wand to charm any thing or anybody; a sword is only an unusually aggressive sort of spike. It becomes a fairy-sword by defending fairy-land. An invader rushing on the spears might in itself have been as unpleasant a sight as an intruder impaled on spikes. The point is that the spiked wall is a garden wall; but above all that it is a living wall, and more like a hedge with thorns than a wall with spikes. It is a living wall made of the men who love the garden.

Indeed, something of this truth of

separation and selection has been the dubious palliation, but the genuine explanation, even of imperial and tribal adventures. The common phrase about "carving out a kingdom" has that amount of truth in it that a man cannot even create it without limiting it. It is the whole point of a sculptor, carving the statue, that he refuses the rock. That is, he will not be satisfied with anything so insignificant as the whole. But no imperial adventures, no carving out of kingdoms, can ever approach, or be worthy to approach, the direct purity of this passion as it exists in defense. Then, indeed, it is true to say that the nation is like a garden and the army like a hedge, and there is a moment of mystical illumination and indignation when the hedge is more beautiful than the garden. Our own country is never really herself save in those rare moments when she is in danger of invasion. No gropings or grabbings in remote colonies or commercial markets would give any one a notion of that secret garden, or the living hedge that stood around it for five terrible years, in the dark time when the thieves out of the Northern forests found that there were thorns upon the English rose.

In short, men fight for the nation at the worst because they believe in the nation, and at the best because they believe in nations. They defend these human subdivisions because they value them; and sometimes because they value subdivision itself.

§ 4

But are they valuable, and are they worth defending? That is obviously the next question we have to consider. It is not an easy question to answer, not because the answer is doubtful,

but because it is so multitudinously manifest. It is almost an understatement to say that our history is bound up with our country. History simply means humanity, and humanity itself, especially all that is called the humanities, has come to us in a national shape. The reason that a man will not allow his national life to be lost is that he does not know how much of his human life would be lost with it. He will not exchange a complex reality for an abstraction; he fears that, in another sense, it would be an abstraction, or at any rate a subtraction.

There is an inner truth in that triad invoked by the great English romantic, "for England, home, and beauty." Just as a man cannot abruptly dissolve any beautiful work of art into its elements, or decide suddenly which words or colors are essential, so he cannot abruptly break up and analyze the unity called home or the unity called England. Short as was my visit to America, I wandered long enough lost in the vast plains of the Middle West to have flying fits of homesickness, and to see in a vision of strange vividness the site and scenery of my home. Suppose a mad millionaire, like some who run wild in those parts, had walked up to me and offered to build then and there on the prairie the thing I called my home or an exact replica of my home. Suppose, if I murmured something about a row of elm-trees, he instantly proposed to plant them, if only in a row of pots. Suppose I grew sentimental over the skylark, and he rapidly arranged to bring over skylarks in cages, or in an enormous aviary suspended from an enormous aëroplane. Perhaps the skylarks could be trained to follow the aëroplane as sea-gulls follow the ship.

For I know that aviation at its best is only skylarking, just as I know that Mr. Wells with his Martians and men in the moon is only skylarking. And I can imagine Mr. Wells writing another fantastic and fascinating romance about the experiment of my mad millionaire in reproducing all the atmosphere and conditions of England in the middle plains of America. For instance, I should certainly miss the clouds, for the clouds of England are as beautiful in one way as the clear skies of America in another. I do not know whether there is any tariff or duty on importing sunset clouds into the strictly protected territory of the land of the setting sun, but in Mr. Wells's imaginary romance I prefer to fancy the sunset clouds would be carefully produced by chemical combinations on the spot. I am quite sure that he knows enough about the laws of light and vapor and evaporation to give a plausible account of how any such atmospheric conditions were created. I like to think of the colossal power-stations and tanks and tubes away behind the scenes of the artificial landscape, busy piling up cumuli or carefully manufacturing a thunder-storm. I really think Mr. Wells would enjoy himself in pretending to be that mad millionaire, and I respectfully offer him the notion. There is a great deal of talk about construction just now—construction of cities and civic institutions, town-planning and housing, and all the rest of it; but I doubt if any one has really tried to construct a climate. Nobody has been bold enough to build the weather, in the manner of the mad millionaire of my dreams. It would certainly be a new and literal way of creating a new heaven and earth.

