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Contents

Editorial		1
David Lake	The Current Texts of Wells's Early SF Novels: Situation Unsatisfactory (Part 1)	3
R.D. Haynes	The Unholy Alliance of Science in <i>The Island of Doctor Moreau</i>	13
John Huntington	Wells and Social Class	25
James Dilloway	The World of H.G. Wells: A Tale of Stimulus and Response	33
Review Articles	Writing through Armageddon (Roger T. Stearn)	48
	Shadows and Glimpses (David C. Smith)	52
	Which shall it be? (Michael Draper)	54
List of Contributors		58
Recent Books and Articles on Wells		59

Editorial

As I write, I am the proud owner of some ninety volumes by H.G. Wells: hardcovers, paperbacks, first editions, reprints, facsimiles, bound fortnightly-parts, leaflets, posthumous compilations, mint-condition copies, copies torn, stained and/or burnt, copies with covers sober and outrageous, even translations into foreign tongues and simplified spelling (namely, "*Dhe Star*, publisht on behaaf ov dhe Simplified Speling Sosiëty bie Sur Iezak Pitman & Sunz"). Much as I treasure this motley collection, there are times - for example, after reading David Lake's essay herein on textual variants - when I dream of a proper Collected Edition of Wells, with a carefully-edited text printed on acid-free paper in an attractive jacket, perhaps accompanied by drawings and photographs, certainly accompanied by helpful notes and a sound introduction.

It so happens that my bibliographical dream is a timely one because in 1996, 101 years after publication of *The Time Machine*, Wells's work will go out of copyright in Britain. The opportunity will then exist for university presses and other publishers to reprint his books in any form they wish. His work is already out of copyright in the USA, where special scholarly editions have consequently begun to appear. So far as I know, however, no one has yet made the attempt to initiate a full-scale Collected Works, edited on consistent principles, with the intention of bringing Wells's writings before the public in the most pleasing and illuminating fashion possible.

I say a Collected, not a Complete, Works. To reprint every word Wells wrote would require over a hundred hefty volumes, some of which would probably command a readership too close to zero for comfort. Scholars and collectors will be able to get their hands on the first editions still, and much of Wells's best non-fictional work has been assembled on microfiche by former Wells Society Chairman, Bob Watkins (for Oxford Microform Publications, part of the Blackwell Group). My dream edition would therefore consist of the well-known fictional works, together with many of the lesser-known novels, plus generous selections from the non-fiction, some volumes combining several items with a common theme.

A standard edition such as this would take preeminence on the shelves of academic and public libraries, and some of its most popular texts could also be made available to the general public in a cheaper paperback version. Once a Collected Works of Wells has been produced - as sooner or later, for good or ill, it most certainly will be - it's going to be difficult for a later version, even a much better one,

to find buyers. The Wells Society must have members with the knowledge, skill and regard for Wells to do the job successfully; shouldn't those people be doing it first? If you have suggestions of any kind on this subject, please let me know.

Part Two of David Lake's article on the textual history of the scientific romances will appear in the 1989 *Wellsian*. If you want to learn whereabouts on the lunar surface the Cavorite sphere landed in *The First Men in the Moon*, and what would happen in real life if you exposed a slab of antigravity substance in the Earth's atmosphere, make sure you renew your subscription. All will be revealed next summer!

M.D.