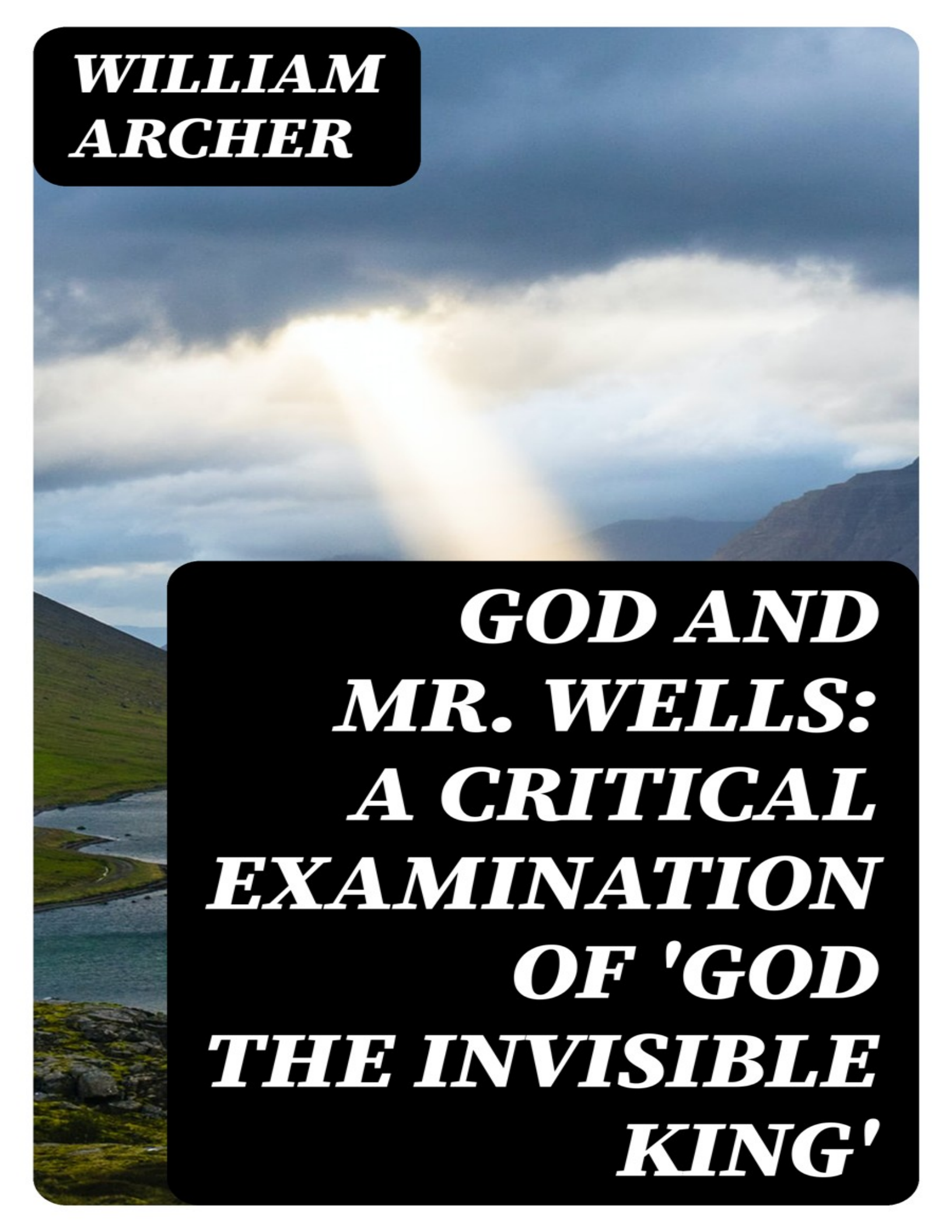




***WILLIAM
ARCHER***

***GOD AND
MR. WELLS:
A CRITICAL
EXAMINATION
OF 'GOD
THE INVISIBLE
KING'***

William Archer

God and Mr. Wells: A Critical Examination of 'God the Invisible King'

EAN 8596547207566

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEW YORK · ALFRED A. KNOPF · 1917

FOREWORD

GOD AND MR. WELLS

I

THE GREAT ADVENTURER

II

A GOD WHO "GROWED"

GOD THE INVISIBLE KING

III

NEW MYTHS FOR OLD

IV

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

V

WHEN IS A GOD NOT A GOD?

