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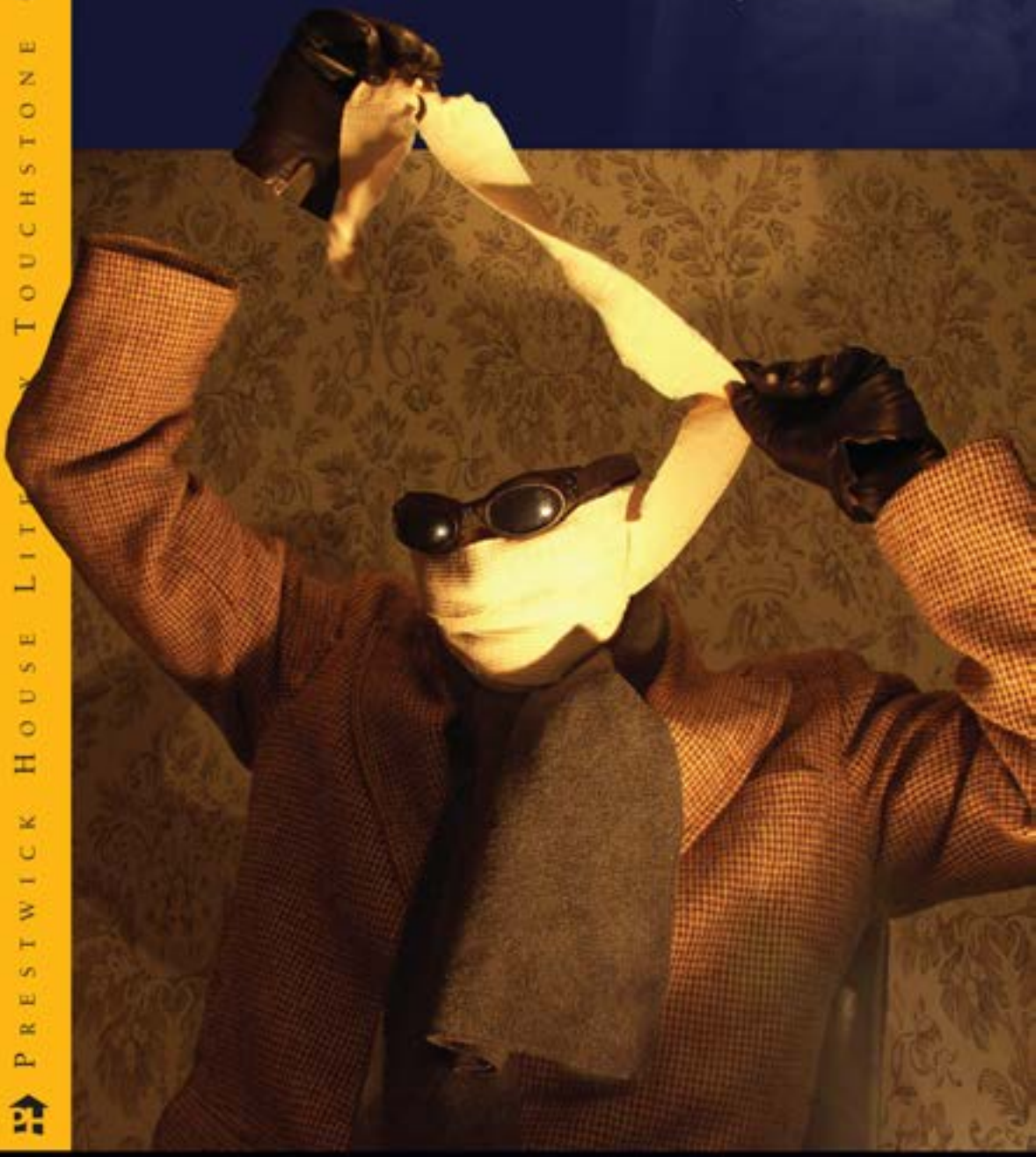
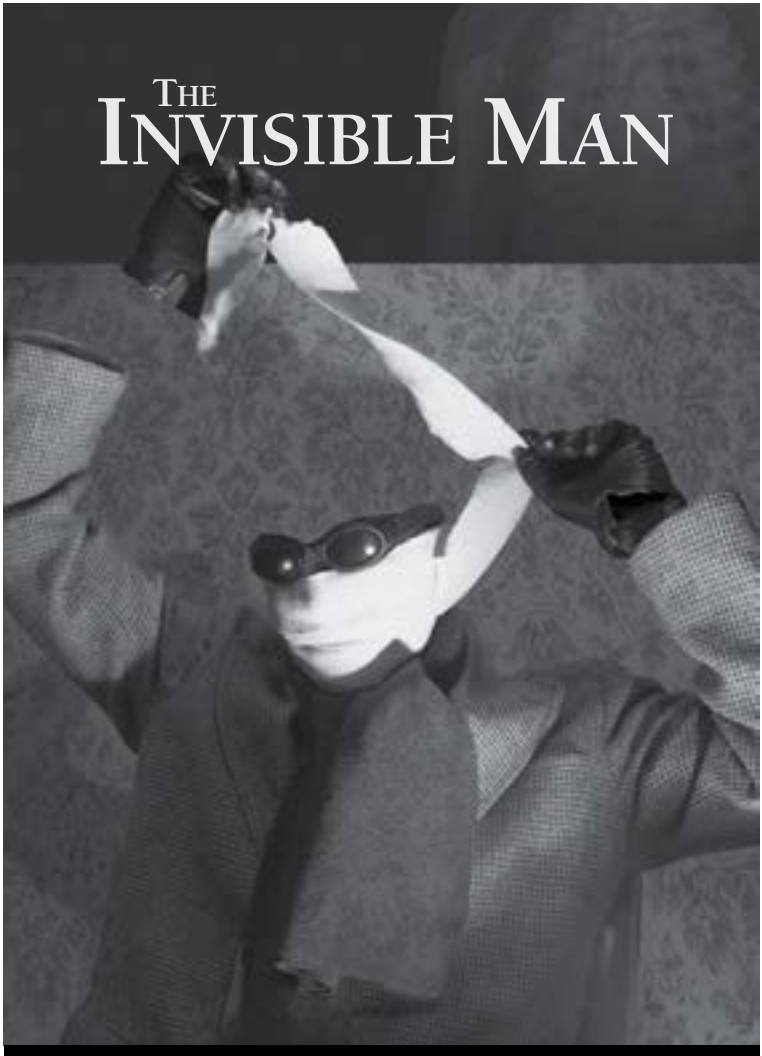
The Invisible Man

