

may inflict for the perplexing distinction of his work. What harm can there be, and who is going to suffer to any appreciable extent, if, temperately and modestly, and without any attempt to direct the natural direction of the "boom" current, the indisputable fact that Mr James is, after all, no mere obscure novelist in a crowd, but a very considerable Literary Swell indeed, is permitted occasionally to appear?
Yours, &c. ,

Oct. 12. 1900

H.G. WELLS.

(This letter is dealt with in our leading columns.)

Book Review

J. R. Hammond, *An H.G. Wells Companion*, Macmillan, 1979, 288 pps., index, illustrations, £12.

Although one has many good friends in the Wells Society, and when one thinks of Britain and H.G. Wells (as I do every day of my life) I can conjure up many faces and many happy times; in fact, John Hammond is the person most likely to come to mind when I think of the Society, and especially when I have a query about Wells. I suppose much the same thing is true of many others for whom Hammond, as the long time secretary of the Society, remains the source of knowledge on H.G. W. This book provides much of that knowledge for us in a readily accessible form and it also allows us to think about Hammond's views of the fiction of Wells, to quarrel with it perhaps, to accept much of it, to rethink our own views, but to have, as the book's title suggests, a companion to Wells, which is what John Hammond is and has been through his role in the Society.

It is not a complete guide to Wells at all. Its focus is almost entirely on the fiction, including the short stories (or many of them). Very little of the journalism is mentioned, and almost none of the important works of prognostication, social engineering, philosophy, speculation, and science that also gushed forth from Wells's pen and mind. This is not because Hammond does not know these works, but this book is one of a series to be a companionate source to English authors. The others in the series, Jane Austen, the Brontës, Hardy and Lawrence help place the provenance of this book exactly.

There is a brief introduction to Wells, and an essay on his literary reputation, neither of which are startling. This is followed by a dictionary listing of the items that fit into the fictional canon with a brief descriptive note on each item. A section on the short stories occurs and a detailed summary (a page or two for each) of all the romances, and then the novels. There then follows what Hammond calls a key to all the characters and locations utilized in Wells's work of this nature. A brief appendix listing film versions is very useful, and the obligatory notes, and bibliography are appended as

well. Twelve pages of plates are an important section of the book. They show primarily locations in which he lived or with which he was very familiar. Three are portraits of Wells, and two are stills from his great film, *Things To Come*.

I have enjoyed this book very much since it arrived, reading it through twice, and dipping into it time after time for pleasure or to check a fact. For me one of the most interesting features of the book is to hear Hammond's considered views on Wells's fiction. Although they may be received by some as too filiopietistic (if Hammond thinks Wells wrote a bad book, he does not tell us), they are, nevertheless, well worth considering. Hammond places the novels into a framework which is useful and reminds the reader always of the considerable strength of Wells's writing even in works little read today. Years ago at a Wells Society meeting, I heard Hammond extol the virtues of *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*. I found the book to be exciting and important when I read it after this comment, and one expects that Hammond's book will provide the same service to many, both those who know Wells intimately, and those for whom the book provides an introduction.

The areas in which Hammond is especially useful are in his understanding of the whole of Wells's fiction, and he does a very neat analysis of Wells's use of his friends and lovers as pattern figures in his work. There may be some modification of these views, but basically this is a major contribution. I am also taken with Hammond's constant restatement of Wells's ability to abstract himself from the writing, to observe, as it were the action of his characters with detachment, even scientific coldness. Wells anticipated the detachment of the scientific observer well in his description of landings on the moon, and later Wells is remarkably agile in his ability to use his great descriptive powers as if he were a scientist observing his characters, describing them almost without ethical content. We see this in my favourite short story 'A Slip Under the Microscope' where the ethical content is easily supplied, but not directly by H.G., and of course, in that important and perhaps forgotten novel, *The Dream*. Hammond is good on this subject (p. 98, 113, 133-4).

Hammond does not, I think, make enough of Wells's use of the figure and concept of dreaming. It occurs throughout his fiction as a way of establishing his scientific objectivity and abstraction from the event. There is a good deal of evidence in Wells that he adopted this technique in his non-fiction writing to stabilize it, and may have learned the technique in his work in the college laboratory. Some of this accounts, it seems to me, for the ambivalence in his writing before 1914 and before *Boon*. The man of science and the man of fiction war within Wells — each winning sometimes, and occasionally in some books (*Moreau*, *The War in the Air*, *The Sleeper Awakes* are examples) both sides win battles, and neither wins the overall war, making the works flawed and occasionally frustrating to read.

