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H. G. WELLS

THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON

Introduction by Robert A. W. Lo[illegible]

Complete and Unabridged

THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON

H. G. WELLS

AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET · NEW YORK 10022

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ISBN: 0-8049-0078-7

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Introduction

"Wells impressed me as about the best mind that I had met in my many years in England . . ." writes Frank Harris in the fourth volume of his autobiography. Harris was not just a name-dropper; he met an astonishingly large percentage of the great and near-great personalities of his time, and his writings show that he was a very able judge of character and intelligence.

Novelist and short story writer, sociologist, historian, and Utopian—these four categories do not exhaust but merely list the most prominent features of Herbert George Wells, who was born on September 21st, 1866, at Bromley, Kent, England. His father, Joseph Wells, was a professional cricketeer; and in this period class lines were still drawn quite strictly in Britain. Born into the "lower middle class," young Herbert was expected to keep to his proper station, as did most members of his class. Needless to say, he did nothing of the kind; but the psychic marks of his struggle to break out of the artificial boundaries that society placed upon him remained with him all his life. He was always on the defensive in his contacts with others of "higher" birth and privilege.

Intelligence and ability, like murder, however, will "out" if there is the slightest opportunity; and despite the restrictions of the times, there was opportunity for the young man with exceptional ability. Young Herbert won grants and scholarships which took him to the Royal College of Science and South Kensington, and he fufilled the promise that he showed in winning these grants by graduating in 1888 with first-class honors from London Uni-

versity as a Bachelor of Science. He turned first to teaching, and was a schoolmaster and private coach in science for a few years.

It would seem that he had found his niche. Another man would have made himself comfortable in it, perhaps, for he had already risen beyond the level of his parents. Surely this was a "proper station" for the son of a cricketeer with exceptional ability. As a teacher and scholar he could make an honorable and noteworthy career for himself, within limitations. But there was another way open to a man in his position who had literary talent. He turned to journalism and, in 1895, seven years after his graduation, his first book, *Select Conversations with an Uncle,* was published.

Now the way was clear, hard though it would be for him. He had majored in science; he had published a book; and the times were right for the popularization of science. The idea of constant progress was in the air, and science was regarded as the vehicle through which man would conquer not only the world in all its manifestations, but himself as well. Science and education would put an end to war, to poverty, to ignorance, to disease, and all the ills that have plagued humankind living in society. The novels of Jules Verne were read avidly in these days (as they still are), but not only as wonderful romances—people saw them as prophecies of wonders to come in the future, some within the lifetimes of the readers.

In his very first work of fiction, *The Time Machine* (1895), Wells sounded the keynotes of his scientific romances: the use not only of imaginary but also very improbable devices and inventions for the purpose of placing his characters into situations where the interaction of scientific progress and society are examined. Where Jules Verne depicts the development of something which has already been shown as possible (such as the submarine, the flying machine, etc.), Wells invents a time machine—a device which will permit him to travel into the future and then return to the present—for which there is no theoretical basis, no previous experimentation whatsoever. He will, indeed, at times depict inventions which are entirely sound; in *The Land Ironclads* he describes the modern tank in warfare, before the first tanks had been built—this in the late '90s. But as often as not, his "science" is magic or flummery.

He shares Verne's capacity for detail, but goes far beyond Verne in characterization. Where the French author presents casts of amusing national stereotypes, Wells puts living individuals into his short stories and novels, and treats ordinary people, particularly awkward and shabby people, with great sympathy and understanding. This is hardly astonishing, for he is describing in such passages his own feelings as a self-made man who can never forget what society expected him to be and the innumerable encounters with those "above him" who regarded him as a freak at best.

After several novels and collections of short stories, most of them scientific romances, but some mainstream novels (*Love and Mr. Lewisham, Kipps,* and *The History of Mr. Polly*), Wells found himself famous for *The Invisible Man* (Airmont 1964), *The War of the Worlds* (Airmont 1964), and *When the Sleeper Wakes.* The last of the three is remarkably prophetic in its vision of a future where labor unions and other aspects of the moderate, mostly non-Marxian socialism that Wells favored combine with technological progress to form a frighteningly oppressive society, and where propaganda has become nearly an exact science. The seeds of many of the horrors of the 20th Century are revealed in this novel which appeared in 1899.

Jules Verne wrote *From the Earth to the Moon* to show how it might be possible for people in a capsule to be shot from the Earth, encircle the Moon, and return safely. Despite the liberties Verne took, his fundamental principles were sound. He said later that he would have liked to have his characters land on the Moon, but under the conditions he had set up, this would not be possible.

