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THE TIME MACHINE

by H. G. Wells

UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

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H.G. Wells

Prestwick House

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Contents

NOTES

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

H. G. WELLS

Wells sometime before 1916.

HERBERT GEORGE WELLS was born on September 21, 1866, in Kent, England, to a working-class family, who felt that the child would assume his proper place in British society as a common laborer. After a series of menial jobs that disgusted him, Wells found some pleasure as a teaching assistant, and he completed college in 1888.

Wells married a cousin, Isabel Mary Wells, then divorced her; he later married Amy Catherine Robbins, and, despite his numerous affairs, they remained together until her death in 1927.

His first successful book, *The Time Machine*, published serially in magazines and eventually as a book in 1895, was immediately popular with both critics and the public. Consequently, Wells had no financial worries for the rest of his life.

H. G. Wells in 1907 at the door of his house at Sandgate.

READING POINTERS

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

To better appreciate *The Time Machine*, it will be helpful to explore some of the historical, social, and scientific assumptions on which Wells based his story:

As a Socialist, Herbert George Wells was very concerned with the relationship between the working class and the ruling class in England.

- The Industrial Revolution had established a wealthy and politically powerful middle class, as well as creating a new form of urban poverty not previously known.

- Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) asserted that revolution was unavoidable in any society in which the means of production (the factories) were owned by one class (the capitalists) and operated by another (the workers). According to Marxist philosophy, the wealth of the middle class capitalists was made possible only by the exploitation of the workers.

- Wells saw that the gap between capitalists and workers was widening and he hypothesized where such a discrepancy would lead in the future. Thus, he developed the Eloi (future descendents of the capitalists) and the Morlocks (future descendents of the workers).

Wells was also a historian and a sociologist, greatly interested in the scientific theories and advancements of his day.

- The theories asserted in Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) provided the scientific background Wells needed for his two social classes to evolve into two distinct species as described above.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE TIME TRAVELLER (for so it will be convenient to speak of him) was expounding a recondite matter to us. His 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 in the lilies of silver caught the bubbles that flashed and passed in our glasses. Our chairs, being his patents, embraced and caressed us rather than submitted to be sat upon, and there was that luxurious after-dinner atmosphere, when thought runs gracefully free of the trammels of precision. And he put it to us in this way—marking the points with a lean forefinger—as we sat and lazily admired his earnestness over this new paradox (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 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 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.

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

"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 Traveller proceeded, "any real body must have extension in *four* directions: it must have Length, Breadth, Thickness, and—Duration.† But through a natural infirmity of the flesh, which I 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, because it happens 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 relight his cigar 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 accession of cheerfulness. "Really this is what is meant by the Fourth Dimension, though 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 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 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 been asking why *three* dimensions particularly—why not another direction at

†Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

right angles to the other three?—and have even tried to construct a Four-Dimensional geometry. Professor Simon Newcomb† 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 models 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 lapsed into an introspective state, his lips moving as one who repeats mystic words. "Yes, I think I see it now," he said after some time, brightening in a quite transitory manner.

"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 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 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 recognised? But certainly it traced such a line, and 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 Traveller smiled. "Are you 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, save for spasmodic jumping and the inequalities of the surface, man had no freedom of vertical movement."

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

"Easier, far easier down 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 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 the germ of my great discovery. But 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 for a moment. Of course we have no means of staying back for any length of Time, any more than a savage or an animal has of staying six feet above the ground. But a civilized man is better off than the savage in this respect. He 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 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 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 driver 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!"

"Don't you think you would attract attention?" said the Medical Man. "Our ancestors had no great tolerance for anachronisms."

Glossary

I: Introduction

" **'Clearly,' the Time Traveller…and—Duration.'"** – Wells is preparing the reader for a discussion of what would later be proven by Einstein: In order for an object to exist, it must have not only the three dimensions of length, width, and height, it must also be determined by time. Distance is a function of time. Wells says, later, "…Time is only a kind of Space."

Simon Newcomb – (1835-1909), a Canadian-American mathematician, economist, and astronomer

the Battle of Hastings – a battle in England in which William the Conqueror defeated the Saxons in 1066

Homer – (8th century B.C.) a famous Greek poet

Plato – (428-348 B.C.) a famous Greek philosopher

Burslem – a town in England

II: The Machine

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III: The Time Traveller Returns

Linnæan – relating to Carolus Linnæus, a Swedish scientist who developed the method by which animals are classified into categories

Tübingen – a city in Germany

Richmond – a city in England

Nebuchadnezzar – an ancient Babylonian king, known for his wealth, and for conquering, destroying, and rebuilding Jerusalem

Rosebery – a reference to Archibald Rosebery (1847-1929), the Earl of Primrose. Rosebery was a politician whose views on imperialism frequently caused conflict with the British Prime Minister.

Hettie Potter – a possible reference to Beatrice Potter Webb, a member of the Fabian Society, along with H. G. Wells. The Fabians were against Marxism, which believed that social improvements and the creation of permanent political organizations would develop socialism naturally. Fabians, however, favored gradual, natural societal changes, rather than revolutionary and drastic ones; their goal was to change society by setting an example for others to follow.

Vocabulary

I: Introduction

accession – succession
anachronism – something that is out of place in its time period
anecdote – a relevant story or tale
assimilation – absorption; understanding of
conjurer – a magician, sorcerer
controvert – to oppose, object to
erected – created, built
expounding – explaining
extensively – comprehensively, broadly
fecundity – fruitfulness, productivity
germ – the origin, beginning
humbug – nonsense
immaterial – unimportant
incandescent – brilliant, glowing
infirmity – an illness, sickness
intermittently – irregularly
introspective – thoughtful
latter – the last, final
little-go – [slang] the first examination to obtain a degree at an English University
mathematical plane – a grid on which numbers are charted
misconception – a mistaken belief
mystic – magical
nil – zero, nothing
pensive – thoughtful
perspective – a viewpoint, outlook
plough – to handle
provincial – simple, unsophisticated
recondite – unclear, difficult to understand
sleight-of-hand – trickery, skill
spasmodic – irregular
trammels – restrictions
transitory – temporary
unalterable – permanent, unchangeable
vividly – brightly, brilliantly