

BURSLEM BOOKS

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THE TIME MACHINE: a sequel



or
'ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD'

a new novelette by
H.G. Wells & David Haden

2010

The Time Traveller returned to us at some unknown hour during those traditionally restful days between Boxing Day and New Year's Eve, at the end of the year 1905. He had been away for nearly six years. As his good friend I had seen to it that his old house at Richmond was securely boarded up, and that his laboratory and papers were left intact and untouched. I cannot name the precise hour or day of his return, since he did not immediately make himself known to me. I assume that he had first slept a long and exhausted sleep, and then on waking he may have sent some passing boy to the local inn to fetch him cuts of cold meat. Nor do I truly know the full reasons for his return, except to say that I later found some signs among all his glittering mechanisms, diagrams, and books, indicating that he had worked for many hours in his laboratory to repair or refit parts of his magnificent time machine. Some months later I did as he asked and burned certain of his personal papers and notes, these being his own unpublished scientific papers on advanced physical optics.

I

His return had been very oddly anticipated, and in a manner that even now I cannot fully explain. In early November 1905 I had ventured inside his old house, simply on my usual monthly inspection intended to keep the place safe and secure. The house had gained a bad name, and adolescent man and Nature would have combined to bring swift desolation upon it, if I had not kept a regular vigil. Swallows and martins built every year more thickly in the silent, airy, upper floors, and I feared a summer fire in the roof-spaces. I lit a match and then a candle, and slipped past the dusty curtains forming the entrance to his smoking-room. My candle flared suddenly with the air from the chimney and made the shadows cower and quiver. I stood with the candle held aloft, surveying in my mind's eye the bright firelit scene of the inventor's first triumph, as he had sent his model machine whirring on its way into the stream of time. I could almost see again before me the incredulous faces of the Medical Man, the Provincial Mayor (since passed away), the Psychologist, the Editor and his disagreeable Reporter (later involved in a scandal), the Very Young Man, and good old Filby (who had gone on to become a fine playwright).

In the deep chill of that dark and unheated room, I saw it. At first, it was just a faint glitter where some parts had reflected my candle light. I stood rigid for half a minute perhaps, for I half-suspected what it was that I had glimpsed. Then I stepped closer. Resting on the table — the very table that it had vanished from five years before — was the

inventor's model machine. His prototype had returned! I saw the very same framework, about the size of a small clock, and as I stooped to look closer I saw again the delicate metalwork, forming a carapace for the dots of that mysterious transparent crystalline substance that appeared to power or direct his machines. I remembered how our Inventor had told us then that he did not know if his model had gone into the future or the past. I wondered at that time about the wisdom of not setting up some little mechanism or spring, some trigger that might eventually reverse its motion after a time and thus rescue the precious model, but I said nothing of it then or afterwards. At that moment of return in the darkened house, I suspected the Time Traveller had set just such a cog or gear or spring into his little model. I found any other explanation was simply too far-fetched to believe — that perhaps a race of men in some far future had somehow detected and then arrested the travel, reset the model and returned it exactly to its origin? No, that simply could not be. Then an old thought occurred to me, one among many ideas I had pondered in recent years — that perhaps time was not linear, but somehow circular or curved. That if one simply travelled on and on, and with sufficient speed, one would eventually arrive back at one's starting point. Just as one might do on the surface of the Earth. This explanation also seemed unsatisfactory, for at that time there was no scientific theory to even hint at such a possibility, although it was increasingly said that a Mr. Einstein — in 1905 a name only just becoming known to the most learned men among the English-speaking peoples — might one day make such things clear to humanity.

I left the model, just as it was. It was some eight weeks later that the Time Traveller stepped from the snowy street into my bookshop.

II

I saw his face at first, and I was so astounded at the sight that I clapped my hand to my mouth. He was looking with pleasure into my bookshop window, just as any normal customer might. The contents of my large and handsome show window had been heavily depleted by the usual pre-Christmas sales period, but I and my two staff had taken the time to come in on the 30th so as to restock and reorder, and to dress the window as well we could ahead of an opening for a special discounted sales day on New Year's Eve. The pride of place in my window was the little metal pedestal containing the last slim copy of my own short account of his first adventure, titled by myself *The Time Machine: an invention*. That first and rather limited printing, undertaken at my own expense, had now completely sold out to lovers of the curious and the fantastic. This last display copy in the window was my own — and was most assuredly not for sale. He then noticed me watching him, and he pointed to the book with a smile of amusement.

