

Watts's volume is unexplained and distinctly odd, being neither chronological nor thematic and bearing no relation to Wells's own ordering of them in his various published volumes. The notes, however, would be hard to improve upon.¹

It would be tedious to pick out the various errors in the other introductions and sets of notes, although rather too many can be found. (I was particularly disappointed to find Laurence Davies repeating the old *canard* that 'little Rosebery' in *The Time Machine* is the name of a racehorse, a myth that was disproved in a scholarly article by Nicholas Ruddick in 2001 – as anyone googling 'little Rosebery' will quickly discover.) It is easy to imagine young readers, new to Wells, who will be fascinated and thrilled by these volumes, and the fact that they have been published testifies to the belief that reading Wells for the first time can still change people's lives. At the same time, I would firmly suggest that citations of Wells's writings from the Wordsworth Classics editions should be permanently banned by *The Wellsian* and other scholarly journals. The texts are simply not reliable or consistent enough.

H. G. WELLS, *CHRISTINA ALBERTA'S FATHER* (LONDON: PETER OWEN, 2017) ISBN 978-0-7206-1939-3 (PB) £9.99; *MR. BLETTSWORTHY ON RAMPOLE ISLAND* (LONDON: PETER OWEN, 2017) ISBN 978-0-7206-1943-0 (PB) £9.99 [PATRICK PARRINDER]

Since the copyrights in Wells's works published during his lifetime have now lapsed, we may hope to see new editions of a number of his lesser-known titles. Already, the 2015 Penguin reprint of *The Rights of Man* (1940) seems to have enjoyed an unexpected success. Now Peter Owen have republished his novels *Christina Alberta's Father* (1925) and *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* (1928) with excellent new introductions by Michael Sherborne.

Blettsworthy, it is true, has never been entirely forgotten. Most notably, its curious blend of scientific romance and contemporary

¹ Watts, however, echoes many previous scholars in giving the first publication of 'The Door in the Wall' as being in the *Daily Chronicle* on 14 July 1906. A study of the British Library microfilm of this newspaper shows no trace of Wells's story. In fact, it was printed in a special Summer Supplement published on or around 7 July, and not – at least, in this instance – bound in with the daily newspaper. No surviving copy has yet been traced.

commentary was singled out by Julius Kagarlitsky in *The Life and Thought of H. G. Wells* (1966). It was, Kagarlitsky wrote, ‘an integral, forceful, deep book, filled with civic passion, wit, bitterness, fantasy – in a word, the kind of novel that, it had seemed, Wells had forgotten how to write’. In 1978 it was the subject of a scholarly article by Roger Bowen in *The Wellsian*, and Bowen’s example has been followed by others including myself. *Christina Alberta’s Father* is a very different matter, and I confess that until this new edition came along I had barely opened it since my PhD research in the late 1960s.

Necessarily, Michael Sherborne’s introduction to *Blettsworthy* begins by invoking Wells’s earlier and much more famous ‘dystopian island’ romance, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Arnold Blettsworthy, like Edward Prendick, is introduced as a ‘Gentleman of Culture and Refinement’, but the two novels are quite different in plan: Blettsworthy begins by telling of his birth and upbringing, and – sometime after his period as an island castaway – he describes his experiences as a soldier in the First World War. Before that, he has undergone mental treatment in New York. Is he insane, or is it a question of the whole world’s insanity? And how, exactly, should we interpret his memories of Rampole Island? As Sherborne warns new readers, there are ‘some deceptive waters ahead’.

It is true that, in the final chapter of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Prendick returns from his ordeal on Moreau’s island to confront what he now sees to be a totally insane world. Back in London, he finds himself surrounded by Beast Folk at every turn, and he is the first of Wells’s many characters to be forced to consult a mental specialist. To the reader, nevertheless, the England which now horrifies Prendick is still pretty much the staid and civilised country which had been shocked to the core by Dr Moreau’s experiments. After the Great War, this underlying continuity of civilised values was no longer credible – or such, at least, was the message of *Blettsworthy* and *Christina Alberta’s Father*, two novels exemplifying Wells’s developing interests in psychoanalysis, mental trauma and theories of the unconscious.

Albert Edward Preemby, Wells’s protagonist in the 1925 novel, is at once a comic ‘little man’ and an insatiable dabbler in the occult. Taking part in an impromptu séance, his life is transformed by a communication informing him that he is the reincarnation of the ancient Sumerian emperor Sargon I. Moreover, he has a mission to set the world to rights as Sargon, the King of Kings, once did. Sherborne describes Preemby as a ‘projection of Wells as he secretly feared he might be – an earnest little man trying to save

the world but deluding himself about his own importance', but it may be that contemporary satire is also in play here. Psychological research was still a going concern in what Wells, in the novel's opening paragraph, calls 'the age of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, broadcasting, and the first Labour peers'. 1925 was the year both of *Christina Alberta's Father* and of W. B. Yeats's *A Vision*, a cosmic, cyclical theory of history which he claimed was dictated to him by spirits using his wife as a medium. Conan Doyle too was a noted occultist, who published his *History of Spiritualism* in 1926. Preemby's own reading matter apparently includes D. H. Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922). So Wells's 'little man' is in some rather exalted company. But, not being a famous writer, he has to undergo a series of humiliating experiences including confinement in a mental asylum. Here, Wells can claim to be a pioneer in exposing the inhumane treatment of mental patients; and, as Sherborne reminds us, one of *Christina Alberta's* most ardent admirers was C. G. Jung.

Preemby, or Sargon, escapes from the asylum with the help of a shell-shocked Great War veteran, Robert Roothing. (Indeed, this part of the novel is an exciting adventure narrative which suggests that Wells had been reading not just Conan Doyle but John Buchan.) Preemby then becomes the patient of a sympathetic psychiatrist, while Roothing falls in love with the forcefully feminist Christina Alberta: but in this traumatised post-War world the outcome is not what we may have expected: Christina Alberta, unlike Ann Veronica whose successor she is in many respects, does not seek fulfilment in marriage. She is one of the 'New People' of the post-War world, a political and sexual radical who talks (or so the puzzled Roothing reflects) 'like the people in some horrible Utopia by Wells'. But *Christina Alberta's Father* is far from being a utopia, and in it we find, not the hectoring 'social prophet' side of Wells, but one capable of listening with great sensitivity to the post-War new age. This is a novel which will surely find new readers in our ever more disconcerting twenty-first century.

The two books come in handsome paperback volumes, with texts photographically reproduced from their respective first editions – with one unfortunate omission. In each case, the initial contents page has been left out. In *Blettsworthy*, the publishers have reprinted the summaries of contents preceding Chapters 2, 3 and 4, but not that before Chapter 1. In *Christina Alberta's Father*, we are no longer shown in advance the plan of the novel's three Books, 'The Coming of Sargon', 'The World Rejects Sargon' and 'The Resurrection of Sargon'. These lists of contents were carefully crafted by Wells, and their absence is a blemish on two very fine volumes.