

Introduction

'When I had started building the Time Machine, I had had the stupid idea that the people of the future would certainly be far ahead of us in all their inventions.'

The most important person in this book – we know him only as the Time Traveller – has built his own time machine and has gone forwards into the future, to the year 802,701. He expects to find a world with more intelligent people, better machines and a much better way of living. Perhaps we expect this too, because most books and films about time travel show the future in this way.

Instead, he discovers a world where people live simple lives. They play and dance in the sunshine. They sleep in groups in large ruined buildings from an earlier time. They eat nothing except fruit and own nothing except the clothes they wear. At first this is only inconvenient for the Time Traveller, because he has come badly-prepared for a world like this. He has brought only a box of matches. He has no camera, no medicine, not even anything to smoke. To us, a world without meat or tobacco may seem better, or at least healthier, than the modern world, but HG Wells wrote this book at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time people ate meat if they could afford it, and most men smoked, and very few people really questioned these habits.

During the 1800s, the lives of people in Britain had changed more than they ever had before. A hundred years earlier, most had worked on the land and had lived very similar lives to the lives of their parents. By 1895, when *The Time Machine* appeared, millions had moved to the growing cities and were working in factories. The richer people were able to enjoy the things that the new machines produced. But life for the ordinary workers and their families was difficult, dirty and often dangerous.

The future of the great numbers of workers in the cities, and of society in general, was on many people's minds. It was not really surprising that Karl Marx had lived in London. He had seen the situation of the workers there and put the results of his thinking into his books. Wells was not a follower of Marx, but he believed that everybody should have the chance to go to school, that science could improve people's lives and that a better, fairer kind of society was possible.

At the beginning of the book, Wells shows us that the Time Traveller lives in a large house and has servants. His friends include a doctor, a psychologist and the editor of a newspaper – people who have good jobs. The Time Traveller seems to do no regular work himself, so either he has a lot of money or he makes money from his inventions. Wells then sends him forwards in time to a possible future. In this time the workers and the managers have become more and more separate, until they have almost lost contact with each other completely. Their different lives have changed them into physically quite different species. The workers are ugly creatures who live almost like animals, although they still remember how to make things, while the managers have changed into people who are small, quite beautiful – and completely useless.

It is possible to see this as the old fight between good and bad, but Wells was not a very religious man. Also, to help the beautiful people, the Time Traveller is ready to fight against the others. On a number of occasions he attacks those in the other group, and can only with difficulty stop himself killing them. This is perhaps not the normal behaviour of a 'good' man, but the end of the nineteenth century was a time when war, often fought in colourful uniforms, was still seen as an activity in which men showed that they were men. Nobody could imagine the great killing of the next fifty years. In the book, Wells says that difficulties and dangers make people strong, clever and

intelligent, and it is clear that strength includes the ability and willingness to fight. Wells argued for world peace but understood the nature of man. So when he uses weapons, the Time Traveller only does what was expected of a man of his time. But he can dance too, and when he fights or when he dances he shows types of behaviour that belong to each of the two human groups of the future.

One of the dinner guests in Chapter 1 is a psychologist. Like many people of his time, Wells was interested in this new science and it is also possible to see the two social groups of the future as different parts of the human mind. Sigmund Freud's first book appeared in the same year as *The Time Machine*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (also a Penguin Reader) had come out less than ten years before. In that book, Stevenson used science to separate the good and bad sides of the same person. In a different way, Wells was doing something similar.

Wells was, perhaps, also examining his own behaviour. He was a very hard worker. In his life he wrote more than Dickens and Shakespeare together. But he also enjoyed his free time – sometimes in a way that shocked many people. Although Wells married his cousin in 1891, just over a year later he ran away with – and later married – one of his students. Later, he had a great number of relationships with other women, which his wife appeared to accept.

When the Time Traveller goes into the future, he meets a woman called Weena and they become close friends. We are told that Weena, like the others of her group, is small and almost childlike. To us, there may be something slightly worrying about this description, but confident women with ideas of equality were unusual in Wells's time. Some existed: they were known as New Women, and in his book *Ann Veronica* (1909) Wells wrote about one of them. But in general, middle-class women were

seen as weak creatures to be protected by men. And so the Time Traveller protects Weena, and she cares for him. Nothing more happens in the relationship between them. This book is not a love story.

