



**CORE CLASSICS**

**ABRIDGED FOR YOUNG READERS**

# **The Time Machine**

**BY H. G. WELLS**



# The Time Machine

## An Invention

*by*  
H. G. Wells

**CORE CLASSICS®**

EDITOR FOR THIS VOLUME  
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ISBN 978-1-68380-881-7

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PRINTED IN CANADA

CORE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION  
801 EAST HIGH STREET  
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22902

[www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org)



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This Core Classics edition of *The Time Machine* uses the chapter divisions and titles from the first British edition published by the William Heinemann company in May 1895, with the exception of Chapter 1, which uses the chapter title as it appeared in January 1895 in the journal called the *New Review*. In later editions, the author divided the book into twelve chapters and an Epilogue, and removed the chapter titles.

# INTRODUCTION

**T**he *Time Machine*, the first novel by the British writer H. G. Wells, is one of the pioneering works of science fiction. When the book was first published in 1895, people didn't refer to it as science fiction — that term only came into use some decades later in the twentieth century. Instead, they often called such novels “scientific romances.” In this case, *romance* doesn't mean a love story but a story full of imaginative adventures.

Science fiction stories use facts and ideas from science and technology to make the fantastical seem possible. Some science fiction writers strive to be technically accurate and highly believable; others use science as a starting point to take off into realms of fantasy. H. G. Wells, who is sometimes called “the father of science fiction,” showed how science fiction can entertain while also examining moral questions about human behavior, identity, and destiny.

*The Time Machine* was so successful that Wells quickly went on to write more science fiction novels, including some you may know, such as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*.

Those stories remain popular to this day. *The Time Machine* has been turned into movies, comic books, graphic novels, and even a (very loosely adapted) musical.

Why has *The Time Machine* remained so popular? Partly because it's a thrilling adventure, full of mystery, suspense, and narrow escapes. Or maybe it has something to do with the deep emotional appeal of the idea of time travel—even if you don't (as H. G. Wells did) imagine the details of a machine to take you through time, whenever you think, "If only I could go back and change what I did," or, "If only I could go forward and see what's going to happen," you are, in a way, wishing to time travel.

H. G. Wells, however, wasn't much interested in how time travel might personally affect an individual. His main character, known simply as the Time Traveler, does not go back to his childhood, nor does he go ahead to see how his life turns out. Instead, in his invention, the Time Machine, he leaps far, far ahead, past the year 800,000.

Why go so far ahead in time? There's a clue in a comment that Wells made about forty years after writing *The Time Machine*. In a radio interview, he said, "The more you go ahead, the more you

seem to get entangled with the burning questions of your own time.”

When *The Time Machine* first came out as a novel, Wells’s “own time” was the late Victorian era in England, named after Queen Victoria, who reigned from 1837 to 1901. The Victorian era was a time of great technological change. New factories churned out new products. Steam-powered railroads transformed trips that once took days into hours. The telegraph made it possible to communicate across long distances almost instantaneously.

These innovations and others led to many changes in society, not all of them good. Cities suffered from overcrowding, pollution, and disease. There was a growing gap between wealth and poverty—the rich got richer, the poor got poorer. Despite these social problems, many people in Victorian England held a confident faith in progress and looked forward to an ever-brighter future.

Was this progress real or an illusion? Were people making the world a better place or worse? Was humanity headed toward a bright future or something darker? These are some of the “burning questions” that fueled the imagination of H. G. Wells as he wrote *The Time Machine*.



While shaping the story, Wells's mind was buzzing with the ideas of various thinkers of the Victorian era. Before you jump into the adventure of *The Time Machine*, let's very briefly meet some of those thinkers, including two—Karl Marx and Charles Darwin—whose ideas remain influential and controversial to this day. We'll begin, however, with Henry George, a writer who is less remembered now but whose work was talked about around the world in Wells's time.

### ***Henry George: Progress and Poverty***

In 1879, the American writer Henry George published *Progress and Poverty*, a book that had a great influence around the world, and on the young H. G. Wells.

In *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George asked why great technological advances brought not only great wealth but also great poverty. In the modern world, he said, "It is true that wealth has been greatly increased, and that the average of comfort, leisure, and refinement has been raised." But not everyone shared in this progress. Instead, he said, "It is as though an immense wedge were being forced . . . through society. Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who

are below are crushed down.” The result, he said, was that “material progress does not merely fail to relieve poverty—it actually produces it.”

As Henry George saw it, “This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times . . . . It is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization.” (You might recall that in mythology, the Sphinx—a creature with a lion’s body and a human head—posed a riddle to all who came near, and killed anyone who could not answer correctly.)

Henry George questioned whether the many improvements achieved by modern civilization could really be thought of as progress. He said, “So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent.”

When he first encountered Henry George’s ideas, H. G. Wells was a young man struggling to make a living. Every day he was confronted by the frustrating reality of the gap between the Haves and Have-Nots. As Wells later recalled, *Progress and Poverty* gave him an “extremely simplified and

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**enigma:** riddle; mystery; something very hard to understand or explain

plausible story” that helped answer his question, “Why was . . . every advantage secured against me before I came into the world?” Such ideas and feelings fed the imagination of H. G. Wells as he wrote *The Time Machine*.

### *Karl Marx: Class Struggle*

Some passages in *The Time Machine* recall the ideas of Karl Marx, a German scholar who moved to London in 1849, and who saw the course of human history as a constant struggle between the social classes. In modern industrial societies, said Marx, on one side of this struggle were the *bourgeoisie* (BOOR-zhwa-zee), the people wealthy enough to own property and control factories and other means of production. On the other side were the proletariat, the workers in the lower classes. Marx said that the bourgeoisie, who had property and power, exploited the proletariat—that is, they took advantage of the workers, for example, by forcing them to work long hours in dangerous conditions, or by paying them less than their labor was worth.

In 1848, Marx published a short book called *The Communist Manifesto*. In it he predicted that the struggle between the classes would eventually

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**manifesto:** a public statement of one's objectives and opinions

lead to a great revolution in which the workers would overthrow the upper class and establish a communist society—a society that would abolish the private ownership of property and be based instead on community ownership. In a communist society, the people would cooperatively own and control all property and businesses, and so there would be no rich or poor; everyone would be equal. (In the twentieth century, Communist revolutions took place in Russia and China, but the resulting oppressive societies were far from the ideal that Marx had envisioned.)

Ideas about class struggle come up in *The Time Machine*, and at one point the Time Traveler sees what he thinks is a communist community. Wells, however, was not promoting Marx's ideas but indirectly questioning them through his fiction. (Later in his life, Wells argued strongly against Marxism, which he summed up as based on the "dangerous idea of reconstituting the world on a basis of mere resentment and destruction.")

### ***Charles Darwin: Evolution and Social Darwinism***

While Karl Marx examined the struggle between social classes, the English scientist Charles Darwin examined a different kind of struggle—the struggle of living things to survive as they

adapt to changing conditions over time. Darwin's ideas were very much on Wells's mind as he wrote *The Time Machine*.

In the 1830s, Darwin sailed around the world and filled many notebooks with his observations of various plants and animals. In the Galápagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean, he made a careful study of the beaks of certain birds. From these studies, he developed his theory of evolution, which explained how, over the course of many generations, animals and plants can develop into new species.

Darwin's theory of evolution is built on the idea of natural selection. In his groundbreaking 1859 book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Darwin explained how natural selection works. He observed that living things pass on various traits to their offspring. He noted that the offspring with traits that made them better suited to compete for food and other limited resources tend to survive and pass on those beneficial traits to their offspring. And so through this process of natural selection, said Darwin, living things develop and change over many generations, sometimes evolving in ways that lead to new species.

Darwin is often associated with the idea of "survival of the fittest," though he did not invent the phrase. Nor did he apply the idea of "survival

of the fittest” to human society, though others in the Victorian era were quick to do so. These Social Darwinists, as they are known, believed that in a world of competition for limited resources, the strong would survive and the weak would die out. They saw rich and powerful people as “the fittest,” whose success proved their superiority. They argued against any government regulation of business or any social programs to help the poor, because they believed that unrestricted competition was the key to progress. They thought that over time, as “the fittest” survived and thrived, the human race would keep on evolving and improving. Their ideas had no basis in science, and were mainly a way to justify their own power and privilege, while letting them see less fortunate people as weak and deserving of their fate.

Darwin’s ideas provoked heated debates, and not just among scientists. In Victorian society, many people were shaken by this theory that seemed to contradict their religious beliefs. But others took a much more optimistic view of evolution. They saw in it a promise of continuous progress. They paid little attention to Darwin’s ideas about biology and instead embraced evolution as nature’s guarantee that everything—individual people, nations, the human race—must be developing for the better.

*Thomas Henry Huxley: Evolution and Progress*

As a young student, H. G. Wells learned much about Darwin from a course taught by Thomas Henry Huxley, a scientist and writer who championed Darwin's theory of evolution. Huxley rejected the claims of the Social Darwinists. As for the popular notion that evolution promised progress—that, said Huxley, was a “fallacy,” a mistaken belief. “I suspect,” said Huxley, “that this fallacy has arisen out of the unfortunate ambiguity of the phrase ‘survival of the fittest.’ ‘Fittest’ has a connotation of ‘best’; and about ‘best’ there hangs a moral flavor.” Human beings who considered themselves nature's best achievement assumed that the evolutionary process would “help them towards perfection”—but in nature, said Huxley, “what is ‘fittest’ depends upon the conditions.”

For example, said Huxley, if the earth were to undergo a great cooling, then in the plant kingdom, “the ‘fittest’ that survived might be nothing but lichens, diatoms, and such [other] microscopic organisms. . . .” And if instead the earth were to grow much hotter, then in time “the pleasant valleys . . .

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**ambiguity:** uncertainty of meaning

**connotation:** an idea or quality that a word suggests beyond its main meaning

**diatoms:** single-celled algae

might be uninhabitable by any animated beings save those that flourish in a tropical jungle. They, as the fittest, the best adapted to changed conditions, would survive.” In short, insisted Huxley, nature had no special obligation to favor humanity, and evolution made no promise of eventual human perfection.

As H. G. Wells developed his own thinking about Darwin’s ideas, he too opposed the idea that human evolution would necessarily lead to progress and improvement. A few decades after the publication of *The Time Machine*, Wells described his novel as an “assault on human self-satisfaction.” Wells used the imaginary device of time travel to leap far ahead in the slow evolutionary process and give, in his words, “a glimpse of the future that ran counter to the placid assumption . . . that Evolution was a pro-human force making things better and better for mankind.”

Social inequality, class struggle, Social Darwinism—*The Time Machine* gets us to think about these and other big ideas while also engaging us in an exciting and imaginative adventure. In *The Time Machine*—the book that launched his long and varied career—H. G. Wells blazed the

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**save:** except

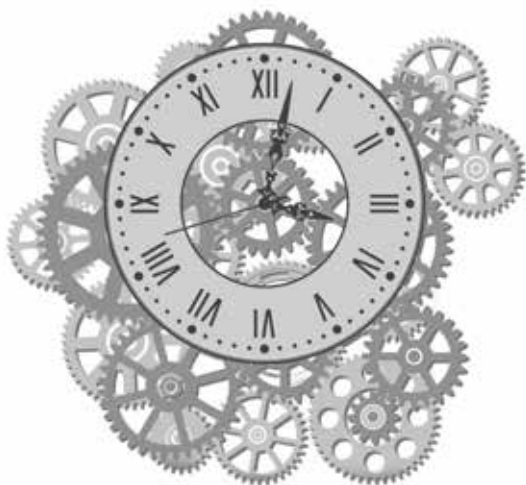
**placid:** calm and untroubled



way for many writers to come by showing how science fiction can take us far away in time or space while also making us think deeply about the here and now.

### Editor's Note

This Core Classics edition of *The Time Machine* is abridged and adapted for young readers. Some passages have been left out of the original text, and some have been rewritten to make them more readily understandable. Any adaptation is also an interpretation—in choosing what to leave out and what to rewrite, we have tried to be guided by the goal of remaining faithful to the themes, style, and spirit of the original novel.



*The Time Machine*  
*An Invention*

by  
H. G. Wells



## THE INVENTOR

The Time Traveler (for so it will be convenient to speak of him) was explaining a recondite matter to us. His pale grey eyes shone and twinkled, and his usually pale face was flushed and animated. The fire burnt brightly, and the soft radiance of the incandescent lights caught the bubbles that flashed and passed in our glasses. Our chairs, which he had designed, caressed us rather than submitted to be sat upon. There was that luxurious after-dinner atmosphere, when thought runs gracefully free. And he put it to us in this way—marking the points with a lean forefinger—

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**recondite:** little-known; beyond ordinary understanding

**flushed:** red from strong feeling

**incandescent:** glowing with heat [Note that reliable electric lights bulbs had been only recently invented, around 1880, and that in the Time Traveler's time, around 1895, electric lighting in homes was still fairly new. As you will see, in his home, the Time Traveler still uses candles as well as electricity for lighting.]

**bubbles:** These bubbles are in the sparkling wine (such as Champagne) that the men are drinking.

**caressed:** touched gently

**lean:** thin

as we sat and lazily admired his earnestness over this new paradox (as we thought it).

“You must follow me carefully. I shall have to contradict one or two ideas that are almost universally accepted. The geometry, for instance, they taught you at school is founded on a misconception.”

“Is not that rather a large thing to expect us to begin upon?” said Filby, an argumentative person with red hair.

“I do not mean to ask you to accept anything without reasonable ground for it. You know of course that a mathematical line, a line of thickness nil, has no real existence. They taught you that? Neither has a mathematical plane. These things are mere abstractions.”

“That is all right,” said the Psychologist.

“Nor, having only length, breadth, and thickness, can a cube have a real existence.”

---

**earnestness:** deep sincerity and seriousness

**paradox:** a statement that seems to contradict itself but may nevertheless be true, for example, “Less is more.”

**nil:** zero; nothing

**psychologist:** a scientist who studies the mind and behavior

**breadth:** width; the measurement of something from side to side

“There I object,” said Filby. “Of course a solid body may exist. All real things—”

“So most people think. But wait a moment. Can an instantaneous cube exist?”

“Don’t follow you,” said Filby.

“Can a cube that does not last for any time at all, have a real existence?”

Filby became pensive. “Clearly,” the Time Traveler proceeded, “any real body must have extension in *four* directions: it must have Length, Breadth, Thickness, and—Duration. But we tend to overlook this fact. There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time. There is, however, a tendency to draw an unreal distinction between the former three dimensions and the latter, because our consciousness moves in one direction along the latter from the beginning to the end of our lives.”

“That,” said a very young man, “that is . . . very clear indeed.”

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**pensive:** thoughtful

**latter:** Used with *former* earlier in the sentence, the *former* refers to things or people mentioned first, while the *latter* refers to things or people mentioned second. (In this case, “the latter” refers to what the Time Traveler calls the fourth dimension, Time.)

“Really,” continued the Time Traveler, “this is what is meant by the Fourth Dimension. It is only another way of looking at Time. *There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it.* But some foolish people have got hold of the wrong side of that idea. You have all heard what they have to say about this Fourth Dimension?”

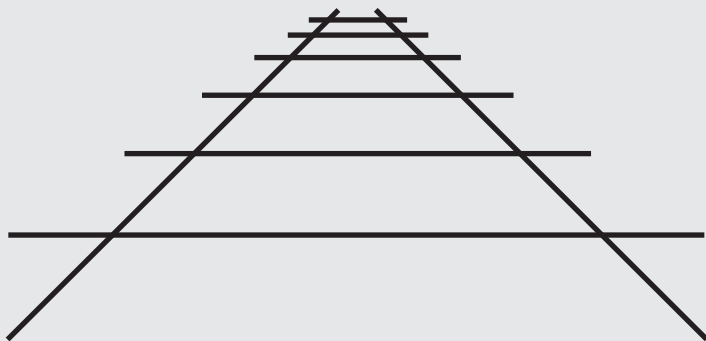
“I have not,” said the Mayor.

“It is simply this. That Space, as our mathematicians have it, is spoken of as having three dimensions, which one may call Length, Breadth, and Thickness, and is always definable by reference to three planes, each at right angles to the others. But some philosophical people have been asking why three dimensions particularly? Why not another direction at right angles to the other three? They have even tried to construct a Four-Dimensional geometry. You know how on a flat surface, which has only two dimensions, we can represent a figure of a three-dimensional solid, and similarly they think that by models of three dimensions they could represent one of four—if they could master the perspective of the thing. See?”

**From 2-D to 3-D . . . to 4-D?**

The Time Traveler points out that “on a flat surface, which has only two dimensions, we can represent a figure of a three-dimensional solid.” A flat surface—such as a piece of paper, or a painter’s canvas—has length and width. On such a surface, how can we create the illusion of a third dimension—of depth?

In the early 1400s, during the period of brilliant artistic innovation in Italy called the Renaissance, artists began using *perspective* to make two-dimensional images look three-dimensional. They gave their paintings an illusion of depth by making the people or objects in the foreground of a painting look bigger than those in the background. The artists also noticed that if you stand between two parallel lines that stretch into the distance, the lines seem to get closer together. For example, look at the drawing here representing railway tracks. The 2-D drawing looks 3-D because of the illusion created by perspective, as the lines get closer together.





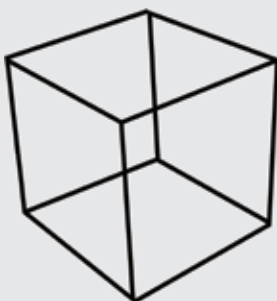
The Time Traveler says that mathematicians have “tried to construct a Four-Dimensional geometry,” and that “they think that by models of three dimensions they could represent one of four—if they could master the perspective of the thing.” Since the time of H. G. Wells, mathematicians have developed a 4-D model of a cube, called a *tesseract*. If you have read Madeline L’Engle’s novel *A Wrinkle in Time*, you might recall how she used the idea of a tesseract. Search the Internet to see animated models of a tesseract and for more discussion of possible dimensions beyond the three that we can perceive.

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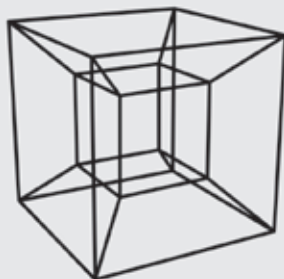
**Line**  
**1-D**



**Square**  
**2-D**



**Cube**  
**3-D**



**Tesseract**  
**4-D**

“I think so,” murmured the Mayor, knitting his brows. “Yes, I think I see it now,” he said after some time, brightening briefly.

“Well, I do not mind telling you I have been at work upon this geometry of Four Dimensions for some time. Some of my results are curious. For instance, here is a portrait of a man at eight years old, another at fifteen, another at seventeen, another at twenty-three, and so on. All these are evidently sections, as it were, Three-Dimensional representations of his Four-Dimensioned being, which is a fixed and unalterable thing.

“Scientific people,” proceeded the Time Traveler, “know very well that Time is only a kind of Space. Here is a popular scientific diagram, a weather record. This line I trace with my finger shows the movement of the barometer. Yesterday it was so high, yesterday night it fell, then this morning it rose again, and so gently upward to here. Surely the mercury did not trace this line in any of the dimensions of Space generally recognized? But certainly it traced such a line, and

**knitting his brows:** tightening his eyebrows in a frown

**as it were:** an expression meaning, in a way

**unalterable:** not able to be changed

that line, therefore, we must conclude, was along the Time-Dimension."

"But," said the Medical Man, staring hard at a coal in the fire, "if Time is really only a fourth dimension of Space, why is it, and why has it always been, regarded as something different? And why cannot we move in Time as we move about in the other dimensions of Space?"

The Time Traveler smiled. "Are you so sure we can move freely in Space? Right and left we can go, backward and forward freely enough, and men always have done so. I admit we move freely in two dimensions. But how about up and down? Gravitation limits us there."

"Not exactly," said the Medical Man. "There are balloons."

"But before the balloons, except for jumping, man had no freedom of vertical movement."

"Still they could move a little up and down," said the Medical Man.

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**balloons:** The Medical Man is referring to hot air balloons, a method of transportation consisting of a large basket connected to a large bag. The balloon rises when the bag is filled with heated air. (*The Time Machine* was published in 1895, before the invention of the airplane.)

“Far easier down than up.”

“And you cannot move at all in Time,” said the Medical Man, “you cannot get away from the present moment.”

“My dear sir, that is just where you are wrong. That is just where the whole world has gone wrong. We are always getting away from the present moment. Our mental existences, which are immaterial and have no dimensions, are passing along the Time-Dimension with a uniform velocity from the cradle to the grave. Just as we should travel *down* if we began our existence fifty miles above the earth’s surface—”

“But the great difficulty is this,” interrupted the Psychologist. “You can move about in all directions of Space, but you cannot move about in Time.”

“That is my great discovery. You are wrong to say that we cannot move about in Time. For instance, if I am recalling an incident very vividly I go back to the instant of its occurrence: I become absent-minded, as you say. I jump back

---

**immaterial:** without physical substance; bodiless

**uniform:** unchanging; remaining the same

for a moment. Of course we have no means of staying back for any length of Time, any more than an animal has of staying six feet above the ground. But a man can go up against gravitation in a balloon, and why should he not hope that ultimately he may be able to stop or accelerate his drift along the Time-Dimension, or even turn about and travel the other way?"

"Oh, *this*," began Filby, "is all —"

"Why not?" said the Time Traveler.

"It's against reason," said Filby.

"What reason?" said the Time Traveler.

"You can show black is white by argument," said Filby, "but you will never convince me."

"Possibly not," said the Time Traveler. "But now you begin to see the object of my investigations into the geometry of Four Dimensions. Long ago I had a vague idea of a machine —"

"To travel through Time!" exclaimed the Very Young Man.

"That shall travel in any direction of Space and Time, as the driver determines."

Filby laughed.

“But I have experimental verification,” said the Time Traveler.

“It would be remarkably convenient for the historian,” the Psychologist suggested. “One might travel back and verify the accepted account of a great battle, for instance!”

“Then there is the future,” said the Very Young Man. “Just think! One might invest all one’s money and—”

“Of all the wild extravagant theories!” began the Psychologist.