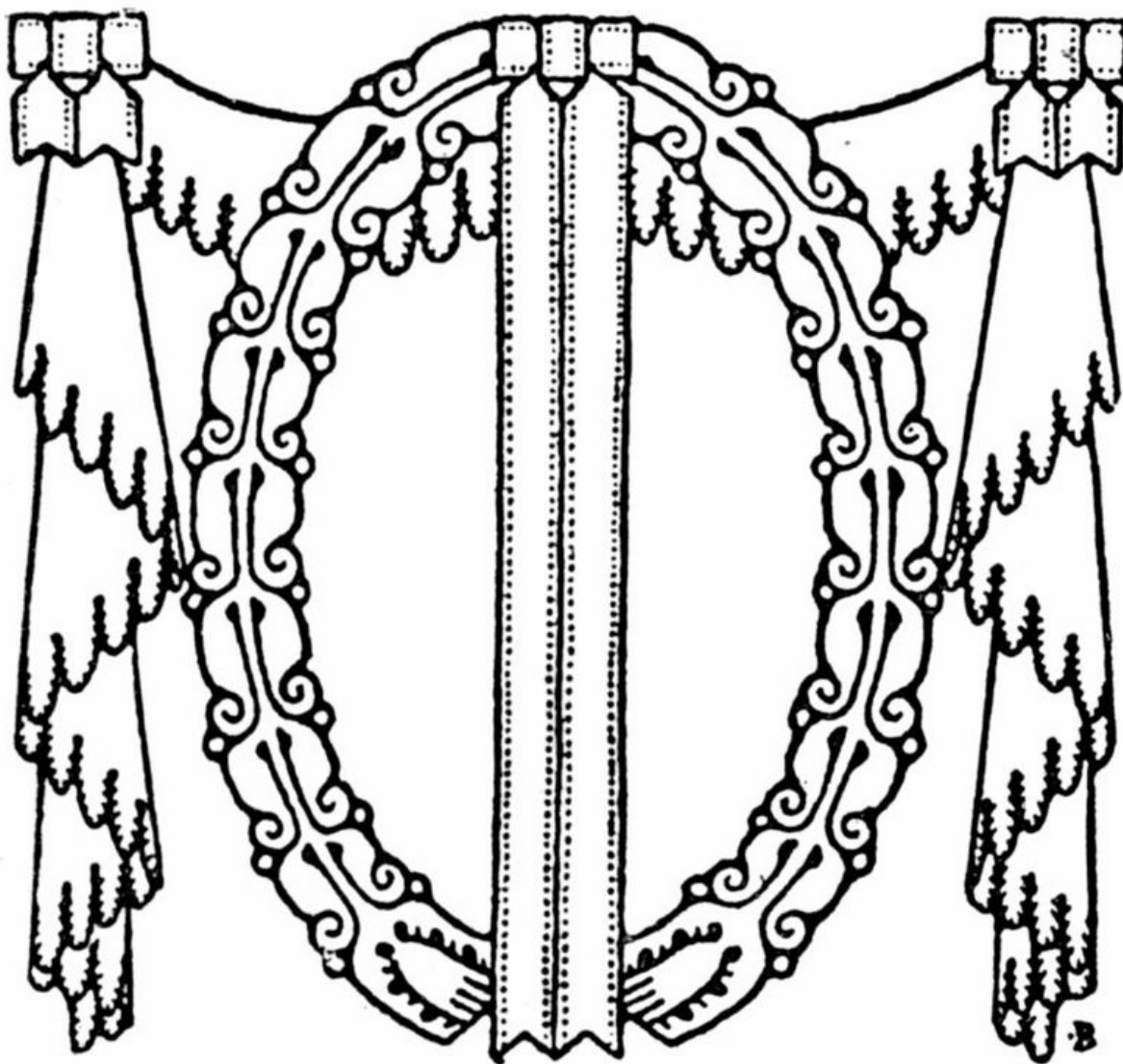
VI

FOR AND AGAINST PERSONIFICATION

VII

BACK TO THE VEILED BEING

THE NEWEST BORZOI BOOKS



NEW YORK · ALFRED A. KNOPF · 1917

[Table of Contents](#)

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA**

FOREWORD

Table of Contents

As I look through the proofs of this little treatise, a twinge of compunction comes upon me. That humane philosopher Mr. Dooley has somewhere a saying to this effect: "When an astronomer tells me that he has discovered a new planet, I would be the last man to brush the fly off the end of his telescope." Would not this have been a good occasion for a similar exercise of urbanity? Nay, may it not be said that my criticism of *God the Invisible King* is a breach of discipline, like duelling in the face of the enemy? I am proud to think that Mr. Wells and I are soldiers in the same army; ought we not at all costs to maintain a united front? On the destructive side (which I have barely touched upon) his book is brilliantly effective; on the constructive side, if unconvincing, it is thoughtful, imaginative, stimulating, a thing on the whole to be grateful for. Ought one not rather to hold one's peace than to afford the common enemy the encouragement of witnessing a squabble in the ranks?

But we must not yield to the obsession of military metaphor. It is not what the enemy thinks or what Mr. Wells or I think that matters—it is what the men of the future ought to think, as being consonant with their own nature and with the nature of things. Ideas, like organisms, must abide the struggle for existence, and if the Invisible King is fitted to survive, my criticism will reinforce and not invalidate him. Even if he should come to life in a way one can scarcely anticipate, his proceedings will have to be carefully watched. He cannot claim the reticences of a "party truce." He will be all the better for a candid, though I hope not captious, Opposition.

