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## REVIEW ARTICLES

### THE CORRESPONDENCE OF H.G. WELLS

David C. Smith, ed, *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells 1880-1946*. 4 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto. 1998. 2,234pp, index, notes. £275 1 85196 173 9

These four attractively produced volumes bring together in a convenient format 2800 of Wells's letters, many of them not previously published. Hitherto, the reader interested in Wells's correspondence has been given tantalising glimpses of the letters through those reproduced in his autobiography and in the biographies by Geoffrey West, Lovat Dickson, Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, and David Smith. Now for the first time the letters are brought together in a single compilation; the publisher and the editor are to be warmly congratulated on this initiative. (It should be noted however that these four volumes do not include the letters previously published from Wells to Henry James, Gissing, Bennett and Shaw. For these it is still necessary to refer to the separate volumes).

David Smith has performed a magnificent task in collecting and editing this immense body of correspondence. Prior to this, the letters were scattered throughout the world in libraries, universities and private collections; it was therefore a difficult, if not impossible, task to refer to the correspondence apart from extracts reproduced in the standard biographies.

This edition includes full critical apparatus including a biographical outline, a chronology, rules of transcription, and a detailed explanation of the principles of selection and editing. The letters themselves are helpfully annotated with explanatory notes containing background information on the recipients and on other points requiring explication. There is a comprehensive index arranged both by recipient and by subject. Patrick Parrinder contributes a most illuminating introductory essay, "Wells in his Letters", offering an overview of Wells as a correspondent of prodigious energy and interests.

One of the great joys of browsing through the correspondence is the delightful illustrations, many of which are reproduced here. Some of the letters are enlivened by amusing "picshuas" of people and places: letter 1031, for example, contains a

hilarious cartoon of prominent individuals including the Archbishop of Canterbury, J.L. Garvin and St Loe Strachey.

To read Wells's letters is to be struck afresh by his enormous energy and the wide range of interests. The letters include his comments on the multitudinous events of the twentieth century including the First and Second World Wars, the rise of Nazism, the Spanish Civil War, and the growing threats to freedom of speech and thought. David Smith has wisely decided to include Wells's letters to the press as well as to individual correspondents, so that by reading the correspondence in chronological order, one gains an overall impression of Wells's engagement with the issues of his time. The topics covered in the letters range from the fundamental issues of war and peace to minutely detailed instructions for making a cup of tea.

The abiding impression one gains from the correspondence is of a man who was fully engaged with the day-to-day concerns of his time and was simultaneously a friend and confidante who cherished lifelong friendships with a select band of colleagues. His letters to Elizabeth Healey, Morley Davies, Tommy Simmons and R.A. Gregory testify to his loyalty to the friendships he formed at South Kensington. One of the most moving letters of the collection is one written to Elizabeth Healey only weeks before his death insisting that "Stoicism has been my refuge all my life. Take what comes to you and help the weaker brethren to endure." Wells also emerges as a generous man, offering encouragement and practical help to those less fortunate than himself and sending messages of support to young and struggling writers.

In addition to letters to some of the outstanding personalities of his day including Rebecca West, Amber Reeves, Beatrice Webb, Bernard Shaw and G.K. Chesterton, the volumes also contain letters to his family, especially his mother, Sarah, his brother Fred and his wife, Amy Catherine ("Jane"). These are some of the most interesting items in the collection, witnessing to the warmth of his affections and his lifelong concern for the wellbeing of his family. The relationship between H.G. and his mother is a fascinating one which has perhaps not been fully explored in the biographies: the letters published here help us to understand that relationship with greater insight.

The volumes do contain a small number of errors that can no doubt be corrected in future editions. Joseph Wells died in 1910 not 1911. The photograph captioned "A literary weekend at Easton" was in fact taken at Warwick Castle. The landlady at Hunstanton was Mrs Crown not Mrs Crum. When Wells wrote to Morley

Davies to tell him he was divorcing Isabel he said he was doing this "as quietly as possible", not "as quickly as possible". Some of the letters are clearly in the wrong order – for example, letter 703, from Wells to Fisher Unwin, which belongs to October 1908 not 1907. But in a body of work as huge as this a few errors are bound to creep in, and some are no doubt caused by a misreading of Wells's tiny handwriting.

May one hope that in a future reprint some of the gaps in the collection can be filled? There must be many more letters to Amber Reeves, for example, and also to Odette Keun and Joseph Conrad. No doubt in time some of these lacunæ can be filled. Meanwhile, we should be grateful for a monumental assignment ably and conscientiously performed.

Students of Wells owe a debt of gratitude to David Smith for overtaking such an immense task with such devotion. Our understanding of Wells and his circle is bound to be enhanced by these splendid volumes.

