

# THE MAN FROM NOT-YET

*fiction*

BY JOHN SLADEK

*wherein the most enlightened man in the age of enlightenment—having consented to visit the 20th century—sees for himself that it just doesn't work*

To Jeremy Botford, Esq.  
Dear Jerry,

Aug. 10, 1772

It was with mixt feelings that I returned to London after all these years. The city is more splendid and horrid than ever; it is a sort of great Press, into which every kind of person has been tumbled, without the least regard for whether or not he is choaked with the stench of his neighbours.

For my part, the only retreat offering succour from the noxious Crowd's putrefaction is the coffee house. Of course I refer to Crutchwood's in Clovebelly Lane, which you may fondly remember. It still affords an entertaining company, and I was surprized to remark several of our old number about the fire yet. Augustus Strathnaver has grown quite stout and dropsical, but his Wit is lean and ready as ever. Dick Blackadder is still soliciting subscriptions for his translations of Ovid: He is still soliciting in vain and he is still of good chear about *(continued on page 185)*



# MAN FROM NOT-YET

(continued from page 103)

it, I learned that poor Oliver Colquhoun, who never could get his play tried in Drury Lane, is dead.

But I was attended by greatest astonishment when I apprehended a gross figure in a snuff-coloured coat seated next the fire with its back to the company.

The figure turned to regard me, presenting its great Wart-hog's face. When its mouth opened, 'twas like the splitting of a steamed pudding. "So! (it said) I see you have not yet learnt your lesson, Timothy Scuntle, but must needs be taught more manners! Do you not know better than to interrupt a man while he is meditating?"

It was indeed our old friend, cantankerous as ever. I shall never forget the time I spilled mulled wine upon him—indeed, he shall never let me forget it, though it happened close on eleven years ago!

I stayed to see the evening out with Johnson and his circle, to which there are no few additions. The good Doctor is thicker of limb now, with a propensity (he says) to gout; though I perceive no shortening of his breath. He disposed last evening of two Philosophy Students (They were arguing about the Soul, I believe, I could not follow them.), a Schoolmaster, a Grub Street writer, and a poor inoffensive solicitor who wandered in for a cup of tea and did not stay to see it cooled. In short, Dr. Johnson is himself; Witty, Splenetic, and Eminently Sensible. I was keenly reminded of the days when we young dogs were used to tease him, and he to muzzle us properly. Remember the fun we had with the visitor from "the Future," and how the good Doctor shewed him for the merry-andrew he was? I can never forget it, as I hope you cannot forget.

Your affectionate  
Timothy Scuntle

To Sir Timothy Scuntle, Bart.

Dear Tim, Aug. 25

I am glad you have not forgotten the Incident of the man from "Not-Yet," for I have begun assembling some paltry Reminiscences and would greatly appreciate the help of your keen memory. While I believe I recall the Incident perfectly, much Muck has covered it in ten years' time, and I would rather have your version of the story, too.

Eternally gratefull, I remain, Dear Tim,

Your affectionate  
Jer. Botford

To Jeremy Botford, Esq.

Dear Jerry, Sept. 5

Your memory is doubtless better than mine, but I have made some Notations of that curious Incident, which, in the

interests of your book, I hereby place at your disposal:

It was a December evening in 1762, and our usual circle, dominated by Dr. Johnson, was gathered in the gaming room at Crutchwood's. Paunceford, the proprietor, seemed to be having an argument with some man in the front doorway, and the room grew quite chill.

"Damme, Sir," Johnson roared out. "Are you determined to give us all the Ague? Bring the gentleman in."

Paunceford led in a thin, spindle-shanked fellow, oddly dressed. I recall he wore his hair natural and shockingly short, and that his breeches reached to his ankles.

Johnson's snuffbox clattered to the floor. "Good God!" he cried. "What manner of Whig is this?"

The fellow made no reply, but gazed about him in some consternation.

"Or is it Methodism you're spreading? Or Dissension?" Johnson snarled. "You'll do a barrel more converts if you bag a decent periwig."

"Perhaps," said Strathnaver, tittering. "perhaps the gentleman believes it is Satanic to adorn the body."

"Yes, well, you'll take note he has no scruples against hiding his spindly calves, however. My name is Dr. Samuel Johnson, Sir. You'll forgive me for not rising. I am rather gouty this evening. What might your name be?"