“Yes, so it seemed to me, and so I never talked of it until—”

“Experimental verification!” I cried.

“The experiment!” cried Filby, who was getting brain-weary.

“Let’s see your experiment anyhow,” said the Psychologist, “though it’s all humbug, you know.”

The Time Traveler smiled round at us. Then, still smiling faintly, and with his hands deep in

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**verification:** proof; confirmation of something as true or accurate

**verify:** to prove that something is true or accurate

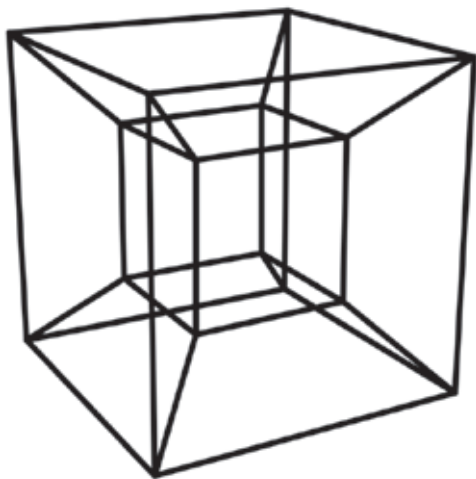
**extravagant:** going beyond reason

**humbug:** nonsense; something intended to deceive or trick

his trousers pockets, he walked slowly out of the room, and we heard his slippers shuffling down the long passage to his laboratory.

The Psychologist looked at us. "I wonder what he's got?"

"Some clever trick or other," said the Medical Man, and Filby tried to tell us about a magician he had once seen, but before he had finished the Time Traveler came back.



## THE MACHINE

The thing the Time Traveler held in his hand was a glittering metallic framework, scarcely larger than a small clock, and very delicately made. There was ivory in it, and some transparent crystalline substance. And now I must be explicit, for what follows—unless his explanation is to be accepted—is an absolutely unaccountable thing.

He took one of the small tables scattered about the room and set it in front of the fire. On this table he placed the mechanism. Then he drew up a chair and sat down. The only other object on the table was a small shaded lamp, the bright light of which fell upon the model. There were also perhaps a dozen candles about, so that the room was brilliantly illuminated. I sat in a low arm-chair nearest the fire, and I drew this forward so as to be almost between the Time Traveler and the fireplace. Filby sat behind him, looking over

---

**explicit:** clear, precise, and detailed in expression

**unaccountable:** unable to be explained



his shoulder. The Medical Man and the Mayor watched him from the right, the Psychologist from the left. The Very Young Man stood behind the Psychologist. We were all on the alert. It appears incredible to me that any kind of trick could have been played upon us under these conditions.

The Time Traveler looked at us, and then at the mechanism. "Well?" said the Psychologist.

"This little affair," said the Time Traveler, resting his elbows upon the table and pressing his hands together above the apparatus, "is only a model. It is my plan for a machine to travel through time. You will notice that there is an odd twinkling appearance about this bar, as though it was in some way unreal." He pointed to the part with his finger. "Also, here is one little white lever, and here is another."

The Medical Man got up out of his chair and peered into the thing. "It's beautifully made," he said.

"It took two years to make," said the Time Traveler. "Now I want you clearly to understand that this lever, being pressed over, sends the

apparatus: device; mechanism



THE MEDICAL MAN PEERED INTO THE THING.  
"IT'S BEAUTIFULLY MADE," HE SAID.

machine gliding into the future, and this other reverses the motion. This saddle represents the seat of a time traveler. I am going to press the lever, and off the machine will go. It will vanish, pass into future Time, and disappear. Have a good look at the thing. Look at the table too, and satisfy yourselves there is no trickery. I don't want to waste this model, and then be told I'm a quack."

There was a minute's pause perhaps. The Psychologist seemed about to speak to me, but changed his mind. Then the Time Traveler put forth his finger towards the lever. "No," he said suddenly. "Lend me your hand." And turning to the Psychologist, he took that individual's hand in his own and told him to put out his forefinger. So it was the Psychologist himself who sent forth the model Time Machine on its interminable voyage. We all saw the lever turn. I am absolutely certain there was no trickery. There was a breath of wind, and the lamp flame jumped. One of the candles was blown out, and the little machine suddenly

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**quack:** faker; phony; fraud

**interminable:** endless

swung round, became indistinct, was seen as a ghost for a second perhaps, as an eddy of faintly glittering brass and ivory; and it was gone—vanished! Except for the lamp the table was bare.

Everyone was silent for a minute.

The Psychologist recovered from his stupor, and suddenly looked under the table. At that the Time Traveler laughed cheerfully. “Well?” he said. Then, getting up, he began to fill his pipe.

We stared at each other. “Look here,” said the Medical Man, “do you seriously believe that that machine has traveled into time?”

“Certainly,” said the Time Traveler. Then he turned, lighting his pipe. “What is more, I have a big machine nearly finished in there”—he indicated the laboratory—“and when that is put together I mean to have a journey on my own account.”

“You mean to say that that machine has traveled into the future?” said Filby.

“Into the future or the past—I don’t, for certain, know which.”

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**indistinct:** blurry; unclear

**eddy:** a current traveling in a circular motion; a whirlpool

**stupor:** daze

After a pause the Psychologist had an inspiration. "It must have gone into the past if it has gone anywhere," he said.

"Why?" said the Time Traveler.

"Because I presume that it has not moved in space, and if it traveled into the future it would still be here all this time, since it must have traveled through this time."

"But," said I, "if it traveled into the past it would have been visible when we came first into this room; and last Thursday when we were here; and the Thursday before that; and so forth!"

"Serious objections," remarked the Mayor, turning towards the Time Traveler.

"Not a bit," said the Time Traveler, and, to the Psychologist: "*You* can explain that."

"Of course," said the Psychologist, and reassured us. "I should have thought of it. We cannot see it any more than the spoke of a wheel spinning, or a bullet flying through the air. If it is traveling through time fifty times or a hundred times faster than we are, if it gets through a minute while we get through a second, the impression it creates will of course be only one-fiftieth or one-

hundredth of what it would make if it were not traveling in time. That's plain enough." He passed his hand through the space in which the machine had been. "You see?" he said, laughing.

We sat and stared at the vacant table for a minute or so. Then the Time Traveler asked us what we thought of it all.

"It sounds plausible enough tonight," said the Medical Man, "but wait until tomorrow. Wait for the common sense of the morning."

"Would you like to see the Time Machine itself?" asked the Time Traveler. And, taking the lamp in his hand, he led the way down the long corridor to his laboratory. I remember vividly the flickering light, the dance of the shadows, how we all followed him, puzzled but incredulous, and how there in the laboratory we beheld a larger edition of the little mechanism which we had seen vanish from before our eyes. Parts were of nickel, parts of ivory, parts had certainly been filed or sawn out of rock crystal. The thing was generally complete,

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**plausible:** reasonable; believable

**corridor:** hallway

**incredulous:** unwilling or unable to believe

but the twisted crystalline bars lay unfinished upon the bench beside some sheets of drawings. I picked one up for a better look at it. It seemed to be made of quartz.

“Look here,” said the Medical Man, “are you perfectly serious? Or is this a trick—like that ghost you showed us last Christmas?”

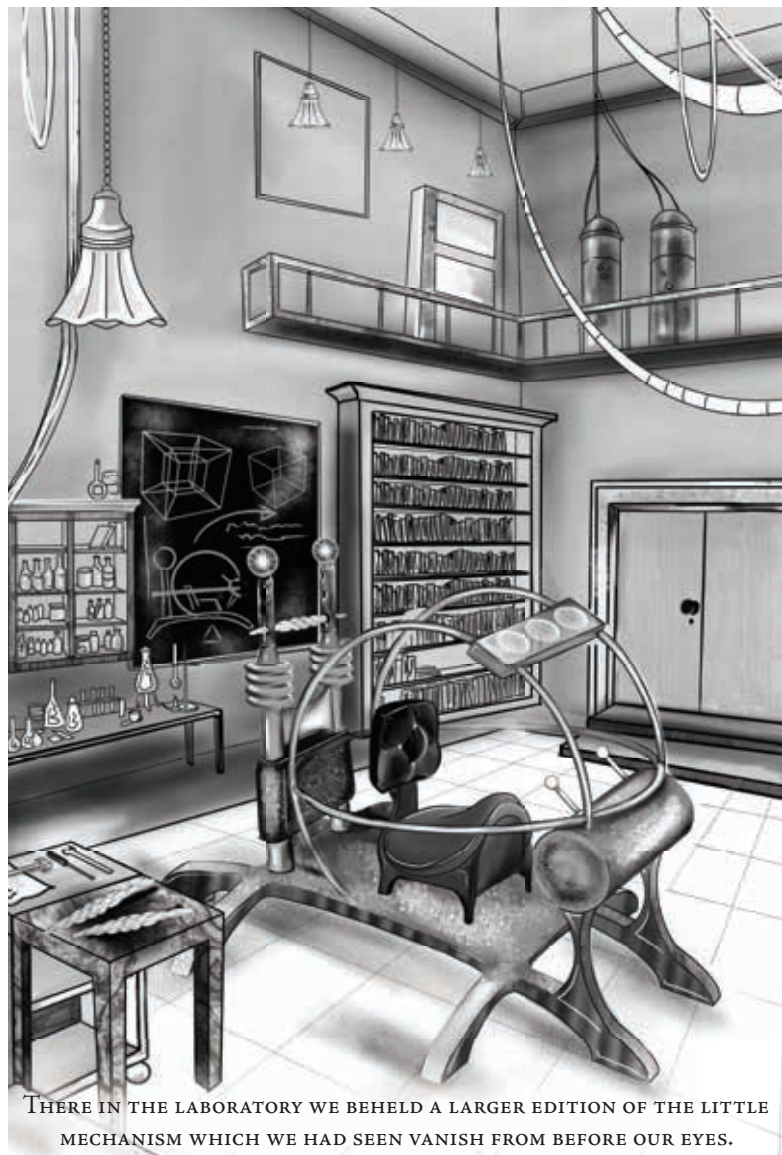
“Upon that machine,” said the Time Traveler, “I intend to explore time. Is that plain? I was never more serious in my life.”

None of us quite knew how to take it.

I caught Filby’s eye over the shoulder of the Medical Man, and he winked at me.

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**quartz:** a hard crystalline mineral, sometimes used in making clocks and watches



THERE IN THE LABORATORY WE BEHELD A LARGER EDITION OF THE LITTLE MECHANISM WHICH WE HAD SEEN VANISH FROM BEFORE OUR EYES.



## THE TIME TRAVELER RETURNS

I think that at that time none of us quite believed in the Time Machine. The fact is, the Time Traveler was one of those men who are too clever to be believed. Things that would have made the fame of a less clever man seemed tricks in his hands. The serious people who took him seriously never felt quite sure of him. So I don't think any of us said very much about time traveling between that Thursday and the next, though it ran in most of our minds: its plausibility, its incredibleness, the curious possibilities of anachronism and of utter confusion it suggested. For my own part, I was particularly preoccupied with the trick of the model, which I remember discussing with the Medical Man. He said he had once seen a similar thing, and emphasized the blowing-out of the candle. But how the trick was done he could not explain.

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**plausibility:** the quality of seeming reasonable or believable

**incredibleness:** impossibility; un-believability

**anachronism:** something (or someone) placed in a time period in which it does not belong

**utter:** complete; total

**"The Curious Possibilities of Anachronism"**

The narrator of *The Time Machine* says that while thinking about time travel, he considered "the curious possibilities of anachronism." The word *anachronism* comes from the Greek *ana*, meaning "back" or "against," and *chronos*, meaning "time." So, an *anachronism* is something against time, or out of its proper time—it's a thing, person, or event placed in a time period in which it does not belong. For example, if you're watching a movie about a Civil War battle, and you catch a glimpse of an American flag with 50 stars, that flag would be an anachronism.

Imagine you could time travel back to the year 1776—in what ways would you appear anachronistic? Your clothes, to begin with. Perhaps you have a cell phone with you and you show it to the people of 1776—you snap a group selfie and show them the photo. You play some music stored on your phone—maybe a favorite pop, rock, or hip-hop song. How do you think the people of 1776 would respond to these anachronisms?

What other "curious possibilities of anachronism" can you imagine if you were to travel backward or forward in time?

The next Thursday I again visited the Time Traveler—I suppose I was one of his most constant guests. Arriving late, I found four or five men already assembled in his drawing-room. The Medical Man was standing before the fire with a sheet of paper in one hand and his watch in the

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**drawing-room:** a room in a house where guests are received and entertained

other. I looked round for the Time Traveler, and — “It’s half-past seven now,” said the Medical Man. “I suppose we’d better have dinner?”

“Where’s — — ?” said I, naming our host.

“You’ve just come? It’s rather odd. He’s unavoidably detained. He asks me in this note to lead off with dinner at seven if he’s not back. Says he’ll explain when he comes.”

“It seems a pity to let the dinner spoil,” said the Editor of a well-known daily paper; and so the Doctor rang the bell.

The Psychologist was the only person besides the Doctor and myself who had attended the previous dinner. The other men were the Editor just mentioned, a certain journalist, and a quiet, shy man with a beard, whom I didn’t know. There was some speculation at the dinner-table about the Time Traveler’s absence, and, half-joking, I suggested he might be time traveling. The Editor wanted that explained to him. The Psychologist

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**detained:** held back; delayed

**Doctor:** also called the Medical Man

**rang the bell:** the signal to the household staff that dinner is to be served

**speculation:** forming opinions without firm evidence; guessing

began to describe the “ingenious paradox and trick” we had witnessed a week ago, when the door from the corridor opened slowly and without noise. I was facing the door, and saw it first.

“At last!” I said.

The door opened wider, and the Time Traveler stood before us. I gave a cry of surprise. “Good heavens, man, what’s the matter?” cried the Medical Man, who saw him next. And the whole tableful turned towards the door.

He was in an amazing plight. His coat was dusty and dirty, and smeared with green down the sleeves; his hair disordered, and seemed to me greyer—either with dust and dirt or because its color had actually faded. His face was ghastly pale; his chin had a brown cut on it—a cut half-healed; his expression was haggard and drawn, as by intense suffering. For a moment he hesitated in the doorway, as if he had been dazzled by the light. Then he came into the room. He walked with a limp. We stared at him in silence, expecting him to speak.

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**plight:** a difficult or troubled situation

**ghastly:** frighteningly; or, in a way resembling a ghost

**haggard:** looking worn out and unwell

**drawn:** looking strained and worn from exhaustion or pain

He said not a word, but came painfully to the table.

“What on earth have you been up to, man?” said the Doctor. The Time Traveler did not seem to hear. “Don’t let me disturb you,” he said, with a certain hesitation in his speech. “I’m all right.” His glance flickered over our faces and then went round the warm and comfortable room. Then he spoke again, as though he were feeling his way among his words. “I’m going to wash and dress, and then I’ll come down and explain things. . . . Save me some of that mutton. I’m starving for a bit of meat.”

The Editor began a question. “Tell you shortly,” said the Time Traveler. “I’m feeling—strange. Be all right in a minute.”

He walked towards the staircase door. Again I remarked his lameness and the soft padding sound of his footsteps. As he went out, I saw he had nothing on his feet but a pair of tattered, blood-stained socks. Then the door closed upon him. I thought I might follow him, till I remembered how he detested any fuss about himself.

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**mutton:** sheep flesh, prepared as food

**detested:** strongly disliked

“Remarkable Behavior of an Eminent Scientist,” I heard the Editor say, thinking in headlines. And this brought my attention back to the bright dinner-table.

“What’s his game?” said the Journalist. “I don’t follow.” I met the eye of the Psychologist, and read my own interpretation in his face. I thought of the Time Traveler limping painfully upstairs. I don’t think anyone else had noticed his lameness.

The first to recover completely from this surprise was the Medical Man, who rang the bell for a hot plate—the Time Traveler hated to have servants waiting at dinner. The Editor turned to his knife and fork with a grunt, and the Silent Man did the same. The dinner was resumed.

“I feel sure it’s this business of the Time Machine,” I said, and took up the Psychologist’s account of our previous meeting. The new guests were incredulous. The Editor raised objections. “What was this time traveling? A man couldn’t cover himself with dust by rolling in a paradox,

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**eminent:** well-known and respected

**interpretation:** explanation of what something means

**servants:** In Victorian England, many upper and middle class households employed servants, who performed household duties such as cleaning and cooking.

could he? Hadn't they any clothes-brushes in the Future?" The Journalist too, would not believe, and joined the Editor in the easy work of heaping ridicule on the whole thing.

The Time Traveler came back. He was dressed in ordinary evening clothes, and nothing but his haggard look remained of the change that had startled me.

"I say," said the Editor hilariously, "these chaps here say you have been traveling into the middle of next week!"

The Time Traveler smiled quietly, in his old way. "Where's my mutton?" he said. "What a treat it is to stick a fork into meat again!"

"Story!" cried the Editor.

"I want something to eat," said the Time Traveler. "I won't say a word until I get some protein into my arteries. Thanks. And the salt."

"One word," said I. "Have you been time traveling?"

"Yes," said the Time Traveler, with his mouth full, nodding his head.

The rest of the dinner was uncomfortable. The Journalist tried to relieve the tension by telling

anecdotes. The Time Traveler devoted his attention to his dinner, and displayed the appetite of a tramp. The Medical Man watched the Time Traveler through his eyelashes. The Silent Man seemed quite nervous.

At last the Time Traveler pushed his plate away. "I suppose I must apologize," he said. "I was simply starving. I've had a most amazing time. But come into the next room. It's too long a story to tell over greasy plates." And ringing the bell in passing, he led the way into the adjoining room.

"You have told them about the machine?" he said to me, leaning back in his easy-chair and looking at the new guests.

"But the thing's a mere paradox," said the Editor.

"I can't argue tonight. I don't mind telling you the story, but I can't argue. I will," he went on, "tell you the story of what has happened to me, if you

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**anecdotes:** brief stories, often amusing or entertaining

**tramp:** hobo; a person who travels from place to place in search of work (and so would not be likely to enjoy regular meals)

**ringing the bell:** a signal to let the household staff know that dinner is over and the dishes ready to be cleared

**adjoining:** next to; connected to



like, but you must refrain from interruptions. I want to tell it. Badly. Most of it will sound like lying. So be it! It's true—every word of it, all the same. I was in my laboratory at four o'clock, and since then . . . I've lived eight days . . . such days as no human being ever lived before! I'm nearly worn out, but I shall not sleep till I've told this to you. Then I shall go to bed. But no interruptions! Is it agreed?"

"Agreed," said the Editor, and the rest of us echoed "Agreed." And with that the Time Traveler began his story as I have set it forth. He sat back in his chair at first, and spoke like a weary man. Afterwards he got more animated. In writing it down I feel the inadequacy of pen and ink—you cannot see the speaker's sincere face in the bright circle of the little lamp, nor hear his voice. You cannot know how his expression followed the turns of his story! Most of us hearers were in shadow, for the candles in the room had not been lighted, and only the face of the Journalist and the legs of the Silent Man from the knees downward were

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**refrain:** hold back from doing something

**inadequacy:** the state of not being enough or not being good enough

illuminated. At first we glanced now and again at each other. After a time we ceased to do that, and looked only at the Time Traveler's face.

### **What Is a Frame Story?**

H. G. Wells's novel *The Time Machine* is a frame story, also called a frame narrative. A frame surrounds a picture; in a frame story, one story surrounds another. A frame story tells a story within a story.

*The Time Machine* begins with the story told by the narrator, who introduces us to the Time Traveler and his dinner guests. In the chapters you've read so far, the narrator has described what went on during two evening gatherings at the Time Traveler's house.

Why do you think H. G. Wells went to the trouble of setting up this outer story? Why introduce the various dinner guests, who sometimes express their disbelief and make skeptical remarks? How is your attitude toward the Time Traveler affected by his answers and explanations to his guests? How is your attitude toward the Time Traveler affected by what the narrator says about him?

Beginning with the next chapter, we get the story within the story. The Time Traveler takes over as narrator, telling the story in his own words—or, to be precise, his words as recalled and written down by our original narrator. You will notice that all the following chapters are in quotation marks, because our original narrator is quoting the story told by the Time Traveler. In most of the remaining chapters, then, the Time Traveler is telling his own story to his invited guests—and, by extension, to us as readers.

## TIME TRAVELING

“I told some of you last Thursday of the principles of the Time Machine, and showed you the actual thing itself, incomplete in the workshop. There it is now, a little travel-worn, truly; and one of the ivory bars is cracked, and a brass rail bent; but the rest of it’s sound enough. I expected to finish it on Friday; but on Friday, when the putting together was nearly done, I found that one of the nickel bars was exactly one inch too short, and this I had to get remade; so that the thing was not complete until this morning. It was at ten o’clock today that the first of all Time Machines began its career. I gave it a last tap, tried all the screws again, put one more drop of oil on the quartz rod, and sat myself in the saddle.

“I took the starting lever in one hand and the stopping one in the other, pressed the first, and almost immediately the second. I seemed to reel; I felt a nightmare sensation of falling; and, looking round, I saw the laboratory exactly as before.

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**sound:** in good condition

Had anything happened? For a moment I suspected that my intellect had tricked me. Then I noted the clock. A moment before, as it seemed, it had stood at a minute or so past ten; now it was nearly half-past three!

“I drew a breath, set my teeth, gripped the starting lever with both hands, and went off with a thud. The laboratory got hazy and went dark. Mrs. Watchett came in and walked, apparently without seeing me, towards the garden door. I suppose it took her a minute or so to move along, but to me she seemed to shoot across the room like a rocket. I pressed the lever over to its extreme position. The night came like the turning out of a lamp, and in another moment came tomorrow. The laboratory grew faint and hazy, then fainter and ever fainter. Tomorrow night came black, then day again, night again, day again, faster and faster still. A swirling murmur filled my ears, and a strange, dumb confusedness descended on my mind.