Then he came into the shop, glanced warily over his shoulder, and softly shut the door. My two girl assistants, whom I had hired only two years before, did not know him. They looked askance at his

unfashionable garments and somewhat worn shoes. But immediately I knew him as if it was yesterday, and by his smile and sparkling eyes I found him to be healthy. He had not aged, yet he now seemed rather more worn and tight around the eyes and mouth. I met him with a beaming smile, but at first we said nothing and did not step forward and shake hands. We understood one another. My shop was nearly set for our sales day, and thus I immediately sent the girls home early.

“The wanderer returns!” I burst out, as soon as my assistants had left.

“Indeed” he replied softly. “And with wonders to discourse —”

I then shook him warmly by the hand and ushered him toward the door leading into the parlour, and there I set a strong fire and we had a good afternoon feast of tea and scones and different jams. I was silently pleased that we were able to settle ourselves into two of his very own patented ‘comfortable’ armchairs. In the particularly profitable year of 1903 I had purchased these two red leather examples of his design for my shop — the better to entertain specialist book collectors and widows disposing of personal libraries. He could tell that I was itching with curiosity and questions, yet he simply flashed me a warning smile. We went on quietly enjoying our tea, and once again we became used to one another’s close company. The clock ticked steadily.

He first asked me to find a pencil and large notepad from the storeroom, and this I quickly did. I was not going to miss the opportunity of taking down whatever it was he had to tell me. Then he sat back in his comfortable chair and sighed, and spoke at first like a man who has not had occasion for many months to speak seriously

and easily with anyone intelligent. Afterwards he became more loquacious, and he ceased to stumble over certain words, as we talked of the likely reception of my little book about his adventure in time.

“It certainly does jar with accepted opinions,” I agreed with him. “Men, from the very exigencies of their being, find this hard to believe. Learned men such as yourself think that every other mind wants to know the truth of things. But it is not so. Many lesser minds do not take kindly to being forcefully expanded and informed. Even as fiction they mostly disparage my book, and the critics employed by the daily newspapers are very strongly against it — when they have even deigned to mention it. I do not think their editors like the idea that such ‘scientific romances’ might adversely influence impressionable young imaginations. And yet, I know all that is in it to be true — for I have germinated *two* of the little seeds that had stuck inside Weena’s flowers, and even had one plant survive into the summer. It was a most strange and small thing, but quite beautiful. I even made a few photographs of it, though it did not survive the intense heat of late summer 1901.”

The Time Traveller smiled then, and I thought it an indication that he was glad of some further proof that Weena had been real to him. “It is perhaps better that they think it a lie, a fiction, an elaborate mystification...” he replied. “I do not now wish our present humanity to take up this new light of travel in a fourth dimension and then to re-examine all our physical science in its illumination. For the people of my time will soon approach a moment when the seeming impossibility grows possible, and I will leave them *no* tangible things

of mine such as diagrams and models to make it so. Yes...” he nodded, “I have destroyed the model that has so inexplicably returned...”

He spoke to me then of some mere lighter matters from the near future. Of his staring with some incredulity at the changing fashions in women’s clothing, and of his strange encounter with the oddest music pulled from the air by small ceramic boxes. But soon after this he became morose, and felt compelled to speak with no little disgust of the seemingly perpetual state of war and noise and loneliness in the 20th century. London had been rebuilt to be a mere series of conduits for the infernal motor carriage, and all civilised public life was thereby squeezed into mere corners and pockets. He painted a frightening picture of the miserable degeneration of London’s lower classes under the influence of alcohol and opiate drugs, after they had first been herded into bleak crumbling stone towers by city officials. My friend had then realised something of the awful ways in which good intentions for social progress might go awry, and he had swiftly fled from that abominable century — the full horrors of which he would not discourse on.

He again whirled through the centuries and then, as he slowed to peer around, he found his machine floating amid the passing seasons of an elegant garden. This, in far future years, is to be set upon the site of his old house. I nodded with joy and raised my cup in a cheer, on being told that one of my own distant ancestors would found such a public garden together with a public trust fund for its upkeep, so as to

keep it clear in case the Time Traveller should one day return to the site of his old home. And I admit that I was then somewhat overcome with emotion to learn that the garden would endure, and be tended as a tradition, for two thousand years — just as some of the churchyards of our own time have now survived as turf and trees for well over a thousand years.

He had his camera and knapsack with him in the machine, as I have previously recorded, and the various other items taken with him on his departure. But now he told me that the knapsack contained only basic rations, some medical and darning kits, and three key books. He had always been determined to gather a more suitable and substantial pack of useful supplies at some near-future time. These supplies he would then carry across eight thousand centuries to the year 802,701. So it was that he adjusted the levers of his machine and came to a halt in the sprawling London of the early years of the 40th Century. He removed the vital control levers from his machine, and stepped out onto the firm green turf of his little park.

And thus the Time Traveller began his second long account, just as I have set it forth for you here.