The man put out his left hand, withdrew it, then offered it again. Finally he extended the proper hand and shook.

"My name is Darwin Gates," he said shyly. "And I'm from the Twentieth Century."

Dr. Johnson's hand hesitated just a fraction as he reached for his snuffbox. "Is it a place, then?" he said, offering snuff around. "I should have thought it a direction. But it is very interesting to meet you, Sir. I suppose you have all manner of wonders to divulge to this fortunate company, do you not?"

Mr. Gates sat down and leaned forward earnestly. "As a matter of fact, I do. You wouldn't believe the half—"

"Indeed? But I have a reputation for credulency," Johnson said. A sly smile was beginning to play about his great, ugly mouth. "You will want to tell me no doubt of carriages that operate without benefit of horses. Of engines that carry men through the air like birds. Of ships without sails."

The man flushed darkly and stammered. "As a matter of fact—"

Johnson's voice rose in both pitch and volume. "Of machines which carry men under the waters of the sea like fish, where they witness countless wonders. Of mechanical horses capable of drawing a dozen carriages at once. Of artificial candles, powered by some mysterious Force of which we know nothing as yet. Of buildings made of crystal and iron, perhaps, wherein one may order



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servants to select the sort of weather one desires. Is that the sort of Future you are about to describe for us, Mr. Gates?"

The poor visitor looked positively apoplectic with embarrassment and chagrin. I had no doubt but that he had planned a much poorer tale than this. "I—" he stammered. "—that is, I—"

"But," continued Dr. Johnson, grinding his teeth, "I speak only of mere physical inventions, devices which any rude Mechanick may surmise. 'Twould do you no credit at all, Sir, if you had not a better tale than that. Perhaps you come to tell me of the Politicks of the Twentieth Century. Let me see—there would be no war, because terrible Weapons would have been invented, the which are too dangerous to be used. The colonies in America will have rebelled and become a Powerful Nation, where, they will claim, All Men are Equal. Mayhap they will even free the slave Negroes, though that is perhaps too much to expect of our American friends."

"Just a minute!" said the visitor. "I resent that. I'm an American—"

"Tush!" said Johnson. "Next you will be a Red Indian. I warn you, Sir, it was I who exposed George Psalmanazar, who posed forty years as a 'Formosan,' having made up his own 'language.'" All this Johnson delivered in an undertone, then resumed his ordinary Rasp and said, "I suppose the Powers and Alli-

ances of all Europe will have shifted considerable. England's monarch will have no more weight than a common sweep. I surmise."

"How did you know?" asked the astonished Mr. Gates.

"Pooh, Sir, I am merely spinning my tale to keep from being bored by yours. But be so good as to let me go on. I have not yet discoursed upon the Future state of Painting, of Musick, of Moral & Natural Philosophy—"

"First we must give Mr. Gates a cup of punch," murmured Strathnaver. "Assuming, that is, that persons from that time so little evident to our senses can drink and eat. Are you, Mr. Gates, an æthereal spirit, like one of Mr. Milton's angels? Do you sleep, ingest food, and so on?"

While the poor stranger was helped to a cup of punch, Dr. Johnson sat back and regarded him incuriously. I read contempt in Johnson's face; whenever the right side of his mouth gets drawn up, as though attracted to the wart just above it at the corner, then he is in a phrensy of contempt.

"Of Painting I know little," he said. "It is at best a clumsy art, making awkward imitations of Nature. I expect patrons will grow weary of Copyism, and turn their attention elsewhere."

"Everyone in the Twentieth Century will of course have Musick at hand as he

desires it. I can well imagine the deleterious effect this will have upon Taste & Sense, when every cordwainer or every smith can hammer upon shoes to Musick of his own chusing. Art does not, Sir, lend itself to Dilution."

"There will always be a plenitude of varieties in the Garden of Philosophy from which to make a nosegay. At some point, men will stop speaking of Reason and start speaking of Responsibility. There is, they will say, no order in the Universe but what we chuse to see—as there were no Giants in Sir Quixote's windmills. Absurdity will become a philosophical catchword—there will be a Silly Season."

"Of Natural Philosophy I can well imagine the devising of all manner engines and games. No doubt men of the Twentieth Century will go to and fro the Moon, if not the Sun. Astronomy, Chymistry, Mathematics and Medicine will all advance apace. Plague will be almost unknown. I daresay it will have been proven to everyone's satisfaction that Tobacco is a poisonous weed."