“I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time traveling. They are excessively

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**Mrs. Watchett:** the Time Traveler's housekeeper

**faint:** pale and unclear in appearance

unpleasant. There is a feeling exactly like that one has upon a switchback—of a helpless headlong motion! I felt the same horrible anticipation, too, of an imminent smash. Night followed day like the flapping of a black wing. The dim suggestion of the laboratory seemed to fall away from me, and I saw the sun hopping swiftly across the sky, leaping it every minute, and every minute marking a day. I supposed the laboratory had been destroyed and I had come into the open air. I was already going too fast to be conscious of any moving things. The slowest snail that ever crawled dashed by too fast for me. The twinkling succession of darkness and light was excessively painful to the eye. I saw the moon spinning swiftly through her quarters from new to full, and had a faint glimpse of the circling stars. As I went on, still gaining velocity, night and day merged into one continuous greyness; the sky took on a wonderful deepness of blue, a splendid luminous color like that of early twilight;

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**switchback:** a road or railway that zigzags as it goes up and down steep hills; or, a roller coaster

**anticipation:** strong expectation that something will happen

**imminent:** about to happen

**smash:** crash; violent collision

**luminous:** shining

the jerking sun became a streak of fire, a brilliant arch, in space; the moon a fainter fluctuating band; and I could see nothing of the stars, except now and then a brighter circle flickering in the blue.

“The landscape was misty and vague. I was still on the hillside upon which this house now stands. I saw trees growing and changing like puffs of vapor, now brown, now green; they grew, spread, shivered, and passed away. I saw huge buildings rise up and pass like dreams. The whole surface of the earth seemed changed—melting and flowing under my eyes. The little hands upon the dials that registered my speed raced round faster and faster. I noted that my pace was over a year a minute; and minute by minute the white snow flashed across the world, and vanished, and was followed by the bright, brief green of spring.

“The unpleasant sensations of the start merged into a kind of hysterical exhilaration. I felt a clumsy swaying of the machine, but my mind was too confused to attend to it, so with a kind of madness growing upon me, I flung myself into futurity. At

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**fluctuating:** continually shifting or changing

**hysterical:** emotionally out of control

**exhilaration:** extreme excitement or delight

first I hardly thought of stopping or of anything but these new sensations. But soon a certain curiosity and a certain dread grew in my mind until at last they took complete possession of me. I thought, what strange developments of humanity, what wonderful advances upon our rudimentary civilization, might appear when I came to look closely into the world that raced before my eyes! I saw great and splendid architecture rising about me, more massive than any buildings of our own time, and yet, as it seemed, built of glimmer and mist. I saw a richer green flow up the hillside, and remain there, without ever changing to winter. Even through the veil of my confusion the earth seemed very fair. And so my mind came round to the business of stopping.

“The risk lay in the possibility of my finding some substance in the space which I, or the machine, occupied. So long as I traveled at a high velocity through time, this scarcely mattered: I was slipping like a vapor through the interstices

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**dread:** great fear that something will happen

**rudimentary:** basic; undeveloped, or in an early stage of development

**interstices:** very small gaps or spaces

of intervening substances! But to come to a stop involved the jamming of myself, molecule by molecule, into whatever lay in my way, bringing my atoms into such contact with those of the obstacle that a far-reaching chemical reaction—possibly an explosion—would result, and blow myself and my apparatus out of all possible dimensions into the Unknown. This possibility had occurred to me again and again while I was making the machine; but then I had cheerfully accepted it as one of the risks a man has got to take! Now that the risk was inevitable, I no longer saw it in the same cheerful light. The absolute strangeness of everything, the sickly jarring and swaying of the machine, above all, the feeling of prolonged falling, had absolutely upset my nerves. I told myself that I could never stop, and with a burst of petulance I pulled the lever, and the thing went reeling over, and I was flung headlong through the air.

“There was the sound of a clap of thunder in my ears. I may have been stunned for a moment.

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**intervening:** existing between two things

**inevitable:** unavoidable; sure to happen

**jarring:** rough bumping and shaking

**petulance:** impatient irritation



A pitiless hail was hissing round me, and I was sitting on soft turf in front of the overturned machine. Everything still seemed grey, but I soon noticed that the confusion in my ears was gone. I looked round me. I was on what seemed to be a little lawn in a garden, surrounded by rhododendron bushes, and I noticed that their purple blossoms were dropping under the beating of the hailstones. The rebounding, dancing hail hung in a little cloud over the machine, and drove along the ground like smoke. In a moment I was wet to the skin. ‘Fine hospitality,’ said I, ‘to a man who has traveled innumerable years to see you.’

“Then I thought what a fool I was to get wet. I stood up and looked round me. A colossal figure, carved apparently in some white stone, loomed beyond the rhododendrons through the hazy downpour. But all else of the world was invisible.

“As the columns of hail grew thinner, I saw the white figure more distinctly. It was very large, for a silver birch tree touched its shoulder. It was of white marble, in shape something like a winged sphinx.

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**rhododendron:** a flowering shrub

**innumerable:** too many to be counted

**loomed:** appeared in a shadowy way, often looking large or threatening

The wings were spread so that it seemed to hover. The pedestal, it appeared to me, was of bronze, and was thick with verdigris. It chanced that the face was towards me; the sightless eyes seemed to watch me; there was the faint shadow of a smile on the lips. It was greatly weather-worn, which gave it an unpleasant suggestion of disease. I stood looking at it for half a minute, perhaps, or half an hour. At last I tore my eyes from it for a moment, and saw that the sky was lightening with the promise of the sun.

### **The Figure of the Sphinx**

In traveling to the future, one of the first things the Time Traveler sees is something we usually associate with the past—a sphinx. The sphinx is a mythological creature with a lion's body and a human head. You might have seen a sphinx in ancient Egyptian art, or read about one in legends from long ago.

The well-known Greek myth of Oedipus tells how a terrible winged sphinx sat perched on a cliff near the city of Thebes. To people who came near, it would pose a riddle: "What walks on four feet in the morning, on two feet at noon, and on three feet in the evening?" If they could not answer, the sphinx would swoop down and eat them. Finally, the riddle was solved by Oedipus,

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**pedestal:** the base that supports a statue

**bronze:** an alloy mainly composed of copper and tin

**verdigris:** a blue-greenish crust that forms on copper (or bronze) when exposed to the atmosphere for a long time



THE SIGHTLESS EYES SEEMED TO WATCH ME; THERE WAS THE FAINT  
SHADOW OF A SMILE ON THE LIPS.

who answered, “Man, who crawls on hands and knees as a baby, then goes on two legs as an adult, and walks with a cane in old age.”

Why did H. G. Wells choose to have the Time Traveler come upon the figure of a giant winged sphinx? Perhaps Wells was thinking of the myth that associates the sphinx with riddles, mystery, and deadly threats—all of which the Time Traveler confronts, as you will see in the chapters ahead.

Or perhaps the sphinx was suggested, if only indirectly, by Wells’s memory of a passage from a book he had read, called *Progress and Poverty*. The author of that book, Henry George, asked: Why do great technological advances bring not only great wealth but also great poverty? That question, he said, “is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization, and which not to answer is to be destroyed.” (For information on Henry George’s ideas, see the Introduction to this book, page 4.)

“I looked up again at the crouching white shape, and the full temerity of my voyage came suddenly upon me. What might appear when that hazy curtain of hail was withdrawn? What might have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if the human race had had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, dreadful and disgusting, a foul creature to be slain.

---

**temerity:** reckless boldness; excessive overconfidence

**slain:** killed

“Already I saw other vast shapes—huge buildings with tall columns, with a wooded hillside dimly creeping in upon me through the lessening storm. I was seized with a panic fear. I turned frantically to the Time Machine, and struggled to readjust it. As I did so the shafts of the sun broke through the thunderstorm. The grey downpour was swept aside and vanished like the trailing garments of a ghost. Above me, in the intense blue of the summer sky, some faint brown shreds of cloud whirled into nothingness. The great buildings about me stood out clearly, shining with the wet of the thunderstorm and the white unmelted hailstones.

“I felt naked in a strange world. I felt as perhaps a bird may feel in the clear air, knowing the hawk flies above and will swoop. My fear grew to frenzy. I took a breathing space, set my teeth, and again grappled fiercely, wrist and knee, with the machine. It turned over and struck my chin violently. One hand on the saddle, the other on the lever, I stood panting heavily, ready to mount again.

**frantically:** in a way showing wild excitement or panic

**frenzy:** a state of wild mental excitement and disturbance

“My courage recovered. I looked more curiously and less fearfully at this world of the remote future. In a circular opening, high up in the wall of a nearby building, I saw a group of figures clad in rich soft robes. They had seen me, and their faces were directed towards me.

“Then I heard voices approaching me. Coming through the bushes by the White Sphinx were the heads and shoulders of men running. One of these emerged in a pathway leading straight to the little lawn upon which I stood with my machine. He was a slight creature—perhaps four feet high—clad in a purple tunic, tied at the waist with a leather belt. Sandals were on his feet; his legs were bare to the knees, and his head was bare. Noticing that, I noticed for the first time how warm the air was.

“He struck me as being a very beautiful and graceful creature, but extremely frail. At the sight of him I suddenly regained confidence. I took my hands from the machine.

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**remote:** distant; very far away

**clad:** clothed; dressed

**tunic:** a loose garment like a short robe

**frail:** weak and fragile

## IN THE GOLDEN AGE

“**I**n another moment we were standing face to face, I and this fragile thing of the future. He came straight up to me and laughed into my eyes. The absence of any sign of fear struck me at once. Then he turned to the two others who were following him and spoke to them in a strange and very sweet and flowing language.

“There were others coming, and soon a little group of perhaps eight or ten of these exquisite creatures were about me. One of them addressed me. I thought my voice might be too harsh and deep for them, so I shook my head, and, pointing to my ears, shook it again. He came a step forward, hesitated, and then touched my hand. Then I felt other soft little touches upon my back and shoulders. They wanted to make sure I was real.

“There was nothing in this at all alarming. Indeed, there was something in these pretty

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**Golden Age:** a time of widespread peace, plenty, and happiness  
**exquisite:** beautiful and delicate

little people that inspired confidence—a graceful gentleness, a certain childlike ease. And besides, they looked so frail that I could imagine myself flinging the whole dozen of them about like bowling pins. But I made a sudden motion to warn them when I saw their little pink hands feeling at the Time Machine. Happily, before it was not too late, I thought of a danger I had forgotten, and reaching over the bars of the machine I unscrewed the little levers that would set it in motion, and put these in my pocket. Then I turned again to see what I could do in the way of communication.

“And then, looking more nearly into their features, I saw some further peculiarities in their delicate prettiness. Their hair, which was uniformly curly, came to a sharp end at the neck and cheek; there was not the faintest suggestion of it on the face, and their ears were singularly minute. The mouths were small, with bright red, rather thin lips, and the little chins ran to a point. The eyes were large and mild; and it seemed that

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**uniformly:** identically; in a way without difference

**singularly:** extraordinarily; in a remarkable and noticeable way

**minute** [pronounced *my-NOOT*]: tiny



there was a certain lack of the interest I might have expected in them.

“As they made no effort to communicate with me, but simply stood round me smiling and speaking in soft cooing notes to each other, I began the conversation. I pointed to the Time Machine and to myself. Then, hesitating for a moment how to express Time, I pointed to the sun. At once a quaintly pretty little figure in checkered purple and white followed my gesture, and then astonished me by imitating the sound of thunder.

“For a moment I was surprised, though the meaning of his gesture was plain enough. I thought: were these creatures fools? I had always anticipated that the people of the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand odd would be incredibly ahead of us in knowledge, art, everything. Then one of them suddenly asked me a question that showed him to be on the intellectual level of one of our five-year-old children—asked me, in fact, if I had come from the sun in a thunderstorm! It let loose the judgment I had held

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**odd:** Used in this way, with a number, *odd* means a little more than that number.

back upon their clothes, their frail light limbs, and fragile features. A flow of disappointment rushed across my mind. For a moment I felt that I had built the Time Machine in vain.

### **The Time Traveler's Disappointment**

After he encounters the people of the distant future, the Time Traveler says, "A flow of disappointment rushed across my mind." Why is he disappointed? What did the Time Traveler expect the people of the future to be like? How did the people he encountered in the future differ from his expectations?

The Time Traveler admits that he has always assumed that the future will bring progress, that things and people will evolve to some higher and better state. Do you share this attitude? Do you think the future will bring progress? Why or why not?

"I nodded, pointed to the sun, and gave them such a vivid rendering of a thunderclap as startled them. They all withdrew a pace or so and bowed. Then came one laughing towards me, carrying a chain of beautiful flowers altogether new to me, and put it about my neck. In a moment they were all running to and fro for flowers, and

in vain: uselessly

rendering: a performance (as of a song or play)

to and fro: back and forth

laughingly flinging them upon me until I was almost smothered with blossom. You who have never seen the like can scarcely imagine what delicate and wonderful flowers countless years of culture had created. Then someone suggested that their plaything should be exhibited in the nearest building, and so I was led past the sphinx of white marble, which had seemed to watch me all the while with a smile at my astonishment, towards a vast grey edifice of ridged stone. As I went with them the memory of my confident anticipations of a deeply serious and intellectual posterity came, with irresistible merriment, to my mind.

“The colossal building had a huge entry. I was naturally most occupied with the growing crowd of little people, and with the big open portals that yawned before me shadowy and mysterious. My general impression of the world I saw over their heads was a tangle of beautiful bushes and flowers, a long neglected and yet weedless garden. I saw a

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**culture:** cultivation, the act of growing and caring for plants

**edifice:** a building, especially a large and impressive one

**posterity:** the people of future generations

**colossal:** gigantic; huge

**portals:** doorways; entrances

number of tall spikes of strange white flowers, measuring a foot perhaps across the spread of the waxen petals. They grew scattered, as if wild, among the shrubs, but I did not examine them closely at this time. The Time Machine was left deserted on the turf among the rhododendrons.

“The arch of the doorway was richly carved, but it struck me as very badly broken and weather-worn. Several more brightly clad people met me in the doorway, and so we entered, I, dressed in dingy nineteenth-century garments, wreathed with flowers, and surrounded by a mass of bright, soft-colored robes and shining white limbs, in a melodious whirl of laughter and laughing speech.

“The big doorway opened into a great hall hung with brown. The windows admitted a softened light. The floor was made up of huge blocks of some very hard white metal, much worn by the going to and fro of past generations. There were innumerable tables made of slabs of polished stone, raised a foot from the floor, and upon these were heaps of fruits. Some I recognized as a kind of overgrown raspberry and orange, but for the most part they were strange.

“My guides seated themselves upon a great number of cushions scattered between the tables, and signed for me to do likewise. With a pretty absence of ceremony they began to eat the fruit with their hands, flinging peel and stalks, and so forth, into the round openings in the sides of the tables. I did not hesitate to follow their example, for I felt thirsty and hungry. As I did so I surveyed the hall.

“And perhaps the thing that struck me most was its dilapidated look. The stained-glass windows, which displayed only a geometrical pattern, were broken in many places, and the curtains that hung across the lower end were thick with dust. And it caught my eye that the corner of the marble table near me was fractured. Nevertheless, the general effect was extremely rich and picturesque. There were, perhaps, a couple of hundred people dining in the hall, and most of them, seated as near to me as they could come, were watching me with interest, their eyes shining over the fruit they were eating. All were clad in the same soft, and yet strong, silky material.

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**dilapidated:** run down; worn out with age and lack of care

**picturesque:** pretty and charming

“Fruit, by the way, was all their diet. These people of the remote future were strict vegetarians, and while I was with them, in spite of some cravings, I had to be also. Indeed, I found afterwards that horses, cattle, sheep, dogs, had followed the dinosaurs into extinction. But the fruits were very delightful; one, in particular, that seemed to be in season all the time I was there—a floury thing in a three-sided husk—was especially good, and I made it my staple.



THEY WERE WATCHING ME WITH INTEREST, THEIR LITTLE EYES  
SHINING OVER THE FRUIT THEY WERE EATING.

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**staple:** A *staple* food is a main or important part of one's diet.

“As soon as my appetite was a little satisfied, I determined to attempt to learn the speech of these new men of mine. The fruits seemed a convenient thing to begin upon, and holding one of these up I began a series of questioning sounds and gestures. I had some difficulty in conveying my meaning. At first my efforts met with a stare of surprise or laughter, but soon a fair-haired little creature seemed to grasp my intention and repeated a name. They had to chatter and explain the business at great length to each other, and my first attempts to make the exquisite little sounds of their language caused an immense amount of amusement. I felt like a schoolmaster among children, and persisted, and soon I had a number of nouns at my command; and then I got to pronouns, and even the verb ‘to eat.’ But it was slow work, and the little people soon tired and wanted to get away from my interrogations, so I decided to let them give their lessons in little doses when they felt inclined. And very little doses I found they were, for I never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued.

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**persisted:** kept on despite difficulties

**interrogations:** questionings

**indolent:** lazy; tending to avoid activity

**fatigued:** tired out

## THE SUNSET OF MANKIND

“A strange thing I soon discovered about my little hosts, and that was their lack of interest. They would come to me with eager cries of astonishment, like children, but, like children they would soon stop examining me, and wander away after some other toy. After the dinner and my conversational beginnings ended, I noted for the first time that almost all those who had surrounded me at first were gone. It is odd, too, how speedily I came to disregard these little people. I went out through the portal into the sunlit world again as soon as my hunger was satisfied. I was continually meeting more of these people of the future, who would follow me a little distance, chatter and laugh about me, and, having smiled and gestured in a friendly way, leave me on my own.

“The calm of evening was upon the world as I emerged from the great hall, and the scene was lit by the warm glow of the setting sun. At first things were very confusing. Everything was so entirely different from the world I had known—even the



flowers. The big building I had left sat on the slope of a broad river valley, but the Thames had shifted, perhaps, a mile from its present position. I resolved to mount to the summit of a hill, perhaps a mile and a half away, from which I could get a wider view of this our planet in the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One, A.D. For that, I should explain, was the date the little dials of my machine recorded.

“As I walked I was watching for anything that could possibly help to explain the condition of broken-down splendor in which I found the world—for in ruins it was. A little way up the hill, for instance, was a great heap of granite, bound together by masses of aluminum, a maze of steep walls and crumpled heaps, with thick heaps of very beautiful plants tinted brown about the leaves. It was evidently the abandoned remains of some vast structure, but for what purpose it had been built I could not determine. It was here that I was later to have a very strange experience—the first hint of a still stranger discovery—but I will

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**Thames** [pronounced *tehmz*]: a major river in England that flows through the city of London

**summit**: the highest point of a hill or mountain

speak of that in its proper place.

“Looking round, with a sudden thought I realized that there were no small houses to be seen. Apparently the single house, and possibly even the household, had vanished. Here and there among the greenery were palace-like buildings, but the house and the cottage, which form such characteristic features of our own English landscape, had disappeared.

“‘Communism,’ said I to myself.

### **“Communism” in the Distant Future?**

Communism is an economic system based on community ownership of property. Communists support the principle that the people should own and control everything together, as a community—hence the name, *communism*.

When a family owns a house, that is private ownership of property. When the Time Traveler sees no houses anywhere, he thinks that this future world might have changed over to a communist economic system.

Keep in mind that the Time Traveler is using the word “communism” simply to name the economic system he thinks he sees. He is making a neutral observation, not passing a judgment. Since 1895, when *The Time Machine* was first published, world-shaking events have made it difficult for many people to hear the word “communism” in a neutral way. In the Time Traveler’s day, however, the world had not yet experienced the violent upheavals

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**household:** the people living together in a house

in Russia, China, and elsewhere that led to societies in which harsh totalitarian governments claimed to pursue economic equality through communism but crushed individual freedom and destroyed many lives in the process.

(See the Introduction to this book, page 6, for a brief account of the influence of the ideas of Karl Marx, who hoped for a communist society.)

“I looked at the half-dozen little figures that were following me. Then, in a flash, I perceived that all had the same form of costume, the same soft hairless appearance, and the same roundness of limb. It may seem strange, perhaps, that I had not noticed this before. But everything was so strange. Now, I saw the fact plainly enough. In dress and in all the outward differences that now mark off the sexes from each other, these people of the future were alike. And the children seemed to my eyes to be but the miniatures of their parents.

“Seeing the ease and security in which these people were living, I felt that this close resemblance of the sexes was after all what one would expect; where violence comes but rarely and offspring are secure, the specialization of the sexes with reference to their children’s needs disappears. This, I must remind you, was my speculation at

the time. Later, I was to appreciate how far it fell short of the reality.

“My attention was attracted by a pretty little structure, like a well under a cupola. I thought for a moment of the oddness of wells still existing. There were no large buildings towards the top of the hill, and I was soon left alone for the first time. With a strange sense of freedom and adventure I pushed on up to the crest.

“There I found a seat of some yellow metal that I did not recognize, corroded in places with a kind of pinkish rust and half smothered in soft moss, the arm-rests shaped into the resemblance of griffins’ heads. I sat down on it, and I surveyed the broad view of our old world under the sunset of that long day. It was as sweet and pleasing a view as I have ever seen. The sun had already gone below the horizon and the west was flaming gold, touched with some horizontal bars of purple and crimson. Below was the valley of the Thames, in

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**cupola** [pronounced *KYOO-puh-luh*]: a dome or rounded roof (or part of a roof)

**crest**: top of a hill or mountain

**griffin**: in mythology, a creature with a lion’s body and the head and wings of an eagle



MY ATTENTION WAS ATTRACTED BY A PRETTY LITTLE STRUCTURE,  
LIKE A WELL UNDER A CUPOLA.

which the river lay like a band of burnished steel. I have already spoken of the great palaces dotted about among the greenery, some in ruins and some still occupied. Here and there rose a white or silvery figure. There were no hedges, no signs of proprietary rights, no evidences of agriculture; the whole earth had become a garden.

“I began to put my interpretation upon the things I had seen, something in this way. (Afterwards I found I had got only a half truth—or only a glimpse of the truth.)

### **The Time Traveler as Storyteller: Wrong Theories and Half-Truths**

The Time Traveler tells us his first impressions and early explanations for what he sees in the distant future; at the same time, he tells us that those explanations later turn out to be wrong. He says things like:

*“This . . . was my speculation at the time. Later, I was to appreciate how far it fell short of the reality.”*

*“I began to put my interpretation upon the things I had seen . . . . Afterwards I found I had got only a half truth.”*

The Time Traveler tells us his first ideas were based on “half truth,” and he hints that later we will get the whole truth. But in telling his story, he holds back and makes us wait for the whole truth. Why? Is he trying to keep us in suspense by making us experience the same confusion and mystery that he felt? What do you think about the way he tells the story?

