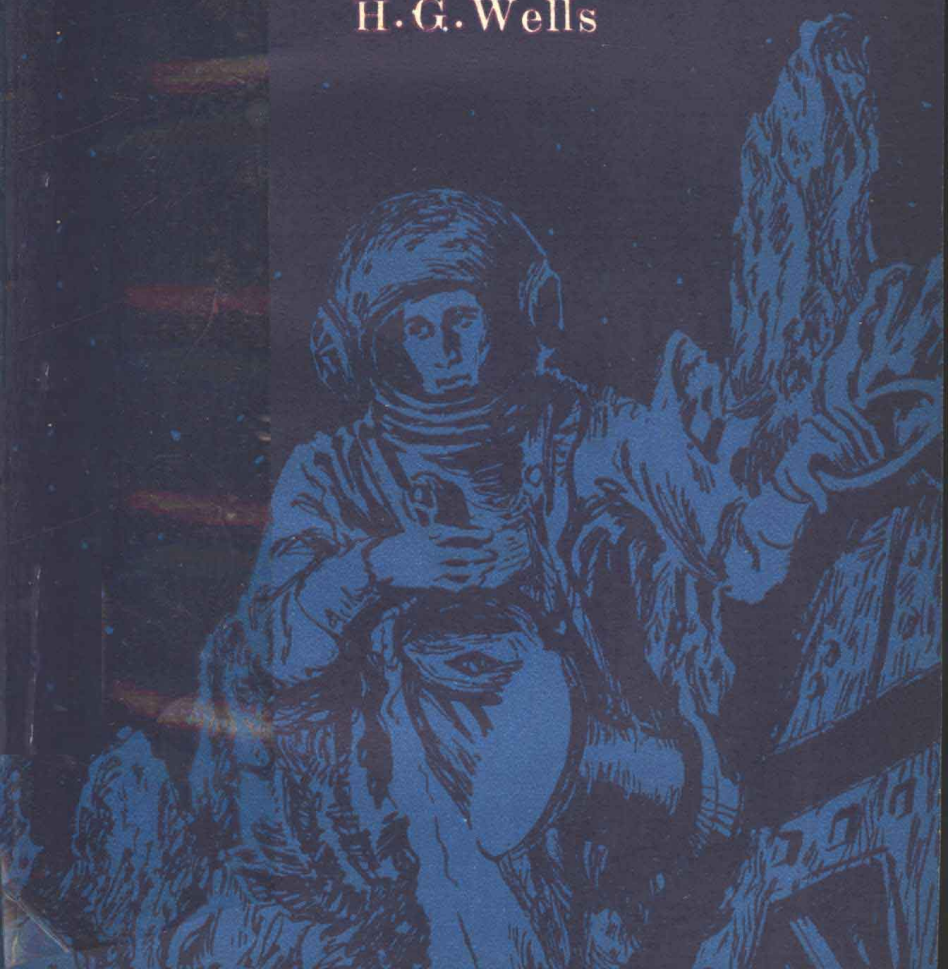
The First Men in the Moon

H. G. Wells



THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON

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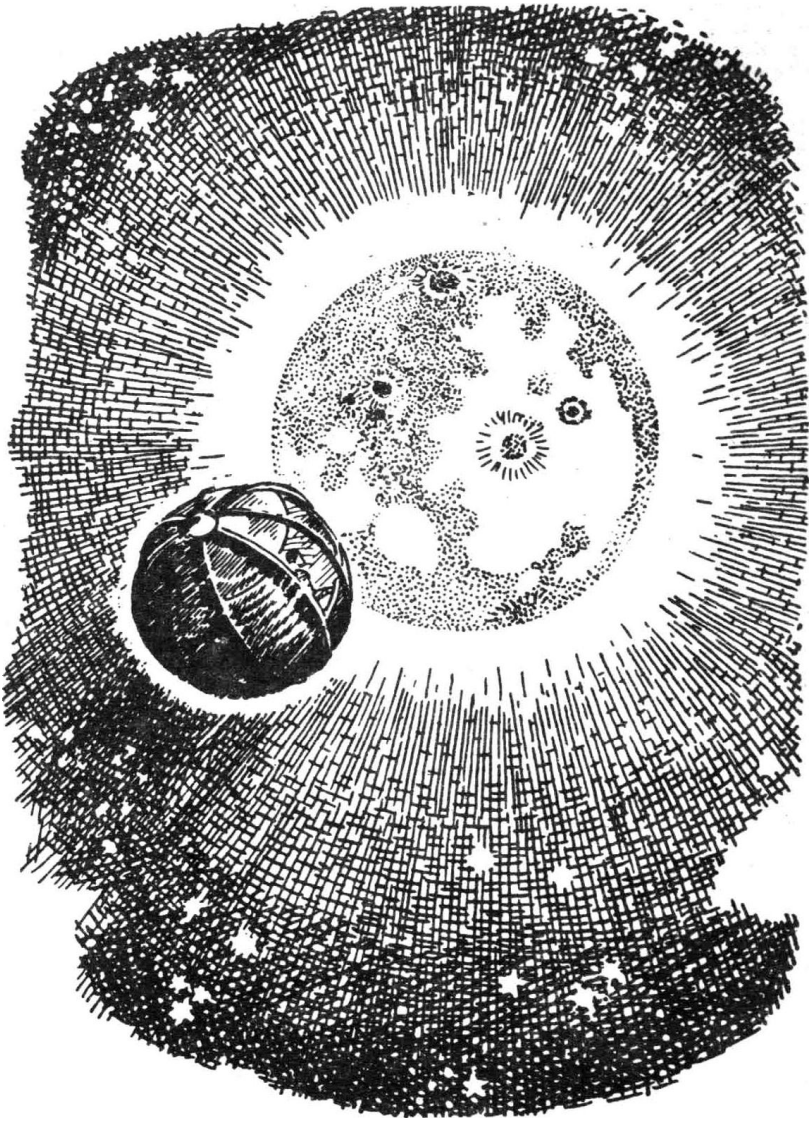

The sphere approaching the moon.

THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON

THE BRIDGE SERIES

General Editor: J. A. Bright

Its Aim and Purpose

The average student who has completed a simplified course of English has a vocabulary of about two thousand headwords, some familiarity with simple English syntax in shortish sentences, and a very limited acquaintance with English thought and ways of life. With this equipment or something very like it, he is usually invited to plunge into the largely uncharted seas of full English, to read books written specifically for an English audience assuming a full knowledge of English life and manners, complete familiarity with the most complex syntax, and a recognition vocabulary of at least ten and possibly twenty thousand words. It is no wonder if he becomes discouraged at the gap between what he knows and what he sees he has to learn. It is to help in closing this gap that The Bridge Series has been planned.

The student's troubles at this level are of three kinds, difficulties due to ignorance of background, difficulties of structure and difficulties of vocabulary. Difficulties of background can never be completely eliminated, but by careful choice of book and by annotation where difficulties are known to exist they have been to some extent minimized. Difficulties of understanding complicated sentences and slightly involved syntactical constructions can only be overcome by practice in reading them unhampered by

irrelevant difficulties of vocabulary. The syntactical structures of these books are therefore those of the original writers. This is not only advantageous because it gives useful practice in understanding more advanced structures, but also because it makes it possible to keep the original flavour of a book and a great deal of its literary value.

It is the difficulties of vocabulary that can be vigorously dealt with. Here we take it for granted that the student will know the vocabulary of simplified English (the words in *A General Service List of English Words*, Longmans, 1953, containing the General Service List of the Carnegie Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection, and, where they differ, the first three thousand words in Thorndike and Lorge's *A Teachers' Handbook of Thirty Thousand Words*, Columbia University 1944). The words outside that vocabulary are defined within the simplified vocabulary in a glossary.