When Wells wrote his Moon novel, *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), he had an entirely different purpose. Most assuredly he was not greatly concerned with describing a means through which we might actually reach the Moon.

The narrator of the story, Mr. Bedford, is a writer, but he also has inflated confidence in his abilities as a first-rate businessman. Because of some business reverses, he has gone off to a very secluded spot to write a play, which he is sure will make up some of his financial losses. But even there he cannot work undisturbed, for every day at the same hour, a Mr. Cavor passes by his house, stops, makes some buzzing sounds, stays a while, looks at his watch, and returns to his own house. Bedford talks to him and stops this annoying procedure, but its cessation makes it impossible for Cavor to continue with his work. He calls on Bedford to tell about this problem, and Bedford learns that Cavor is a scientist and just now is working on a new invention—a substance which will be opaque to gravitation, cutting off the gravitational attraction between bodies which it screens.

Bedford is enthusiastic and dubs the substance "Cavorite"; he sees great commercial possibilities for it, and persuades Cavor to let him be business manager for Cavorite.

Cavor accidentally succeeds in his experiments. He is actually on his way to see Bedford when the ingredients of Cavorite, back in the furnace at Cavor's house, momentarily neglected by his assistants, fall into the required combination. Bedford, looking out the windows, sees Cavor coming, then . . .

"The chimneys jerked heavenward, smashing into a string of bricks as they rose, and the roof and a miscellany of furniture followed. Then overtaking them came a huge white flame. The trees about the building swayed and whirled and tore themselves

to pieces, that sprang towards the flare. My ears were smitten with a clap of thunder that left me deaf on one side for life, and all about me windows smashed, unheeded.

"I took three steps from the verandah towards Cavor's house, and even as I did so came the wind.

"Instantly my coat tails were over my head, and I was progressing in great leaps and bounds, and quite against my will, towards him. In the same moment the discoverer was seized, whirled about, and flew through the screaming air. I saw one of my chimney pots hit the ground within six yards of me, leap a score of feet, and so hurry in great strides towards the focus of the disturbance. Cavor, kicking and flapping, came down again, rolled over and over on the ground for a space, struggled up and was lifted and borne forward at an enormous velocity, vanishing at last among the labouring, lashing trees that writhed about his house.

"A mass of smoke and ashes, and a square of bluish shining substance rushed up towards the zenith. A large fragment of fencing came sailing past me, dropped edgeways, hit the ground and fell flat, and then the worst was over. The aerial commotion fell swiftly until it was a mere strong gale, and I became once more aware that I had breath and feet. By leaning back against the wind I managed to stop, and could collect such wits as still remained to me."

Such is the discovery of Cavorite, and the necessary measures for controlling it lead to the construction of a sphere in which Cavor and Bedford make man's first flight to the Moon. The voyage, landing, and exploration of the Moon are described with meticulous detail and realism; but it is when a strange civilization is discovered in the lunar caverns that we discover the author's chief interest in writing the novel. Here we have one of the early true science-fiction novels which criticize human society through the depiction of a non-human culture: Wells the sociologist joins forces with Wells the writer of scientific romances, and the two aspects of the author are well balanced.

The balance was not to be maintained. Soon after the turn of the century, Wells started writing essays in constructive sociology, wherein he made various prophecies; the first two books of this nature were *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making* (1903). He began to take an active interest in politics, and criticized the methods of the Fabian Society, which he had joined in 1903. In 1905 *A Modern Utopia* displayed what would emerge as his preoccupying notion: the salvation of the world by a group of self-appointed, dedicated aristocrats—persons of intellectual and moral superiority who regarded their talents as obligations to the world, rather than grounds for special privilege. It was Wells's "socialism" and his utopian ideals and writings, his sociological speculations, etc., which aroused the admiration of Frank Harris and others with similar views.

Wells the historian emerged in the 1920's with *The Outline of History,* several times revised and enlarged; and its final edition in the early 30's is still an astonishingly strong work. Harris is obviously speaking of the early version when he writes, "A history of humanity to the present time in which Shakespeare is not mentioned and Jesus dismissed in a page carelessly, if not with contempt, shocks me." The Founder of Christianity is not treated cavalierly in the revised edition which Wells regarded as final.

