

H. G. WELLS *and* HARRODS

"Our only paymaster ought to be the reader"

Recently Harrods ventured to invite three of our greatest Masters of the Written Word to lend the influence of their pens to the cause of Business. By permission, and without comment, Harrods publish their replies. The second—that of Mr. H. G. Wells—appears below:

I'M afraid I cannot do what you ask because I have my mind quite full with other work, and even if that were not so, I think I should have to decline your offer.

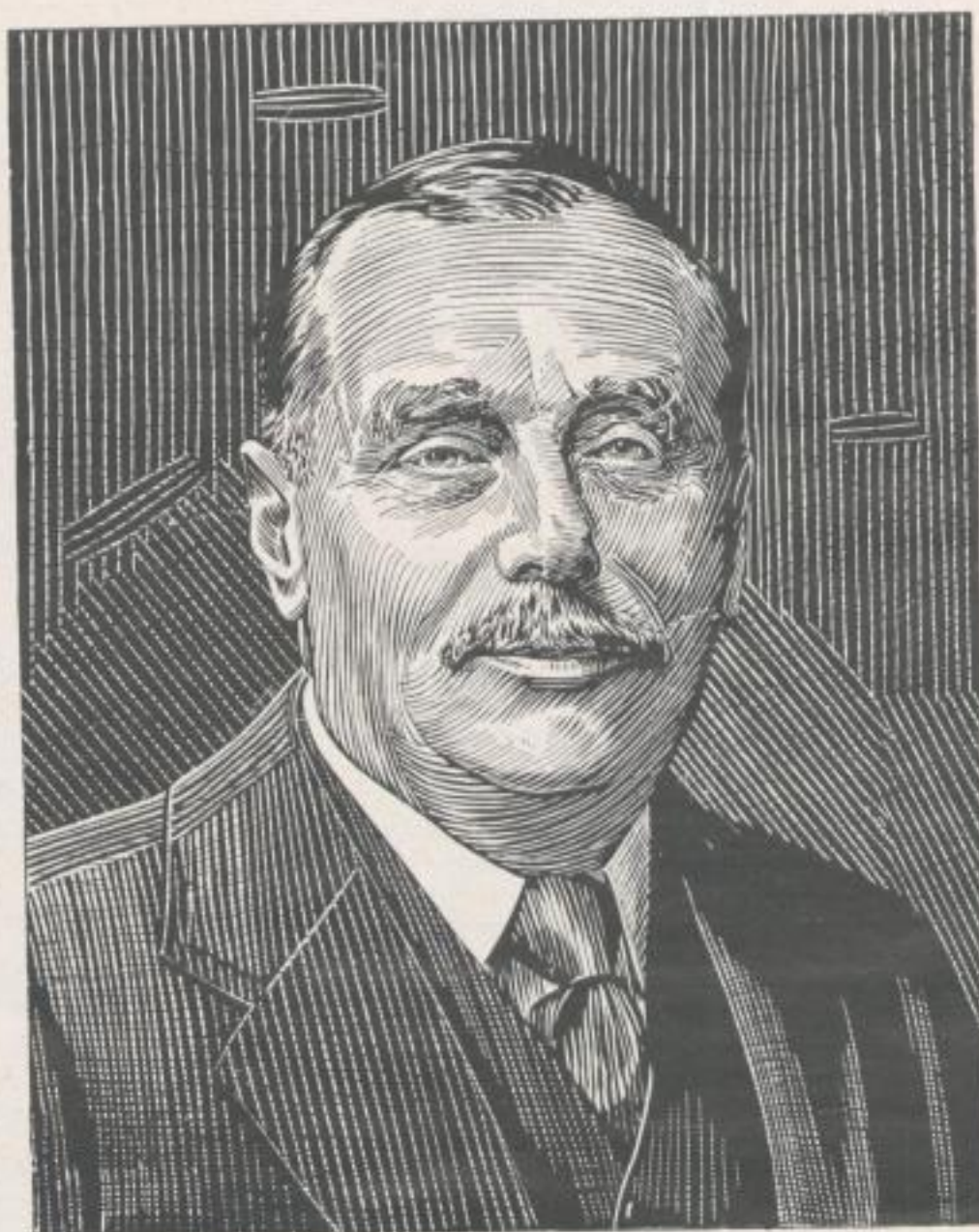
I feel I must decline, but I find I have to rout about in my mind, to discover the hidden, almost instinctive reason for that refusal.

A writer, you say, is a skilled professional, an artist. Why should he not do what all artists, architects, technicians, and so forth do, and place his skill at your disposal?

The answer is that, rightly or wrongly, the writer takes himself more seriously than that. In his heart he classes himself not with the artists but with the teachers and the priests and prophets. That may be an old view, and it may be going out of fashion.

We all believe, of our generation, deep in our foundations, that our only paymaster ought to be the reader. We live on sales to readers and we don't accept fees. There is, we feel, an implicit understanding between writer and reader to that effect. Publishers and newspapers may buy our work for considerable sums, but that is merely a speculative anticipation of the reader's tribute.

Apart from that your project is most attractive. I can imagine nothing more amusing and exciting



than to study your marvellous organisation closely and explain its working.

Some day I shall do something of the sort and come to you for particulars. But you will pay me nothing for that. I shall do it because it will interest me and because I think it will interest my readers. Facts you may give me with both hands, but not money.

I have already sketched the appearance of your type of business in *Clissold* and of something distantly akin in *Tono Bungay*. I have long thought of coming closer to facts and tracing the actual development of some great distributing firm.

H. G. Wells

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