

The Time Machine, by H. G. Wells [1895]

I

The Time Traveller (for so will be convenient to speak of him)

was expanding a recalcitrant matter to us. His grey eyes shone and twinkled, and his usually pale face was flushed and animated. The fire burned brightly, and the soft radiance of the incandescent filaments in the tiles of silver caught the bubbles that flashed and passed in or against our faces. Our chairs, being his own, embraced and caressed us rather than submitted to be sat upon, and there was that luxurious after-dinner atmosphere when thought roams gracefully free of the trammels of present time. And he put it to us in this way—marking the points with a lean forefinger—as we sat and lazily admired his comeliness over his new apparel (as we thought it) and his fecundity.

"You must follow me carefully. I shall have to controvert one or two ideas that are almost universally accepted. The geometry, for instance, they taught you at school is founded on an assumption."

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

"I do not mean to ask you to accept anything without reasonable ground for it. You will soon admit as much as I need from you. 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.

"No, having only length, breadth, and thickness, can a cube have a

real existence."

"There's object," said Filby. "Of course a solid body may exist. All real things—"

"So most people think. But was a moment. Can an instantaneous cube exist?"

"Doesn't follow," said Filby.

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

Filby became persive. "Clearly," the Time Traveller proceeded, "any real body must extend in *four* directions: it must have length, breadth, thickness, and duration. But through a natural infirmity of the flesh, which will explain to you in a moment, we incline 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, another at appears that our consciousness moves intermittently in one direction along the latter from the beginning to the end of our lives."

"That," said a very young man, making spasmodic efforts to straighten his eyes over the lamp, "that... very clear indeed!"

"Now, it is very remarkable that this is so extensively overlooked," continued the Time Traveller, with a slight accent of cheerfulness. "Really this is what is meant by the Fourth Dimension, through some people who talk about the Fourth Dimension do not know they mean it. It is only another way of looking at Time... There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space, and that is what is meant by the Fourth Dimension."

"But some people say that Time is not a dimension at all, and that people have got hold of the wrong side of the idea. You are all here who have told them they have to say about this Fourth Dimension?"

"I, have not," said the Provincial 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 asked why *three*, —Dimensions particularly—why not another direction at right angles to the other three?" and have even tried to controvert me. I called upon my Professor Simon Newcomb and was expounding this to the New York Mathematical Society only a month or so ago. 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 a figure of three dimensions they could represent one of four—if they could master the perspective of the thing. See?"

"I think so," murmured the Provincial Mayor, and, knitting his brows, he leaped into an introspective state, his lips moving as one who repeats mystic words. "Yes, I think I see now," he said after some time, brightening a little.

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

"Scientific people," proceeded the Time Traveller, after the pause required for the proper assimilation of this, "know very well that Time is only a kind of Space. Here is a popular scientific diagram, a weather-cock. This line traces with its finger the course of the movement of the barometer. Yesterday it was so high, yesterday night it fell, then this morning it rose again, and so my logic would be 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 that is what is meant by the Fourth Dimension."

"But," said the Medical Man, staring hard at a coil 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 so different from what we move in Time—as we move about in the three dimensions of Space?"

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

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

"But before the balloons, save for spasmodic jumping and the inequalities of the surface, man has no freedom of vertical movement."

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

"Easier, far easier than up."

"And you cannot move at all in Time, 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 activities, 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't move about in all directions of Space, but you cannot move about in Time."

"That is the gem of my great discovery. But it is wrong to say that we cannot move about in Time. For instance, if I am reading an incident very good to read but the instant of its occurrence, I become absent-minded, as you say. I jump back to a moment. Of course we have no means of ascertaining for any length of Time, if not from a savager or an animal has of staying six feet above the ground. But a civilized man is better than the savage in this respect. He can go against gravitation in a balloon, and why should he not hope that ultimately he may be able to stop or accelerate his motion, or only leave it to accumulate at will and travel the other way?"

"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 matter," said the Time Traveller, hiding the lamp as he went, "I intend to expiate time. Is that plain? I was never more serious in my life."

"None of us quite know how to take it."