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**burnished:** polished till smooth and bright

**proprietary rights:** rights of private ownership

“It seemed to me that I had happened upon humanity upon the wane. The ruddy sunset set me thinking of the sunset of mankind. For the first time I began to realize an odd consequence of the social effort in which we are at present engaged. And yet it is a logical consequence. Strength is the outcome of need; security sets a premium on feebleness. The work of improving the conditions of life—the true civilizing process that makes life more and more secure—had gone steadily on to a climax. One triumph of a united humanity over Nature had followed another. Things that are now mere dreams had become projects purposefully carried forward. And the harvest was what I saw!

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**upon the wane:** in a state of decline; growing weaker in strength or importance

**ruddy:** reddish in color

**security:** a state of safety, protected from risks or threats

**sets a premium on:** To “set [or put] a premium on” something means to consider it as especially important or valuable. For example, “Our coach put a premium on cooperation—she told us, ‘There is no *I* in *teamwork*.’”

**triumph:** great victory

**harvest:** The word *harvest* usually refers to crops, but the Time Traveler is using it in a general sense that means, the product or result of an action.

“After all, the sanitation and the agriculture of today are still in the rudimentary stage. The science of our time has only begun to attack the field of human diseases. Our agriculture and horticulture destroy a weed just here and there and cultivate perhaps a score or so of wholesome plants, leaving the greater number to fight out a balance as they can. We improve our favorite plants and animals gradually by selective breeding; now a new and better peach, now a seedless grape, now a sweeter and larger flower, now a more convenient breed of cattle. We improve them gradually, because our knowledge is very limited. Someday all this will be better organized, and still better. The whole world will be intelligent, educated, and cooperating; things will move faster and faster towards the subjugation of Nature. In the end, wisely and

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**horticulture:** the practice of promoting and improving the growth of fruits, vegetables, and flowers

**cultivate:** to promote or improve the growth of a plant or crop

**score:** twenty

**selective breeding:** the scientific practice of bringing together specific plants or animals so that when they reproduce, the offspring develop specific traits (such as crops that can resist drought, or dogs with a certain size or appearance)

**subjugation:** the act of overpowering and taking control of someone or something



carefully we shall readjust the balance of animal and vegetable life to suit our human needs.

“This adjustment, I say, must have been done, and done well, in the space of Time across which my machine had leapt. The air was free from gnats, the earth from weeds or fungi; everywhere were fruits and sweet and delightful flowers; brilliant butterflies flew here and there. Diseases had been stamped out. I saw no evidence of any contagious diseases during all my stay.

“Social triumphs, too, had been achieved. I saw mankind housed in splendid shelters, gloriously clothed, and as yet I had found them engaged in no toil. There were no signs of struggle, neither social nor economical struggle. The shop, the advertisement, traffic, all that commerce which makes up the body of our world, was gone. It was natural on that golden evening that I should jump at the idea of a social paradise.

“But with this change in condition comes inevitably adaptations to the change. Unless biological science is a mass of errors, what is the

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**toil:** hard work

**commerce:** buying and selling of goods and services

cause of human intelligence and vigor? Hardship and freedom: conditions under which the active, strong, and subtle survive and the weaker fail or fall; conditions that put a premium upon the loyal alliance of capable men, upon self-restraint, patience, and decision.

“I thought of the physical slightness of the people, their lack of intelligence, and those big ruins, and it strengthened my belief in a perfect conquest of Nature. For after the battle comes Quiet. Humanity had been strong, energetic, and intelligent, and had used all its abundant vitality to alter the conditions under which it lived. And now came the reaction of the altered conditions.

“Under the new conditions of perfect comfort and security, that restless energy, that with us is strength, would become weakness. Even in our own time certain tendencies and desires, once necessary to survival, are a constant source of failure. Physical courage and the love of battle, for instance, are no great help—may even be hindrances—

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**subtle:** clever; highly perceptive

**self-restraint:** self-control; self-discipline

**abundant:** plentiful; more than enough

**hindrances:** obstacles that hold back or delay progress

to a civilized man. And in a state of physical balance and security, power, intellectual as well as physical, would be out of place. I reasoned that for countless years there had been no danger of war or individual violence, no danger from wild beasts, no disease to require strength of constitution, no need of toil. For such a life, what we should call the weak are as well-equipped as the strong, are indeed no longer weak. Indeed they are better equipped, for the strong would be disturbed by an energy for which there was no outlet.

“Even the artistic impulse had almost died in the Time I saw. To adorn themselves with flowers, to dance, to sing in the sunlight: so much was left of the artistic spirit, and no more. Even that would fade in the end into a contented inactivity. We are kept keen on the grindstone of pain and necessity, and it seemed to me that here that hateful grindstone was broken at last!

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**constitution:** one's overall physical health and condition

**impulse:** urge or need to do something

**adorn:** decorate; make more attractive

**keen:** sharp; or, highly perceptive and responsive

**grindstone:** a rotating stone wheel used for sharpening

“As I stood there in the gathering dark I thought that in this simple explanation I had mastered the problem of the world—mastered the whole secret of these delicious people. Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough—as most wrong theories are!

### **On Strength and Security: The Time Traveler’s Theory**

Why have the people of the year 802,701 become small, childlike, and weak? To answer that question, the Time Traveler, being a good scientist, comes up with a theory. He begins by stating a principle: “Strength is the outcome of need; security sets a premium on feebleness.” What does he mean by that? Let’s work through his thinking.

The Time Traveler theorizes that over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, the human race, through their strength and ingenuity, must have gone on making life “more and more secure” by achieving a “perfect conquest of Nature.” In the absence of hunger and disease, people no longer needed to struggle against the natural world, and eventually, they no longer struggled against each other, as war and violence disappeared. With all of humanity’s basic needs fulfilled, there was no need to struggle to survive.

Once humanity achieved this complete security, what happened? With all their needs met, and with no natural threats or social competition, people no longer needed

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**delicious:** delightful; charming

to be strong, energetic, or clever. Indeed, says the Time Traveler, such qualities might even be disturbing in a time of complete security.

"What . . . is the cause of human intelligence and vigor?" the Time Traveler asks. He promptly answers, "Hardship and freedom: conditions under which the active, strong, and subtle survive and the weaker fail or fall." In these thoughts, the Time Traveler, like many people in the Victorian era, is taking the ideas of the evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin and using them to explain human and social developments. (For more about Darwin, see the Introduction to this book, page 8.)

According to the Time Traveler, competition and struggle are necessary to build character and intellect. In his view, when life was harder and humans had to struggle, they developed intelligence and strength to enable them to meet their needs. But, the Time Traveler theorizes, when life got softer, so did humans. And by the year 802,701, no longer facing "pain and necessity," the human race has grown smaller, weaker, and less intelligent

The Time Traveler admits that he will later discover this theory to be "wrong," which invites us to question the theory and the assumptions behind it. Does the Time Traveler's theory make sense to you? Do you agree that "strength is the outcome of need"? Do you think competition and struggle make us stronger and smarter? Is human progress mainly a matter of making life "more and more secure"? Does progress depend on the "conquest of nature"? Can progress go so far that it becomes the opposite, leading to a great decline?

## A SUDDEN SHOCK

“**A**s I stood there musing over this too perfect triumph of man, the full moon came up out of an overflow of silver light in the northeast. The bright little figures ceased to move about below, a noiseless owl flitted by, and I shivered with the chill of the night. I determined to descend and find where I could sleep.

“I looked for the building I knew. Then my eye traveled along to the figure of the White Sphinx upon the pedestal of bronze, growing clearer as the light of the rising moon grew brighter. I could see the silver birch tree against it. There was the tangle of rhododendron bushes, black in the pale light, and there was the little lawn. I looked at the lawn again. A doubt chilled me. ‘No,’ said I firmly to myself, ‘that is not the lawn.’

“But it *was* the lawn. For the white face of the sphinx was towards it. Can you imagine what I

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**mus**ing: thinking deeply or carefully about

**triumph of man**: For the meaning of this phrase, revisit the previous chapter, especially the references to the “triumph of a united humanity over Nature” and “the subjugation of Nature.”

felt as this realization came home to me? But you cannot. The Time Machine was gone!

“At once came the possibility of losing my own time, of being left helpless in this strange new world. I could feel the bare thought of it grip me at the throat and stop my breathing. In another moment I was in a passion of fear and running with great leaping strides down the slope. Once I fell headlong and cut my face; I jumped up and ran on, with a warm trickle down my cheek and chin. All the time I ran I was saying to myself: ‘They have moved it a little, pushed it under the bushes out of the way.’ Nevertheless, I ran with all my might. All the time, with the certainty that sometimes comes with great fear, I knew that such assurance was folly, knew that the machine was removed out of my reach. My breath came with pain. I suppose I covered the whole distance from the hill crest to the little lawn, two miles perhaps, in ten minutes. And I am not a young man. I cursed my confident folly in leaving the machine. I cried aloud, and none answered. Not a creature seemed to be stirring in that moonlit world.

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**folly:** foolishness

“When I reached the lawn my worst fears were realized. Not a trace of the thing was to be seen. I felt faint and cold when I faced the empty space among the black tangle of bushes. I ran round it furiously, as if the thing might be hidden in a corner, and then stopped abruptly, with my hands clutching my hair. Above me towered the sphinx upon the bronze pedestal, white, shining, sickly, in the light of the rising moon. It seemed to smile in mockery of me.

“I might have consoled myself by imagining the little people had put the mechanism in some shelter for me, had I not felt sure they were physically and intellectually incapable of doing so. That is what dismayed me: the sense of some unsuspected power, through whose action my invention had vanished. Yet, I felt assured that the machine could not have moved in time. The attachment of the levers—I will show you the method later—prevented anyone from tampering with the machine when they were removed. It had moved, and was hid, only in space. But then, where could it be?

**consoled:** calmed and comforted

**dismayed:** discouraged; filled with distress



“I think I must have had a kind of frenzy. I remember running violently in and out among the moonlit bushes all round the sphinx, and startling some white animal that, in the dim light, I took for a small deer. I remember, too, late that night, beating the bushes with my clenched fist until my knuckles were gashed and bleeding from the broken twigs. Then, sobbing and raving in my anguish of mind, I went down to the great building of stone. The big hall was dark, silent, and deserted. I slipped on the uneven floor, and fell over one of the tables, almost breaking my shin. I lit a match and went on past the dusty curtains.

“There I found a second great hall covered with cushions, upon which, perhaps, a score or so of the little people were sleeping. No doubt I seemed strange to them, coming suddenly out of the quiet darkness with the flare of a match, for they knew nothing about matches.

“‘Where is my Time Machine?’ I began, bawling like an angry child, laying hands upon them and shaking them up together. It must have been very strange to them. Some laughed, most of

**raving:** talking loudly in a wild and angry way

**anguish:** extreme mental or physical pain

them looked frightened. When I saw them standing round me, I realized I was doing a very foolish thing in trying to scare them. For, reasoning from their daylight behavior, I thought they must have forgotten the sensation of fear.

“Abruptly, I dashed down the match, and knocking one of the people over in my course, went blundering across the big dining-hall again, out under the moonlight. I heard cries of terror and their little feet running and stumbling this way and that. I do not remember all I did as the moon crept up the sky. I suppose it was the unexpected nature of my loss that maddened me. I felt hopelessly cut off from my own kind—a strange animal in an unknown world. I must have raved to and fro, screaming and crying upon God and Fate. I have a memory of horrible fatigue, as the long night of despair wore away; of looking in this impossible place and that; of groping among moonlit ruins and touching strange creatures in the black shadows; at last, of lying on the ground near the sphinx and weeping with absolute

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**fatigue:** extreme tiredness; exhaustion

**despair:** hopelessness

wretchedness. I had nothing left but misery. Then I slept, and when I woke again it was full day, and a couple of sparrows were hopping round me on the turf within reach of my arm.

“I sat up in the freshness of the morning, trying to remember how I had got there, and why I had such a deep sense of despair. Then things came clear in my mind. With the plain, reasonable daylight, I could look my circumstances fairly in the face. I saw the wild folly of my frenzy overnight, and I reasoned with myself. ‘Suppose the worst?’ I said. ‘Suppose the machine altogether lost—perhaps destroyed? It is necessary for me to be calm and patient, to learn the way of the people, to get a clear idea of the method of my loss, and the means of getting materials and tools; so that in the end, perhaps, I may make another.’ That would be my only hope, a poor hope, perhaps, but better than despair. And, after all, it was a beautiful and curious world.

“Probably the machine had only been taken away. Still, I must be calm and patient, find its hiding-place, and recover it by force or cunning.

**wretchedness:** state of extreme sadness

**cunning:** clever trickiness

And with that I scrambled to my feet and looked about me, wondering where I could bathe. I felt weary, stiff, and travel-soiled. The freshness of the morning made me desire an equal freshness. I had exhausted my emotion. Indeed, as I went about my business, I found myself wondering at my intense excitement overnight. I made a careful examination of the ground about the little lawn. I wasted some time in futile questionings to the little people that came by. They all failed to understand my gestures; some made no response, some thought it was a jest and laughed at me. I had the hardest task in the world to keep my hands off their pretty laughing faces. It was a foolish impulse, but the devil born of fear and blind anger was still eager to take advantage of my perplexity.

“I got better guidance from the ground of the lawn. I found a groove ripped in it, about midway between the pedestal of the sphinx and the marks of my feet where, on arrival, I had struggled with the overturned machine. There were other signs of removal about, with odd narrow footprints

**futile:** useless; pointless

**jest:** joke

**perplexity:** a state of confusion or bewilderment

like those I could imagine made by a sloth. This directed my closer attention to the pedestal. It was, as I think I have said, made of bronze. It was not a mere block, but highly decorated with deep framed panels on either side. I went and rapped at these. The pedestal was hollow. Examining the panels with care, I found no handles or keyholes. But if these panels were doors, as I supposed, possibly they opened from within. One thing was clear enough. It took no very great mental effort to infer that my Time Machine was inside that pedestal. But how it got there was a different problem.

“I saw the heads of two orange-clad people coming through the bushes and under some blossom-covered apple-trees towards me. I turned smiling to them, and beckoned them to me. They came, and then, pointing to the bronze pedestal, I tried to make known my wish to open it. But at my first gesture they behaved very oddly. I don’t know how to convey their expression to you. Suppose you were to use a grossly improper gesture to a delicate-minded woman—it is how she would look.

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**infer:** to figure out based on reasoning and evidence

**beckoned:** gestured with the hand or head to signal someone to follow or come closer

They went off as if they had received the worst possible insult. I tried a sweet-looking little chap in white next, with exactly the same result. Somehow, his manner made me feel ashamed of myself. But, as you know, I wanted the Time Machine, and I tried him once more. As he turned off, like the others, my temper got the better of me. In three strides I was after him, had him by the loose part of his robe round the neck, and began dragging him towards the sphinx. Then I saw the horror on his face, and all of a sudden I let him go.

“But I was not beaten yet. I banged with my fist at the bronze panels. I thought I heard something stir inside—I thought I heard a sound like a chuckle—but I must have been mistaken. Then I got a rock from the river, and came and hammered at the panels. The delicate little people must have heard me hammering a mile away on either hand, but nothing came of it. I saw a crowd of them upon the slopes, sneaking quick looks at me. At last, hot and tired, I sat down to watch the place. But I was too restless to watch long. I could work at a problem for years, but to wait inactive for twenty-four hours—that is another matter.

“I got up after a time, and began walking aimlessly through the bushes towards the hill again. ‘Patience,’ said I to myself. ‘If you want your machine again you must leave that sphinx alone. If they mean to take your machine away, it’s little good wrecking their bronze panels, and if they don’t, you will get it back as soon as you can ask for it. To sit before a puzzle like that is hopeless. That way lies madness. Face this world. Learn its ways, watch it, be careful of too hasty guesses at its meaning. In the end you will find clues to it all.’ Then suddenly the humor of the situation came into my mind: the thought of the years I had spent in study and toil to get into the future age, and now my anxious desire to get out of it. I had made myself the most complicated and the most hopeless trap that ever a man devised. I could not help myself—I laughed aloud.

“Going through the big palace, it seemed to me that the little people avoided me. It may have had something to do with my hammering at the gates of bronze. Yet I felt fairly sure of the avoidance. I was careful, however, to show no concern and to hold back from any pursuit of them, and in the course of

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**pursuit:** the act of following or chasing someone or something

a day or two things got back as they were.

“I made what progress I could in the language, and in addition I pushed my explorations here and there. Either I missed some subtle point or their language was excessively simple—almost entirely composed of concrete nouns and verbs. There seemed to be few, if any, abstract terms, or little use of figurative language. Their sentences were usually simple and of two words, and I failed to convey or understand any but the simplest statements. I determined to put the thought of my Time Machine and the mystery of the bronze doors under the sphinx as much as possible in a corner of memory, until my growing knowledge would lead me back to them in a natural way. Yet a certain feeling, you understand, kept me in a circle of a few miles round the point of my arrival.

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**subtle:** not obvious; difficult to notice [The word *subtle* has various meanings; previously, on page 77, it was used to mean “clever, highly perceptive.”]

**abstract terms:** In contrast to concrete nouns—which refer to a specific person, place or thing, such as *flag*—abstract terms refer to a general idea or quality, such as *freedom*.

**figurative language:** In contrast to literal language—words used to say exactly what you mean—figurative language uses words in imaginative and colorful ways. *Literal:* The bird flew away. *Figurative:* I feel free as a bird. *Literal:* I’m happy. *Figurative:* I’m on top of the world!



## EXPLANATION

“So far as I could see, all the world displayed the same fertile richness as the Thames valley. From every hill I climbed I saw the same abundance of splendid buildings, endlessly varied in material and style, the same clustering thickets of evergreens, the same blossom-laden trees and tree ferns. Here and there water shone like silver, and beyond, the land rose into blue undulating hills, and so faded into the serenity of the sky.

“A peculiar feature was the presence of certain circular wells. Several, it seemed to me, were of a very great depth. One lay by the path up the hill which I had followed during my first walk. Like the others, it was rimmed with bronze, and protected by a little cupola from the rain. Sitting by the side of these wells, and peering down into the darkness, I could see no gleam of water, nor could I start any reflection with a lighted match.

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**thickets:** closely-spaced groups of trees or bushes

**undulating:** rising and falling

**serenity:** state of peaceful calm

But in all of them I heard a certain sound: a thud—thud—thud, like the beating of some big engine; and I discovered, from the flaring of my matches, that a steady current of air set down the shafts. Further, I threw in a scrap of paper and, instead of fluttering slowly down, it was at once sucked swiftly out of sight.

“After a time, I came to connect these wells with tall towers standing here and there upon the slopes; for above them there was often just such a flicker in the air as one sees on a hot day above a sun-scorched beach. Putting things together, I reached a strong suggestion of an extensive system of subterranean ventilation, whose true significance it was difficult to imagine. I was at first inclined to associate it with the sanitary apparatus of these people. It was an obvious conclusion, but it was absolutely wrong.

“I have read some visions of Utopia and coming times in which there is a vast amount of detail about building, and social arrangements, and

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**subterranean:** underground

**sanitary apparatus:** equipment for the disposal of waste;  
sewage system

**Utopia:** an imaginary perfect society

so forth. But while such details are easy enough to obtain when the whole world is contained in one's imagination, they are altogether inaccessible to a real traveler in such realities as I found here. I was aware of much unseen, which contributed to my comfort; but except for a general impression of automatic organization, I fear I can convey very little of the difference to your mind.

### Visions of Utopia

The Time Traveler says he has read a number of books that present "visions of Utopias and coming times." The word *Utopia* comes from the title of a book from 1516 by Sir Thomas More, which describes his vision of a perfect society on an imaginary island. He made up the word *utopia* from the Greek words *ou* (meaning "no") and *topos* (meaning "place")—so, a utopia is "no place," a place that doesn't exist.

The word *utopia* has come to be used for any imaginary vision of a perfect society. In H. G. Wells's time, during the late 1800s, many writers were offering their optimistic visions of ideal societies in the future. As the Time Traveler notes, these utopian writings often provided detailed descriptions of modes of government, kinds of housing, systems of transportation and manufacturing, and more. In this way, while these utopian

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**inaccessible:** out of reach; beyond understanding

**general impression of automatic organization:** The Time Traveler refers here to his vague sense that in the distant future, technology has advanced to the point that the basic needs of the people are automatically filled—though the Time Traveler cannot see how this is achieved.

writings optimistically predicted progress and improvement in the future, they also indirectly criticized present-day social arrangements by showing how far they were from the visions of future perfection.

Two utopian novels were especially popular in H. G. Wells's time: *Looking Backward* by the American writer Edward Bellamy (published in 1888), and *News from Nowhere* by the English writer William Morris (published in 1890). In *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, Wells casts doubt on the optimistic visions of those novels and other utopian writings. Later, in 1905, Wells published a book titled *A Modern Utopia*, a curious work in which he both offers a utopian vision and constantly questions it.

In recent times, a new word, *dystopia*, has been used to suggest the opposite of *utopia*. (The prefix *dys* comes from a Greek term meaning "ill" or "bad.") Modern-day dystopian novels and movies imagine a world gone terribly wrong. Dystopian fictions warn us that unless we change our ways, we might be heading toward dystopia sooner than we think.

Think about your own vision of utopia. What are the top three features of your perfect society?

"For instance, I could see no signs of crematories nor cemeteries nor anything like tombs. But it occurred to me that these might be somewhere beyond the range of my exploring. And this puzzled me still more: among this people none were aged or infirm.

**crematories:** place where the bodies of the dead are cremated  
(burned into ashes)

**infirm:** sickly; physically weakened by old age or illness

“My first theories of an automatic civilization did not last long, yet I could think of no other. Let me explain my difficulties. The several big palaces I had explored were mere living places, great dining-halls and sleeping apartments. I could find no machinery, no appliances of any kind. Yet these people were clothed in pleasant fabrics that must at times need renewal, and their sandals, though undecorated, were fairly complex specimens of metalwork. Somehow such things must be made. And the little people displayed no trace of a creative tendency. There were no shops, no workshops. They spent all their time in playing gently, in bathing in the river, in eating fruit, and sleeping. I could not see how things were kept going.