We also believe that the student should meet common words before rare ones. For example we keep in words like *affectionate, arouse, blunt, compliment, humour*, but we eliminate words like *sequestered, imputation, quondam, incoherent, demeanour* and *laudatory*. This is not because they are not useful words, but because someone with a vocabulary of two or three thousand words has many thousands of more common and therefore more useful words to learn before he comes to these comparative rarities. This elimination is done empirically on the basis of experience and common sense and also by the aid of Thorndike's list. The aim has been to get rid of all words outside the commonest seven thousand unless there was some obvious reason for keeping them. The territory of the series may therefore be broadly defined as starting from the three thousand word level and includes new words (suitably glossed) up to a seven thousand word ceiling.

Another important feature is that new words are evenly

spread throughout the books, and therefore the reader does not come across a discouraging multitude of strangers in the first chapter. Words outside simplified English (unless they have appeared earlier in the book) are not introduced at a greater density than twenty-five per thousand running words of text—a density that experience has shown to be consistent with enjoyable reading. These new words, moreover, are not printed in black type or indicated in any other way because such indications lead to an undesirable concentration on the words rather than the sense, help to isolate words from the context in which they should be learnt, and above all discourage the reader from attempting to infer the meanings of unknown words either from the context or from his knowledge of related words. Skill in inference is one of the most important things to develop at this level.

The final assumption of the series is that after a diet of simplified English the student would like something with plenty of meat in it, and the greatest care is therefore taken to preserve everything possible of the vigour of the original, if the book is a simplification; or to give the reader plenty to think about, if the book is an original one.

Summing up, we can say that the books in The Bridge Series are of intermediate difficulty between simplified and full English. They contain little of vocabulary or idiom that is not immediately valuable, and we hope they will prove thoroughly enjoyable to read and study for their own sakes.

J.A.B.

WADI SEIDNA, OMDURMAN.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I

Mr. Bedford Meets Mr. Cavor at Lympne

As I sit down to write here among the shadows of vine-leaves under the blue sky of southern Italy, I am somewhat astonished to think that my taking part in these amazing adventures of Mr. Cavor was, after all, the result of the purest chance. I had gone to Lympne because I had imagined it the most uneventful place in the world. And this book is the result!

I was young in those days, and proud of my business ability. I took risks, and as a result got into debt. In order to pay off my creditors I decided to write a play, and I rented a little bungalow in the solitary village of Lympne where I hoped to work undisturbed.

It stood on the edge of a cliff facing the sea. In very wet weather the place is muddy and almost out of reach.

The window at which I worked looked over a marsh, and it was from this window that I first set eyes on Cavor. The sun had set, the sky was a bright green and yellow, and against that he came—the oddest little figure.

He was a short, fat little man; he wore a cricket cap, an overcoat, and cycling trousers and stockings. Why he did so I do not know, for he never cycled and he never played cricket. He made strange gestures with his hands and arms, and jerked his head about. Exactly as he came against the sun, he stopped, pulled out a watch and hesitated. Then he turned and retreated hastily.

This occurred on the first day of my stay in the bungalow,

when my play-writing energy was at its height, and I regarded the incident simply as an annoying interruption —the waste of five minutes. I returned to my play. But when the same thing was repeated day after day, concentration upon the play became a considerable effort, and I cursed the man pretty heartily.

Then my annoyance gave way to amazement and curiosity. Why on earth should a man do this thing? On the fourteenth evening I could stand it no longer, and as soon as he appeared I opened the french window, crossed the verandah, and directed myself to the point where he usually stopped.

He had his watch out as I came up to him. "One moment, sir," said I as he turned.

He started. "One moment," he said, "certainly. Or if you wish to speak to me for longer, would it trouble you to accompany me?"

"Not in the least," said I, placing myself beside him.

"My habits are regular. My time for intercourse—limited."

"This, I presume, is your time for exercise?"

"It is. I come here to enjoy the sunset."

"You don't."

"Sir?"

"You never look at it."

"Never look at it?"

"No. I've watched you thirteen nights, and not once have you looked at the sunset—not once."

He frowned like one who meets a problem.