But, for all that, the mad millionaire

would really be mad. He would have set himself an impossible and indeed intrinsically illogical task. If Mr. Wells is the fine artist that I take him for, he would finish off the story with a failure, and a failure on some point apparently small, but fatally serious. It would be impossible really to reproduce for the exile the thing he calls "home," for the exile does not remember everything he wants, even when he knows it is all he wants. He remembers the wall or hedge that runs round the garden, but he cannot be expected to give a botanical catalogue of all the plants in the garden, even of the plants that please him most. He knows that the life he loves is found within certain frontiers, and the only simple definition of it is to state the frontiers. To the exile in the prairies the word "home" might cover half a hundred things, from a cat to a collection of butterflies; but he knows, for all that, that it is one thing, and that it is well described by that one word. He can never be certain that any other word, especially an abstract word, will cover the same thing, and he suspects that in shifting to Utopia, U. S. A., some of the butterflies will be lost in the move, the plants may not bear transplantation, and the cat may go back to the old home.

But there is a further difficulty for the mad millionaire making his model of a home from home. He cannot recreate the charm exactly, because the charm was partly in the inexactitude. When the traveler really goes home, the thing that may make him feel most at home may be a book upside down in the book-case, or a stake leaning crooked in the fence. It is often through seeing something in the

wrong place that he realizes he has come to the right place. It is rather especially, if anything, an English eccentricity, though it has other forms in all other nations. Indeed, the English domestic ideal is best indicated in the English nursery-rhyme about the adventures of the crooked man who went a crooked mile and found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile. Certainly, in the personal case, there is something that moves me profoundly about that elfish rhyme. I will not here discuss the delicate question of whether I myself am crooked; it may be enough to concede that, like space in Einstein, I am curved. But it will be generally agreed among my friends that my stile on which I lean is likely to become a crooked stile, and that, if there is a sixpence lying about, I am very likely to tread on it and turn it into a crooked sixpence. But, above all, whether or no I am a crooked man, I am proud and happy to say that I always walk a crooked mile, whenever I walk up any of the country roads to my house. And that is an excellent example of this indispensable irregularity not only as a note of the home, but as a note of the nation. The English roads are really much more crooked than convenience requires, and any Englishman ought to be ready to die rather than to see them put straight.

§ 5

To show that this is indeed the note of a nation, I may refer in passing to the parallel of language, which is the very voice of a nation. Here, again, what is really difficult to render is the irregularity and not merely the regularity. We hear much of the translator's task in turning good English

into good French, but the real test of a good translator would be turning bad English into bad French. It would be getting the word that is wrong in the right way, instead of merely right in the wrong way. How could the translation, however literary, convey the idea of something that is humorous because it is illiterate? And some of the most English masterpieces are literary because they are illiterate. It has been noted that when we speak of England, we mean one thing which is also a thousand things, from a dog to a Dickens novel. But it is equally true that when we speak of a Dickens novel, we mean one thing which is also a thousand things, including some deliberately perverse and imperfect things. When the elder *Mr. Weller* says that "circumvented is a more tenderer word" than circumscribed, I think the translator will have a difficulty in finding a word even equally tender. I think the international language, like the international state, will indeed find itself circumscribed, and will find that the national tongue and temper have very decidedly circumvented it. When the same invaluable coachman comments on the condolences of his wife and *Mr. Stiggins*, who visit *Sam* in prison only to sit on each side of his fireplace and groan, he merely asks *Sam* whether he does not "feel his spirits rose" by the visit. I do not feel my own spirits rose by the prospect of finding a Frenchman who could find a French past participle to convey the exact nuance of nonsense in that English past participle. In short, the thing has not only got to be wrong, but got to be wrong in the one way that is right. And that is precisely the point about this touch of crookedness in the creations of these local loves of

humanity. The picturesqueness of the nursery-rhyme landscape is concerned not only with the mile and the stile being crooked, but with precisely how crooked they are. It is a question of the exact angle of absurdity at which the thing can still stand upright.

