

The Library Page

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THE NEW MACHIAVELLI

By H. G. Wells

Reviewed by R. L. Herbert

There are those who intend that literature should have but one purpose, that of entertainment. There are others who say that literature should not only entertain, but that between the lines and passages written purely for entertainment, between the direct action passages, there should be philosophy, thought, teaching and similar subjects for digressions.

People who hold the former view should not read *The New Machiavelli*. In writing it, H. G. Wells evidently had the desire to write a book of philosophy, sociology and politics, between the teaching passages of which was to be a story.

Had I written the book, I would have entitled it *The Biology of a Politician*, for that is exactly what Wells presents in the book—the biology of a political reformer, his reactions to various situations, his growth from childhood through statesmanship to downfall.

The New Machiavelli has no characters. Richard Remington, the politician about whom the book centers, is really an idea, a muddle of social and political views. One never feels he knows Remington. If asked to do so, it would be most difficult for the reader to sketch, ever so briefly, his idea of the man. Margaret, Remington's wife, is even more difficult to grasp, and Isabel, for whom Remington gives up his wife and political and social ambitions, is almost as hard to reach.

The only person in the book of whom one carries away a picture is Remington's father, an irascible, misplaced tutor and school teacher who fits nowhere and is understood by no one, not even by himself. Some of the best thoughts in the book, and certainly all of the humor, come from him, and the reader is just contemplating more than a little pleasure from this source, when Wells, as if to rid his work of the only tangible character in it, has him break his neck while pruning a vine in the yard, falling off an ill-conceived apparatus consisting of a rickety old kitchen table, a step-ladder, and a garden roller, which rolled at the wrong moment.

"He was lying close by the garden door with his head queerly bent back against a broken and twisted rain water pipe, an expression of pacific content on his face, a bamboo curtain rod with a table knife tied to the end of it, still gripped in his hand.

"Arthur! I remember my mother crying with the strangest break in her voice, 'What are you doing there? Arthur—and Sunday!'"

Here we have told so simply that it is emphatic—one of the most ad-

mirable of Well's characteristics—the death of the father. From it, also, we get a small portion of the father's character, and also a bit—all that there is—of the mother's as well.

Richard Remington is an idealist, a dreamer who through "Love and Fine Thinking" hopes to bring the world to the end of its turmoil and strife, to an eternity of peace and orderliness, a millenium. But though "Love and fine thinking" is his favorite catch phrase and forms the keynote of his teaching, Remington is no saint. Though he lacks the quantity of escapades of Sinclair Lewis' hero, he is there with the quality. He is in truth the Elmer Gantry of socialism and statesmanship, of British literature.

It is this "animal humor," his queer indecent side, that forms the romantic element of the story. Little time is spent with romance. Well's merely bares Remington's sex views and lets them dominate him, forcing him out of public life when it seems as though he is on the road to achievement in everything but romance.

Remington at first attempts to reform the world as a liberal, groomed by Altiora Bailey and her husband. What these people were one can imagine from Well's description of Altiora: "Altiora thought trees

were hopelessly irregular and sea cliffs a great mistake." It is easily seen that a temperament like Remington's would tire of such grooming and soon he finds himself drifting to the Tories. Through his writing he soon reaches an important pinnacle of statesmanship with this group, and it is here that Isabel Rivers comes in.

Isabel was, to say the least, attractive, and she was intelligent. Remington is attracted—or fools himself into believing so—by her intelligence, and when she leaves Oxford he gives her a place on his weekly magazine. Close contact leads to intimacy, and "love will out," par-

ticularly when there are political enemies to search out scandal. It is up to Remington to choose between Isabel and fame, statesmanship and the world. He chooses Isabel.

It may not have been the main point intended by Wells—but if not, he devoted too much space to it—to show that the present system of education in England, the practice of leaving sex and things sexual to be discovered by contact and nature, is wrong. Throughout the book Remington bewails the fact that his parents failed to instruct him in sex, and that his school and college instructors utterly ignored the sex factor. There is no doubt that Wells

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The moral is to avoid situations where it is impossible to pause and refresh yourself—because whenever you can't is when you most wish you could. Fortunately, in normal affairs there's always a soda fountain or refreshment stand around the corner from anywhere with plenty of ice-cold Coca-Cola ready. And every day in the year 8 million people stop a minute, refresh themselves with this pure drink of natural flavors and are off again with the zest of a fresh start.

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IT HAD TO BE GOOD TO GET WHERE IT IS