"Well, I enjoy the sunlight—the atmosphere—I go along this path, through that gate"—he jerked his head over his shoulder—"and round——"

"You don't. You never have been. There isn't a way. To-night for instance——"

"Oh! To-night! Let me see. Ah! I just glanced at

my watch, saw that I already had been out just three minutes over the precise half-hour, decided there was not time to go round, turned——"

"You always do."

He looked at me—reflected. "Perhaps I do, now I come to think of it. But what was it you wanted to speak to me about?"

"Why, this!"

"This?"

"Yes. Why do you do it? Every evening you come making strange gestures——"

"Strange gestures?"

"Yes, like these"—I imitated his jerky movements.

He looked at me. "Do I do *that*?" he asked.

"Every single evening."

"I had no idea. Can it be that I have formed a habit? My mind is much occupied. Do these things annoy you?"

"Not *annoy*," I said. "But—imagine yourself writing a play!"

"I couldn't."

"Well, anything that needs concentration."

"Ah!" he said, "of course," and meditated. There was such an expression of sorrow on his face that I began to soften towards him

"I must stop it," he said. "I am getting absurdly absent-minded. The thing shall end. And now, sir, I have brought you farther than I should have done."

"I do hope my speaking to you uninvited——"

"Not at all, sir, not at all. I am greatly indebted to you."

I raised my hat and wished him a good evening. He answered jerkily, and so we went our ways.

The next evening I saw nothing of him, nor the next. But on the third day he called upon me. He told me that he had walked past my bungalow for years, and that I had

made that impossible. He was engaged in a very important scientific research which required constant mental ease and activity. And his afternoon walk had been his brightest time, until I interrupted it. I suggested he might try some other direction.

"No," he said, "I've inquired; there is no other direction."

"But why not come by still?" I said.

"It would be all different. I should think of you at your play—watching me irritated, instead of thinking of my work."

It occurred to me that I would like to know more of this research, as a relief from play-writing, and I asked him for more detailed information. He talked for nearly an hour, and I must confess I found it very difficult to understand what he said. Half his words were scientific terms entirely strange to me. "Yes," I said, "yes. Go on." Nevertheless I made out enough to convince me that he was not merely playing at discoveries. He told me of a work-shed he had, and of three assistants whom he had trained. He invited me to visit him, and I agreed readily.

At last he rose to depart, with an apology for the length of his call. Talking over his work was, he said, a pleasure enjoyed only too rarely. It was not often he found such an intelligent listener as myself. "Why not," said I, "make this your new habit? In the place of the one I spoilt? Why not come and talk about your work to me? It's certain I don't know enough to steal your ideas myself—and I know no scientific men——"

I stopped. He was considering. Evidently the idea attracted him. "But I'm afraid I should bore you," he said.

"You think I'm too dull?"

"Oh, no; but technical matters——"

"Anyhow, you've interested me immensely this afternoon."

"Of course it would be a great help to me. Nothing clears up ideas so much as explaining them. But can you spare the time?"

"There is no rest like change of occupation," I said.

The affair was over. On my verandah steps he turned. "I am greatly indebted to you," he said; "you have completely cured me of my ridiculous gestures." I said I was glad to be of any service to him, and turned away. No sooner had he left me than his arms began to wave in their former fashion!

He came the next day, and the day after, and delivered two lectures on physics to the satisfaction of both of us. It was tremendously difficult stuff, but I do not think he ever suspected how little I understood him.

At the earliest opportunity I went to see his house. It was large and carelessly furnished; there were no servants other than his three assistants. But the sight of his equipment settled many doubts. The ground floor rooms contained benches and apparatus, the kitchen boiler had developed into a furnace, and dynamos occupied the cellar.

The object of Mr. Cavor's search was a substance that should be unaffected by all forms of radiant energy. "Radiant energy," he made me understand, was anything like light or heat, or X-Rays, or gravitation. All these things, he said, radiate out from centres, and act on bodies at a distance. Now almost all substances are unaffected by some form or other of radiant energy. Glass, for example, is transparent to light, but less so to heat, and alum is transparent to light, but blocks heat completely.