This work was one of a trilogy; with Julian Huxley and G. P. Wells, he wrote *The Science of Life* (1929), and in 1932, alone, *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind.*

In the passage originally quoted from Harris, the writer goes on to note that "The Great War seems to have shaken him," and there can be no doubt that the preacher and prophet crowded out the scientific romancer in H. G. Wells after 1918. He reverted more and more to his group of aristocrats as the only salvation for the world—most memorably for science-fiction readers in the "Wings Over the World" organization portrayed in the film version of *Things to Come* in 1936. (Interestingly enough, in this movie, the final war starts in 1939; the aggressor, however, is never identified.)

There would be other utopian novels, however; *Men Like Gods* (1923) can stand as the model. It has its interest today, but virtually nothing is left in it of the author who wrote the wonderful scientific romances before the turn of the century. It resembles Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (a grand tour of a socialistic utopia) more than is comfortable, and while Wells's superior writing qualities show themselves, and the people in the story are credible, as always with him, there is hardly any story at all.

Like Verne and so many others who started with the dream of science reforming not only the material world, but man himself, H. G. Wells grew increasingly bitter toward the end of his life. Strangely enough, Verne, too, depicts dictatorship of the dedicated as the only hope for humanity—but this is little more than hinted at in his final novel, *The Master of the World,* which was a story, first of all. (Airmont 1965).

His limitations are those common to people who seek utopias and, in their early enthusiasms at least, oversimplify the problem of human perversity, ignorance, laziness, and outright malice. Such people have little patience with the necessity for slow development and they hold their own convictions with such tenacity and vigor that they cannot be patient with others who hold differing convictions. In the end, the course of history shows how cruelly they deceived themselves with their over-simplified solutions.

It is interesting to compare the career of H. G. Wells and C. S. Lewis, a contemporary author on religious subjects, who examined and wrote about the same human problems as Wells, in

his "Perelandra" trilogy of science-fiction novels. Lewis lived to see far greater evils than Wells, who died in 1946; but Lewis knew there was no utopia, no simple solution to human ills, and showed far deeper understanding of the human condition. Wells died in despair; Lewis never despaired.

Nevertheless, so long as people want to read great works of science fiction, the short stories and early romances of H. G. Wells will remain alive.

—Robert A. W. Lowndes

Chapter the First:

Mr. Bedford Meets Mr. Cavor at Lympne

As I sit down to write here amidst the shadows of vineleaves under the blue sky of southern Italy it comes to me with a certain quality of astonishment that my participation in these amazing adventures of Mr. Cavor was, after all, the outcome of the purest accident. It might have been anyone. I fell into these things at a time when I thought myself removed from the slightest possibility of disturbing experiences. I had gone to Lympne because I had imagined it the most uneventful place in the world. "Here at any rate," said I, "I shall find peace and a chance to work!"

And this book is the sequel. So utterly at variance is Destiny with all the little plans of men.

I may perhaps mention here that very recently I had come an ugly cropper in certain business enterprises. At the present moment, surrounded by all the circumstances of wealth, there is a luxury in admitting my extremity. I can even admit that to a certain extent my disasters were conceivably of my own making. It may be there are directions in which I have some capacity; the conduct of business operations is not among these. But in those days I was young, and my youth, among other objectionable forms, took that of a pride in my capacity for affairs. I am young still in years, but the things that have happened to me have rubbed something of the youth from my mind. Whether they have brought any wisdom to light below it, is a more doubtful matter.

It is scarcely necessary to go into the details of the speculations that landed me at Lympne in Kent. Nowadays even about business transactions there is a strong spice of adventure. I took risks. In these things there is invariably a certain amount to give and take, and it fell to me finally to do the giving reluctantly enough. Even when I had got out of everything one cantankerous creditor saw fit to be malignant. Perhaps you have met that flaming sense of outraged virtue or perhaps you have only felt it. He ran me hard. It seemed to me at last that there was nothing for it but to write a play, unless I wanted to drudge for my living as a clerk. I have a certain imagination, and luxurious tastes, and I meant to make a vigorous fight for it before that fate overtook me. In addition to my belief in my powers as a business man I had always in those days had an idea that I was equal to writing a very good play. It is not, I believe, an uncommon persuasion. I knew there was nothing a

man can do outside legitimate business transactions that has such opulent possibilities, and very probably that biased my opinion. I had indeed got into the habit of regarding this unwritten drama as a convenient little reserve put by for a rainy day. That rainy day had come and I set to work.