by H. G. Wells



UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES



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THE INVISIBLE MAN

BY H.G. WELLS

CONTENTS

NOTES

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

H. G. WELLS

Wells sometime before 1916.

HERBERT GEORGE WELLS was born on September 21, 1866, in Kent, England, to a working-class family, who felt that the child would assume his proper place in British society as a common laborer. After a series of menial jobs that disgusted him, Wells found some pleasure as a teaching assistant, and he completed college in 1888.

Wells married a cousin, Isabel Mary Wells, then divorced her; he later married Amy Catherine Robbins, and, despite his numerous affairs, they remained together until her death in 1927.

His first successful book, *The Time Machine*, published serially in magazines and eventually as a book in 1895, was immediately popular with both critics and the public. Consequently, Wells had no financial worries for the rest of his life.

H. G. Wells in 1907 at the door of his house at Sandgate.

His next three books are very well known and helped cement his reputation as the "father of modern science fiction": *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Wells also gained notoriety through his support of various causes, among them equal rights for women, evolution, socialism, and the improvement of humanity through the application of scientific principles. Despite his desires to be an advocate for social change, Wells is better known and respected for his many writings, which have been enormously successful through the years, both as novels and as movies.

H. G. Wells in 1943.

H. G. Wells died of cancer in 1946, living long enough to see many of the ideas he formulated in his novels come to fruition.