And just as a man will not simply exchange English for Esperanto, so he will not simply exchange England for the earthly paradise, especially when he knows very little about the earthly paradise except that it will cover the whole earth. Of course *Mr. Wells* himself is under no illusions about the difficulties of making it cover the whole earth. He faces the certainty of difficulty, and especially of delay. He is far too shrewd a man to suppose that such deep and delicate traditions would be easy to deracinate, or that his humanitarian empire could rapidly encircle the globe. He does not propose to put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes, or even to go round the world in eighty days. But there is another respect in which his argument does sometimes recall such a circular journey, and that is when it is something of an argument in a circle. Being unable to create a real planetary patriotism by bringing Martian invaders from another planet, he proposes, apparently, to launch a universal propaganda in the form of universal education. But to make this universal, there must surely be a system to universalize it. So that it looks to me a little like establishing a world state in order to teach people that it would be well to establish it. Nor is this the only example of such an argument in a circle. He tries to dispose of the difficulty on which I have touched elsewhere, the danger of despotism in any political power so supreme and

remote, by denying that it need be personal, and even in a sense that it need be powerful. He seems to think we could get on with a sort of republic without any president, and almost, one might say, a sort of committee without any chairman. I think this utterly untenable, but I may perhaps touch on that topic later in another connection. Anyhow, Mr. Wells defends his acephalous and somewhat amorphous parliament by saying, "There will be no war and no diplomacy." This is a circular argument if ever there was one. There will be no war if and because the world state is strong enough to impose peace; we cannot argue from that that the world state need not be strong because there will be no war. If it is weak, there will probably be any number of wars; and it will not be a complete comfort that the little club which pretends to rule the world when it cannot choose to call them revolutions.

But in truth there will, in any case, be revolutions, which will be quite indistinguishable from wars. There will be revolutions because the reality of these national and local creations will not find anything more real than itself in any of the abstractions now offered as the philosophy of a world state. Whether there might not be a religion that would offer such a reconciling reality might be discussed. Whether there is not already such a religion might be discussed. But that modern humanitarianism is not such a religion is really beyond all discussion. Humanitarianism has no principles even about our duty to humanity. It has no doctrines except doubts, which are just as destructive to any doctrine it might attempt to maintain. It has no way of holding even its own human

followers from the most inhuman fancies and speculations. It cannot tell us what to do with a man or a Martian or a microbe. When it talks perpetually about problems, social problems and sexual problems and economic problems, it means that it cannot make up its mind to any solution of any of them. Its philanthropy is simply a phrase, and men cannot be governed by perorations. This humanitarianism is a thing far poorer than humanity. It is poorer than humanity as it is, with all its wars and empires and tribal pride and prejudice. That is why people will not break down the wall of their garden to let in this howling wilderness. That is why they will not give up the complex, but complete, reality called England or Ireland or France for an incomplete and incomprehensible extension. That is why they will not surrender the local for the universal. It is because the universal is so very much lower than the local. It is quite true that the modern world contains many international things as well as national things. And, broadly speaking, it is the international things that are base and the national things that are noble. It is quite true that railways are international while rivers are regarded as national. That is why few poets are found writing an ode to a railway, and many writing an ode to a river. Usury is international, and useful work is generally local. Spies are international, and soldiers are generally national. Banks are at their best when they are at their biggest, but guilds of arts and crafts have generally been at their best when possessed of very local liberties. Indeed, the most completely cosmopolitan force of all is a mere cosmopolitan conspiracy, not even openly admitted by the

financiers who whisper about it all over the world.

The most universal system is actually a secret. The scientific prophets sometimes tell us that nations will be brought together by a vast system of aviation as continuous as an overhead railway; but in truth the cosmopolitan is not establishing something like an overhead railway, but something like a labyrinth of channel tunnels.

I do not of course connect Mr. Wells with such cynical cosmopolitanism, from which nobody could be more remote. I merely point out that the only practical forces fulfilling his definition would fulfil it in a way very divergent from his doctrine. If there were really a republic of the world, it would be much more worldly than public. If there was really no war, it would be because there was a great deal of diplomacy, especially secret diplomacy. It would be worked at best by those peculiar humanitarians who professed to abolish secret diplomacy and did it by means of secret societies. But all this, even at its best, would be very far from Mr. Wells's new vision of the glories of man, or even his old vision of the terrors of Mars. In conclusion, however, I will merely mention one possibility which might also assist his ideal, though it is very much at variance with his idea.