I soon discovered that writing a play was a longer business than I had supposed—at first I had reckoned ten days for it—and it was to have a *pied-à-terre* while it was in hand that I came to Lympne. I reckoned myself lucky in getting that little bungalow. I got it on a three-years' agreement. I put in a few sticks of furniture, and while the play was in hand I did my own cooking. My cooking would have shocked Mrs. Beeton. And yet, you know, it had a flavour. I had a coffee-pot, a saucepan for eggs and one for potatoes, and a frying-pan for sausages and bacon. Such was the simple apparatus of my comfort. One can't always be magnificent, but simplicity is always a possible alternative. For the rest I laid in an eighteen-gallon cask of beer on credit, and a trustful baker came each day. It was not perhaps in the style of Sybaris, but I have had worse times. I was a little sorry for the baker, who was a very decent man; but even for him I hoped.

Certainly if anyone wants solitude the place is Lympne. It is in the clay part of Kent, and my bungalow stood on the edge of an old sea cliff and stared across the flats of Romney marsh at the sea. In very wet weather the place is almost inaccessible, and I have heard that at times the postman used to traverse the more succulent portions of his route with boards upon his feet. I never saw him doing so, but I can quite imagine it. Outside the doors of the few cottages and houses that make up the present village, big birch besoms are stuck to wipe off the worst of the clay, which will give some idea of the texture of the district. I doubt if the place would be there at all if it were not a fading memory of things gone for ever. It was the big port of England in Roman times, Portus Lemanis, and now the sea is four miles away. All down the steep hill are boulders and masses of Roman brickwork, and from it old Watling Street, still paved in places, starts like an arrow to the north. I used to stand on the hill and think of it all, the galleys and legions, the captives and officials, the women and traders, the speculators like myself, all the swarm and tumult that came clanking in and out of the harbour. And now just a few lumps of rubble on a grassy slope and a sheep or two—and I! And where the port had been were the levels of the marsh, sweeping round in a broad curve to distant Dungeness and dotted here and there with tree clumps and the church towers of old medieval towns that are following Lemanis now towards extinction.

That outlook on the marsh was indeed one of the finest views I have ever seen. I suppose Dungeness was fifteen miles away; it lay like a raft on the sea, and farther westward were the hills by Hastings under the setting sun. Sometimes they hung close

and clear, sometimes they were faded and low, and often the drift of weather took them clean out of sight. And all the nearer parts of the marsh were laced and lit by ditches and canals.

The window at which I worked looked over the skyline of this crest, and it was from this window that I first set eyes on Cavor. It was just as I was struggling with my scenario, holding down my mind to the sheer hard work of it, and naturally enough he arrested my attention.

The sun had set, the sky was a vivid tranquillity of green and yellow, and against that he came out black, the oddest little figure.

He was a short, round-bodied, thin-legged little man, with a jerky quality in his motions; he had seen fit to clothe his extraordinary mind in a cricket cap, an overcoat, and cycling knickerbockers and stockings. Why he did so I do not know, for he never cycled and he never played cricket. It was a fortuitous concurrence of garments arising I know not how. He gesticulated with his hands and arms and jerked his head about and buzzed. He buzzed like something electric. You never heard such buzzing. And ever and again he cleared his throat with a most extraordinary noise.

There had been rain, and that spasmodic walk of his was enhanced by the extreme slipperiness of the footpath. Exactly as he came against the sun he stopped, pulled out a watch, hesitated. Then with a sort of convulsive gesture he turned and retreated with every manifestation of haste, no longer gesticulating, but going with ample strides that showed the relatively large size of his feet—they were I remember grotesquely exaggerated in size by adhesive clay—to the best possible advantage.

This occurred on the first day of my sojourn when my playwriting energy was at its height, and I regarded the incident simply as an annoying distraction—the waste of five minutes. I returned to my scenario. But when next evening the apparition was repeated with remarkable precision, and again the next evening, and indeed every evening when rain was not falling, concentration upon the scenario became a considerable effort. "Confound the man," said I, "one would think he was learning to be a marionette!" and for several evenings I cursed him 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 veranda, and directed myself to the point where he invariably stopped.

He had his watch out as I came up to him. He had a chubby rubicund face, with reddish-brown eyes—previously I had seen him only against the light. "One moment, sir," said I as he turned.

He stared. "One moment," he said, "certainly. Or if you wish

to speak to me for longer, and it is not asking too much—your moment is up—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 knitted his brows like one who encounters 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. It's all nonsense. 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 had already 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 night you come making a noise——"

"Making a noise?"

"Like this." I imitated his buzzing noise. He looked at me and it was evident the buzzing awakened distaste. "Do I do *that?*" he asked.

"Every blessed evening."

"I had no idea."

He stopped. He regarded me gravely. "Can it be," he said, "that I have formed a habit?"

"Well, it looks like it. Doesn't it?"

He pulled down his lower lip between finger and thumb. He regarded a puddle at his feet.