Pointers

Reading Pointers

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

Consider these points as you read *The Invisible Man*:

Griffin as a sympathetic character: Throughout the course of the story, it is difficult, at times, to view Griffin as a sympathetic character. In the beginning, his privacy is compromised, but his insolence, anger, arrogance, and seemingly evil nature make it hard for the reader to like his character. As the story progresses, it becomes even more difficult, based on Griffin's lack of empathy for others. In the end, however, it is clear that Griffin truly is a character deserving of respect because of his past and the implied reasoning for his scientific research.

Psychological: Griffin's mental state is a direct result of the scientific advancement he has made. Becoming invisible has caused him to lose touch with the rest of humanity; therefore, he has also lost many of the emotions essential for a successful social life. Once invisible, Griffin's character is changed, and he no longer values human life. Even though we have little knowledge of his personality prior to the discovery of invisibility, he does go through psychological changes throughout the course of the story.

Societal pressures: As the story begins, Griffin desires his privacy, but because his appearance is suspicious and his actions odd and curious, the townspeople are unable to make much sense out of him, a serious situation in a small English town in the late nineteenth century. Griffin, too, is suspicious of the motives of the townspeople. He has a secret he wants to keep and does not want to risk betrayal. Take note of the result that occurs because of the townspeople's curiosity. In addition, a very important and subtle piece of information is divulged in the Epilogue that reveals Griffin's own motive for wanting to become invisible.

Industrialization: *The Invisible Man*, written by Wells in 1897, seems to be pinpointing the problematic nature of scientific and industrial advances that he saw as having harmed society physically and psychologically. Griffin, a man with expansive knowledge, longs to discover a scientific breakthrough.

He reached his goal, but it does not turn out as he had planned because neither society nor the individual can cope with the magnitude of the discovery of invisibility.

Societal fears of the *Different*: Griffin was viewed as different, even before he became invisible because of his physical appearance. Once his experiment was successful, however, he became a threat to society because of his knowledge and the power he obtained (or the power society thought he obtained) from his invisibility. What problems does Griffin encounter with his invisibility that he did not account for prior to becoming invisible? Why were these problems overlooked? Keep these questions in mind as you read through the story.

The Epilogue: Wells' use of irony is apparent throughout the course of this story, but especially in the Epilogue. The innkeeper is depicted as a common man, poor, without family, seemingly ordinary in all respects, but he lies about the Invisible Man's secrets. The landlord, as the only one who possesses Griffin's notebooks, says that he would not use the power of invisibility as Griffin did if he were able to decipher the code. But Wells concludes by having him say, "I'd just—well!" This final comment makes the reader wonder if humanity's acquisition of forbidden knowledge is worthwhile.

CHAPTER I

The Strange Man's Arrival

THE STRANGER CAME early in February, one wintry day, through a biting wind and a driving snow, the last snowfall of the year, over the down,† walking from Bramblehurst railway station, and carrying a little black portmanteau in his thickly gloved hand. He was wrapped up from head to foot, and the brim of his soft felt hat hid every inch of his face but the shiny tip of his nose; the snow had piled itself against his shoulders and chest, and added a white crest to the burden he carried. He staggered into the Coach and Horses,† more dead than alive, and flung his portmanteau down. "A fire," he cried, "in the name of human charity! A room and a fire!" He stamped and shook the snow from off himself in the bar, and followed Mrs. Hall into her guest parlour to strike his bargain.† And with that much introduction, that and a couple of sovereigns flung upon the table, he took up his quarters in the inn.

