

## THE WELLSIAN

The Journal of the H.G. Wells Society  
No. 19 1996

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ISSN 0263 1176

### Contents

#### Editorial and Notes on Contributors

<b>Lyman T. Sargent</b>	<i>The Time Machine</i> in the Development of Wells's Social and Political Thought	3
<b>John Partington</b>	<i>The Time Machine</i> : A Polemic on the Inevitability of Working Class Liberation and a Plea for a Socialist Solution to Late-Victorian Capitalist Exploitation	12
<b>Alan Mayne</b>	The Virtual Time Machine: Part I	22
<b>Tom Miller</b>	<i>The War in the Air</i> : A Study in Plotting	27
<b>Eric L. Fitch</b>	How Green was my Utopia?: A reflection on William Morris's <i>News from Nowhere</i> , H. G. Wells's <i>Men Like Gods</i> and Ernest Callenbach's <i>Ecotopia</i>	30
<b>Cliona Murphy</b>	H.G. Wells: His History, the People and the Historians	36
Review Articles		
<b>Nicoletta Vallorani</b>	A review of Fernando Porta's <i>La scienza come favola. Saggio sui scientific romances di H.G. Wells.</i>	48
<b>Michael Sherborne</b>	Leon Stover's critical editions of <i>The Time Machine</i> and <i>The Island of Doctor Moreau</i> .	50
<b>David C. Smith</b>	J. Percy Smith, ed. <i>Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells.</i>	53
<b>Sylvia Hardy</b>	Alan Mayne's edition of <i>World Brain</i>	55

### Editorial

In my last Editorial, I referred to the large number of "interesting and widely varying papers" which had been delivered at *The Time Machine* Symposium in July 1995. This issue of the *Wellsian* is bumper size because it includes three of these. Lyman Tower Sargent's and John Partington's articles relate to "The Time Machine as text" section; Alan Mayne's appeared in "The Time Machine and Science" slot. There are also two papers, Tom Miller's on *The War in the Air* and Eric Fitch's on *Men Like Gods*, which continue the science fiction theme, whilst Cliona Murphy's "H.G. Wells: His History, the People and the Historians" explores the continuing popularity of Wells's writing on history in relation to the hostility of professional historians. Because this edition is so much longer than usual, I will make the editorial correspondingly shorter, but I feel I should mention the two BBC *Bookmark* Programmes on H.G. Wells which were broadcast at the end of August this year. Admittedly, they elicited mixed reactions from critics and from Wellsians, but whatever one's opinion of the programmes, there's no doubt that they attracted large audiences at peak viewing times and have therefore made more people aware of the importance and scope of Wells's work.

### Notes on Contributors

**Eric Fitch** is a long-standing member of the H.G. Wells Society. He lives in Burnham, Buckinghamshire, and has written two books, one on local legends and ancient sites and the other on the stories about Hern the Hunter.

**Alan Mayne** has been interested in the life, work and ideas of H.G. Wells, ever since he was a teenager. He has been writing books on the human situation, from the 1990s into the 21st century, for Adamantine Press, London. His latest publication is the new edition of H.G. Wells' *World Brain* (1995), which he edited (reviewed in this issue), and he is now writing *Politics in the 21st Century*.

**Tom Miller** lives in Guernsey. He has been a member of the Wells Society for a number of years, and a frequent contributor to the *Wellsian* and Newsletter.

**Cliona Murphy** is an associate professor of modern European History at California State University Bakersfield. She has written a book on Irish women's history and edited another. Her other areas of research and publication are on nationalism, women's history, Protestant evangelism and H.G. Wells.

**David C. Smith** a former professor of history at Maine University is a biographer of Wells and has been working on a multi-volume edition of H.G. Wells's correspondence, which he has edited will soon be published.

**John Partington** is currently an MA student at Leeds University, where he is researching the early science fiction of H.G. Wells.

**Lyman Tower Sargent** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Missouri, St Louis, and has until recently been engaged in research at the Stout Research Centre, Wellington, New Zealand.

**Michael Sherborne's** edition of *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories* by H G Wells was published in the USA by Oxford University Press in 1996.

**Nicoletta Vallorani** is engaged in research on H.G. Wells's early work at the University of Milan.

## Lyman Tower Sargent

### The Time Machine in the Development of Wells's Social and Political Thought

I want to suggest that we take seriously the idea that the later Wells emerged from the the earlier one. On the one hand, there are many Wells; on the other hand, there is one Wells, and I want to focus on the one rather than the many.

My argument is that Wells spent his life trying to fend off the future described in *The Time Machine*. At times he is hopeful; at times he nearly despairs. And, of course, he ends in something that at least approaches desperate. Quite a few commentators have argued that it is the inevitability of evolution leading to something like the degenerate human race that is found in the future of *The Time Machine*, or, as many put it, the death of the human or, some writers indicate, the death of Wells that one can see throughout his writings. But while I think there is room for such essentially psychological interpretations, I find them ultimately unconvincing. While all interpretations help us illuminate areas of Wells, I am unconvinced because I think that any reading of Wells's life must conclude that he finds nothing inevitable. He is constantly trying to shake people up, organize change, point a new direction. And, or course, sometimes people listen and sometimes they do not, and Wells knowing how important what he is saying is - after all the future of humanity rests on it - alternates between great optimism and profound pessimism.

In what follows, I use *The Time Machine* to set the stage, so to speak, because I think it does, but then I go on to look at both how Wells tried to ensure that the future of *The Time Machine* would not happen and his intense frustration as he recognized that each of his attempts was failing outright or only partially or temporarily succeeding. In a sense I use the Eloi and the Morlocks as metaphors for exploring Wells's social and political thought, and I find their trail everywhere.

Warren Wagar has neatly put Wells's position: "In the extension to social problems of the scientific spirit, the spirit of experiment, clearheadedness, intellectual honesty, and orderly thinking he placed his desperate hopes for the salvation of the species." The phrase "his desperate hope for the salvation of the species" may strike some as overly dramatic, but it is my position that Wagar has it absolutely right, and the futures of *The Time Machine* are scenarios of one alternative of what will happen if we