"Amazing!" quoth our visitor. "How did you know—"

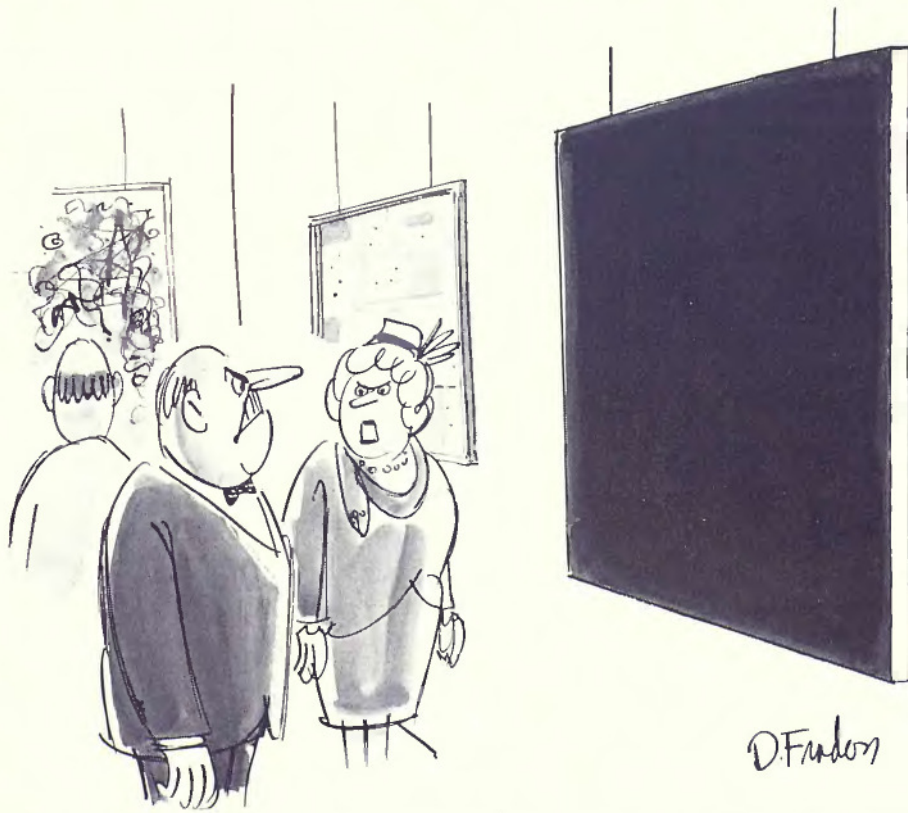
"I have met better mountebanks than you, Sir!" said Johnson, fetching him a stern look. "I am forced by gout to sit here night after night, prey to every single one of 'em. Only last month I was confronted by a 'man from Not-Yet' who puts you to shame. Not only had he elegant manners and wondrous tales to tell, he looked exactly like me!"

Our visitor looked pale and ill. "Like you?" he said.

"Yes. The rogue tried to convince me that he *was* I, but I have not yet met the man I could not outreason. I proved to him, as I shall prove to you, that man cannot travel from the Future to the Past."

"Man cannot move about in Time as though it were Space. Nature forbids it, as she forbids Levitation or a Vacuum. Think of the awful Paradoxes which might occur! Should you, for example, return to your childhood, you might see yourself as a child. Yet suppose your carriage ran over that child? Would you then cease to be? How, then, would you yet be alive? And there are Paradoxes even more hideous to contemplate. Suppose you got a child upon your own mother, and suppose the child were you? How, then, may a man be his own father or son, a travesty of Physical and Moral Law? I do not even dare consider that weightier problem by far: Which of you, should you meet yourself, would have your Soul? Is the Soul single or divisible? Would some of your selves be soulless animals, mere Automata?"

"You cannot be from the Future because the Future is, by definition, that which is not yet. There is no Future. And even were travel in time possible, you would not be from Posterity. I



"Oh, for goodness' sake! It has nothing to do with black power!"





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believe that Man grows every generation more happily endowed with Understanding—yet you are content to sit here gape-mouthed, listening to specious arguments."