Mrs. Hall lit the fire and left him there while she went to prepare him a meal with her own hands. A guest to stop at Iping† in the wintertime was an unheard-of piece of luck, let alone a guest who was no "haggler," and she was resolved to show herself worthy of her good fortune. As soon as the bacon was well under way, and Millie, her lymphatic aid, had been brisked up† a bit by a few deftly chosen expressions of contempt, she carried the cloth, plates, and glasses into the parlour and began to lay them with the utmost *éclat*.† Although the fire was burning up briskly, she was surprised

†Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

to see that her visitor still wore his hat and coat, standing with his back to her and staring out of the window at the falling snow in the yard. His gloved hands were clasped behind him, and he seemed to be lost in thought. She noticed that the melting snow that still sprinkled his shoulders dripped upon her carpet. "Can I take your hat and coat, sir?" she said, "and give them a good dry in the kitchen?"

"No," he said without turning.

She was not sure she had heard him, and was about to repeat her question.

He turned his head and looked at her over his shoulder. "I prefer to keep them on," he said with emphasis, and she noticed that he wore big blue spectacles with sidelights,† and had a bushy side-whisker† over his coat-collar that completely hid his cheeks and face.

"Very well, sir," she said. "*As* you like. In a bit the room will be warmer."

He made no answer, and had turned his face away from her again, and Mrs. Hall, feeling that her conversational advances were ill-timed, laid the rest of the table things in a quick staccato and whisked out of the room. When she returned he was still standing there, like a man of stone, his back hunched, his collar turned up, his dripping hat-brim turned down, hiding his face and ears completely. She put down the eggs and bacon with considerable emphasis, and called rather than said to him, "Your lunch is served, sir."

"Thank you," he said at the same time, and did not stir until she was closing the door. Then he swung round and approached the table with a certain eager quickness.

As she went behind the bar to the kitchen she heard a sound repeated at regular intervals. Chirk, chirk, chirk, it went, the sound of a spoon being rapidly whisked round a basin. "That girl!" she said. "There! I clean forgot it. It's her being so long!" And while she herself finished mixing the mustard, she gave Millie a few verbal stabs for her excessive slowness. She had cooked the ham and eggs, laid the table,† and done everything, while Millie (help indeed!) had only succeeded in delaying the mustard. And him a new guest and wanting to stay! Then she filled the mustard pot, and, putting it with a certain stateliness upon a gold and black tea-tray, carried it into the parlour.

She rapped and entered promptly. As she did so her visitor moved quickly, so that she got but a glimpse of a white object disappearing behind the table. It would seem he was picking something from the floor. She rapped down the mustard pot on the table, and then she noticed the overcoat and hat had been taken off and put over a chair in front of the fire, and a pair of wet boots threatened rust to her steel fender.† She went to these

things resolutely. "I suppose I may have them to dry now," she said in a voice that brooked no denial.

"Leave the hat," said her visitor, in a muffled voice, and turning she saw he had raised his head and was sitting and looking at her.

For a moment she stood gaping at him, too surprised to speak.

He held a white cloth—it was a *serviette* he had brought with him—over the lower part of his face, so that his mouth and jaws were completely hidden, and that was the reason of his muffled voice. But it was not that which startled Mrs. Hall. It was the fact that all his forehead above his blue glasses was covered by a white bandage, and that another covered his ears, leaving not a scrap of his face exposed excepting only his pink, peaked nose. It was bright, pink, and shiny just as it had been at first. He wore a dark-brown velvet jacket with a high, black, linen-lined collar turned up about his neck. The thick black hair, escaping as it could below and between the cross bandages, projected in curious tails and horns, giving him the strangest appearance conceivable. This muffled and bandaged head was so unlike what she had anticipated, that for a moment she was rigid.

He did not remove the *serviette*,† but remained holding it, as she saw now, with a brown gloved hand, and regarding her with his inscrutable blue glasses. "Leave the hat," he said, speaking very distinctly through the white cloth.

Her nerves began to recover from the shock they had received. She placed the hat on the chair again by the fire. "I didn't know, sir," she began, "that—" and she stopped embarrassed.

"Thank you," he said drily, glancing from her to the door and then at her again.