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

"I think that at that time none of us quite believed in the Time Machine. The fact is, the Time Traveller was one of those men who are too clever to be believed; you never felt that you are all around him, you always suspected some subtle reserve, some ingenuously in ambush, behind his kind frankness. Had Filby shown the mood and explained the matter in the Time Traveller's words, we should have shown *him*, just his scepticism. For we should have perceived his motive, a pink button could understand Filby. But the Time Traveller had more than a touch of whim among his elements, and we disturbed him. Things that would have made the frame of a less clever man seemed tricks in his hands. It is a mistake to do things too easily. The serious people who took him seriously never felt his ease and his ingenuously, they were somehow aware that boasting their reputations for judgment with him was actually fulfilling a nursery with egg-shell china. So I don't think any of us said very much about time travelling, the interval between Thursday and the next, though it's odd possibilities ran, no doubt, in most of our minds. Its possibility, that is, its practical irreducibility, was the curious point of attraction and of other confusion it created. For my own part, I was particularly preoccupied with the fact of the matter. I remember discussing with the Medical Man who met me on Friday at the Linnean. He said he had been a similar thing at Tubingen, and had considerable stress on the blowing out

"Oh, this," began Filby, "is all—"

"Why not?" said the Time Traveller.

"It's against reason," said Filby.

"What reason?" said the Time Traveller.

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

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

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

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

Filby contented himself with laughter.

"But I have experimental verification," said the Time Traveller.

"It would be remarkably convenient for the historian," the Psychologist suggested. "One might travel back and verify the accepted account of the Battle of Hastings, for instance?"

"Do not think you could attract attention?" said the Medical Man. "Our ancestors had no great tolerance for anachronisms."

"One might get one's Greek from the very lips of Homer and Plato," the Very Young Man thought.

"In which case they would certainly punish you for the Little-go. The German scholars have improved Greece very much."

"Then there is the future," said the Very Young Man. "Just think! One might witness the world, leave it to accumulate at will and interest, and hurry on ahead!"

of the candle. But how the trick was done he could not explain.

The next Thursday I went out to Richmond—I suppose I was one of the Time Traveller's most constant guests—and, arriving late, found four or five men already seated 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 other. I looked round for the Time Traveller.

"Where's—?" said I, naming our host.

"You've just come!" he rather roared. "He's unavoidably detained. He asks me in this note to lead of 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 theproud 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 Blank, the Editor aforementioned, a certain journalist, and another—a quiet, shy man with a beard—whom I don't know, and who, as far as my observation went, never opened his mouth all the evening. There was some speculation at the dinner-table about the Time Traveller's absence, and I suggested time travelling, in a half-proud spirit.

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wind, and the lamp flame jumped. One of the candles on the mantle was blown out, and the little machine suddenly swung round, became indistinct, was seen as a glow for a second perhaps, as an eddy of fairy gilding brass and ivory, and it was gone—vanished! Save for the lamp the table was bare.

Everyone was silent for a minute. Then Filby said he was dazed.

The Psychologist recovered from his stupor, and suddenly looked up at the Time Traveller with a look of intense incredulity. "Well?" he said, with a remembrance of the Psychologist. Then, getting up, he went to the tobacco jar on the mantel, and with his finger he touched the pipe.

"We started at each other. Look here," said the Medical Man, "are you in the same line of thought?"

"Certainly," said the Time Traveller, stooping to light a spill at the fire. Then he turned, lighting his pipe, to look at the Psychologist's face. (The Psychologist, to show that he was not unringed, helped himself to a cigar and tied it to his neck.) "What's more, I have a big machine nearly finished in there—the indicated laboratory," said when that is put together I mean to have a journey on my own account."

"You mean to say that that machine has travelled into the future?" said Filby.

"Into the future or the past—don't, for certain, know which," said the Time Traveller.

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

"Why?" said the Time Traveller.

"Because I presume that it has not moved in space, and if it travelled into the future it would still be in space, as it is, and it must have travelled through this time."

"But," said I, "if it travelled into the past it would be seen."