“Then, again, about the Time Machine: something had taken it into the hollow pedestal of the White Sphinx. Why? For the life of me I could not imagine. Those waterless wells, too, those flickering pillars. I felt I lacked a clue.

“On the third day of my visit to the world of Eight Hundred and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One, I made a friend—of a sort.

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**of a sort:** an expression meaning, not quite of the usual kind

It happened that, as I was watching some of the little people bathing in a shallow part of the river, one of them was seized with cramp and began drifting downstream. The main current ran rather swiftly, but not too strongly for even a moderate swimmer. It will give you an idea, therefore, of the strange deficiency in these creatures, when I tell you that none made the slightest attempt to rescue the weakly crying little thing that was drowning before their eyes. When I realized this, I hurriedly waded in at a point lower down, where I caught the poor mite and drew her safe to land. A little rubbing of the limbs soon brought her round, and I had the satisfaction of seeing she was all right before I left her.

“This happened in the morning. I did not expect any gratitude from her, but I was wrong. In the afternoon I met my little woman, as I believe it was, as I was returning from an exploration, and she received me with cries of delight and presented me with a big garland of flowers—

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**deficiency:** a state in which there is not enough of something, or something is lacking in a way that causes a problem

**mite:** a small person or thing

**garland:** wreath; a ring of flowers and leaves worn as a decoration

evidently made for me and me alone. The thing took my imagination. Very possibly I had been feeling desolate. At any rate I did my best to display my appreciation of the gift. We were soon seated together, engaged in conversation, chiefly of smiles. The creature's friendliness affected me exactly as a child's might have done. We passed each other flowers, and she kissed my hands. I did the same to hers. Then I tried talk, and found that her name was Weena, which, though I don't know what it meant, somehow seemed appropriate enough. That was the beginning of an unusual friendship which lasted a week, and ended—as I will tell you!

“She was exactly like a child. She wanted to be with me always. She tried to follow me everywhere, and on my next journey out and about it touched my heart to tire her down and leave her exhausted, calling after me rather plaintively. But the problems of the world had to be mastered.

“Her distress when I left her was very great, sometimes frantic, and I think I had as much

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**desolate:** deeply sad and alone

**at any rate:** in any case; anyway

**plaintively:** pitifully; sadly and mournfully



SHE RECEIVED ME WITH CRIES OF DELIGHT AND PRESENTED ME  
WITH A BIG GARLAND OF FLOWERS.



trouble as comfort from her devotion. Nevertheless she was, somehow, a very great comfort. I thought it was mere childish affection that made her cling to me. Until it was too late, I did not clearly know what I had inflicted upon her when I left her. Nor until it was too late did I clearly understand what she was to me. For, by merely seeming fond of me, and showing in her weak, ineffective way that she cared for me, the little doll of a creature soon gave my return to the neighborhood of the White Sphinx almost the feeling of coming home; and I would watch for her tiny figure of white and gold so soon as I came over the hill.

“It was from her, too, that I learned that fear had not yet left the world. She was fearless enough in the daylight; once, in a foolish moment, I made threatening grimaces at her, and she simply laughed at them. But she dreaded the dark and shadows. Darkness to her was the one thing dreadful. It was a remarkably intense emotion, and it set me thinking and observing. I discovered then, among other things, that these little people

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**grimaces:** twisted or ugly facial expressions

gathered into the great houses after dark, and slept in large groups. To enter upon them without a light was to put them into great fear and alarm. I never found one outdoors, or one sleeping alone inside, after dark. Yet I was still such a blockhead that I missed the lesson of that fear, and in spite of Weena's distress, I insisted upon sleeping away from these slumbering multitudes.

"It troubled her greatly, but in the end her odd affection for me triumphed, and for five of the nights of our acquaintance, including the last night of all, she slept with her head pillowed on my arm. But my story slips away from me as I speak of her.

"It must have been the night before her rescue that I was awakened about dawn. I had been restless, dreaming that I was drowned, and that sea anemones were feeling over my face with their soft tentacles. I woke with a start, and with an odd sense that some greyish animal had just rushed out. I tried to get to sleep again, but I felt restless and uncomfortable. It was that dim grey hour when things are just creeping out of darkness,

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**sea anemones:** small, colorful sea animals that look like flowers

when everything is colorless and clear cut, and yet unreal. I got up, and went down into the great hall, and so out upon the flat stone walkway in front of the palace. I thought I would make a virtue of necessity, and see the sunrise.

“The dying moonlight and the first pale glow of dawn were mingled in a ghastly half-light. The bushes were inky black, the ground a dull grey, the sky colorless and cheerless. And up the hill I thought I could see ghosts. Three times, as I scanned the slope, I saw white figures. Twice I thought I saw a solitary white, ape-like creature running quickly up the hill, and once near the ruins I saw a few of them carrying some dark body. They moved hastily. I did not see what became of them. It seemed that they vanished among the bushes. The dawn was still indistinct, you must understand. I was feeling that chill, uncertain, early-morning feeling you may have known. I doubted my eyes.

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**make a virtue of necessity:** an expression meaning, to make the best out of a situation in which you have no choice, or you have to do something

**scanned:** looked carefully at all parts of

“As the eastern sky grew brighter, and the light of the day came on and its vivid coloring returned upon the world once more, I again looked closely at the hillside. But I saw no traces of the white figures. They were mere creatures of the half-light. ‘They must have been ghosts,’ I said. But the joke was unsatisfying, and I was thinking of these figures all that morning until Weena’s rescue drove them out of my head. I associated them in some indefinite way with the white animal I had startled in my first search for the Time Machine. They were soon destined to take far deadlier possession of my mind.

“I think I have said how much hotter than our own was the weather of this Golden Age. I cannot account for it. It may be that the sun was hotter, or the earth nearer the sun. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the sun was very much hotter than we know it.

“Well, one very hot morning—my fourth, I think—as I was seeking shelter from the heat and glare in a colossal ruin near the great house

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**account for:** give a satisfactory explanation of

**glare:** a harsh, bright light

where I slept and fed, a strange thing happened. Clambering among these heaps of masonry, I found a narrow gallery, whose end and side windows were blocked by fallen masses of stone. By contrast with the brilliant light outside, it seemed at first impenetrably dark to me. I entered it groping, for the change from light to blackness made spots of color swim before me. Suddenly I halted spellbound. A pair of eyes, luminous by reflection of the daylight outside, was watching me out of the darkness.

“The old instinctive dread of wild beasts came upon me. I clenched my hands and firmly looked into the glaring eyeballs. I was afraid to turn. Then the thought of the absolute security in which humanity appeared to be living came to my mind. And then I remembered that strange terror

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**clambering:** climbing or crawling in an awkward way

**masonry:** stone and brick

**gallery:** a long, narrow room

**impenetrably:** in a way that is impossible to see through or pass through

**spellbound:** held in fixed attention, as though hypnotized or under a spell

**luminous:** shining in the dark

**glaring:** shining with a harsh light

of the dark. Overcoming my fear to some extent, I advanced a step and spoke. I will admit that my voice was harsh and ill-controlled. I put out my hand and touched something soft. At once the eyes darted sideways, and something white ran past me. I turned with my heart in my mouth, and saw a strange little ape-like figure, its head held down in a peculiar manner, running across the sunlit space behind me. It blundered against a block of granite, staggered aside, and in a moment was hidden in a black shadow beneath another pile of ruined masonry.

“My impression of it is, of course, imperfect; but I know it was a dull white, and had strange large greyish-red eyes; also that there was flaxen hair on its head and down its back. But, as I say, it went too fast for me to see distinctly. I cannot even say whether it ran on all fours, or only with its forearms held very low.

“After an instant’s pause I followed it into the second heap of ruins. I could not find it at first; but, after a time in the deep darkness,

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**staggered:** moved unsteadily from side to side

**flaxen:** pale yellow

I came upon one of those round well-like openings of which I have told you, half closed by a fallen pillar. A sudden thought came to me. Could this Thing have vanished down the shaft? I lit a match, and, looking down, I saw a small, white, moving creature, with large bright eyes which regarded me as it retreated. It made me shudder. It was so like a human spider! It was clambering down the wall, and now I saw for the first time a number of metal foot and hand rests forming a kind of ladder down the shaft. Then the light burned my fingers and fell out of my hand, going out as it dropped, and by the time I had lit another match the little monster had disappeared.

“I do not know how long I sat peering down that well. I could hardly persuade myself that the thing I had seen was human. But, gradually, the truth dawned on me: that Man had not remained one species, but had differentiated into two distinct animals: that my graceful children of the Upper World were not the only descendants of our generation, but that this bleached, obscene,

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**descendants:** offspring; people related to past groups of people

**obscene:** disgusting; repulsive; nasty

nocturnal Thing, which had flashed before me, was also heir to all the ages.

“I thought of the flickering pillars and of my theory of an underground ventilation. I began to suspect their true significance. And what, I wondered, was this lemur doing in my scheme of a perfectly balanced organization? How was it related to the indolent serenity of the beautiful Overworlders? And what was hidden down there, at the foot of that shaft? I sat upon the edge of the well telling myself that there was nothing to fear, and that there I must descend for the solution of my difficulties. And yet I was absolutely afraid to go!

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**nocturnal:** mainly active at night

**heir to all the ages:** An heir is a person who inherits property from someone who has died. In a famous poem by the Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson, the phrase “heir of all the ages” suggests a person who inherits the history and traditions of the people who came before him, and who represents a sense of possibility for the future. H. G. Wells’s Time Traveler is shocked to think that these strange, pale creatures might be the heirs of humanity.

**the flickering pillars:** In the earlier chapter titled “Explanation” (see page 93), the Time Traveler sees “circular wells” dotting the landscape. Related to these, he thinks, as part of “an extensive system of subterranean ventilation,” are “tall towers standing here and there upon the slopes; for above them there was often just such a flicker in the air as one sees on a hot day above a sun-scorched beach.”

**lemur:** a small monkey-like mammal with large eyes



“As I hesitated, two of the beautiful upperworld people came running across the daylight in the shadow. They seemed distressed to find me, my arm against the overturned pillar, peering down the well. Apparently it was considered inappropriate to take note of these apertures; for when I pointed to this one, and tried to ask about it in their language, they were still more distressed and turned away. But they were interested by my matches, and I struck some to amuse them. I soon left them. My mind was turning. I had now a clue to the meaning of these wells, to the ventilating towers, to the mystery of the ghosts—as well as a hint at the meaning of the bronze gates and the fate of the Time Machine! And very vaguely there came a suggestion towards the solution of the economic problem that had puzzled me.

“Here was the new view. Plainly, this second species of Man was subterranean. There were three circumstances in particular which made me think that its rare emergence above ground was the outcome of a long-continued underground

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**apertures:** openings; holes

**economic problem:** The Time Traveler refers to his puzzlement about how the little people meet their needs when they neither work nor have any system of manufacturing or trade.

**emergence:** the act of coming into view

habit. In the first place, there was the bleached look common in most animals that live largely in the dark—the white fish of the Kentucky caves, for instance. Then, those large eyes, with that ability to reflect light, are common features of nocturnal things, such as the owl and the cat. And last of all, that evident confusion in the sunshine, that hasty yet fumbling awkward flight towards dark shadow, and that peculiar carriage of the head while in the light—all reinforced the theory of an extreme sensitiveness of the retina.

“Beneath my feet, then, the earth must be tunneled enormously, and these tunnels were the habitat of the New Species. The presence of ventilating shafts and wells along the hill slopes—everywhere, in fact, except along the river valley, made it natural to assume that it was in this artificial Underworld that such work as was necessary to the comfort of the daylight people was done. The notion was so plausible that I at once accepted it, and went on to consider how the human species had been split.

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**retina:** the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eyeball

**notion:** idea; opinion

“At first, proceeding from the problems of our own age, it seemed clear as daylight to me that the key lay in the gradual widening of the present social difference between the Capitalist and the Laborer. No doubt it will seem wildly incredible to you, and yet even now there are existing circumstances to point that way. There is a tendency to utilize underground space for the less ornamental purposes of civilization; for instance, there are new electric railways, there are subways, there are underground workrooms and restaurants, and they increase and multiply. Evidently, I thought, this tendency had increased till Industry had gradually gone deeper and deeper into larger and ever larger underground factories, till, in the end—! Even now, does not an East End worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of the earth?

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**Capitalist and the Laborer:** Here, the Time Traveler begins “to consider how the human species had been split” by examining the division of society into social classes. The “Capitalists” are the upper class, those who have money, who own businesses, and who employ the “Laborers,” the working class. This analysis of society in terms of class divisions recalls the ideas of the German scholar Karl Marx. For more information on the influence of Marx, see the Introduction to this book, page 6.

**ornamental:** decorative; used to make more attractive

**East End:** the eastern part of the city of London, known in the Victorian era as an overcrowded area of great poverty

“The exclusive tendency of richer people is already leading to the closing, in their interest, of considerable portions of the surface of the land. About London, for instance, perhaps half the prettier country is shut in against intrusion. There is a widening gulf between the refinement of the rich and the rude violence of the poor. This gap is due to the length and expense of the higher educational process and the increasingly refined habits on the part of the rich. This same widening gulf will make social advancement by marriage between the classes less and less frequent, which at present delays the splitting of our species along lines of social stratification. So, in the end, above ground you must have the Haves, pursuing pleasure and comfort and beauty, and below ground the Have-nots, the Workers getting continually adapted to the conditions of their

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**exclusive tendency of richer people:** The Time Traveler uses this phrase to suggest that wealthy people tend to exclude and keep themselves apart from those who are not rich.

**in their interest:** for their benefit (that is, for the good of the richer people)

**intrusion:** unwanted or illegal entrance

**gulf:** a large difference or division between two people or groups

**refinement:** polite manners and sophisticated tastes

**social stratification:** the division of society into different classes

labor. Once they were there, they would no doubt have to pay rent, and not a little of it, for the ventilation of their caverns; and if they refused, they would starve or be suffocated. The miserable and rebellious would die; and, in the end, the survivors would become as well adapted to the conditions of underground life, and as happy in their way, as the Overworld people were to theirs.

“The great triumph of Humanity had been no triumph of moral education and general cooperation as I had imagined. Instead, I saw a real aristocracy with a perfected science taking the industrial system of today to a logical conclusion — not simply a triumph over Nature, but a triumph over Nature and the fellow-man. This, I must warn you, was my theory at the time. My explanation may be absolutely wrong. I still think it is the most plausible one. But this balanced civilization must have long since passed its zenith, and was now far fallen into decay. The too-perfect security of the Overworlders had led them to a slow movement of degeneration, to a general decrease in size, strength, and intelligence.

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**aristocracy:** the highest social class

**zenith:** highest point of success

**degeneration:** process of becoming worse, weaker, lower in quality

That I could see clearly enough already. What had happened to the Undergrounders I did not yet suspect; but, from what I had seen of the Morlocks—that was the name by which these creatures were called—I could imagine that the modification of the human type was even far more profound than among the ‘Eloi,’ the beautiful little people that I already knew.

“Then came troublesome doubts. Why had the Morlocks taken my Time Machine? For I felt sure it was they who had taken it. Why, too, if the Eloi were masters, could they not restore the machine to me? And why were they so terribly afraid of the dark?

“I questioned Weena about this Underworld, but she refused to answer. She shivered as though the topic was unbearable. And when I pressed her, perhaps a little harshly, she burst into tears. They were the only tears, except my own, I ever saw in that Golden Age. When I saw them I ceased abruptly to trouble Weena about the Morlocks. And very soon she was smiling and clapping her hands, while I solemnly burnt a match.

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**solemnly:** in a serious and unsmiling manner

**The Time Traveler's "New View":  
The Theory of Two Species**

In an earlier chapter (see pages 74-79), the Time Traveler offered his first theory about the world of the distant future. He theorized that the human race had achieved a "conquest of nature" resulting in "an automatic civilization" in which there was no hunger or disease, and all of humanity's basic needs were met without work or struggle. Even as he explained this first theory, he told us it would prove to be "wrong."

Now, faced by new facts—especially his encounter with the underground creatures—the Time Traveler offers his "new view." He no longer thinks that the small, childlike people live in a civilization in which their needs are somehow automatically met. Instead, he now thinks that there is an "Underworld" populated by creatures who do "such work as was necessary to the comfort of the daylight people." His revised theory, he says, grows out of his thinking about "the problems of our own age"—that is, the Time Traveler's present-day, the late Victorian era in England, around 1900.

"It seemed clear as daylight to me," he says, "that the key lay in the gradual widening of the present social difference" between the upper and lower classes. According to the Time Traveler's new theory, great social changes eventually led to great biological changes: "Man had not remained one species," he theorizes, "but had differentiated into two distinct animals." He thinks that in the far distant future, the upper and lower classes have grown so far apart that they have actually evolved into two different species: above ground, the childlike Eloi, and below, the "ape-like" Morlocks. According to the Time Traveler, what led to the gradual splitting of humanity into two different species?

When the Time Traveler talks of the upper classes of his own time, he does not criticize them—after all, the Time Traveler is himself wealthy enough to hold frequent dinner parties in a nice house staffed by a number of servants. The Time Traveler is mainly interested in scientific theory, not social criticism. But through the Time Traveler's theories about the future, the author, H. G. Wells, draws attention to what he sees as serious problems in his own time, including the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

## THE MORLOCKS

“It may seem odd to you, but it was two days before I could follow up the newfound clue in the proper way. I felt a peculiar shrinking from those pallid bodies. They were just the half-bleached color of the worms and things one sees preserved in alcohol in a museum. And they were filthily cold to the touch. Probably my shrinking was largely due to the influence of the Eloi, whose disgust of the Morlocks I now began to appreciate.

“The next night I did not sleep well. I was oppressed with perplexity and doubt. Once or twice I had a feeling of intense fear for which I could perceive no definite reason. I remember creeping noiselessly into the great hall where the little people were sleeping in the moonlight. That night Weena was among them. I felt reassured by their presence. It occurred to me that in the course of a few days the moon must pass through its last quarter, and the nights would grow dark —

**shrinking:** moving away from, in fear or disgust

**pallid:** pale in a sickly way

**oppressed:** distressed; discouraged; emotionally weighed down



then these unpleasant creatures from below, these whitened lemurs, this new vermin that had replaced the old, might appear more often.

“On these days I had the restless feeling of one who shirks an inevitable duty. I felt sure that the Time Machine was only to be recovered by boldly penetrating these mysteries of underground. Yet I could not face the mystery. If only I had had a companion it would have been different. But I was so horribly alone, and even to clamber down into the darkness of the well appalled me. I don’t know if you will understand my feeling, but I never felt quite safe at my back.

“It was this restlessness, this insecurity, perhaps, that drove me farther and farther away in my exploring expeditions. Going towards the rising country south-westward, I observed far off a vast green structure, different in character from any I had seen. It was larger than the largest of the palaces or ruins I knew, and the face of it had the bluish-green tint of a certain type of

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**vermin:** pests; harmful animals such as rats or cockroaches

**shirks:** avoids (a duty or responsibility)

**appalled:** horrified and discouraged

**tint:** shade or small amount of a color

Chinese porcelain. This difference in appearance suggested a difference in use, and I wanted to push on and explore. But the day was growing late, so I resolved to hold over the adventure for the following day, and I returned to the welcome of little Weena. But next morning I perceived that my curiosity regarding the Palace of Green Porcelain had enabled me to put off an experience I dreaded. I resolved I would make the descent without further waste of time, and started out in the early morning towards a well near the ruins of granite and aluminum.

“Little Weena ran with me. She danced beside me to the well, but when she saw me lean over the well-mouth and look downward, she seemed strangely upset. ‘Good-bye, little Weena,’ I said, and then I reached in and began to feel for the climbing hooks. Rather hastily, I may as well confess, for I feared my courage might leak away! At first she watched me in amazement. Then she gave a most piteous cry, and running to me, she

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**porcelain:** a hard material made from baking clay, sometimes used to make dishes, vases, figurines, etc.

**well-mouth:** the opening into the well

**piteous:** sad; pitiful; heartbreaking

began to pull at me with her little hands. I think her opposition encouraged me to proceed. I shook her off, perhaps a little roughly, and in another moment I was in the throat of the well. I saw her agonized face and smiled to reassure her. Then I had to look down at the unstable hooks to which I clung.

“I had to clamber down a shaft of perhaps two hundred yards, by means of metallic bars projecting from the sides of the well. These being adapted to the needs of a creature much smaller and lighter than myself, I was quickly cramped and fatigued by the descent. And not simply fatigued! One of the bars bent suddenly under my weight, and almost swung me off into the blackness beneath. For a moment I hung by one hand, and after that experience I did not dare to rest again. Though my arms and back were soon in great pain, I went on clambering down the sheer descent with as quick a motion as possible. Glancing upward, I saw the opening, a small blue disc in which a star was visible, while little

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**agonized:** showing great mental or physical pain

**sheer:** very steep

Weena's head showed as a round black projection. The thudding sound of a machine below grew louder and more oppressive. Everything except that little disc above was profoundly dark, and when I looked up again Weena had disappeared.

"I was in an agony of discomfort. I had some thought of trying to go up the shaft again, and leave the Underworld alone. But I continued to descend. At last, with intense relief, I saw dimly coming up, a foot to the right of me, a slender loophole in the wall. Swinging myself in, I found it was the opening to a narrow horizontal tunnel in which I could lie down and rest. It was not too soon. My arms ached, my back was cramped, and I was trembling with the prolonged terror of a fall. Besides this, the unbroken darkness had had a distressing effect upon my eyes. The air was full of the throb and hum of machinery pumping air down the shaft.