"My mind is much occupied," he said. "And you want to know why! Well, sir, I can assure you that not only do I not know why I do these things, but I did not even know I did them. Come to think, it is just as you say; I never *have* been beyond that field. . . . And these things annoy you?"

For some reason I was beginning to relent towards him. "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. His expression became so eloquent of distress that I relented still more. After all there is a touch of aggression in demanding, of a man you don't know, why he hums on a public footpath.

"You see," he said weakly, "it's a habit."

"Oh, I recognise that."

"I must stop it."

"But not if it puts you out. After all, I had no business—it's something of a liberty."

"Not at all, sir," he said, "not at all. I am greatly indebted to you. I should guard myself against these things. In future I will. Could I trouble you—once again? that noise?"

"Something like this," I said. "Zuzzoo, zuzzoo— But really you know——"

"I am greatly obliged to you. In fact—I know—I am getting absurdly absent-minded. You are quite justified, sir—perfectly justified. Indeed, I am indebted to you. The thing shall end. And now, sir, I have already brought you farther than I should have done."

"I do hope my impertinence——"

"Not at all, sir, not at all."

We regarded each other for a moment. I raised my hat and wished him a good evening. He responded convulsively, and so we went our ways.

At the stile I looked back at his receding figure. His bearing had changed remarkably; he seemed limp, shrunken. The contrast with his former gesticulating, zuzzooing self took me in some absurd way as pathetic. I watched him out of sight. Then, wishing very heartily I had kept to my own business, I returned to my bungalow and my play.

The next evening I saw nothing of him, nor the next. But he was very much in my mind, and it had occurred to me that as a sentimental comic character he might serve a useful purpose in the development of my plot. The third day he called upon me.

For a time I was puzzled to think what had brought him—he made indifferent conversation in the most formal way—then abruptly he came to business. He wanted to buy me out of my bungalow.

"You see," he said, "I don't blame you in the least, but you've destroyed a habit and it disorganises my day. I've walked past here for years—years. No doubt I've hummed. . . . You've made all that impossible!"

I suggested he might try some other direction.

"No. There is no other direction. This is the only one. I've inquired. And now every afternoon at four—I come to a dead wall.'

"But, my dear sir, if the thing is so important to you——"

"It's vital! You see I'm—I'm an investigator—I am engaged in a scientific research. I live—" he paused and seemed to think. "Just over there," he said, and pointed suddenly dangerously

near my eyes. "The house with white chimneys you see just over the trees. And my circumstances are abnormal—abnormal. I am on the point of completing one of the most important demonstrations, I can assure you, one of the most important of all the demonstrations that have ever been made. It requires constant thought, constant mental ease and activity. And the afternoon was my brightest time!—effervescing with new ideas —new points of view."

"But why not come by still?"

"It would be all different. I should be self-conscious. I should think of you at your play—watching me irritated! Instead of thinking of my work. No! I must have the bungalow."

I meditated. Naturally I wanted to think the matter over thoroughly before anything decisive was said. I was generally ready enough for business in those days and selling always attracted me, but in the first place it was not my bungalow, and even if I sold it to him at a good price I might get inconvenienced in the delivery if the current owner got wind of the transaction, and in the second I was, well—undischarged. It was clearly a business that required delicate handling. Moreover the possibility of his being in pursuit of some valuable invention also interested me. It occurred to me that I would like to know more of this research, not with any dishonest intention, but simply with an idea that to know what it was would be a relief from play-writing. I threw out feelers.

He was quite willing to supply information. Indeed, once he was fairly under way the conversation became a monologue. He talked like a man long pent up, who has had it over with himself again and again. He talked for nearly an hour, and I must confess I found it a pretty stiff bit of listening. But through it all there was the undertone of satisfaction one feels when one is neglecting work one has set oneself. During that first interview I gathered very little of the drift of his work. Half his words were technicalities entirely strange to me, and he illustrated one or two points with what he was pleased to call elementary mathematics, computing on an envelope with a copying ink pencil, in a manner that made it hard even to seem to understand. "Yes," I said. "Yes. Go on!" Nevertheless I made out enough to convince me that he was no mere crank playing at discoveries. In spite of his cranklike appearance there was a force about him that made that impossible. Whatever it was it was a thing with mechanical possibilities. He told me of a workshed he had and of three assistants, originally jobbing carpenters whom he had trained. Now from the workshed to the patent office is clearly only one step. He invited me to see these things. I accepted readily and took care by a remark or so to underline that. The proposed transfer of the bungalow remained very conveniently in suspense.

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