At times in the book we may feel that all the human work of Wells's time, all the scientific progress, has been useless in the end. Wells left his course at a London science college before he finished it because he had lost interest in his studies. At one point the Time Traveller sees some old books that have fallen to pieces. He thinks about the scientific papers he wrote himself, which have now turned to dust.

After he leaves the year 802,701 the Time Traveller travels forwards, further and further in time, until he finally stops his machine on a frozen beach under an enormous red dying sun. The world has stopped turning and its end is near. In the end the power of nature is greater than the power of science, and there is no real purpose to human life. This sadness in the book may be the result of the mood of the time. The story was written at the very end of the 1800s, when many people were afraid of the new century. Some felt – correctly – that a great war between European countries was coming, and that things would never be the same again. But it may be that Wells could see beyond the daily lives of people, with their hopes and fears, beyond life and death, to a greater picture in which all of us simply live in this world and, one day, will leave it.

HG Wells wrote about the ideas and problems of his time, but he also wrote about feelings which are true in any time, including our own. That is one reason why *The Time Machine*, like a number of his other books, is still popular today.

Herbert George Wells was born in England in 1866. He did not come from a rich family. His parents had a small shop but it was not successful and closed when he was thirteen. He worked at

different times in a clothes shop and a chemist's. He always read a lot and later managed to get a place at a science college. After he left there he became a teacher, but he was badly hurt while playing football and this meant that he could not continue. He then worked in London, writing for newspapers and doing some teaching of small groups. None of this made him much money.

The Time Machine was his first fictional work. It appeared in weekly parts in a magazine in 1894 and as a book the following year. At the time, Wells was married to his second wife and was trying to support both her and her mother. He needed to make money, so he wrote it quite quickly. Although he was never really happy with the finished book, it was a great success and allowed him to continue as a writer.

It is not easy for us to understand how different this book was from others of the time. It is the first real science fiction book. It introduces the reader to the idea of time as the fourth dimension, with the three dimensions of space, ten years before Einstein made it part of scientific thinking. Wells also describes a simple mechanical answer to the problem of time travel – a time machine. Nobody had ever described time travel in a machine before, and the words 'time machine' entered the English language.

After the great success of this book, Wells wrote more science fiction. His most famous books are *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). All of them have been filmed, some more than once. *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man* are also Penguin Readers. HG Wells died in London in 1946.



'This line shows the changes in temperature.'

Chapter 1 The Time Traveller

The Time Traveller (it will be convenient to call him this) was talking to us about geometry. His grey eyes shone and his usually pale face was red and excited. The fire burned brightly and there was that relaxed after-dinner feeling when thoughts run freely.

'You must listen carefully. I shall have to destroy one or two ideas that almost everyone accepts – for example, the geometry that they taught you at school. You know, of course, that a mathematical line, a line with no thickness, doesn't really exist. They taught you that? A mathematical model, which only has length, width and thickness, doesn't really exist either. It's just an idea.'

'That's all right,' said the Psychologist.

'But if you make that model out of a material,' said Filby, a red-haired man who liked an argument, 'it exists. All real things exist.'

'Most people think so. But wait a moment. Imagine a thing that doesn't last for any time. Can it have a real existence?' Filby looked thoughtful. 'Clearly,' the Time Traveller said, 'a real body must have length, width, thickness (the dimensions of space) – and also exist in time. But through a natural human weakness, we usually forget the fourth of these.'

'That,' said a very young man, 'is very clear.'

'Well, I don't mind telling you that I have been at work on this geometry of four dimensions for some time. Some of my results are interesting. Here is a record of the weather. This line shows the changes in temperature. Yesterday it was quite high, last night it fell, then this morning it rose again. Surely that line is not in any of the dimensions of space that we generally understand? It is along the time-dimension.'

'But,' said the Medical Man, looking hard at the fire, 'if time is

really only a fourth dimension of space, why can't we move about in it as we move in the other dimensions?'

The Time Traveller smiled. 'Are you so sure we can move freely in space? We can go right and left, backwards and forwards freely enough. But up and down? That isn't so easy.'

'Well, we can move a little up and down,' said the Medical Man. 'But we can't move at all in time. We are always in the present moment.'

'That is at the centre of my great discovery. Why can a modern man not hope that one day he might travel in time?'

'It doesn't make sense,' said Filby.

'Possibly not,' said the Time Traveller. 'But now you begin to see the reason for my work on the geometry of four dimensions. Long ago I had an idea for a machine that can travel in any direction of space and time, as the driver wants.'

Filby started to laugh.

'But I have proved this by experiment,' said the Time Traveller.

'It would be very useful for the historian,' the Psychologist suggested. 'He could travel back and see how things really happened!'

'Then there is the future,' said the Very Young Man. 'Just think! You could put all your money in the bank, leave it to grow and hurry on ahead!'

'To discover a society,' I said, 'that doesn't use money.'

'Of all the crazy ideas!' began the Psychologist.

'It seemed so to me, and I never talked about it until —'

'An experiment!' I cried. 'You are going to prove *that*?'

'Let's see what you can do,' said the Psychologist, 'though I think it's all rubbish.'

The Time Traveller smiled at us. Then, with his hands deep inside his trouser pockets, he walked slowly out of the room and we heard him going down to the laboratory.

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

'A trick probably,' said the Medical Man, and Filby tried to tell us about a trick he had seen once, but before he had really started his story the Time Traveller came back.

He held something in his hand. It was made of shiny metal and was not much larger than a small clock. And now I must be exact, because unless you believe his explanation it is impossible to explain what happened next.

He took one of the small tables in the room and put it in front of the fire. On this he placed the machine. Then he placed a chair next to it and sat down. The only other object on the table was a small lamp, the light of which fell on the model.

I sat in a low chair nearest the fire and I pulled this forwards so I was almost between the Time Traveller and the fire. Filby sat behind him, looking over his shoulder. The Medical Man watched him from the right; the Psychologist from the left. The Very Young Man stood behind the Psychologist. We were all wide awake. I cannot believe that a trick was played on us under these conditions.

'This little thing,' said the Time Traveller, resting his elbows on the table and pressing his hands together above the machine, 'is only a model. It is my plan for a machine to travel through time. You will notice that it looks a little rough, and this bar has an odd shining appearance — it looks quite unreal.' He pointed to this part with his finger. 'Also, here is one little white lever, and here is another.'

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

'It took two years to make,' said the Time Traveller. Then, when we had all had a close look, he said, 'Now I want you to understand clearly that this lever sends the machine flying into the future, and this other one sends it into the past.'

'Soon, I'm going to press the lever and the machine will disappear into future time. Have a good look at the thing. Look

at the table too, and satisfy yourself that there can be no tricks. I don't want to waste this model and then be told I'm dishonest.'

There was a minute's pause perhaps. The Psychologist opened his mouth to speak to me but closed it again. Then the Time Traveller put out his finger towards the lever.

'No,' he said suddenly, pulling his finger away again. 'Lend me your hand.' And turning to the Psychologist, he took that person's hand in his own and told him to put out his first finger and touch the lever.

So the Psychologist himself sent the model time machine on its endless journey. We all saw the lever turn. I am completely certain there was no trick. There was a breath of wind and the lamp flame jumped. The machine suddenly turned round, looked unclear, was seen like a ghost for a second and was gone – disappeared! Except for the lamp, the table was empty.

Everyone was silent for a minute. Then the Psychologist recovered from his surprise and looked under the table.

The Time Traveller laughed cheerfully. 'Well?' he said.

We all stared.

'My friend,' said the Medical Man quietly, 'are you serious about this? Do you really believe that machine has travelled in time?'

'Certainly,' said the Time Traveller. 'And I have a big machine nearly finished in there' – he pointed to the laboratory – 'and when that is put together I intend to go on a journey myself.'

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

'Into the future or the past – I'm not completely sure which.'

After some time the Psychologist said, 'It has gone into the past if it has gone anywhere.'

'Why?' said the Time Traveller.

'Because I'm quite sure that it hasn't moved in space, and if it travelled into the future it would still be here all this time. It

would have to travel through the time that is passing as we stand here.'

'But,' I said, 'if it travelled into the past, why wasn't it here when we first came into this room, and last Thursday when we were here – and the Thursday before that?'

'Let's be fair – these are serious questions,' said Filby, turning towards the Time Traveller.

'That can be explained,' the Time Traveller said to the Psychologist. 'It's there but can't be seen.'

'Of course,' said the Psychologist. 'That's simple enough. Why didn't I think of it? We can't see it, in the same way that we can't see a bullet flying through the air. If it is travelling through time fifty times or a hundred times faster than we are, we can see only one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of it.'

We sat and stared at the empty table for a minute or two. Then the Time Traveller asked us what we thought of it all.

'It sounds believable enough tonight,' said the Medical Man, 'but it will seem different in the morning.'

'Would you like to see the Time Machine itself?' asked the Time Traveller. And then, taking the lamp in his hand, he led the way to the laboratory.

I remember clearly how we all followed him, and how in the laboratory we saw a larger copy of the little machine. It was almost complete, but two bars lay unfinished on the table and I picked one up for a better look.

'Now listen,' said the Medical Man, 'are you really serious?'

'In that machine,' said the Time Traveller, holding the lamp high, 'I intend to travel in time. Is that clear? I was never more serious in my life.'

None of us knew what to say. I looked at Filby over the shoulder of the Medical Man and he smiled at me.

Chapter 2 The Traveller Returns

I think at that time none of us really 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 knew everything about him. You always thought that something was hidden, that he was playing a trick on you. If Filby showed us the model and explained things in the Time Traveller's words, we would believe him more easily. We would understand his reasons – because anyone could understand Filby. But the Time Traveller had a strong imagination and we didn't really believe him.

The next Thursday I went to Richmond again and, arriving late, found four or five men already in the sitting room. The Medical Man was standing in front of the fire with a sheet of paper in one hand and his watch in the other. I looked around for the Time Traveller.

'It's half-past seven now,' said the Medical Man. 'I suppose we'd better have dinner?'

'Where's our host?' I asked.

'You have just come? It's rather odd. He has been delayed. He asks me in this note to start dinner at seven if he's not back. He says he will 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 Medical Man rang the bell.

Only the Psychologist, the Medical Man and myself had attended the first dinner. The other men were the Editor, a journalist and another – a quiet, shy man with a beard – who I didn't know. There was some discussion at the dinner table about the Time Traveller's absence and I suggested time travelling, in a half-joking way. The Editor wanted that to be explained to him and the Psychologist gave a very dull description of the 'clever trick' we had seen a week before.

He was in the middle of this when the door opened slowly and without noise. I was facing it and saw him first. 'Well!' I said. 'At last!'

The door opened wider and the Time Traveller stood in front of us. I gave a cry of surprise.

'Oh, my friend! What's the matter?' cried the Medical Man, who saw him next.

The others turned towards the door.

He looked very strange. His coat was dusty and dirty, his hair untidy and, it seemed to me, greyer – either with dust or because its colour had gone. His face was very pale and his chin had a cut on it. For a moment he stopped at the door; the light seemed too strong for his eyes. Then he came into the room. He walked slowly, with a bad limp.

He did not say a word, but came painfully to the table and moved a hand towards the wine. The Editor filled a glass and pushed it towards him. He drank it and it seemed to do him good because he looked round the table and smiled a little.

'What have you been doing?' said the Medical Man.

The Time Traveller did not seem to hear. 'Don't let me worry you,' he said in a tired voice. 'I'm all right.' He stopped, held out his glass for more, and drank it down. 'That's good,' he said. His eyes grew brighter, and a faint colour came to his face. Then he spoke again. 'I'm going to wash and dress, and then I'll come down and explain things . . . Save me some of that meat. I'm hungry.' The Editor began a question. 'I'll tell you soon,' said the Time Traveller. 'I'm feeling strange! I'll be all right in a minute.'

He put down his glass and walked towards the door to the stairs. Standing up in my place, I saw his feet as he went out. He had nothing on them except a pair of socks with holes in them. They were covered with dried blood. Then the door closed behind him. For a minute, perhaps, my mind was empty.

'Strange Behaviour of a Famous Scientist,' I heard the Editor say, thinking of his newspaper.

'What's happened to him?' said the Journalist. 'I don't understand.' I thought of the Time Traveller walking painfully upstairs. I don't think anyone else had noticed his limp.

The Medical Man recovered from his surprise first, and rang the bell for a hot plate. The Editor picked up his knife and fork and the Silent Man did the same. The dinner started again. Conversation was slow for a minute or two because we were so surprised. Then the Editor said, 'Does our friend have another job, or just a strong imagination?'

'I feel sure it's this business of the Time Machine,' I said, and continued the Psychologist's story of our earlier meeting. The new guests were very surprised and the Editor said, 'What is this time travelling? A man couldn't cover himself with dust by doing something impossible, could he?'

The Journalist, too, refused to believe it, and started to make a joke of the whole thing. 'Our Special Reporter in the Day after Tomorrow reports,' he was saying – or shouting – when the Time Traveller came back. He was dressed in ordinary evening clothes and nothing except his tired look reminded me of the change that had shocked me.

'Well,' said the Editor, laughing, 'these men say you have been travelling into the middle of next week.'

The Time Traveller sat down without a word. He smiled quietly, in his usual way. 'Where's my meat?' he said. 'How nice it is to stick a fork into meat again.'

'Story!' cried the Editor.

'Later,' said the Time Traveller. 'I want something to eat first. I won't say a word until I get some food into my stomach. Thanks. And the salt.'

'One word,' I said. 'Have you been time travelling?'

'Yes,' said the Time Traveller, with his mouth full.

'I'd give a pound a line for the story in your own words,' said the Editor. The Time Traveller pushed his glass towards the Silent Man, who was staring at his face. He jumped a little, then poured him some wine. The rest of the dinner was uncomfortable. The Journalist tried to relax us by telling funny stories. The Medical Man smoked a cigarette and watched the Time Traveller closely. The Silent Man seemed nervous, and drank a lot of wine.

At last the Time Traveller pushed his plate away and looked round at us. 'I suppose I must apologise,' he said. 'I was so hungry. I've had a most interesting time.' He put out his hand for a cigarette. 'But come into the smoking room. The story is too long to tell over dirty plates.' And he led the way.

'You have told these men about the machine?' he said to me, sitting back in his chair and naming the three new guests.

'But the thing's just a trick,' said the Editor.

'I can't argue tonight. I don't mind telling the story, but I can't argue. I will,' he continued, 'tell you the story of what has happened to me, if you like, but you mustn't interrupt. Most of it will sound like lies, but it is true – every word of it. I was in the laboratory earlier, and since then . . . I have lived eight days . . . days like no human being ever lived before! I am very tired, but I shan't sleep until I have told this thing to you. But no interruptions! Is it agreed?'

We all agreed and the Time Traveller began his story as I have written it down. He sat back in his chair at first and spoke slowly. Afterwards he got more excited. As I write it down I feel the limits of pen and ink, and my own limits. You will read, I expect, with enough attention, but you cannot see the speaker's white, honest face in the bright circle of the little lamp, or hear his voice. Most of us listeners were in shadow. At first each looked at the others. After a time we stopped doing that and looked only at the Time Traveller's face.

Chapter 3 Forwards in Time

'I told some of you last Thursday how the Time Machine works, and showed you the actual thing itself, incomplete in the laboratory. It is there now, a little damaged by travel, but not in bad condition. I expected to finish it on Friday, but when I had put most of it together, I found that one piece was too short. I had to make this again, and the thing wasn't complete until this morning. So at ten o'clock today, the first of all Time Machines began its journey.

'I checked everything, then got into the seat. I felt a little frightened, but interested in what was going to happen next. I took the starting lever in one hand and the stopping one in the other. Then I pressed the first and almost immediately the second. I felt that I was falling but, looking around, I saw the laboratory exactly as before. Had anything happened? For a moment I thought that my mind had tricked me. Then I noticed the clock. A moment before, it had showed a minute or two past ten. Now it was nearly half-past three.

'I took a breath, held the starting lever with both hands and pushed it harder. The laboratory became unclear and went dark. Mrs Watchett, my cook, came in and walked, without seeing me, towards the garden door. I suppose it took her a minute or two to cross the room, but she seemed to move at high speed. I pressed the lever over to its furthest position.

'The night came, and in another moment came tomorrow. The laboratory grew faint and unclear. Tomorrow night became black, then day again, night again, day again – faster and faster. A low and changing sound filled my ears, and my mind became confused.

'As my speed increased, night followed day faster and faster. The faint picture of the laboratory seemed soon to move away from me. I saw the sun jumping quickly across the sky,



The laboratory grew faint and unclear.

once every minute, each minute being a day. I supposed that the laboratory had been destroyed and I had come into the open air. The quick changes of darkness and light were very painful to my eyes. Then, in the short dark times, I saw the moon turning quickly through her quarters from new to full.

'Soon, as I continued, still increasing speed, the change from night to day became one continuous greyness. The sky turned a wonderful deep blue. The jumping sun became a line of fire, the moon a fainter line that changed in width.

'The land was difficult to see clearly. I was still on the hillside where this house now stands. I saw trees growing and changing. They changed from green to brown and back to green again, grew tall, died and fell. I saw enormous buildings rise up, then disappear like dreams. The speed dials on the machine went round faster and faster. The line of the sun moved up and down, from summer to winter, in a minute or less. Minute by minute white snow spread across the world and disappeared, and was followed by the green of spring.

'The unpleasant feelings at the beginning now changed into a kind of crazy excitement. I noticed a strange movement of the machine from side to side, which I couldn't explain, but my mind was too confused to pay any attention to it. So with a kind of madness growing in me, I threw myself into the future. At first I didn't think of stopping. But then a new feeling grew in my mind – a sense of fear mixed with the need to know.

'What strange changes had happened to people? What wonderful improvements to our simple way of life might appear when I looked more closely into that world? I saw large and wonderful buildings growing in front of me, bigger than ours. I saw a stronger green colour move up the hillside, and stay there without any interruption by snow. Although I was travelling so quickly, the world still seemed beautiful, and so my mind turned to stopping the machine.

'My greatest fear was that there would already be something in the space when I, or the machine, stopped. While I travelled at high speed through time, this didn't matter much – I seemed to move like a gas through other things. But when I stopped, I would put myself into whatever lay in my way. Such close contact with the other thing might cause a great explosion. I had thought of this possibility again and again while I was making the machine, but then I had cheerfully accepted it as one of the necessary dangers that a man must face. I wasn't as cheerful now, when I couldn't escape it.

'The strangeness of everything, the movement of the machine and the feeling of continual falling had made me very nervous. I told myself that I could never stop. Then, becoming suddenly angry, I decided to stop immediately. Like a fool in a hurry, I pulled over the lever. The machine turned over and I was thrown through the air.

'There was the sound of thunder in my ears. For a moment I forgot what was happening, then I found myself sitting on soft grass in front of the machine. Heavy rain was falling. Everything still seemed grey, but soon I noticed that the confusion in my ears was gone. I looked around me. I was on a small lawn, surrounded by bushes. Their purple flowers were dropping under the beating of the heavy rain. In a moment I was wet to the skin. "A fine welcome," I thought, "to a man who has travelled so many years to see you."

'Soon I stood up and looked around me. Through the heavy rain I could see an enormous figure cut, perhaps, out of white stone. But the rest of the world was unclear.

'As the rain became lighter, I saw the white figure more clearly. It was very large – a tree touched its shoulder. It was shaped a little like a sphinx with spread wings, and seemed to be flying. The pedestal seemed to be made of metal, and had turned green with age. I stood looking at the figure for some time.

When, at last, I took my eyes from it for a moment, I saw that the rain was stopping and the sky was growing lighter.

'Then I suddenly realised the full danger of my journey. What might appear when the rain stopped? What might people be like? Had they perhaps changed into something inhuman and very strong? I might seem like an old-world wild animal, but more frightening because I looked like them – a horrible creature to be speedily killed.

'Already I saw the shapes of enormous buildings, and a wooded hillside growing clearer through the dying storm. I turned quickly to the Time Machine and tried hard to turn it the right way up. As I did so, the grey rain suddenly stopped and the sun shone through the clouds. My fear grew stronger and I fought hard with the machine. It moved under my attack and turned over. It hit my chin violently. One hand on the seat, the other on the lever, I stood breathing heavily, ready to climb inside it again.

'But now I had a way of escaping, my confidence recovered. I looked with more interest and less fear at this world of the future. In a round opening, high up in the wall of the nearest building, I saw a group of figures wearing soft robes. They had seen me, and their faces were turned towards me.

'Then I heard voices coming nearer. Through the bushes I saw the heads and shoulders of running men. One of these appeared on a path leading straight to the lawn where I stood. He was quite thin, just over a metre high, wearing only a long purple shirt tied at the waist with a leather belt. Noticing that, I realised for the first time how warm the air was.

'He seemed to be very beautiful, but also very weak. At the sight of him, my confidence returned. I took my hands from the machine.

Chapter 4 The People of the Future

'In another moment we were standing face to face, I and this weak creature from the future. He came straight up to me and laughed into my eyes. I noticed immediately that he had no fear in him. Then he turned to the two others who were following him. He spoke to them in a strange and very sweet-sounding language.

'There were more coming, and soon a little group of perhaps eight or ten of these beautiful people were around me. One of them spoke to me. I don't know why, but I thought that my voice was too strong and deep for them. So I shook my head and, pointing to my ears, shook it again. He came a step forwards, stopped and then touched my hand. Then I felt other soft little hands on my back and shoulders. They wanted to make sure that I was real.

'There was nothing at all frightening in this. In fact, these pretty little people had a relaxed and childlike gentleness that made me confident. And also, they looked so weak that I could imagine myself throwing the whole group of them to the ground.

'But I made a sudden movement to warn them when I saw their little pink hands touching the Time Machine. Fortunately then, when it wasn't too late, I thought of the danger that I had forgotten. Reaching over the bars of the machine, I took out the little levers that would make it move. I put these in my pocket. Then I turned again to the little people to see how I could communicate.

'Looking closer at their faces, I saw some strange differences in their sweet prettiness. They all had the same wavy hair, and this came to a sharp end at the neck and below the ears. There was none growing on their faces, and their ears were very small. Their mouths were small, too, with bright red, rather thin lips. Their

little chins came to a point and their eyes were large and gentle. Perhaps my sense of my own importance is too great, but I felt even then that they showed very little interest in me.

'Because they didn't try to speak to me, but simply stood smiling and speaking softly to each other, I began the conversation. I pointed to the Time Machine and to myself. Then, after thinking for a moment how to describe time, I pointed to the sun. At once a pretty little figure dressed in purple and white did the same, and then made the sound of thunder.

'For a moment I was very surprised, though the meaning of his movement was clear enough. The question had come into my mind suddenly: were these people fools? You couldn't really understand how I felt. I had always expected that people living about 800,000 years in the future would have much greater knowledge than us in science, art – everything.

'But one of them had asked me a very simple question, which showed him to be on the level of intelligence of one of our five-year-old children. He had asked me, in fact, if I had come from the sun in a thunderstorm!

'This made me think again about their clothes, their weak arms and legs and pretty faces. A feeling of sadness came into my mind. For a moment I felt that I had built the Time Machine for no reason at all.

'I said yes, pointed to the sun, and made a sound like thunder. This was so real that it frightened them – they all stood back a step or two and bent their heads down. Then one came laughing towards me, carrying some beautiful flowers which were new to me. He put these around my neck.

'The idea made them all happy. Soon they were running around for flowers and throwing them on me until I was almost covered with them. You cannot imagine what wonderful flowers countless years of work had produced.

'Then someone suggested that their new toy should be shown to others in the nearest building, and so I was led past the sphinx made of white stone, which had seemed to watch me all the time with a smile at my surprise. As I went with them, the memory of my hopes for a future full of highly intelligent people came to my mind, and made me smile.

'The building had a very large entrance, and was really enormous. I was worried about the growing crowd of little people, and the shadows beyond the big open doors. Around me I saw many bushes and flowers. It was clear that no gardener was looking after them, but they still looked beautiful. The Time Machine was left on the lawn.

'Several more brightly-dressed people met me in the doorway and we walked through into a large hall. The roof was in shadow and the windows, partly made of coloured glass, let in a soft light. The floor was made of large pieces of a very hard white metal, lower in places where people had clearly walked across it for hundreds of years.

'Along the length of the room were many tables made of shiny stone, perhaps half a metre above the floor, and on these were piles of fruit. Some I recognised as larger apples and oranges, but mostly they were strange.

'The people with me sat down around a table and made signs for me to do the same. They immediately began to eat the fruit with their hands. I was happy to follow their example because I felt thirsty and hungry. As I did so, I took some time to look around the hall and noticed that the glass windows were broken in many places and the curtains were thick with dust. The general effect, though, was very attractive.

'There were, perhaps, a couple of hundred people eating in the hall, and most of them were watching me with interest, their little eyes shining over the fruit they were eating. All of them were wearing the same soft but strong material.

'Fruit, I later learned, was all that they ate. These people of the future didn't eat meat, and while I was with them, although I missed it, I could only eat fruit too. In fact, I discovered later that horses, cows and sheep, and dogs, had disappeared from Earth. But the fruits were very pleasant.

'When I had filled my stomach, I tried to learn some of the language of these new people. The fruits seemed an easy thing to start with, and holding one of these up, I began using questioning sounds and movements. I had great difficulty making them understand. At first they stared in surprise and laughed, but soon a fair-haired little female seemed to realise what I wanted and repeated a name.

'They had to talk for some time to explain things to each other, and when I first tried to make the sounds of their language they were very amused. I felt like a teacher among children, but soon I at least knew a number of names for things and even the verb "to eat".

'It was slow work, though, and the little people soon got tired and wanted to get away from my questions, so I decided to let them give short lessons when they wanted to. And they were very short lessons because I have never met people who are lazier or more easily tired. They used to come to me with happy cries of surprise, like children, but like children they soon stopped examining me and went away to find another toy.

'When the dinner ended, I noted the disappearance of almost all the creatures who had surrounded me at first. It is odd, too, how quickly I stopped caring about these little people. I was continually meeting more of them. They followed me a little distance, talked and laughed around me, smiled in a friendly way, then left me alone.

'The evening was calm as I came out of the great hall, and the land was lit by the colour of the sun as it went down. The big building was on the side of a wide river valley, but the Thames had moved a kilometre or two from its present position. I decided to climb to the top of a hill from where I could see more of our world in the year 802,701. That was the date the little dials of my machine had showed.

'As I walked, I looked for anything that could explain the bad condition of things. A little way up the hill, for example, was a great pile of stones held together by pieces of metal. These were the ruins of a great building, although I couldn't imagine what its use had been.

'Looking round with a sudden thought, I realised that there were no small houses. Here and there among the trees and bushes were palace-like buildings, but the single house, and possibly even the family, had disappeared.

'And then came another thought. I looked at the small group of figures who were following me. I saw that all had the same type of clothes, the same soft hairless faces and the same girlish arms and legs.

'It may seem odd, perhaps, that I hadn't noticed this before. But everything was so strange. Now, I saw the fact clearly enough. These people of the future were all very similar in clothes, and in all other ways the differences between men and women had almost disappeared. And the children seemed to my eyes to be just smaller adults.

'Seeing how safely and comfortably these people lived, I felt that this close similarity of the sexes was understandable. If there are enough people, it becomes a problem rather than an advantage to have a lot of children. If violence comes only rarely and children are safe, there is less need for men to be strong and