"I do not know how long I lay. I was roused by a soft hand touching my face. Starting up in the darkness I snatched at my matches and, hastily

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**agony:** extreme mental or physical pain

**roused:** brought out of a state of sleep or inactivity

striking one, I saw three stooping white creatures similar to the one I had seen above ground in the ruin, hastily retreating before the light. Living, as they did, in what appeared to me impenetrable darkness, their eyes were abnormally large and sensitive, just as are the pupils of the fishes of the deep, and they reflected the light in the same way. I have no doubt they could see me in that rayless obscurity, and they did not seem to have any fear of me apart from the light. But when I struck a match in order to see them, they fled, vanishing into dark gutters and tunnels, from which their eyes glared at me in the strangest fashion.

“I tried to call to them, but the language they had was apparently different from that of the Overworld people. The thought of fleeing rather than exploring crossed my mind. Feeling my way along the tunnel, I found the noise of machinery grow louder. Soon I came to a large open space. Striking another match, I saw that I had entered a vast arched cavern, which stretched into utter darkness beyond the range of my light. The view

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**obscurity:** dimness or darkness

I had of it was as much as one could see in the burning of a match.

“My memory is vague. Great shapes like big machines rose out of the dimness, and cast grotesque black shadows, in which dim spectral Morlocks sheltered from the glare. The place was very stuffy and oppressive, and the faint scent of freshly-shed blood was in the air. Some way down was a little table of white metal, laid with what seemed a meal. The Morlocks were carnivorous! Even at the time, I remember wondering what large animal could have survived to furnish the red joint I saw. It was all very indistinct: the heavy smell, the big shapes, the obscene figures lurking in the shadows, and only waiting for the darkness to come at me again! Then the match burnt down, and stung my fingers, and fell, a wriggling red spot in the blackness.

“I have thought since how ill-equipped I was for such an experience. When I had started with the Time Machine, I had started with the

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**spectral:** ghostlike

**carnivorous:** meat-eating

**joint:** large piece of meat

**ill-equipped:** badly prepared

absurd assumption that the men of the Future would certainly be infinitely ahead of ourselves in all ways. I had come without arms, without medicine, even without enough matches. If only I had thought of a camera! I could have flashed that glimpse of the Underworld in a second, and examined it at leisure. But, as it was, I stood there with only the weapons and the powers that Nature had given me—hands, feet, and teeth; these, and four matches that still remained.

“I was afraid to push my way in among all this machinery in the dark, and it was only with my last glimpse of light I discovered that my store of matches had run low. It had never occurred to me until that moment that there was any need to economize them, and I had wasted almost half the box in astonishing the Overworlders, to whom fire was a novelty. Now, as I said, I had four left, and while I stood in the dark, a hand touched mine, thin fingers came feeling over my face, and I was sensible of a peculiar unpleasant odor. I thought I heard the breathing of a crowd of those dreadful

**arms:** weapons

**economize:** use carefully so as to avoid waste

**novelty:** something new and unusual

little beings about me. I felt the box of matches in my hand being gently disengaged, and other hands behind me plucking at my clothing.

“The sense of these unseen creatures examining me was indescribably unpleasant. There in the darkness, I suddenly realized how little I knew about them. I shouted at them as loudly as I could. They started away, and then I could feel them approaching me again. They clutched at me more boldly, whispering odd sounds to each other. I shivered violently, and shouted again. This time they were not so seriously alarmed, and they made a strange laughing noise as they came back at me.

“I will confess I was horribly frightened. I determined to strike another match and escape under the protection of its glare. I did so, and eking out the flicker with a scrap of paper from my pocket, I made my retreat to the narrow tunnel. But I had barely entered this when my light was blown out and in the blackness I could hear the Morlocks rustling like wind among leaves, and pattering like the rain, as they hurried after me.

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**disengaged:** separated; removed

**eking out:** making something last longer



“In a moment I was clutched by several hands, and there was no mistaking that they were trying to haul me back. I struck another light, and waved it in their dazzled faces. You can hardly imagine how nauseatingly inhuman they looked—those pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes!—as they stared in their blindness and bewilderment.

“But I did not stay to look. I retreated again, and when my second match had ended, I struck my third. It had almost burnt through when I reached the opening into the shaft. I lay down on the edge, for the throb of the great pump below made me giddy. Then I felt sideways for the projecting hooks, and, as I did so, my feet were grasped from behind, and I was violently tugged backward. I lit my last match . . . and it went out. But I had my hand on the climbing bars now, and, kicking violently, I disengaged myself from the clutches of the Morlocks, and was speedily clambering up the shaft, while they stayed peering and blinking up at me, all except one who followed me for some way and almost took my boot as a trophy.

giddy: dizzy



I STRUCK ANOTHER LIGHT, AND WAVED IT IN THEIR DAZZLED FACES.

“That climb seemed interminable to me. With the last twenty or thirty feet of it a deadly nausea came upon me. I had the greatest difficulty in keeping my hold. The last few yards was a frightful struggle against this faintness. Several times my head swam, and I felt all the sensations of falling. At last, however, I got over the well-mouth somehow, and staggered out of the ruin into the blinding sunlight. I fell upon my face. Even the soil smelled sweet and clean. Then I remember Weena kissing my hands and ears, and the voices of others among the Eloi. Then, for a time, I was insensible.



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**insensible:** unconscious; passed out

## WHEN NIGHT CAME

“Now, indeed, I seemed in a worse case than before. Until now I had hope of escape, but that hope was shaken by these new discoveries. Until now I had simply thought myself held back by the childish simplicity of the little people, and by some unknown forces which I had only to understand to overcome; but there was an altogether new element in the sickening quality of the Morlocks—a something inhuman and malign. Instinctively I loathed them. Before, I had felt as a man might feel who had fallen into a pit: my concern was with the pit and how to get out of it. Now I felt like a beast in a trap, whose enemy would come upon him soon.

“The enemy I dreaded may surprise you. It was the darkness of the coming new moon. Weena had put this into my head by some remarks about the Dark Nights, which at first I did not understand. The moon was waning: each

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**malign:** evil in nature

**loathed:** hated intensely

**waning:** appearing thinner and less full than the night before

night there was a longer interval of darkness. And I now understood to some slight degree the reason of the fear of the little Upperworld people for the dark. I wondered what foul villainy the Morlocks did under the new moon. I felt pretty sure now that my second hypothesis was all wrong. The Upperworld people might once have been the favored aristocracy, and the Morlocks their mechanical servants, but that had long since passed away.

“The two species that had resulted from the evolution of man were sliding down towards, or had already arrived at, an altogether new relationship. The Eloi had decayed to a mere beautiful futility. They still possessed the earth, since the Morlocks, subterranean for innumerable generations, had come at last to find the daylight surface intolerable. I inferred that the Morlocks made the garments of the Eloi, and maintained them in their habitual needs, perhaps through the

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**interval:** a period of time between events

**my second hypothesis:** See pages 110-114.

**mechanical:** acting in an unthinking, automatic, machine-like way

**futility:** uselessness; ineffectiveness

**intolerable:** unbearable

survival of an old habit of service. They did it as a standing horse paws with his foot, or as a man enjoys killing animals in sport, because of ancient and departed necessities. But, clearly, the old order was already in part reversed. The Nemesis of the delicate ones was creeping on apace. Ages ago, thousands of generations ago, man had thrust his brother man out of the ease and the sunshine. And now that brother was coming back—changed! Already the Eloi had begun to learn one old lesson anew. They were becoming reacquainted with Fear. And suddenly, almost like a question from outside, there came into my head the memory of the meat I had seen in the Underworld. I tried to recall the form of it. I had a vague sense of something familiar, but I could not tell what it was at the time.

“Still, however helpless the little people in the presence of their mysterious Fear, I was different. I came out of this age of ours, this prime of the

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**Nemesis:** In Greek mythology, the goddess Nemesis inflicted terrible punishments. Now, *nemesis* means an enemy you cannot avoid or overcome.

**apace:** quickly

**prime:** a time of greatest strength or success

human race, when Fear does not paralyze and mystery has lost its terrors. I at least would defend myself. Without further delay I determined to make myself arms and a safe place where I might sleep. Then I could face this strange world with some of that confidence I had lost in realizing how I lay unprotected from these creatures night by night. I felt I could never sleep again until my bed was secure from them. I shuddered with horror to think how they must already have examined me.

“I wandered during the afternoon along the valley of the Thames, but found no buildings or trees that seemed inaccessible to such dexterous climbers as the Morlocks. Then I remembered the tall pinnacles of the Palace of Green Porcelain and the polished gleam of its walls; and in the evening, taking Weena like a child upon my shoulder, I went up the hills towards the southwest. The distance, I thought, was seven or eight miles, but it must have been nearer eighteen. In addition, the heel of one of my shoes was loose, and a nail was working through the sole, so that I was lame. And

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**dexterous:** highly skillful

**pinnacles:** peaks; highest points

it was already long past sunset when I came in sight of the palace.

“Weena had been delighted when I began to carry her, but after a while she desired me to let her down, and ran along by the side of me, occasionally darting off on either hand to pick flowers to stick in my pockets. My pockets had always puzzled Weena, but she had concluded that they were an odd kind of vase for floral decoration. At least she used them for that purpose. And that reminds me! In changing my jacket I found. . .”

(The Time Traveler paused, put his hand into his pocket, and silently placed two withered, very large white flowers upon the little table. Then he resumed his narrative.)

“As the hush of evening crept over the world and we proceeded over the hill crest, Weena grew tired and wanted to return to the house of grey stone. But I pointed out the distant pinnacles of the Palace of Green Porcelain to her, and managed to make her understand that we were seeking a refuge there from her Fear.

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**withered:** dried out and wrinkled

**refuge:** a place that offers safety and shelter from danger





I POINTED OUT THE DISTANT PINNACLES OF THE PALACE OF GREEN  
PORCELAIN TO HER.

“You know that great pause that comes upon things before the dusk? Even the breeze stops in the trees. To me there is always an air of expectation about that evening stillness. The sky was clear, remote, and empty save for a few horizontal bars far down in the sunset. Well, that night the expectation took the color of my fears. In that darkling calm my senses seemed sharpened. I imagined I could even feel the hollowness of the ground beneath my feet, and see through it the Morlocks on their ant-hill waiting for the dark. In my excitement I imagined that they would receive my invasion of their burrows as a declaration of war. And why had they taken my Time Machine?

“So we went on in the quiet, and the twilight deepened into night. The clear blue of the distance faded, and one star after another came out. The ground grew dim and the trees black. Weena’s fears and her fatigue grew upon her. I took her in my arms and talked to her and soothed her. Then, as the darkness grew deeper, she put her arms round my neck, and, closing her eyes, tightly

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**darkling:** growing dark

pressed her face against my shoulder. So we went down a long slope into a valley, and there in the dimness I almost walked into a little river. I waded across and went up the opposite side of the valley, past a number of sleeping houses, and by a statue—a Faun, or some such figure, without the head. So far I had seen nothing of the Morlocks, but it was yet early in the night, and the darker hours before the old moon rose were still to come.

“From the top of the next hill I saw a thick wood spreading wide and black before me. I hesitated at this. I could see no end to it, either to the right or the left. Feeling tired—my feet were especially sore—I carefully lowered Weena from my shoulder and sat down upon the turf. I could no longer see the Palace of Green Porcelain, and I was in doubt of my direction. I looked into the thickness of the wood and thought of what it might hide. Under that dense tangle of branches one would be out of sight of the stars. Even if there were no other lurking danger—a danger I did not care to imagine—there would still be all the

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**Faun:** in mythology, a creature that is part human and part goat

roots to stumble over and the tree trunks to strike against. I was very tired, too, after the excitements of the day; so I decided that I would not face it, but would pass the night upon the open hill.

“Weena, I was glad to find, was fast asleep. I carefully wrapped her in my jacket, and sat down beside her to wait for the moonrise. The hillside was quiet and deserted, but from the black of the wood there came now and then a stir of living things. Above me shone the stars, for the night was very clear. I felt a certain sense of friendly comfort in their twinkling. All the old constellations had gone from the sky, however: that slow movement which is imperceptible in a hundred human lifetimes, had long since rearranged them in unfamiliar groupings. But the Milky Way, it seemed to me, was still the same tattered streamer of star-dust as of yore.

“Looking at these stars suddenly dwarfed my own troubles. I thought of their unfathomable distance, and the slow inevitable drift of their movements out of the unknown past into the

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**imperceptible:** impossible to see or observe

**of yore:** in the long-ago past

**unfathomable:** beyond understanding

unknown future. I thought of all the years that I had traversed, during which all the activity, all the traditions, the complex organizations, the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence. Instead were these frail creatures who had forgotten their high ancestry, and the white Things of which I went in terror. Then I thought of the Great Fear that was between the two species, and for the first time, with a sudden shiver, came the clear knowledge of what the meat I had seen might be. Yet it was too horrible! I looked at little Weena sleeping beside me, her face starlike under the stars, and immediately dismissed the thought.

“Through that long night I held my mind off the Morlocks as well as I could. The sky kept very clear, except for a hazy cloud or so. No doubt I dozed at times. Then, as my vigil wore on, came a faintness in the eastward sky, like the reflection of some colorless fire, and the old moon rose, thin and peaked and white. And close behind, and

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**traversed:** moved across

**aspirations:** hopes and wishes to achieve something

**vigil:** a time of staying awake to keep watch

overtaking it, and overflowing it, the dawn came, pale at first, and then growing pink and warm. No Morlocks had approached us. Indeed, I had seen none upon the hill that night. And in the confidence of renewed day it almost seemed to me that my fear had been unreasonable. I stood up and found my foot with the loose heel swollen at the ankle and painful under the heel; so I sat down again, took off my shoes, and flung them away.

“I awakened Weena, and we went down into the wood, now green and pleasant instead of black and forbidding. We found some fruit for breakfast. We soon met others of the dainty ones, laughing and dancing in the sunlight as though there was no such thing in nature as the night. And then I thought once more of the meat that I had seen. I felt assured now of what it was, and from the bottom of my heart I pitied this last feeble rill from the great flood of humanity. Clearly, at some time in the Long-Ago the Morlocks’ food had run short. And so these inhuman sons of men — !

“I tried to look at the thing in a scientific

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**dainty:** small and pretty

**rill:** a small stream

spirit. After all, they were less human and more remote than our cannibal ancestors of three or four thousand years ago. And the intelligence that would have made this state of things a torment had gone. Why should I trouble myself? These Eloi were mere fatted cattle, which the ant-like Morlocks preserved and preyed upon. And there was Weena dancing at my side!

“I tried to protect myself from the horror by regarding it as a punishment of human selfishness. Man had been content to live in ease and delight upon the labors of his fellow-man, had taken Necessity as his excuse, and in the fullness of time Necessity had come home to him. But however great their intellectual degradation, the Eloi had kept too much of the human form not to claim my sympathy, and to make me a sharer in their degradation and their Fear.

“I had at that time very vague ideas as to the course I should pursue. My first was to secure some safe place of refuge, and to make myself such arms of metal or stone as I could. That necessity

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**preyed upon:** hunted and killed for food

**degradation:** decline and decay

was immediate. In the next place, I hoped to obtain some means of fire, to have the weapon of a torch at hand, for nothing, I knew, would be more efficient against these Morlocks. Then I wanted to arrange some device to break open the doors of bronze under the White Sphinx. I had in mind a battering ram. I was convinced that if I could enter those doors and carry a blaze of light before me I would discover the Time Machine and escape. I could not imagine the Morlocks were strong enough to move it far away. I had resolved to bring Weena with me to our own time. And turning such schemes over in my mind I pursued our way towards the building I had chosen as our dwelling.





**"Mere Fatted Cattle"**

As you have seen, the Time Traveler offers his theories to explain the life he observes in the distant future, and then offers new theories when he encounters new facts that contradict the old theory. At first he imagined that the Eloi lived peaceful and carefree lives in an "automatic civilization," in which unseen technologies fulfilled the basic needs of the little people. After the Time Traveler sees the machinery in the underground world of the Morlocks, he theorizes that the Morlocks were once the servants of the Eloi, but that this relationship changed as the Eloi, once a "favored aristocracy," grew smaller, weaker, and less intelligent.

Now the Time Traveler reluctantly reaches a new and awful understanding of the relationship between the Morlocks and the Eloi. The Morlocks are not the servants of the Eloi—far from it. Instead, says the Time Traveler, "These Eloi were mere fatted cattle, which the ant-like Morlocks preserved and preyed upon."

The Time Traveler suggests that the Eloi might have brought on their own horrible fate: "I tried to protect myself from the horror," he says, "by regarding it as a punishment of human selfishness. Man had been content to live in ease and delight upon the labors of his fellow-man, had taken Necessity as his excuse, and in the fullness of time Necessity had come home to him."

What does the Time Traveler mean when he says that humans had "taken Necessity as [their] excuse"? Excuse for what? Do you agree that the Eloi might be partly responsible for the situation they are in?

In imagining a distant future in which the descendants of humanity have split into one species that eats the other, what warning do you think H. G. Wells was trying to deliver to the people of his own time?

## THE PALACE OF GREEN PORCELAIN

“I found the Palace of Green Porcelain, when we approached it about noon, deserted and falling into ruin. Only fragments of glass remained in its windows, and great sheets of the green covering had fallen away from the corroded metallic framework. On the Palace I saw an inscription in some unknown writing. I thought, rather foolishly, that Weena might help me to interpret this, but the bare idea of writing had never entered her head. She always seemed to me, I think, more human than she was, perhaps because her affection was so human.

“Within the big door—which was open and broken—we found a long gallery lit by many side windows. At the first glance I was reminded of a museum. The tiled floor was thick with dust, and a remarkable array of miscellaneous objects

**corroded:** worn down and damaged over time (such as by rust)

**inscription:** words written on a surface (such as the page of a book) or carved on a monument or building

**array:** a large group of things

**miscellaneous:** including things of many different kinds

was shrouded in the same grey covering. Then I perceived, standing in the center of the hall, what was clearly the lower part of the huge skeleton of some extinct creature. The skull and the upper bones lay beside it in the thick dust, and in one place, where rainwater had dropped through a leak in the roof, the thing itself had been worn away. Further in the gallery was the huge skeleton of a Brontosaurus. My museum hypothesis was confirmed. Clearing away the thick dust, I found the old familiar glass cases of our own time. They must have been air-tight to judge from the fair preservation of some of their contents. A very splendid array of fossils it must have been.

“The place was very silent. The thick dust deadened our footsteps. Weena very quietly took my hand and stood beside me.

“To judge from the size of the place, this Palace of Green Porcelain had a great deal more in it than a Gallery of Paleontology; possibly historical galleries; perhaps even a library! To me, at least in my present circumstances, these would be vastly

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**shrouded:** covered

**Paleontology:** the scientific study of the fossil remains of plants and animals from long ago

more interesting than this spectacle of old-time geology in decay. Exploring, I found another short gallery, which appeared to be devoted to minerals, and the sight of a block of sulfur set my mind running on gunpowder. But I could find no saltpeter. Yet the sulfur set up a train of thinking. As for the rest of the contents of that gallery, I had little interest.

“We came to a gallery of colossal proportions, but ill-lit, the floor of it running downward at a slight angle from the end at which I entered. White globes hung from the ceiling—many of them cracked and smashed—which suggested that originally the place had been artificially lit. Here, rising on either side of me were the huge bulks of big machines, all greatly corroded and many broken down, but some still fairly complete. I was inclined to linger among these, as they had the interest of puzzles, and I could only guess at what they were for. I imagined that if I could solve their puzzles I would find myself in possession of powers that might be of use against the Morlocks.

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**spectacle:** a large and impressive show or display

**saltpeter:** potassium nitrate, which when mixed with sulfur and charcoal make up gunpowder

“Suddenly Weena came very close to my side—so suddenly that she startled me. Had it not been for her I do not think I would have noticed that the floor of the gallery sloped at all. The end I had come in at was quite above ground, and was lit by slit-like windows. The ground came up against these windows, until at last there was a pit before each, and only a narrow line of daylight at the top. I went slowly along, puzzling about the machines, and had been too focused upon them to notice the gradual dimming of the light, until Weena’s increasing fright drew my attention. Then I saw that the gallery ran down at last into a thick darkness. I hesitated and looked round me.

“Further away towards the dimness, the dust appeared to be broken by a number of small narrow footprints. My sense of the immediate presence of the Morlocks revived at that. I felt that I was wasting my time in the academic examination of machinery. It was already far advanced in the afternoon, and I had still no weapon, no refuge, and no means of making a fire. And then down in the remote blackness of the gallery I heard a

peculiar pattering, and the same odd noises I had heard down the well.

“I took Weena’s hand. Then, struck with a sudden idea, I left her and turned to a machine from which projected a lever. Clambering upon the stand, and grasping this iron handle, I put all my weight upon it sideways. Suddenly Weena, deserted in the central aisle, began to whimper. The lever snapped after a minute’s strain, and I rejoined her with a mace in my hand more than sufficient for any Morlock skull I might encounter. And I longed very much to kill a Morlock or so. Very inhuman, you may think, to want to go killing one’s own descendants! But it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things. Only my reluctance to leave Weena, and the thought that if I began to slake my thirst for murder my Time Machine might suffer, kept me from going straight down the gallery and killing the brutes I heard.

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**mace:** a heavy club used as a weapon

**sufficient:** enough; satisfactory for the purpose

**slake my thirst:** literally, to satisfy your thirst; figuratively, to satisfy your desire

**"Killing the Brutes"**

The more he feels threatened by the Morlocks, the more the Time Traveler shows a side of his character that we haven't seen before. When he says, "I longed very much to kill a Morlock or so," how do you respond? Do you sympathize with him? After all, he fears for his own survival (and that of Weena as well). But his words become even more extreme—he goes beyond self-defense and speaks of actively hunting and killing Morlocks. He speaks of his "thirst for murder" and says he can barely hold himself back from "killing the brutes."

The Time Traveler realizes that we might consider his feelings to be "very inhuman." He excuses himself, however, by explaining that "it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things."

Notice that he calls the Morlocks "things." Earlier, he has compared them to apes, spiders, lemurs, worms, and ants, and labeled them "vermin." He repeatedly sees the Morlocks as less than, or other than, human. Still, while the Time Traveler does not "feel any humanity" in the Morlocks, he acknowledges they are "one's own descendants"—in short, they are humans of some kind.