Now all known substances are affected by gravitation. You can cut off light or heat from anything; but nothing will cut off the attraction of the sun or the moon. Yet why there should be nothing is hard to say. Cavor did not see

why such a substance should not exist, and showed me by calculations on paper that it was possible. It was an amazing piece of reasoning, but it is impossible for me to reproduce it here. All I can say is that he believed he might be able to make this substance out of a complicated mixture of metals and a new element called Helium, which was sent to him from London in sealed stone jars.

Anyone with the least imagination will understand the extraordinary possibilities of such a substance. Whatever use it was put to, one came on miracles. For example, if one wanted to lift a weight, however enormous, one had only to get a sheet of this substance beneath it, and one might lift it with a straw. My first idea was to apply this principle to guns and all the materials of war, and from that to ships, railway engines, building—every imaginable form of human industry. Among other things I saw in it my chance as a business man. I made up my mind straight away. I knew I was staking everything, but I jumped there and then.

"We're about to make the greatest invention that has ever been made," I said, and put the stress on 'we'. "If you want to keep me out of this, you'll have to do it with a gun—I'm coming to be your fourth assistant to-morrow."

He seemed surprised at my enthusiasm. He looked at me doubtfully. "But do you really think——" he said. "And your play? How about that play?"

"It's vanished!" I cried. "My dear sir, don't you see what you've got?"

He didn't. At first I could not believe it. He had not had the least idea. This astonishing little man had been working on purely theoretical grounds the whole time. He had troubled no more about the application of the stuff he was going to turn out than if he had been a machine which makes guns. This was a possible substance, and he was going to make it! If he made it, it would go down to future

generations as Cavorite or Cavorine. And that was all he saw!

When I realized this, it was I who did the talking, and Cavor who said, "Go on!" I jumped up. I walked up and down the room, talking excitedly like a youth of twenty. I assured him we might make wealth enough to bring about any social revolution we wished; we might own and order the whole world. He said something about indifference to wealth, but I brushed all that aside. And gradually the understanding of a Cavorite company grew up between us. He was to make the stuff, and I was to advertise it.

"Here is a substance," I cried, "no home, no factory, no ship can do without. There is not one of its thousand possible uses that will not make us rich, Cavor, beyond our wildest dreams."

"No!" he said. "I begin to see. It's extraordinary how one gets new points of view by talking over things!"

"And as it happens you have just talked to the right man!"

"I suppose no one is absolutely opposed to enormous wealth. Of course there is one thing——" He paused.

I stood still.

"It is just possible, you know, that we may not be able to make it after all! It may be one of those things that are possible in theory, but impossible in practice. Or when we make it, there may be some little difficulty!"

"We'll deal with the difficulty when it comes," said I.

CHAPTER 2

The Making of Cavorite, and the Building of the Sphere

BUT Cavor's fears were groundless, so far as the actual making was concerned. On the fourteenth of October, 1899, this incredible substance was made!

Oddly enough, it was made at last by accident, when Mr. Cavor least expected it. He was coming one day to my bungalow for our afternoon talk and tea, and I was waiting for him on the verandah, when, all of a sudden, the chimneys of his house rose to heaven, smashing into pieces. The roof and furniture followed, and then came a huge white flame. The trees about the house shook violently and sprang towards the fire, and my ears were struck with a deafening noise.

I stepped out towards Cavor's house, and a violent wind instantly caught me and drove me violently towards him. At the same moment the discoverer was seized, whirled about, and flew through the air. Then the storm fell swiftly, and I became once more aware that I had breath and feet.

Presently I saw Cavor rise, all covered with mud, and stretching two bleeding hands towards me. His face was full of emotion. "Congratulate me," he said breathlessly; "congratulate me!"

"Congratulate you!" said I. "Good heavens! What for?"

"I've done it."

"You *have*. What on earth caused that explosion?"

"It wasn't an explosion," he said.

When we had managed at last to reach the shelter of