

The Time Traveler's Journey

The Time Traveler says that he finished his time machine the previous week and immediately decided to try it. When he pulled the lever, he felt a sensation of falling and noticed the clock had moved a few hours into the future. He then pulled the lever in earnest and saw days waxing and waning faster and faster.

While the Time Traveler is moving through time, the only things permanent enough for him to notice are natural processes, like the movement of the sun, or structures and landforms, which, if the time machine is slow enough, come and go on a scale that is observable. This overshadows the human presence on the earth and puts into perspective our impermanence. The Time Traveler's combination of fear and wonder emphasize the theme that intellect must be sharpened through desire, fear, ambition, and risk.

Future Humans

It is the year 802,701, and the Time Traveler finds himself in a garden of strange flowers, near a large Sphinx-like statue made of white stone. For the first time the Time Traveler considers the future of man with fear rather than excitement—what if people are crueler now than they were? What if they are distorted and inhuman? The Time Traveler then sees a group of figures in robes looking at him from a window in a nearby building. Another group approaches him, and he notices that they're smaller than he is and wearing simple robes and sandals. They strike him as being frail.

Up until this point, the Time Traveler has operated under a common assumption: that mankind will advance indefinitely, and future humans will be stronger, smarter, and better than those of the present. This is the beginning of the Time Traveler's disillusionment with this unscientific and naïve belief, and it foreshadows the depravity and degeneration he will find.

The Beings Seem Friendly

One of the frail beings looks at the Time Traveler and smiles, and the Time Traveler is taken by the being's lack of fear. After the being makes some sounds that seem to be its language, the Time Traveler realizes that they cannot communicate. All of the creatures begin to touch him to make sure he is real, and the Time Traveler feels surprised that this is not at all threatening. The beings seem friendly, and, besides, they are so frail that he knows he could throw them off of him if he needed to.

The Time Traveler encounters the new beings cautiously, but is immediately put at ease by their apparent trust and kindness. The Time Traveler considers them to be possible threats to himself, but he seems charmed by the fact that these beings have no similar fear of him. This, at first, seems like a good development for the future of mankind.

The Beings Show Trust and Kindness

Since the beings showed him so much trust and kindness, the Time Traveler feels enough at ease to leave his time machine unattended—a cautionary tale about the perils of not feeling adequate fear. The Time Traveler's quick realization of the intellectual inferiority of future humans is the first indication that all is not well in this new future. The description of the beings draping the Time Traveler with flowers is at once mocking and sweet. These beings are silly and helpless, but their kindness is apparent.

The Changes of the Years

The beings lead the Time Traveler to a large building in which there are exotic flowers, fruits, and bushes, and an even larger group of the beings.

this passage reflects more on the changes of several hundred thousand years. The beings are humanlike but not quite human, the fruits are recognizable as fruits but still unfamiliar, and livestock is now extinct.

Learning Language

The Time Traveler decides to learn their language, and, through gestures, begins by asking the beings to name fruits. He notes that his language lessons had to be short because the beings would tire quickly. “I never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued,” he observes. Once again, the Time Traveler remarks on the surprising lack of interest that all these beings show in him.

The Time Traveler here demonstrates his curiosity and ambition—he wants to learn a strange language, and persists despite the reservation of his teachers. The Time Traveler’s commitment and intellect is a striking contrast to the laziness and lack of interest shown by the beings, making them again seem less than human.

The Beings are Communists

The Time Traveler explores the landscape, trying to observe the details and make sense of them to determine what kind of society he has encountered. He finds some ruins, and then realizes that there are no individual houses: “the single house, and possibly even the household, had vanished,” which he takes to mean that the beings are communists. Supporting this belief, he realizes that everyone is dressed alike and even their features resemble one another, regardless of whether they are male or female.

Class Distinction

In Victorian England social class was essential, so it makes sense that the Time Traveler would begin his inquiry into the new society by remarking on their lack of social hierarchy or even differentiation. The Time Traveler's approval of the loss of class distinctions shows him to be troubled by the inequality that characterized his own era, and he is nearly willing to overlook these new beings' stupidity and weakness when he considers that it might be a result of having solved the most pressing social problems of his time.