What are we to think of these violent and bloodthirsty feelings on the part of a man who is, after all, a highly civilized British gentleman? H. G. Wells was well aware of the murderous violence that civilized people are capable of when they refuse to see other people as fully human. He had witnessed the expansion of the British empire across the globe during the Victorian era. As one scholar has noted, "To the empire builders, killing Africans or Indians was not 'really' murder; they were Other and hence less than truly human."

A few years after writing *The Time Machine*, Wells wrote *The War of the Worlds*, in which he described a Martian invasion of earth. With their advanced technology, the Martians use heat rays and poison gas to kill many people. To the Martians, says the novel's narrator, "the creatures who inhabit this earth must be . . . at least as alien and lowly as are the monkeys and lemurs to us." Furthermore, says the book's narrator, before we condemn the Martians, "we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought." He then recalls the actions of Europeans in Tasmania (an island south of Australia) during the early 1800s: "The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years."

The Time Traveler is far from engaging in "a war of extermination" such as the Europeans waged against the Tasmanians. But H. G. Wells understood that such horrible actions may have their beginnings in murderous impulses toward those who are seen as less than human.

"Well, mace in one hand and Weena in the other, I went out of that gallery and into another and still larger one, which at the first glance seemed to be hung with tattered flags. I soon recognized the brown and charred rags that hung from the sides as the decaying remnants of books. They had long since dropped to pieces, and every

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**tattered:** ragged; old and torn



trace of print had left them. Seeing this wilderness of rotting paper, the thing that struck me was the enormous waste of labor. At the time I will confess that I thought chiefly of my own philosophical writings and seventeen papers upon physical optics.

“Then, going up a broad staircase, we came to what may once have been a gallery of technical chemistry. Except at one end where the roof had collapsed, this gallery was well preserved. I went eagerly to every unbroken case. And at last, in one of the really air-tight cases, I found a box of matches. Very eagerly I tried them. They were perfectly good. They were not even damp. I turned to Weena. ‘Dance,’ I cried to her. For now I had a weapon indeed against the horrible creatures we feared. And in that derelict museum, upon the thick soft carpeting of dust, to Weena’s huge delight, I performed a kind of dance, whistling as cheerfully as I could.

“For this box of matches to have escaped the wear of time for so many years was most fortunate

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**derelict:** run-down due to neglect

for me. Yet, oddly enough, I found a far unlikelier substance, and that was camphor. I found it in a sealed jar so air-tight that this volatile substance had chanced to survive, perhaps through many thousands of centuries. I was about to throw it away, but I remembered that it was flammable and burnt with a good bright flame. It was, in fact, an excellent candle, so I put it in my pocket. I found no explosives, however, nor any means of breaking down the bronze doors. As yet my iron bar was the most helpful thing I had chanced upon. Nevertheless I left that gallery greatly elated.

“I cannot tell you all the story of that long afternoon. It would require a great effort of memory to recall my explorations in the proper order. As the evening drew on, I went through gallery after gallery, dusty, silent, often ruinous, the exhibits sometimes mere heaps of rust.

“We came to a little open court within the

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**camphor:** a white, strong-smelling substance used in some medicines

**volatile:** (in chemistry) tending to evaporate quickly at normal temperatures

**flammable:** able to be easily ignited and burned

**elated:** extremely happy

palace. It had three fruit-trees, so we rested and refreshed ourselves. Towards sunset I began to consider our position. Night was creeping upon us, and I still had to find a safe hiding-place. But that troubled me very little now. I had in my possession a thing that was, perhaps, the best of all defenses against the Morlocks—I had matches! I had the camphor, too, if a blaze were needed. It seemed to me that the best thing we could do would be to pass the night in the open, protected by a fire. In the morning I would go about getting the Time Machine. Towards that, as yet, I had only my iron mace. But now, with my growing knowledge, I felt very differently towards those bronze doors. Up to this, I had held back from forcing them, largely because of the mystery on the other side. They had never impressed me as being very strong, and I hoped to find my bar of iron adequate for the work.

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**adequate:** enough to meet the need or purpose

## IN THE DARKNESS

“We emerged from the Palace while the sun was still in part above the horizon. I was determined to reach the White Sphinx early the next morning. My plan was to go as far as possible that night, and then, building a fire, to sleep in the protection of its glare. As we went along I gathered any sticks or dried grass I saw, and soon had my arms full. Thus loaded, our progress was slower than I had anticipated, and besides Weena was tired. And I, also, began to suffer from sleepiness, so that it was full night before we reached the wood. Upon the shrubby hill of its edge Weena would have stopped, fearing the darkness before us; but a strong sense of impending calamity drove me onward. I had been without sleep for a night and two days, and I was feverish and irritable. I felt sleep coming upon me, and the Morlocks with it.

“While we hesitated, I saw three crouching

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**impending:** about to happen

**calamity:** disaster; terrible misfortune

figures among the black bushes behind us. There was long grass all about us, and I did not feel safe. The forest, I calculated, was a little less than a mile across. If we could get through it to the bare hillside, there, it seemed to me, was an altogether safer resting-place. I thought that with my matches and my camphor I could keep my path illuminated through the woods. Yet it was evident that if I was to light matches with my hands I would have to abandon my firewood; so, rather reluctantly, I put it down. And then it came into my head that I would amaze our friends behind by lighting it. I was to discover the atrocious folly of this plan, but it came to my mind as an ingenious move for covering our retreat.

“I don’t know if you have ever thought what a rare thing flame must be in the absence of man and in a temperate climate. The art of fire-making had been forgotten on the earth. The red tongues that went licking up my heap of wood were an altogether new and strange thing to Weena. She wanted to run to it and play with it. I believe she

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**atrocious:** awful; terrible

**temperate:** having mild temperatures, without extremes of hot or cold

would have cast herself into it had I not restrained her. But I caught her up, and in spite of her struggles, plunged boldly before me into the wood.

“For a little way the glare of my fire lit the path. Looking back, I could see, through the crowded stems, that from my heap of sticks the blaze had spread to some bushes, and a curved line of fire was creeping up the grass of the hill. I laughed at that, and turned again to the dark trees before me. It was very black, and Weena clung to me tightly, but as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, there was still enough light for me to avoid the branches. Overhead it was simply black, except where a gap of remote blue sky shone down upon us here and there. I lit none of my matches because I had no free hand. Upon my left arm I carried my little one, in my right hand I had my iron bar.

“For some way I heard nothing but the crackling twigs under my feet, the faint rustle of the breeze above, and my own breathing and the throb of the blood-vessels in my ears. Then I seemed to hear a pattering behind me. I pushed on. The pattering grew clearer, and then I caught

the same odd sound and voices I had heard in the Underworld. There were evidently several of the Morlocks, and they were closing in upon me. Indeed, in another minute I felt a tug at my coat, then something at my arm. And Weena shivered violently, and became quite still.

“It was time for a match. But to get one I must put her down. I did so, and, as I fumbled with my pocket, a struggle began in the darkness about my knees, perfectly silent on her part and with the same peculiar cooing sounds from the Morlocks. Soft little hands, too, were creeping over my coat and back, touching even my neck. Then the match scratched and fizzed. I held it flaring, and saw the white backs of the Morlocks in flight among the trees. I hastily took a lump of camphor from my pocket, and prepared to light it as soon as the match should start to die out. Then I looked at Weena. She was lying clutching my feet and quite motionless, with her face to the ground. With a sudden fright I stooped to her. She seemed scarcely to breathe. I lit the block of camphor and flung it to the ground. As it split and flared and drove back the Morlocks and the shadows, I knelt

down and lifted her. The wood behind seemed full of the stir and murmur of a great company!

“She seemed to have fainted. I put her carefully upon my shoulder and rose to push on, and then there came a horrible realization. In moving with my matches and Weena, I had turned myself about several times, and now I had not the faintest idea in what direction lay my path. For all I knew, I might be facing back towards the Palace of Green Porcelain. I found myself in a cold sweat. I had to think rapidly what to do. I determined to build a fire and camp where we were. I put Weena down, still motionless, and very hastily I began collecting sticks and leaves. Here and there out of the darkness round me the Morlocks’ eyes shone like bright red jewels.

“My first lump of camphor flickered and went out. I lit a match, and as I did so, two white forms that had been approaching Weena dashed hastily away. One was so blinded by the light that he came straight for me, and I felt his bones grind under the blow of my fist. He gave a whoop of dismay, staggered a little way, and fell down. I lit



another piece of camphor, and went on gathering my bonfire. Soon I noticed how dry the foliage was above me, for since my arrival on the Time Machine, a matter of a week, no rain had fallen. So, instead of looking among the trees for fallen twigs, I began leaping up and dragging down branches. Very soon I had a choking smoky fire of green wood and dry sticks, and could save my camphor. Then I turned to where Weena lay beside my iron mace. I tried what I could to revive her, but she lay like one dead. I could not even tell whether or not she breathed.

“Now, the smoke of the fire beat over towards me, and the vapor of camphor was in the air. I felt very weary and sat down. I seemed just to nod and open my eyes. But all was dark, and the Morlocks had their hands upon me. Flinging off their clinging fingers I hastily felt in my pocket for the match-box, and—it had gone! Then they gripped and closed with me again. In a moment I knew what had happened. I had slept, and my fire had gone out, and the bitterness of death came over my soul. The forest seemed full of the smell of burning

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**foliage:** the leaves of plants

wood. I was caught by the neck, by the hair, by the arms, and pulled down. It was indescribably horrible in the darkness to feel all these soft creatures heaped upon me. I felt as if I was in a monstrous spider's web. I was overpowered, and went down. I felt little teeth nipping at my neck. I rolled over, and as I did so my hand came against my iron lever. It gave me strength. I struggled up, shaking the human rats from me, and, holding the bar short, I thrust where I judged their faces might be. I could feel the succulent giving of flesh and bone under my blows, and for a moment I was free.

“The strange exultation that so often seems to accompany hard fighting came upon me. I knew that both I and Weena were lost, but I determined to make the Morlocks pay for their meat. I stood with my back to a tree, swinging the iron bar before me. The whole wood was full of the stir and cries of them. A minute passed. Their voices seemed to rise to a higher pitch of excitement, and their movements grew faster. Yet none came within reach. I stood glaring at the blackness.

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**succulent:** juicy

**giving:** bending and stretching

**exultation:** feeling of great excitement, joy, and triumph

Then suddenly came hope. What if the Morlocks were afraid? And close on the heels of that came a strange thing. The darkness seemed to grow luminous. Very dimly I began to see the Morlocks about me—three battered at my feet—and then, with surprise and disbelief, I saw that the others were running, in an unbroken stream, as it seemed, from behind me, and away through the wood in front. And their backs seemed no longer white, but reddish. As I stood staring, I saw a little red spark go drifting across a gap of starlight between the branches, and vanish. And at that I understood the smell of burning wood, the gusty roar, the red glow, and the Morlocks' flight.

“Stepping out from behind my tree and looking back, I saw, through the black pillars of the nearer trees, the flames of the burning forest. It was the first fire I had made, coming after me. With that I looked for Weena, but she was gone. The hissing and crackling behind me, the explosive thud as each fresh tree burst into flame, left little time for careful thought. Still gripping my iron bar, I followed in the Morlocks' path. It was a close race.

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**gusty:** characterized by strong, sudden blasts of wind

As I ran, once the flames crept forward so swiftly on my right that I had to strike off to the left. But at last I emerged upon a small open space, and as I did so, a Morlock came blundering towards me, and past me, and went on straight into the fire!

“And now I was to see the most weird and horrible thing, I think, of all that I beheld in that future age. This whole space was as bright as day with the reflection of the fire. In the center was a small hill, on top of which stood a scorched hawthorn. Beyond this was another arm of the burning forest, with yellow tongues of flame already writhing from it, completely encircling the space with a fence of fire. Upon the hillside were some thirty or forty Morlocks, dazzled by the light and heat, and blundering against each other in their bewilderment. At first I did not realize their blindness, and struck furiously at them with my bar, in a frenzy of fear, as they approached me, killing one and crippling several more. But when I saw the gestures of one of them groping under the hawthorn against the red sky, and heard their

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**hawthorn:** a type of small tree

**writhing:** twisting from side to side

moans, I was assured of their absolute helplessness and misery in the glare, and I struck no more of them.

“Yet every now and then one would come straight towards me, setting loose a quivering horror that made me quick to elude him. At one time the flames died down somewhat, and I feared the foul creatures would soon be able to see me. I was thinking of beginning the fight by killing some of them before this should happen; but the fire burst out again brightly, and I held back. I walked about the hill among them and avoided them, looking for some trace of Weena. But Weena was gone.

“At last I sat down on the summit of the hill, and watched this strange incredible company of blind things groping to and fro, and making uncanny noises to each other, as the glare of the fire beat on them. The coiling uprush of smoke streamed across the sky. Two or three Morlocks came blundering into me, and I drove them off with blows of my fists, trembling as I did so.

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**elude:** to avoid or escape

**uncanny:** strange or mysterious in a way that causes feelings of fear and anxiety

THRICE I SAW MORLOCKS PUT THEIR HEADS DOWN IN A KIND OF  
AGONY AND RUSH INTO THE FLAMES.



“Most of that night was a nightmare. I beat the ground with my hands, and got up and sat down again, and wandered here and there, and again sat down. Then I would fall to rubbing my eyes and calling upon God to let me awake. Thrice I saw Morlocks put their heads down in a kind of agony and rush into the flames. But, at last, above the red of the fire, above the streaming masses of black smoke and the whitening and blackening tree stumps, and the diminishing numbers of these dim creatures, came the white light of the day.

“I searched again for traces of Weena, but there were none. It was plain that they had left her poor little body in the forest. I cannot describe how it relieved me to think that it had escaped the awful fate to which it seemed destined. As I thought of that, I was almost moved to begin a massacre of the helpless abominations about me, but I held myself back.

“From the top of the small hill I could now make out through a haze of smoke the Palace of

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**diminishing:** becoming less

**abominations:** things that cause disgust or hatred

Green Porcelain, and from that I could get my bearings for the White Sphinx. And so, leaving the remaining creatures still moaning as the day grew clearer, I tied some grass about my feet and limped on across smoking ashes towards the hiding-place of the Time Machine. I walked slowly, for I was almost exhausted, as well as lame, and I felt the greatest misery for the horrible death of little Weena. It seemed an overwhelming calamity. Now, in this old familiar room, it is more like the sorrow of a dream than an actual loss. But that morning it left me absolutely lonely again — terribly alone. I began to think of this house of mine, of this fireside, of some of you, and with such thoughts came a longing that was pain.

“But, as I walked over the smoking ashes under the bright morning sky, I made a discovery. In my trouser pocket were still some loose matches. The box must have leaked before it was lost.



## THE TRAP OF THE WHITE SPHINX

“**A** bout eight or nine in the morning I came to the same seat of yellow metal from which I had viewed the world upon the evening of my arrival. I thought of my hasty conclusions upon that evening and could not help laughing bitterly at my confidence. Here was the same beautiful scene, the same abundant foliage, the same splendid palaces and magnificent ruins, the same silver river running between its fertile banks. The lively robes of the beautiful people moved among the trees. Some were bathing in exactly the place where I had saved Weena, and that suddenly gave me a keen stab of pain. And like blots upon the landscape rose the cupolas above the ways to the Underworld. I understood now what all the beauty of the Overworld people covered. Very pleasant was their day, as pleasant as the day of the cattle in the field. Like the cattle, they knew of no enemies and provided against no needs. And their end was the same.

**seat of yellow metal:** See page 71.

“I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been. It had committed suicide. It had set itself steadfastly towards comfort and ease, a balanced society with security and permanency as its watchword, it had attained its hopes—to come to this at last. Once, life and property must have reached almost absolute safety. The rich had been assured of their wealth and comfort, the toilers assured of their life and work. No doubt in that perfect world there had been no unemployment problem, no social question left unsolved. And a great quiet had followed.

“It is a law of nature we overlook, that there is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change. Only those animals develop intelligence that have to meet a huge variety of needs and dangers. Intellectual versatility is what we get in return for change, danger, and trouble.

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**steadfastly:** with firm, unchanging focus and dedication

**watchword:** a word or phrase that expresses a principle or rule to be followed

**toilers:** those who do the long, hard work

**versatility:** ability to do many different things and quickly adapt to different needs

“So, as I see it, the Upperworld man had drifted towards his feeble prettiness, and the Underworld to mere machine-like labor. But that perfect state had lacked one thing even for mechanical perfection—absolute permanency. Apparently as time went on, the feeding of an Underworld, however it was done, had become disordered. Mother Necessity, who had been held off for a few thousand years, came back again, and she began below. The Underworld being in contact with machinery—which, however perfect, still needs some little thought—had probably retained more initiative, if less of every other human characteristic, than the Upper. And when other meat failed them, they turned to what old habit had previously forbidden. So I saw it in my last view of the world of Eight Hundred and Two Thousand Seven Hundred and One. It may be as wrong an explanation as a human mind could invent. It is how it all seemed to me, and as such I give it to you.

“After the fatigues, excitements, and terrors of the past days, and in spite of my grief, this seat

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**initiative:** readiness and willingness to take action

**The Time Traveler's Final Theory**

Returning to the place where he first crash-landed in the Time Machine, the Time Traveler sums up his final theory. He thinks that at some point humanity, in its pursuit of "comfort and ease," had achieved a "balanced society," a "perfect world" in which "there had been no unemployment problem, no social question left unsolved." But this so-called "perfect world" was built on a shaky foundation of social inequality, with the "wealth and comfort" of the rich relying on the steady labor of "the toilers."

This state of affairs did not last—as the Time Traveler says, it lacked "absolute permanency." As time went on, what changed? Eventually, says the Time Traveler, "Mother Necessity, who had been held off for a few thousand years, came back again, and she began below." What do you think he means by that?

Even as he sums up his final theory, the Time Traveler admits (as he has before), "It may be as wrong an explanation as a human mind could invent. It is how it all seemed to me, and as such I give it to you." Why do you think he says this?

Do you think any parts of the Time Traveler's theory apply to our world today? For example, do you think most people still put a high priority on increasing their "comfort and ease"? Does social inequality remain a great problem?

and the tranquil view and the warm sunlight were very pleasant. I was very tired and sleepy, and soon spread myself out upon the turf and had a long and refreshing sleep.

"I awoke a little before sunset. I now felt safe against being caught napping by the Morlocks, and, stretching myself, I came on down the hill towards

tranquil: calm and peaceful

the White Sphinx. I had my iron bar in one hand, and the other hand played with the matches in my pocket.

“And now came a most unexpected thing. As I approached the pedestal of the sphinx I found the bronze panels were open. I stopped before them, hesitating to enter.

“Within was a small apartment, and on a raised place in the corner of this was the Time Machine. I had the small levers in my pocket. So here, after all my preparations for the siege of the White Sphinx, was a meek surrender. I threw my iron bar away, almost sorry not to use it.

“A sudden thought came into my head as I stooped towards the doorway. For once, at least, I understood the mental operations of the Morlocks. Holding back a strong desire to laugh, I stepped through the bronze frame and up to the Time Machine. I was surprised to find it had been carefully oiled and cleaned. I have suspected since that the Morlocks had even partially taken it to pieces while trying in their dim way to grasp its purpose.

“Now as I stood and examined it, the thing I had expected happened. The bronze panels suddenly slid up and struck the frame with a clang.

I was in the dark—trapped. So the Morlocks thought. At that I chuckled gleefully.

“I could already hear their murmuring laughter as they came towards me. Very calmly I tried to strike the match. I had only to fix on the levers and depart then like a ghost. But I had overlooked one little thing. The matches were of that kind that light only on the box.

“You may imagine how all my calm vanished. The little brutes were close upon me. One touched me. I made a sweeping blow in the dark at them with the levers, and began to scramble into the saddle of the machine. Then came one hand upon me and then another. Then I had to fight against their persistent fingers as I tried to put the levers in place. Indeed, they almost got one away from me. As it slipped from my hand, I had to butt in the dark with my head—I could hear the Morlock’s skull ring—to recover it.

“But at last the lever was attached and I pulled it over. The clinging hands slipped from me. The darkness presently fell from my eyes. I found myself in the same grey light and confusion I have already described.

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**grey light:** See page 48: “As I went on, still gaining velocity, night and day merged into one continuous greyness.”

## THE FURTHER VISION

“I have already told you of the sickness and confusion that comes with time traveling. And this time I was not seated properly in the saddle, but sideways and in an unstable fashion. For an indefinite time I clung to the machine as it swayed and vibrated, paying no attention to how I went, and when I brought myself to look at the dials again I was amazed to find where I had arrived. One dial shows days, and another thousands of days, another millions of days, and another thousands of millions. Now, instead of reversing the levers, I had pulled them over so as to go forward with them, and when I came to look at these indicators I found that the thousands hand was sweeping round as fast as the seconds hand of a watch—into the future.

“As I drove on, a peculiar change crept over the appearance of things. The greyness grew darker; then—though I was still traveling with prodigious velocity—the blinking succession of

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**prodigious:** tremendous; extraordinary in size or amount

day and night, which indicated a slower pace, returned, and grew more and more noticeable. This puzzled me very much at first. The alternations of night and day grew slower and slower, and so did the passage of the sun across the sky, until they seemed to stretch through centuries. At last there came a steady twilight over the earth, a twilight only broken now and then when a comet glared across the darkling sky. The band of light that had indicated the sun had long since disappeared; for the sun had ceased to set—it simply rose and fell in the west, and grew ever broader and more red. All trace of the moon had vanished. The circling of the stars, growing slower and slower, had given place to creeping points of light.

“At last, some time before I stopped, the sun, red and very large, halted motionless upon the horizon, a vast dome glowing with a dull red heat. I perceived by this slowing down of its rising and setting that the earth had come to rest with one face to the sun, even as in our own time the moon faces the earth. Very cautiously, I began to reverse my motion. Slower and slower went the circling



hands until the thousands one seemed motionless and the daily one was no longer a mere mist upon its scale. Still slower, until the dim outlines of a desolate beach grew visible.