I thought of printing on my title-page a motto from Mr. Bernard Shaw; but it will perhaps come better here. "The fact," says Mr. Shaw, "that a believer is happier than a sceptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality of happiness, and by no means a necessity of life. Whether Socrates got as much happiness out of life as Wesley is an unanswerable question; but a nation of Socrateses would be much safer and happier than a nation of Wesleys; and its individuals would be higher in the evolutionary scale. At all events, it is in the Socratic man and not in the Wesleyan that our hope lies now."

Besides, it has yet to be proved that the believer in the Invisible King is happier than the sceptic.

LONDON, *May* 24, 1917.

GOD AND MR. WELLS

[Table of Contents](#)

I

[Table of Contents](#)

THE GREAT ADVENTURER

[Table of Contents](#)

When it was known that Mr. H. G. Wells had set forth to discover God, all amateurs of intellectual adventure were filled with pleasurable excitement and anticipation. For is not Mr. Wells the great Adventurer of latter-day literature?

No quest is too perilous for him, no forlorn-hope too daring. He led the first explorers to the moon. He it was who lured the Martians to earth and exterminated them with microbes. He has ensnared an angel from the skies and expiscated a mermaid from the deep. He has mounted a Time Machine (of his own invention) and gone careering down the vistas of the Future. But these were comparatively commonplace feats. After all, there had been a Jules Verne, there had been a Gulliver and a Peter Wilkins, there had been a More, a Morris and a Bellamy. It might be that he was fitted for far greater things. "There remains," we said to ourselves, "the blue ribbon of intellectual adventure, the unachieved North Pole of spiritual exploration. He has had countless predecessors in the enterprise, some of whom have loudly claimed success; but their log-books have been full of mere hallucinations and nursery tales. What if it should be reserved for Mr. Wells to bring back the first authentic news from a source more baffling than that of Nile or Amazon—the source of the majestic stream of Being? What if it should be given him to sign his name to the first truly-projected chart of the scheme of things?"