Boon solves the problem. Wells freed himself (psychologically) from the perceived incubus of James, and although the man of fiction, still occurs (and brilliantly) the war is over and that particular source of tension in his work is dissipated.

Wells used his powers of observation to allow himself to "disentangle" himself from his work and this led directly to his concept of revolution by élites. A logical follow-up to his general acceptance of Platonist values, it is his ability to abstract himself, to disentangle himself, to play the role of



observer that allows him to use so tellingly the concept of the Samurai, to analyze so cuttingly the Webbs and others, and ultimately to create the idea of the Open Conspiracy. Here is the final statement of revolution by élite, observing and dominating, and it comes clearly from all of Wells's thought and his scientific training.

Another area that Hammond points out very well is Wells's ability to describe rural areas. Certainly in his plain and relatively unadorned style Wells focusses on surrounding scenes with great power. Whether it be the scene of the giant rats in the Kentish night, the last death of the Martians on Primrose Hill, the decline of the Ravensbourne, or the walk with Jesus in *The Happy Turning*, the reader is always strongly aware of the scene in which the characters are appearing. Dozens of other examples may be adduced, and Hammond mentions several of them. But it is the highlighting of these features of Wells's writing that makes this book such a good companion.

I disagree with Hammond occasionally. I cannot regard *Star-Begotten* as highly as he does, although some of the same themes discussed in this review are utilized in that book. I probably like *Brynhild* better than he, and I find *Marriage* and the other "prig novels" excellent reading with much to commend them. Hammond does too; we differ only in degree.

Wells was one of the towering figures of this century and remains so. John Hammond has done much to keep his name and strengths before the world. This book is a considerable addition to that work, and no serious student of Wells can be without it.

David C. Smith.

ANOTHER VIEW OF *Brynhild* (see David Smith's review above)

"By adapting the manner of Maori archetypes or sacred symbols, Wells attempted to give *Brynhild* a structure appropriate to the qualified Schopenhaurian ideas informing its imagery and characterisation." So argues William J. Scheick in 'Schopenhauer, Maori symbolism and Wells's *Brynhild*', an article in the latest number of 'Studies in the Literary Imagination' (Spring 1980, xiii, pp. 17-29).

We congratulate Professor Scheick (whose earlier contributions include 'The Womb of Time: Spengler's Influence on Wells's *Apropos of Dolores*' on what may be the most remarkably-titled item of Wellsian scholarship to appear for many a long year. Surely such a tour de force must put other Wellsians, and potential Wellsians, on their mettle. We are therefore announcing a competition to find the Most Unlikely Title of any (published) item of Wellsian interest, past or present. In view of the parlous state of the H. G. Wells Society's finances, there will be no prizes apart from the possibility of an honorable mention in the journal.

— The Editor

For the promotion and encouragement of an active interest in, and appreciation of, the life, work and thought of Herbert George Wells.

AIMS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SOCIETY

The H.G.Wells Society was founded in 1960. It has an international membership, and aims to promote a widespread interest in the life, work and thought of Herbert George Wells, and generally to stimulate a Wellsian outlook on the many old and new problems facing Man in the latter part of the twentieth century. It publishes an annual journal and issues a quarterly newsletter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REPRINTS

As part of its celebrations during the Wells Centenary year (1966), the Society has had the first comprehensive bibliography of Wells's works to be compiled. A book was issued in 1968. A number of reprints of books by Wells which have been out-of-print for many years, have also been published. In addition, these, a collected edition of Wells's last two books, *The Happy Ending* and *The End of its Tether*, was published in 1968.

MEETINGS AND SCHOOL GROUPS

The range of Wells's thought and ideas is reflected in the diversity of meetings the Society has held or sponsored. These have included conferences on problems of the international exchange of information, educational associations and town planning, steps towards a unified world and the Society arranges exhibitions, both in Britain and abroad, to stimulate interest in his work. It also encourages the formation of study groups and clubs on Wells.

The Society is open to anyone who subscribes to its aims and agrees to pay a subscription of £3 a year. The joint subscription for a husband and wife is £3.50. Corporate subscription is £5 a year. Donations for general purposes, and towards the Society's publishing expenses, will always be gratefully received.

Further information on any of the Society's activities will gladly be given on request. Enquiries should be addressed to:—

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