"I can't argue to-night. I don't mind telling you the story, but I can't argue. Well, he went on, but he says the story of what has happened to me," you like, but you must refrain from interruptions: I want to tell it. Sadly, most of it I don't sound like lying. So be it! It's true—very word of it, as a matter. I was in my laboratory at four o'clock, and since then—I've lived eight years, and I have been being better believed! I'm nearly worn out, but I shall sleep till I've told this thing over to you. Then I shall go to bed. But no interruptions! It is agreed."

"Agreed," said the Editor, and the rest of us agreed "Agreed." And with that the Time Traveller 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 with only

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 Provincial Mayor, with an air of impartiality, turning towards the Time Traveller.

"No," said the Time Traveller, and to the Psychologist. "You wish. You explain that. It's presentation before the president, you know, diluted presentation."

"Of course," said the Psychologist, and he reassured us. "That's a simple point of psychology. I should have thought of it. It's plain enough, and helps the paradox delightfully. We cannot eat it, nor can we appreciate this machine, any more than we can the spoke of a wheel spinning, or a bullet flying through the air. If it is travelling through time fifty times or a hundred times faster than we are, it'll get through a minute while we get through a second, the impression it creates will of course be only one-fifth or one-hundredth of what it would make if it were not travelling in time. That's plain and evident." He passed his hand through the space in which the machine had been. "You see?" he said, laughing.

"It sounds plausible enough to-night," said the Medical Man, but wait until to-morrow. Wait for the common sense of the morning."

"Would you like to see the Time Machine itself?" asked the Time Traveller. And thereupon, taking the lamp in his hand, he led the way down the long, dimly lighted passage to the laboratory. I remember vividly the flickering light, his queer, broad head in silhouette, the dance of the shadows, how we all followed him, puzzled but incredulous, and how there in the laboratory we saw the larger edition of the little mechanism which we had seen vanish before our eyes. Parts were covered, parts of ivory bars had certainly been moved or sawn off, and I took note of individual parts, but I don't remember, but the twisted crystal parts lay untrampled upon the bench beside the machine. I remember, and took one up for a better look at it. Quartz it seemed to be.

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The Editor aforementioned, a certain journalist, and another—a quiet, shy man with a beard—

blackness that was 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. Naturally, at first I took it to be the moon, but there is much to incline me to believe that what I really saw was the transit of an inner planet passing very near to the earth.

The darkness grew apace: a cold wind began to blow in freshening gusts from the east, and the shimmering 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. All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the creak of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over.

As the darkness thickened, the eddying flakes grew more abundant, dancing before my eyes, and the cold of the air became intense. At last, one by one, swiftly, one after the other, the white peaks of the distant hills vanished into blackness. The sea rose to a moaning wail. I saw the black central shadow of the eclipse sweeping towards me. In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All eyes were restless curiosity. The day was absolutely black.

A horror of this great darkness came on me. The cold, that smote 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 iron 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 shore—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 welling blood-red water, and it was hopping fitfully about. Then I felt it was fainting. But a terrible dread of being helples in that remote and awful twilight sustained me while I clambered upon the saddle.

XII

EPILOGUE

One cannot choose but wonder: Will he ever return? It may be that he swept back into the past, and fell among the blood-drinking, hairy savages of the Age of Unpolished Stone; into the abysses of the Cretaceous Sea; or among the grotesque saurians, the huge reptilian brutes of the Jurassic times. He may even now, if I may use the phrase—be wandering on some plesiosaurus-haunted Oolitic coral reef, or beside the lonely saline lakes of the Triassic Age. 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 manhood of the race? For I, for my own part, cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time! I say, for my own part. He, I know—for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time Machine was made—thought but cheerfully 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 lie as long as though it were not so. But to me the future is still black and blank—is a vast ignorance. It is at a few casual places by the memory of his story that I find a hint, for my comfort, how strange white flowers—sprinkled now, and brown and fat and brittle—no witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man.