“I stopped very gently and sat upon the Time Machine, looking round. The sky was no longer blue. Northeastward it was inky black, and out of the blackness shone brightly and steadily the pale white stars. Overhead it was a deep red and starless, and southeastward it grew brighter to a glowing scarlet where, cut by the horizon, lay the huge hull of the sun, red and motionless. The rocks about me were of a harsh reddish color, and the only trace of life that I could see at first was the intensely green vegetation that covered every point on their southeastern face. It was the same rich green that one sees on forest moss or on the lichen in caves—plants which, like these, grow in a perpetual twilight.

“The machine was standing on a sloping beach. The sea stretched away to the southwest, to rise

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**lichen:** slow-growing plant that grows in a crust-like way on rocks and walls

**perpetual:** going on forever without stopping

into a sharp bright horizon against the pale sky. There were no waves, for not a breath of wind was stirring. Only a slight oily swell rose and fell like a gentle breathing, and showed that the eternal sea was still moving and living. And along the margin where the water sometimes broke was a thick crust of salt—pink under the lurid sky. My head felt weighted down, and I noticed that I was breathing very fast. The sensation reminded me of my only experience of mountaineering, and from that I judged the air to be more rarefied than it is now.

“Far away up the desolate slope I heard a harsh scream, and saw a thing like a huge white butterfly go slanting and fluttering up into the sky and, circling, disappear over some low hills beyond. The sound of its voice was so dismal that I shivered and seated myself more firmly upon the machine. Looking round me again, I saw that, quite near, what I had taken to be a reddish mass of rock was moving slowly towards me. Then I saw the thing was really a monstrous crab-like creature.

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**lurid:** shining with a harsh, unpleasant light

**rarefied:** (when used to describe air) thin and having little oxygen

**dismal:** extremely sad and gloomy, or causing such emotions



THEN I SAW THE THING WAS REALLY A MONSTROUS CRAB-LIKE  
CREATURE.

Can you imagine a crab as large as yonder table, with its many legs moving slowly and uncertainly, its big claws swaying, its long antennae waving and feeling, and its stalked eyes gleaming at you on either side of its metallic front? Its back was ridged and covered with bulky lumps, and greenish scabs blotched it here and there. I could see the many feelers of its complicated mouth flickering as it moved.

“As I stared at this sinister creature crawling towards me, I felt a tickling on my cheek as though a fly had lighted there. I tried to brush it away with my hand, but in a moment it returned, and almost immediately came another by my ear. I struck at this, and caught something threadlike. It was drawn swiftly out of my hand. I turned and saw that I had grasped the antenna of another monster crab that stood just behind me. Its evil eyes were wriggling on their stalks, its mouth was all alive with appetite, and its huge ungainly claws, smeared with slime, were descending upon me.

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**yonder:** over there; at that place

**sinister:** threatening; menacing

**ungainly:** clumsy; awkward

In a moment my hand was on the lever, and I had placed a month between myself and these monsters. But I was still on the same beach, and I saw them as soon as I stopped. Dozens of them seemed to be crawling here and there in the somber light.

“I cannot convey the sense of abominable desolation that hung over the world. The red eastern sky, the northward blackness, the salt Dead Sea, the stony beach crawling with these foul, slow-stirring monsters, the uniform poisonous-looking green of the lichenous plants, the thin air that hurts one’s lungs: all contributed to an appalling effect. I moved on a hundred years, and there was the same red sun—a little larger, a little duller—the same dying sea, the same chill air, and the same crowd of earthy crustacea creeping in and out among the green weed and the red rocks. And in the westward sky, I saw a curved pale line like a vast new moon.

“So I traveled in great strides of a thousand

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**abominable:** awful; terrible

**desolation:** a state of complete emptiness or destruction; a feeling of completely miserable aloneness

**crustacea** (plural of *crustacean*): creatures like crabs and lobsters

years or more, drawn on by the mystery of the earth's fate, watching with a strange fascination the sun grow larger and duller in the westward sky, and the life of the old earth ebb away. At last, more than thirty million years hence, the huge red-hot dome of the sun had come to obscure nearly a tenth part of the darkling heavens. Then I stopped once more, for the crawling multitude of crabs had disappeared, and the red beach, except for its livid green mosses and lichens, seemed lifeless. And now it was flecked with white. A bitter cold assailed me. Rare white flakes came swirling down. To the northeastward, the glare of snow lay under the starlight of the sable sky, and I could see the rise and fall of pinkish white hills. There were fringes of ice along the sea margin, with drifting masses farther out; but the main expanse of that salt ocean, all bloody under the eternal sunset, was still unfrozen.

"I looked about me to see if any traces of animal life remained. A vague apprehension still kept me in the saddle of the machine. But I saw

**assailed:** attacked

**sable:** black

**apprehension:** a worried fear that something bad will happen

nothing moving, in earth or sky or sea. The green slime on the rocks alone testified that life was not extinct. A shallow sandbank had appeared in the sea and the water had receded from the beach. I thought I saw some black object flopping about, but it became motionless as I looked at it, and I judged that my eye had been deceived, and that the black object was merely a rock. The stars in the sky were intensely bright and seemed to me to twinkle very little.

“Suddenly I noticed that the circular westward outline of the sun had changed—a gap had appeared in the curve. I saw this grow larger. For a minute perhaps I stared aghast at this blackness creeping over the day, and then I realized that an eclipse was beginning. Either the moon or the planet Mercury was passing across the sun’s disk.

“The darkness grew quickly; a cold wind began to blow in gusts from the east, and the showering white flakes in the air increased in number. From the edge of the sea came a ripple and whisper. Beyond these lifeless sounds the world was silent. Silent? It would be hard to convey the stillness of it.

**aghast:** shocked and horrified

All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over. As the darkness thickened, the swirling flakes grew more abundant, dancing before my eyes, and the cold of the air more intense. At last, swiftly, one after the other, the white peaks of the distant hills vanished into blackness. The breeze rose to a moaning wind. I saw the black central shadow of the eclipse sweeping towards me. In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All else was rayless obscurity. The sky was absolutely black.

“A horror of this great darkness came on me. The cold, that struck to my marrow, and the pain I felt in breathing, overcame me. I shivered, and a deadly nausea seized me. Then like a red-hot bow in the sky appeared the edge of the sun. I got off the machine to recover myself. I felt giddy and incapable of facing the return journey. As I stood sick and confused I saw again the moving thing upon the beach—there was no mistake now that it was a moving thing—against the red water of the sea. It was a round thing, the size of a football



perhaps, or, it may be, bigger, and tentacles trailed down from it; it seemed black against the blood-red water, and it was hopping fitfully about. Then I felt I was fainting. But a terrible dread of lying helpless in that remote and awful twilight sustained me while I clambered upon the saddle.



### A Vision of the End

The chapter titled “A Further Vision” might just as well be called “A Final Vision,” because it describes the imagined end of the world, some thirty million years in the future. The dying sun, the blood-red ocean, the crusty green vegetation, the primitive life forms—H. G. Wells describes the scene with the visual power and detail of a horror movie (well before the time of movies, of course!). How do you respond to the strange and bleak vision presented in this chapter?

Why would Wells choose to take the Time Traveler to the world’s end? In part, Wells was thinking of scientific ideas that had found their way into the general culture—in particular, ideas about the age of the sun. Scientific discussions of “the age of the sun’s heat” led people to worry about when that heat would run out. The brilliant scientist Sir William Thomson (also known as Lord Kelvin), stated that “inhabitants of the earth cannot continue to enjoy the light and heat essential to their life for many million years longer.” While he did not say the world would end anytime soon, the topic itself raised fears and anxieties about the eventual transformation of the earth into a cold, dark, dead planet.

Lord Kelvin’s estimates were corrected by later scientists, who gained new knowledge of the sources of the sun’s energy. Decades after writing *The Time Machine*, Wells looked back and had this to say about the “Further Vision” chapter: “The geologists and astronomers of that time told us dreadful lies about the ‘inevitable’ freezing up of the world—and of life and mankind with it. There was no escape it seemed.”

## THE TIME TRAVELER'S RETURN

“So I came back. For a long time I must have been insensible upon the machine. The blinking succession of the days and nights was resumed, the sun got golden again, the sky blue. I breathed with greater freedom. The hands spun backward upon the dials. At last I saw again the dim shadows of houses. These, too, changed and passed, and others came. When the million dial was at zero, I reduced speed. I began to recognize our own familiar architecture, the thousands hand ran back to the starting-point, the night and day flapped slower and slower. Then the old walls of the laboratory came round me. Very gently, I slowed the mechanism down.

“I saw one little thing that seemed odd to me. I think I have told you that when I set out, before my velocity became very high, Mrs. Watchett had walked across the room, traveling, as it seemed to me, like a rocket. As I returned, I passed again across that minute when she crossed the

laboratory. But now her every motion appeared to be the exact opposite of her previous ones. The door at the lower end opened, and she glided quietly up the laboratory, back foremost, and disappeared behind the door by which she had previously entered.

"Then I stopped the machine, and saw about me again the old familiar laboratory, my tools just as I had left them. I got off the thing very shakily, and sat down upon my bench. For several minutes I trembled violently. Then I became calmer. Around me was my old workshop again, exactly as it had been. I might have slept there, and the whole thing have been a dream.

"And yet, not exactly! The thing had started from the southeast corner of the laboratory. It had come to rest again in the northwest, against the wall where you saw it. That gives you the exact distance from my little lawn to the pedestal of the White Sphinx, into which the Morlocks had carried my machine.

"I got up and came through the passage here, limping, because my heel was still painful. I saw the newspaper on the table by the door. I found

the date was indeed today, and looking at the timepiece, saw the hour was almost eight o'clock. I heard your voices and the clatter of plates. I hesitated—I felt so sick and weak. Then I sniffed good wholesome meat, and opened the door on you. You know the rest. I washed, and dined, and now I am telling you the story.”



## AFTER THE STORY

“I know,” he said, after a pause, “that all this will be absolutely incredible to you, but to me the one incredible thing is that I am here tonight in this old familiar room looking into your friendly faces and telling you these strange adventures.” He looked at the Medical Man. “No. I cannot expect you to believe it. Take it as a lie—or a prophecy. Say I dreamed it in the workshop. Think that I have been speculating upon the destinies of humanity, until I have hatched this fiction. Treat my assertion of its truth as a mere stroke of art to increase its interest. And taking it as a story, what do you think of it?”

He took up his pipe. There was a momentary stillness. Then chairs began to creak and shoes to scrape upon the carpet. I took my eyes off the Time Traveler’s face, and looked round at his audience. The Medical Man seemed absorbed

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**prophecy:** prediction; statement of what will happen in the future

**assertion:** forceful statement of belief or fact

in the contemplation of our host. The Editor was looking hard at the end of his cigar. The Journalist fumbled for his watch. The others, as far as I remember, were motionless.

The Editor stood up with a sigh. "What a pity it is you're not a writer of stories!" he said, putting his hand on the Time Traveler's shoulder.

"You don't believe it?"

"Well — —"

"I thought not."

The Time Traveler turned to us. "Where are the matches?" he said. He lit one and spoke over his pipe, puffing. "To tell you the truth . . . I hardly believe it myself. . . . And yet . . ."

His eye fell upon the withered white flowers upon the little table. Then he turned over the hand holding his pipe, and I saw he was looking at some half-healed scars on his knuckles.

The Medical Man rose, came to the lamp, and examined the flowers. "The structure's odd," he said. The Psychologist leaned forward to see.

"It's a quarter to one," said the Journalist.

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**contemplation:** the act of thinking deeply about something;  
also, the act of looking carefully

"How shall we get home?"

"Plenty of cabs at the station," said the Psychologist.

"It's a curious thing," said the Medical Man, "but I certainly don't know the natural order of these flowers. May I have them?"

The Time Traveler hesitated. Then suddenly: "Certainly not."

"Where did you really get them?" said the Medical Man.

The Time Traveler put his hand to his head. He spoke like one who was trying to keep hold of an idea that eluded him. "They were put into my pocket by Weena, when I traveled into Time." He stared round the room. "This room and you and the atmosphere of every day is too much for my memory. Did I ever make a Time Machine, or a model of a Time Machine? Or is it all only a dream? They say life is a dream, a precious poor dream at times—but I can't stand another that won't fit. It's madness. And where did the dream come from? . . . I must look at that machine. If there is one!"



He grabbed the lamp swiftly, and carried it, flaring red, through the door into the corridor. We followed him. There in the flickering light of the lamp was the machine sure enough, squat, ugly, and tilted, a thing of brass, ebony, ivory, and translucent glimmering quartz. Solid to the touch—for I put out my hand and felt the rail of it—and with brown spots and smears upon the ivory, and bits of grass and moss upon the lower parts, and one rail bent.

The Time Traveler put the lamp down on the bench, and ran his hand along the damaged rail. “It’s all right now,” he said. “The story I told you was true. I’m sorry to have brought you out here in the cold.” He took up the lamp, and, in an absolute silence, we returned to the drawing-room.

He came into the hall with us and helped the Editor on with his coat. The Medical Man looked into his face and, with a certain hesitation, told him he was suffering from overwork, at which he laughed hugely. I remember him standing in the open doorway, calling out good-night.

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**squat:** low and broad

**translucent:** not see-through like glass but clear enough to allow light to pass through

I shared a cab with the Editor. He thought the tale a “gaudy lie.” For my own part I was unable to come to a conclusion. The story was so fantastic and incredible, the telling so credible and serious. I lay awake most of the night thinking about it. I determined to go next day and see the Time Traveler again. I was told he was in the laboratory, and I went up to him. The laboratory, however, was empty. I stared for a minute at the Time Machine and put out my hand and touched the lever. At that the squat solid-looking mass swayed like a bough shaken by the wind. Its instability startled me extremely, and I had a strange memory of the childish days when I used to be forbidden to meddle. I came back through the corridor. The Time Traveler met me. He was coming from the house. He had a small camera under one arm and a knapsack under the other. He laughed when he saw me, and gave me an elbow to shake. “I’m frightfully busy,” said he, “with that thing in there.”

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**gaudy:** showy; flashy

**meddle:** to touch or handle without permission; to get involved in matters that aren't your business

**frightfully:** (slang) very; extremely

“But is it not some hoax?” I said. “Do you really travel through time?”

“Really and truly I do.” And he looked frankly into my eyes. He hesitated. His eye wandered about the room. “I only want half an hour,” he said. “I know why you came, and it’s awfully good of you. There’s some magazines here. If you’ll stay for lunch I’ll offer complete proof of this time traveling, specimens and all. If you’ll forgive my leaving you now?”

I consented, hardly understanding then the full meaning of his words, and he nodded and went on down the corridor. I heard the door of the laboratory slam, seated myself in a chair, and took up a daily paper. What was he going to do before lunchtime? Then suddenly I was reminded by an advertisement that I had promised to meet Richardson, the publisher, at two. I looked at my watch, and saw that I could barely keep that appointment. I got up and went down the passage to tell the Time Traveler.

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**hoax:** something meant to trick or deceive people  
**specimens:** plants, animals, or objects collected for scientific study

As I took hold of the handle of the door I heard an exclamation, oddly cut off at the end, and a click and a thud. A gust of air whirled round me as I opened the door, and from within came the sound of broken glass falling on the floor. The Time Traveler was not there. I seemed to see a ghostly, indistinct figure sitting in a whirling mass of black and brass for a moment—a figure so transparent that the bench behind with its sheets of drawings was absolutely distinct; but this phantasm vanished as I rubbed my eyes. The Time Machine had gone. Save for a stir of dust, the further end of the laboratory was empty.

I felt an unreasonable amazement. I knew that something strange had happened, and for the moment could not tell what the strange thing might be. As I stood staring, the door into the garden opened, and a servant appeared.

We looked at each other. Then ideas began to come. "Has Mr. — — gone out that way?" said I.

"No, sir. No one has come out this way. I was expecting to find him here."

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**phantasm:** illusion; ghostly appearance

At that I understood. At the risk of disappointing Richardson I stayed on, waiting for the Time Traveler; waiting for the second, perhaps still stranger story, and the specimens and photographs he would bring with him. But I am beginning now to fear that I must wait a lifetime. The Time Traveler vanished three years ago. And, as everybody knows now, he has never returned.



## EPILOGUE

One cannot choose but wonder. Will he ever return? It may be that he swept back into the past, and fell among blood-drinking savages, or into the abysses of the sea, or among the huge reptilian brutes of the Jurassic times. He may even now—if I may use the phrase—be wandering on some prehistoric coral reef beside lonely salt seas.

Or did he go forward, into one of the nearer ages, in which men are still men, but with the riddles of our own time answered and its wearisome problems solved? Into the maturity of humanity: for I, for my own part, cannot think that these days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time!

But I know that he—for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time

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**Epilogue:** a final section after the main part of a book

**wearisome:** causing tiredness and irritation

**mutual:** experienced by two or more people or groups

**discord:** disagreement; conflict

**culminating:** reaching a high point of development

Machine was made—thought cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end. If that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so. But to me the future is still black and blank—is a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story. And I have by me, for my comfort, two strange white flowers—shriveled now, and brown and flat and brittle—to confirm that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the human heart.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Herbert George Wells*



**H**erbert George Wells was born on September 21, 1866, in Bromley, England, which at the time was a growing suburb southeast of the busy heart of London. He was the fourth of four children, including a sister who died young and two older brothers. The family lived in what Wells later remembered as a “needy, shabby home” at the back of a run-down shop where his father and mother tried to sell china and glassware, with little success.



When Bertie (as he was called) was seven, he badly broke his leg. During the weeks he spent in bed while recovering, his father brought him books from the local library—adventure stories, history and science books, and much more. Looking back, Wells later wrote, “I cannot recall now many of the titles of the books I read, I devoured them so fast.”

When the family business failed, Wells’s mother left Bromley to work as a housekeeper at a country estate called Uppark, where she had been previously employed. Like his older brothers before him, Wells, now 14 years old, was apprenticed to a draper’s, a shop that sold cloth and other goods. He put his memories of this work into an early novel, in which the main character, a draper’s assistant, says:

*It’s not a particularly honest nor a particularly useful trade; it’s not very high up; there’s no freedom and no leisure—seven to eight-thirty every day in the week; don’t leave much edge to live on, does it? . . . You look respectable outside, and inside you are packed in dormitories like convicts, fed on bread and butter and bullied like slaves.*

Wells left this job and for a time went to live with his mother at Uppark. There, he was struck by the contrast between the comfortable lives of the wealthy family and the hard lives of the many servants who waited on them. At Uppark and elsewhere, he continued to read many books, including philosophical works by Plato, *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, and the novels of Charles Dickens.

Lacking money, Wells had to find work, and he soon he ended up as a draper's assistant yet again. After two miserable years in this job, one day Wells walked out of the shop. In a heated argument with his mother, he insisted he would never do such work again. He later looked back at this experience and reflected, "If life is not good enough for you, change it; never endure a way of life that is dull and dreary."

Wells found work as an assistant teacher at a local school. He did such excellent work that at the age of eighteen he was offered a scholarship to attend the Normal School of South Kensington, in London. (A "normal school" prepares its students to become teachers.) In his first year, Wells

took two science courses taught by Thomas H. Huxley, a well-known biologist and supporter of the theories of Charles Darwin. Wells was inspired by Huxley's teaching. Looking back, Wells later recalled, "That year I spent in Huxley's class, was beyond all question, the most educational year of my life."

While at the Normal School, Wells and some friends started a magazine they called the *Science Schools Journal*. Wells wrote some stories for the magazine, including, in 1888, "The Chronic Argonauts," in which one of the main characters is the inventor of a time machine. The story provided the seed that, over the next seven years, would grow into *The Time Machine*, although the early story is very different from the later novel.

As Wells moved on to different teaching jobs, he also continued writing stories and articles that he sold to various magazines. Some of the articles explored scientific topics in imaginative ways, while some of the stories were "scientific romances," or what we now call science fiction.

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**Darwin:** See the Introduction to this book (pages 8-11) for a brief discussion of Darwin and Huxley, and how their ideas influenced H. G. Wells.

In one, called “The Star,” Wells imagined an approaching asteroid that threatened to destroy the earth. Later, looking back on how his active imagination shaped these early stories, Wells recalled, “I found that, taking almost anything as a starting-point and letting my thoughts play about it, . . . I would discover I was peering into remote and mysterious worlds.”

In trying to both teach and write, Wells was overworked and often ill. He was also unhappy in his marriage to his cousin, Isabel Mary Wells, whom he had wed in 1891. That marriage lasted only a few years. In 1895, Wells married a former student, Amy Catherine Robbins.

From 1894 to 1895, Wells continued to expand and rework the idea he had first explored in his story of “The Chronic Argonauts.” He published “The Time Traveler’s Story” in episodes that came out in a monthly magazine, then published an updated version of the story in a different magazine. He reworked the story yet again for publication in book form as his first novel, *The Time Machine*. When it was published in 1895, the novel sold well and received high praise.

The success of *The Time Machine* suddenly turned Wells into a well-known and successful author. He quickly set to work to write more “scientific romances,” all of which are now recognized as pioneering works of science fiction. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) tells of a mad scientist who creates hybrid creatures, part animal and part human. The central character of *The Invisible Man* (1897) is a scientist who discovers a way to make himself invisible, and of the violent and tragic consequences that follow. In *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the unnamed narrator describes an invasion by Martians, who have left their dying planet to find a new home on earth. With their superior technology and weapons—including a heat ray and poison gas—they threaten to wipe out humanity in short order, until their advance is unexpectedly halted by a surprising (and scientifically plausible) means. In *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), when an eccentric scientist develops a gravity-defying material, he and a British businessman travel to the moon and there discover an underground civilization.

H. G. Wells's science fiction works have remained popular to this day, and have been adapted for radio, theater, television, and movies. Wells is sometimes called "the father of science fiction." He went on to write many books of many different kinds, not only science fiction but also philosophical works, lighthearted novels, and a three-volume history of the world. In his writings, he foresaw the development of armored tanks, airplanes, space travel, and atomic weapons.

As Wells's career went on, social and political concerns began to dominate his writings—he was a socialist, deeply concerned about social equality, human rights, and world peace. As an internationally famous writer, he met with various world leaders, including U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He became a friend of the young Winston Churchill, who would lead Britain as Prime Minister in World War II. That war left the aging Wells deeply skeptical about the fate of mankind. He died in London on August 13, 1946.

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