It is always possible that modern man may find himself in touch with other worlds in an even wilder sense than that of the "War of the Worlds." Psychic inquiry may call up powers claiming to come from another plane instead of from another planet. They may career about on four-legged tables instead of three-legged tripods; they may be mirrored in the crystal instead of in the moon. I do not particularly

want them or welcome them; on the contrary, in the few glimpses I have caught, they seem as grotesque and unnatural as any of the monsters which he imagined as stalking like vast spiders about the earth or boiling up like vast bubbles out of the moon. So far as I speculate on any spiritual realities behind them, I have the sense of something as hostile as the most martial Martian. If we do not strive against the stars we have named Mars and Mercury and Jupiter, we may yet strive against some such spirits as the early Christians supposed to be masked under the same names. The notion would probably be rather impatiently repudiated by the author himself, but the notion is not half so useful for my purposes as it would be for his. Here, again, it is through what he would reject as an impossibility that he might reach what he would accept as an ideal. But though it is no concern of mine to call it desirable, and though he himself might regard it as incredible, it is very far from improbable. It is not at all unlikely that, through the new scientific interest in abnormal psychological powers, men may come to find that they have let loose things that are a little too powerful, as if they had called down monsters from the moon. Then indeed we should again see man against a background that would isolate and unite him, like a single figure striving on a besieged tower against the sky. Such a struggle with psychic influences could not exactly be called a war against nationalism, through it might be a union of nations; but it might be called a war against imperialism, since those psychic influences are now defined by the word "control"; and it might be called a war against militarism, for their name is legion.

In all Essex Street, in all New York, there ain't such fights like by us."

Her pleadings were in vain. There was no stopping Yankev Ravinsky once his wrath was roused. His daughter's insistence upon the use of a knife and fork spelled apostasy, Anti-Semitism, and the aping of the gentiles.

Like a prophet of old condemning unrighteousness, he ran the gamut of denunciation, rising to heights of fury that were sublime and godlike, and sinking from sheer exhaustion to abusive bitterness.

"*Pfui* on all your American colleges! *Pfui* on the morals of America! No respect for old age. No fear for God. Stepping with your feet on all the laws of the holy torah. A fire should burn out the whole new generation. They should sink into the earth, like Korah."

"Look at him cursing and burning! Just because I insist on their changing their terrible table manners. One would think I was killing them."

"Do you got to use a gun to kill?" cried the old man, little red threads darting out of the whites of his eyes.

"Who is doing the killing? Are n't you choking the life out of me? Are n't you dragging me by the hair to the darkness of past ages every minute of the day? I'd die of shame if one of my college friends should open the door while you people are eating."

"You—you—"

The old man was on the point of striking his daughter when his wife seized the hand he raised.

"*Mincha!* Yankev, you forgot *Mincha!*"

This reminder was a flash of inspiration on Mrs. Ravinsky's part, the only thing that could have ended the quarreling instantly. *Mincha* was the prayer just before sunset of the ortho-

dox Jews. This religious rite was so automatic with the old man that at his wife's mention of *Mincha* everything was immediately shut out, and Yankev Ravinsky rushed off to a corner of the room to pray.

"*Ashrai Yoishwai Waisahuh!*"

"Happy are they who dwell in Thy house. Ever shall I praise Thee. *Selah!* Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. On the majesty and glory of Thy splendor, and on Thy marvelous deeds, will I meditate."

The shelter from the storms of life that the artist finds in his art, Yankev Ravinsky found in his prescribed communion with God. All the despair caused by his daughter's apostasy, the insults and disappointments he suffered, were in his sobbing voice. But as he entered into the spirit of his prayer, he felt the man of flesh drop away in the outflow of God around him. His voice mellowed, the rigid wrinkles of his face softened, the hard glitter of anger and condemnation in his eyes was transmuted into the light of love as he went on:

"The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and of great loving-kindness. To all that call upon Him in truth He will hear their cry and save them."

Oblivious to the passing and re-passing of his wife as she warmed anew the unfinished dinner, he continued:

"Put not your trust in princes, in the son of man in whom there is no help." Here Reb Ravinsky paused long enough to make a silent confession for the sin of having placed his hope on his daughter instead of on God. His whole body bowed with the sense of guilt. Then in a moment his humility was transfigured into exaltation. Sor-