So I came back. For a long time I must have been insensible upon the machine. The biting succession of the days and nights was resumed. The sun got golden again, the sky blue, I breathed with greater freedom. The fluctuating contours of the land ebbed and flowed. The hands spun backward upon the dials. At last I saw again the dim shadows of houses, the evidences of decadent humanity. These, too, changed and passed, and others came. Presently, when the million dial was at zero, I slackened speed. I began to recognize our own pretty and familiar architecture: the thousands hand ran back to the starting-point, the right and day flapped slower and slower. Then the old walls of the laboratory came round me. Very green, now. 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, travelling, as it seemed to me, like a rocket. As I returned, I passed again across that minute when she traversed the laboratory. But now her every motion appeared to be the exact inversion of her previous one. The door at the tower end opened, and she glided quietly up the laboratory, back foremost, and disappeared behind the door by which she had previously entered. Just before that I seemed to see Hilary for a moment; but he passed like a flash.

Then I stopped the machine, and saw about me again the old familiar laboratory, my books, my appliances 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 south-east corner of the laboratory. It had come to rest again in the north-west, 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.

For a time my brain went stagnant. Presently I got up and came through the passage here, limping, because my heel was still painful, and feeling sorely begrieved. I saw the „Pall Mall Gazette“

on the table by the door. I found the date was indeed to-day, 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.

I know, he said, after a pause, that all this will be absolutely incredible to you. To me the one incredible thing is that I am here to-night 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 of the workshop. Consider I have been speculating upon the destinies of our race until I have hatched this fiction. Treat my assertion of its truth as a mere stroke of art to enhance its interest. And taking it as a story, what do you think of it?

He took up his pipe, and began, in his old accustomed manner, to tap with it nervously upon the bars of the grate. There was a momentary stillness. Then chairs began to creak and shoes to scrape upon the carpet. I took my eyes off the Time Traveller's face, and looked round at his audience. They were in the dark, and little spots of colour swam before them. The Medical Man seemed absorbed in the contemplation of our host. The Editor was looking hard at the end of his cigar—the sixth. 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 Traveller's shoulder.

You don't believe it?

Well—

I thought not.

The Time Traveller turned to us. Where are the matches? he said. He lit one and spoke over his pipe, puffing. To tell you the truth

... it hardly believe it myself... And yet...!

His eye fell with a mute inquiry 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-faded scars on his knuckles.

The Medical Man rose, came to the lamp, and examined the flowers. The „gynaecium's" odd, he said. The Physiologist leant forward to see, holding out his hand for a specimen.

I'm hanged if it isn't a quarter to one," said the Journalist. "How shall we get home?"

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

"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 Traveller hesitated. Then suddenly: "Certainly not."

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

The Time Traveller 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 Vienna, when I travelled into Time." He stared round the room. "I'm damned if it isn't all going. This room and you and the atmosphere of every day is so 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 its madness. And where did the dream come from? ... I must look at that machine. If there is one!"

He caught up 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 askew; a thing of brass, ebony, ivory, and translucent glimmering quartz. Sold to the touch—! 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 away.

The Time Traveller 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 smoking-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, bawling good night.

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 sober; I lay awake most of the night thinking about it. I determined to go next day and see the Time Traveller again. I was told he was in the laboratory, and being on easy terms in the house, 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 substantial looking mass swayed like a lough shaken by the wind. Its instability started me extremely, and I had a queer reminiscence of the children days when I used to be forbidden to meddle. I came back through the corridor. The Time Traveller met me in the smoking-room. He was coming from the house. He had a small camera under one arm and a knapsack under the other. He kept when he saw me, and gave me an elbow to shake. "I'm frightfully busy," said he, with that thing in there.

"But is it not some hoax?" 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 stop to lunch I'll give you this time travelling up to the hilt, specimen and all. If you'll forgive my having you now?"

I consented, hardly comprehending then the full import 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 lunch-time? 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 save that engagement. I got up and went down the passage to tell the Time Traveller.

As I took hold of the handle of the door I heard an exclamation, oddly truncated 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 Traveller 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 subsiding stir of dust, the further end of the laboratory was empty. A pane of the skylight had, apparently, just been blown in.

I felt an unreasonable amusement. I knew that something strange had happened, and for the moment could not distinguish what the strange thing might be. As I stood staring, the door into the garden opened, and the main 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."

At that I understood. At the risk of disappointing Richardson I stayed on, waiting for the Time Traveller, 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 Traveller vanished three years ago. And, as everybody knows now, he has never returned.