We almost held our breath in eager anticipation, just as we did when there came from America a well-authenticated rumor that the problem of flying had at last been solved. Were we on the brink of another and much more momentous discovery? Was Mr. Wells to be the Peary of the great quest? Or only the last of a thousand Dr. Cooks?

[Table of Contents](#)

A GOD WHO "GROWED"

[Table of Contents](#)

Our excitement, our suspense, were so much wasted emotion. Mr. Wells's enterprise was not at all what we had figured it to be.

GOD THE INVISIBLE KING

[Table of Contents](#)

is a very interesting, and even stimulating disquisition, full of a fine social enthusiasm, and marked, in many passages, by deep poetic feeling. But it is not a work of investigation into the springs of Being. Mr. Wells explicitly renounces from the outset any dealings with "cosmogony." It is a description of a way of thinking, a system of nomenclature, which Mr. Wells declares to be extremely prevalent in "the modern mind," from which he himself extracts much comfort and fortification, and which he believes to be destined to regenerate the world.

But Mr. Wells will not have it that what is involved is a mere system of nomenclature. He avers that he, in common with many other like-minded persons, has achieved, not so much an intellectual discovery as an emotional realisation, of something actual and objective which he calls God. He does not, so far as I remember, use the term "objective"; but as he insists that God is "a spirit, a person, a strongly marked and knowable personality" (p. 5), "a single spirit and

a single person" (p. 18), "a great brother and leader of our little beings" (p. 24) with much more to the same purpose, it would seem that he must have in his mind an object external to us, no mere subjective "stream of tendency," or anything of that sort. It would of course be foolish to doubt the sincerity of the conviction which he so constantly and so eagerly asserts. Nevertheless, one cannot but put forward, even at this stage, the tentative theory that he is playing tricks with his own mind, and attributing reality and personality to something that was in its origin a figure of speech. He has been hypnotized by the word God:

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why.

At all events, "God the Invisible King" is not the creator and sustainer of the universe. As to the origin of things Mr. Wells professes the most profound agnosticism. "At the back of all known things," he says, "there is an impenetrable curtain; the ultimate of existence is a Veiled Being, which seems to know nothing of life or death or good or ill.... The new religion does not pretend that the God of its life is that Being, or that he has any relation of control or association with that Being. It does not even assert that God knows all, or much more than we do, about that ultimate Being" (p. 14). Very good; but—here is the first question which seems to arise out of the Wellsian thesis—are we not entitled to ask of "the new religion" some more definite account of the relation between "God" and "the Veiled Being"? Surely it is not enough that it should simply refrain from "asserting"

anything at all on the subject. If "God" is outside ourselves ("a Being, not us but dealing with us and through us," p. 6) we cannot leave him hanging in the void, like the rope which the Indian conjurer is fabled to throw up into the air till it hooks itself on to nothingness. If we are to believe in him as a lever for the righting of a world that has somehow run askew, we want to know something of his fulcrum. Is it possible thus to dissociate him from the Veiled Being, and proclaim him an independent, an agnostic God? Do we really get over any difficulty—do we not rather create new difficulties,—by saying, as Mr. Wells practically does, "Our God is no metaphysician. He does not care, and very likely does not know, how this tangle of existence came into being. He is only concerned to disentangle it a little, to reduce the chaos of the world to some sort of seemliness and order"? Is it an idle and presumptuous curiosity which enquires whether we are to consider him co-ordinate with the Veiled Being, and in that case probably hostile, or subordinate, and in that case instrumental? Are we, in a word, to consider the earth a little rebel state in the gigantic empire of the universe, working out its own salvation under its Invisible King? Or are we to regard God as the Viceroy of the Veiled Being, to whom, in that case, our ultimate allegiance is due?

I talked the other day to a young Australian who had been breaking new land for wheat-growing. "What do you do?" I asked, "with the stumps of the trees you fell? It must be a great labour to clear them out." "We don't clear them out," he replied. "We use ploughs that automatically rise when they come to a stump, and take the earth again on