

Alan G. James, ed.. *The Master, the Modern Major General, and His Clever Wife: Henry James's Letters to Field Marshal Lord Wolseley and Lady Wolseley, 1878-1913.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. liii + 202 pp. \$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-3271-2.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Whenever a collection of letters as incomplete and seemingly arcane as those between the novelist Henry James and Lord and Lady Wolseley is published, it gives the impression of academic segmentation run amuck. Alan G. James's brilliant editorial work serves to disprove this and reveals the tremendous complexity, not only of Henry James's relationship to the Wolsleys, but also of elite British society in the late nineteenth century. His efforts add a new depth to not only the study of Henry James, a field already crowded with biographies and a host of other published collections of the man's correspondence, but to the larger understanding of the relationships which defined British political and social developments.

Comprised of 112 letters, almost exclusively from James to the Wolsleys as James destroyed all but two of their responses, the collection demonstrates that, while the Wolsleys were far from the only people James enjoyed extensive correspondence with, their friendship did serve an important role in his life. In addition to providing him with both an intellectual and emotional grounding, they also gave him access to some of the highest levels of British society. Alan James draws from a wide variety of sources including a host of other letters by Henry James to illuminate

the complex relationships between James and the Wolsleys which evolved as their friendship progressed. He argues that despite political differences, stemming from issues like Lord Wolseley's leadership during the Boer War, and the complexities of social interaction in late Victorian Britain, James and the Wolsleys maintained a strong friendship. Alan James argues that Lady Wolseley, in particular, was an adept socialite as well as a voracious bibliophile and thus a consummate ally and confidante for Henry James.

Lady Wolseley's correspondence with James began in late 1879 and displayed a degree of formality which both reflected the flowery but stifling style of the day and the slow development of their friendship. Partially this was the result of James' ambiguous position within society as an American living in England and as a writer. But it may also reflect the fleeting nature of their meetings as Lady Wolseley negotiated the contours of elite British society often without her husband, whose peripatetic military career took him to almost every corner of the British Empire. After 1886, James's increasing literary reputation coincided with Lord Wolseley's growing popular military fame after his leadership of the victorious Tel-el Kebir campaign in Egypt and the failed mission to rescue General Gordon in the Sudan cata-

pulted him to national acclaim. This brought Wolseley promotion to high command and a peerage, which meant that he spent increasing amounts of time in the British Isles and consequently the letters between the Wolseleys and James became more and more frequent. They ranged in topic from the mundane, like Lady Wolseley's advice on James' furniture purchases and the social events of the day, to James's counsel of Lord Wolseley in his efforts towards crafting a biography of the first Duke of Marlborough. The period from 1886 to 1895 represents the pinnacle of the volume and variety of correspondence between James and the Wolseleys, which still focused primarily on mundane topics like dinner plans or invitations to weekends in the country. What makes the letters fascinating far beyond the rather pedestrian nature of their content is Alan James's annotation, which allows the reader to understand every passing reference to a different elite personage who populated Henry James's and the Wolseley's world. It reveals not only how politically and socially connected the Wolseleys were, but also the complex interconnections which characterized elite life in Britain. For example, during the late 1880s, James lived in close proximity to Robert Browning, the Scottish poet, while socializing with the Wolseleys who in turn were close friends of both Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales. These connections would prove vital to the advancement of both James's and Wolseley's careers. But while James's prominence and success grew steadily, the crisis in South Africa and increasingly poor health brought Lord Wolseley's to a abrupt halt. Despite Lord Wolseley's death in 1913, James and Lady Wolseley remained close friends, although they ceased their correspondence, instead speaking on the telephone, until James's death in 1916.

This collection of letters occupies an ambiguous position within the larger historiography of Victorian elite society as well as of Henry James. It certainly is not an authoritative collection of James letters, nor does it function as a complete

or effective biography of James or the Wolseleys, but, it does have a far broader usefulness than its relatively narrow scope would suggest. It provides a fascinating window into life in late Victorian Britain and could also be an invaluable teaching tool as Alan James's annotation would provide students with information that could make these obscure documents illustrative of the period's social structures and interpersonal relations. Overall, this work brilliantly illustrates how excellent scholarship can turn undervalued archival materials into highly relevant, readable, and enjoyable publications.

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