

BOOKS CONTAINING MATERIAL ON WELLS (since 1970)

- **A Soviet Heretic. Essays by Evgeny Zamyatin.** Edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg. Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1970. Contains Zamyatin's essay on "H.G. Wells" (1922), pp. 259-290.
- William Bellamy. **The Novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, 1890-1910.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
- David Lodge. **The Novelist at the Crossroads.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. Contains a reprint of "Assessing H.G. Wells", originally published in *Encounter*, XXVIII, 1 (Jan 1967) 54-61.
- Samuel Hynes. **Edwardian Occasions.** London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972. Contains a reprint of "H.G. and G.B.S.", originally published in *T.L.S.* (Nov. 1969).
- Bernard Bergonzi. **The Turn of a Century.** London, Macmillan, 1973. Contains reprints of "The Correspondence of Gissing and Wells" (1962) and of the Introduction to the Riverside Edition of *Tono-Bungay* (Houghton Mifflin, 1966.)

THE TIME TRAVELLER: THE LIFE OF H.G. WELLS by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973, 487 pp., 46 illustrations. £5.95

This is the first full-length scholarly biography of Wells to appear since his death, and the first to make extensive use of his unpublished private papers.

Devotees of Wells will find it a highly readable, indeed fascinating, account of his life and background -- the kind of book which can be read not only once but can be returned to again and again. It is in no sense a **critical** biography: there is little attempt to discuss Wells's contribution to English literature or to assess his achievement as a thinker and polemic. It is a straightforward account of his life and times, illuminated throughout by penetrating insight and lively scholarship.

The MacKenzies are particularly skilful in tracing the sociological background to the various phases in Wells's career: his birthplace at Bromley; his student days at the Normal School of Science; his encounter with the Fabian Society; his role in the First World War; and so on. At each stage in his life he is placed in the context of his times against the backcloth of his contemporaries in the world of literature and ideas.

Tono-Bungay (in my view a sadly neglected work) receives a warm tribute from the MacKenzies: "With *Tono-Bungay* Wells reached the peak of his career as a novelist. All the earlier books led up to it and the later ones away from it.....of all his novels, it was the epitome of Wells".

Some readers, perhaps, may prefer more analysis of the **writings** as distinct from the **life** -- but that may be asking for too much. Certainly there is a need for a

concise guide book to all Wells's novels -- including the lesser known ones -- but this was clearly outside the scope of the present work.

The *Time Traveller* needs to be read in conjunction with Geoffrey West's admirable *H.G. Wells: A Sketch for a Portrait*, first published in 1930, and as readable today as ever. West's book has the great merit that Wells the man seems to come to life again in his pages and animate each episode, in a way which is not so true of the MacKenzies biography, excellent though it is. Reading these two books together, then, one arrives at a comprehensive view of Wells and a clearer assessment of his place in the history of the twentieth century. The MacKenzies are to be congratulated on producing a well thought out and carefully researched biography, and for their frankness in describing his complicated emotional life -- a full-scale biography like this one was long overdue.

J.R.H.

Alfred Borrello. H.G. WELLS AUTHOR IN AGONY. Southern Illinois University Press, 1972. XVII + 137p., \$5.95.

To sum up in about one hundred and twenty pages the nature of Wells's achievement and to give a balanced critical assessment of it was something of a challenge. Alfred Borrello has risen to it and written a book which is what Wells would probably have called "sound work".

He attempts to place Wells against the background of the XVIIIth century Enlightenment on the one hand, and the modern novel on the other. This enables him to define Wells's position in literature and to point out the reasons why he appeals to modern readers. Wells was not only aware of the dangers inherent in a sudden unforeseen development of science and technology, he also realized that the main problem for modern man was to define his own individuality in a rapidly changing world. Quite rightly Borrello sees in Wells's lifelong quest for "some fit substitute for the God who 'was a lie'" the causes of his success and the reason for his shortcomings: Wells tried to endow man with a divine character and failed to see that this meant imposing upon him a burden that robbed him of his humanity. In spite of his admiration for the scientific mind, he was essentially guided by emotions and instinctive reactions. This Borrello points out very convincingly:

"Wells's pronouncements of his doubts of the existence of true individuality suggest the despair of the twentieth century which has made its youth restless and which is increasingly the concern of its novelist. What he proclaims is not so much what he has concluded logically, but rather what he has developed emotionally." (p.106).

In the same way, he clearly shows that Wells's apparent artlessness stemmed from his wanting to convey in his fiction the formlessness of life, thus creating an illusion of reality that would strengthen the impact of his moral teaching.

Borrello's chief merit lies in his ability to wield great ideas and to see Wells in the perspective of the twentieth century. His vision of Wells is sympathetic, often provocative, and, on the whole, convincing, although there are times when one has the impression that he has let himself be carried away by his desire to make Wells's work fit into a pattern. For example, discussing the concept of love in Wells's novels, he writes: