

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.