"I'll have them nicely dried, sir, at once," she said, and carried his clothes out of the room. She glanced at his white-swathed head and blue goggles again as she was going out of the door; but his napkin was still in front of his face. She shivered a little as she closed the door behind her, and her face was eloquent of her surprise and perplexity. "I *never*," she whispered. "There!" She went quite softly to the kitchen, and was too preoccupied to ask Millie what she was messing about with *now*, when she got there.

The visitor sat and listened to her retreating feet. He glanced inquiringly at the window before he removed his *serviette*, and resumed his meal. He took a mouthful, glanced suspiciously at the window, took another mouthful, then rose and, taking the *serviette* in his hand, walked across the room and pulled the blind down to the top of the white muslin that obscured the lower panes. This left the room in a twilight. This done, he returned with an easier air to the table and his meal.

"The poor soul's had an accident or an op'ration or somethin'," said Mrs. Hall. "What a turn them bandages did give me, to be sure!"†

Glossary

Chapter I

the down – an open field

the Coach and Horses – a local inn in the town of Iping (See note: *Iping* below.)

"**strike his bargain**" – arrange the payment for his lodgings

Iping – a town about 50-60 miles southwest of London, England

"**brisked up**" – made more lively by criticism

éclat – [*French*] obvious brilliance; great success

"**laid the table**" – set the table

sidelights – sidepieces for glasses to block peripheral vision

side-whisker – sideburns

steel fender – In many older homes, a semi-permanent, heavy metal support stood on the hearth in front of a fireplace and resembled the bumper of a car.

serviette – [*French*] a cloth napkin

"**What a turn…to be sure!**" – [*dialect/slang*] possibly referring to Mrs. Hall's becoming upset when she sees her guest's face bandaged so severely

clothes-horse – a term used for what is now called a (wooden) valet, on which can be hung trousers, a vest, and a suit jacket; for temporary use before hanging clothes in a closet

"**man with a trap**" – a term used for a person who owned and drove a light, two-wheeled carriage and who could be hired to deliver goods

Chapter II

clock-jobber – a title used for a clock repairman or watchmaker

"**…lit his eyes…railway signals…**" – a simile used to invoke an image of red lights, a symbol for danger or warning (seen at railroad crossings); note the contrast between the lights and the stranger's darkness.

"**…a vast…his face.**" – This instance of foreshadowing hints as to why the stranger is bandaged.

"**taken aback**" – shocked, surprised

"**And presently…**" – a term meaning "soon" or in a "short while"

"**on the morrow**" – the next morning; tomorrow

Sidderbridge Junction – a small village with a public house where travelers could purchase food and drink

"**wropped**" – [*dialect*] wrapped

"**rum un**" – [*dialect*] a British saying for "strange one"

"**rated**" – [*dialect*] a shortened form of *berated*; scolded

"**wim'** " – [*dialect*] women

Vocabulary

Chapter I
animation – adding life to
audible – able to be heard
brevity – shortness, conciseness
brooked – tolerated
concisely – quickly
contempt – hatred, dislike
deftly – quickly and skillfully
eloquent – clearly expressive
haggler – an argumentative person; a bickerer
hitherto – until that time; up to this point; thus far
impenetrable – unable to be seen through or penetrated
inscrutable – mysterious
lymphatic – here meaning sluggish
muslin – cotton material
obscured – made unnoticeable
perplexity – confusion
portmanteau – a suitcase; briefcase
resolutely – firmly, with perseverance
resolved – made up one's mind
scythe – a long, curved, sharp blade attached to a pole and used for cutting down tall grass or plants
staccato – in an abrupt way; quick
stateliness – dignity
sovereigns – coins
swathed – wrapped
tangent – a thought or action unrelated to the current thought process or situation

Chapter II
apprehension – nervousness
ascertain – to figure out; determine
computations – calculations
constitutionally – naturally
conveyance – a carriage; transportation
excruciating – agonizing
germinated – took root and grew; sprouted
grotesque – extremely misshapen, distorted or unnatural-looking; bizarre, unusual
humbugging – faking, pretending
interminable – seemingly endless; continual
indistinct – not clear
ruddy – reddish in color