John Hammond

#### POSTSCRIPT

The publication of H.G. Wells's correspondence is such a significant event for Wells enthusiasts that I have taken advantage of my position as an editor to add my own response to these volumes, and to add my congratulations. What is fascinating is that although, as John Hammond points out, there are now eight volumes of Wells's letters in print with another in prospect - and David Smith's edition alone includes 2798 letters, this is still only a fraction of H.G.'s vast output, and there are probably caches of letters which have not yet been discovered. This means, of course, that there is no way that the interests and needs of all readers can be catered for - I, for instance, would love to see the letters in which Wells negotiated the film rights for his books, but no doubt these would make dull reading for most readers. I would have liked, too, to have seen more emphasis on his ideas about writing and literature, but then the four already published collections - letters to Gissing, Bennett, Shaw and Henry James - focus on this aspect of his work.

One of the things which David Smith's compilation of H.G. Wells's letters has made me think about is why it is that we want to read other people's letters in the first place. Obviously, most of the people whose correspondence gets published are

famous in some way of other and therefore likely - as in Wells's case - to know and write to people who are also well-known. I suppose, too, that we feel letters are more open, more self-revelatory than published writings. This way we feel, we can know what the writer is *really* like. This an area that John Hammond looks at in his review: the way in which David Smith's selection gives us insights not only into the various facets of Wells's work and interests but also into different aspects of his character - his generosity and loyalty to old friends, for instance. After reading these letters, I did feel that I knew H.G. better than I had before, warts and all. Maybe that *is* what letters are all about.

Sylvia Hardy

### STOVERISM ONCE MORE

H.G. Wells. *"The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance": A Critical Text of the 1897 New York First Edition, with an Introduction and Appendices*. Ed. Leon Stover. 239 pp, index. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998. \$49.50. ISBN 0-7864-0410-8.

H.G. Wells. *"The First Men in the Moon": A Critical Text of the 1901 London First Edition, with an Introduction and Appendices*. Ed. Leon Stover. 321 pp, index. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998. \$55. ISBN 0-7864-0411-6.

Leon Stover is a retired professor of anthropology at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, whose campus was designed by the architect Mies van der Rohe. Mies's aesthetic gospel, repeated time and again during the mid-twentieth century heyday of modernist architecture, was that "Less is more". Stover, who regards Miesian architecture in much the same light as he regards Wellsian socialism, might take as his slogan "More is more". Certainly those who have seen the earlier volumes in his "Annotated H.G. Wells" series will know what to expect from the books under review.

As Wellsians, we all owe a considerable debt to Stover's provocations. He is (despite my reservations below) deeply versed in Wells's works, and, as Michael Sherborne put it in an admirably judicious review of the earlier "Annotated H.G. Wells" volumes (*Wellsian* no.19), he may be considered "Wells's most perceptive detractor since Chesterton". Sherborne, like other reviewers, felt obliged to point out

the many shortcomings of these editions of the scientific romances. Stover is loquacious, frequently swamping the Wellsian text in repetitive and partisan commentary; his annotations are often fanciful and sometimes grossly inaccurate; and rather than considering the scientific romances on their own merits, he (mis)reads the earlier Wells in terms of the later Wells. Unfortunately, the new editions repeat most of the same arguments and exhibit all the same faults that their predecessors did.

At first glance, one might imagine that they were formidable pieces of scholarship. Stover's introductions and annotations are littered with parenthetical references in the somewhat intimidating form known as "MLA style". Even the barest factual statement is given a reference: Stover needs a 1902 Baedeker to assure us that Smithfield was London's central meat market, and the (somewhat irrelevant) information that the former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro was murdered by the Red Brigades in 1977 is credited to "Pickering *et al.* 1922: 514" (*The Invisible Man* 22). But here, as often, reference is not what it seems: the date "1922" is obviously a misprint, and "Pickering *et al.*" turn out to be the editors of *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, one of the numerous general reference books from which Stover derives much of his information. We have the parade of continuous scholarship but not the reality, and sometimes the standard reference works are misused. His reading of *Brewer's Dictionary* seems to have persuaded Stover, on no other evidence, that the cocoanut shy at Iping on Whit Monday was in fact an "illegal cockshy". Trying to work out what has led Stover to this unsupported conclusion, we realise that he has confused Whit Monday with Shrove Tuesday, which was once an important day in the cockfighting calendar (*The Invisible Man* 101).

Apart from standard reference books, the highest proportion of Stover's MLA-style citations are of works by Stover himself, and by H.G. Wells. Even the innocuous statement that Wells was a Bachelor of Science and Fellow of the Zoological Society has to be glossed "(Stover 1996b: 2,n)", though all this means is that the same information was given in Stover's edition of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. When Stover mentions Ernest Renan's *The Future of Science* (1891) he adds that "Wells's familiarity with th[is] work, and his frequent reliance on it, is documented in "Stover (1987a: 88f)" (*The First Men in the Moon* 31). The reader who turns to Stover's book *The Prophetic Soul* in search of the promised documentation will be heavily disappointed. Likewise, Stover's claim that *Brave New World* is a satire on Wells's managerial utopia in *The First Men in the Moon*,