

Ben Kuleshov

Professor Sarah Cole

H.G. Wells ENGLGU4500.001

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Helen Keller and H.G. Wells at Teachers College

The February 1932 issue of the *Teachers College Record* features a section titled “Teachers College Gives Luncheon for H.G. Wells and Helen Keller.” On November 13, 1931, 133 community members attended to enjoy the occasion and hear the honored guests speak. Keller, who became deaf and blind in her infancy from an unknown illness, was a proud socialist who protested U.S. involvement in World War 1 and advocated for women’s suffrage. She delivered a moving address, of which she provided a transcript to the *Record*. “I welcome Mr. Wells today with my lips. Many years ago I welcomed him with my mind... and now I greet him in the crusade against war” (447). Wells had initially refused to speak at the event as he disliked public speaking in general, but Keller’s words so touched him that he felt it was necessary to respond:

“Efforts to avert war, standing by themselves, are useless, almost worse than useless. The only way we can eliminate war is to eliminate our present economic and political organizations. As long as we have independent sovereign states, separate systems of currency, the need of passports to cross from one state to another, national economic systems—all things that make for irritation —just so long shall we have war. The efforts that peace-loving peoples should make should be toward the building of a federated world. I once said civilization was a race between education and catastrophe.

That is not so. Education has not yet started. There must be an education to break down nationalism, to destroy our present narrow conceptions of patriotism and to create a world organization that will transcend nationalism" (446).

Wells was due to embark for France in just a few hours and so was unable to send a manuscript of his words, but they were dutifully recorded by those in attendance. Just imagine that in this very building, a packed room listened carefully to the words of the great socialist minds of 1931, bidding Wells a gracious farewell shortly before a long boat trip.

Works Cited

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