"Please," said Mr. Gates. "I can prove I'm from the Future. I've built the only Time Machine ever made. Let me prove it. Here is a coin—" He fumbled at the hip of his breeches for a moment. "Here is a quarter of a dollar, United States of America currency," he announced proudly, handing the coin to Strathnaver. "You'll see the date is nineteen-something."

"Good God!" said Strathnaver. "The poor wretch has made himself credentials. This is no more a coin than I am. Ho-ho, Mr. Gates. I must give you a lesson in minting, someday. When you design a die, you must *reverse* the image, so that it comes out proper on the coin."

He passed the coin around, and we could all see that the inscription was backwards. It was poor forgery.

"Things have gotten reversed somehow!" shouted Gates. "I don't know how. What can I do to make you believe me?"

"Nothing on earth," said Johnson.

"The last knave shewed me a curious engine he called a Lighter—but when I examined it, 'twas nothing but a tiny oil-wick lamp with a matchlock flint attached."

"I'll take you back to my own time, and that will convince you!"

"A pretty idea," said Mr. Strathnaver. "but you'll never get him away from the fire."

"What?" said Johnson. "Quit the fire to wander about in the aguey snow until this rascal's fellows waylay me and kill me? I cannot say I like the prospect."

"Oh, we don't have to go far," said Gates. "My Time Machine is very close by—and some of your friends can follow and watch. Can it be you are afraid to prove me right?"

For once, Johnson had no answer. He leapt up with surprising agility and signalled for his cloak and hat. "Let us see it, you dog," he rumbled.

Dick Blackadder and I were elected to follow. We went but twenty paces in the snow when we encountered the Time Machine. It was somewhat like a sedan chair, somewhat like a bathing machine, and no little like an upright coffin on

wheels. Gates opened a panel in it, and the two men got themselves inside. The panel closed up.

Dick and I watched the device closely, ready for any trick. All was deathly still.

"I fear something has happened to Samuel," said Dick. "He could never keep silence this long."

I wrenched at the handle of the panel, but it was fast. An unearthly light seemed to stream from crevices and cracks about the door, increasingly bright. I applied my eye to a crack and peered in.

There was not a soul inside.

The light got brighter and brighter until, with a thunderclap, the entire machine fell to pieces about us. I was knocked flat by the Great Noise, and when I regained my feet, I was amazed to see Dr. Johnson standing alone amidst the wreckage.

"Are you hurt, Dr. Johnson?" asked Dick, scrambling to his feet.

"No, I—No."

"But where is Mr. Gates?"

"It would seem," said Johnson, looking about, "that he is blown into Æternity."

We helped him back to the fireside, where, as I recall, he was strangely silent and morose all evening, and would respond to no amount of badinage. He remained muffled in his cloak and refused to say a word.

That is all I know of the Incident, Jerry. Hoping this account is of some good, I remain

Your affectionate  
Timothy Scunthe

*To Sir Timothy Scunthe, Bart.*

Dear Tim. Sept. 9

Rec'd your story and am truly amazed at the copiousness of your memory and notes. Surely you are more the man to pen a Reminiscence than I. You have captured nicely the flavour of the old Wart-hog's speech, and I find your account exact in nearly every Particular.

Do give my regards to Dr. Johnson and pray him to send me some little item of interest to go in my Reminiscences. If it would not inconvenience him, I should mightily like to hear more of his Experience that strange evening. Eternally grateful, I remain

Your affectionate

Jer. Botford

Postscript. How is it you say the Doctor has a wart above the *right* side of his mouth? I have before me a miniature of him, shewing the wart plainly on the *left*.

Yours &c.,

Jer. Botford

*To Jeremy Botford, Esq.*

Dear Jerry. Sept. 14

Business is pressing. This is only a brief billet to inform you that I have spoken to Dr. J. and he has promised to send you something. "But I doubt (he said) that he will desire to use it." Do



you understand this? I confess I do not.  
More later from

Your affectionate  
Timothy Scunthe

To Jeremy Botford, Esq.  
My Dear Jeremy,  
As you hold this letter up to a looking  
glass to read it . . .

. . . I hope you will find it in you to  
pity its author. Do not, I beg you, judge  
me mad until you have read here the  
truth of my plight.

Having departed on December 10,  
1762, from the yard of Crutchwood's, I  
journeyed into the Future. Having made  
my jokes about the Twentieth Century,  
I lived to see them, tragically, become  
Real. I saw Art & Architecture decline to  
Nursery Toys, and Literature reduced to  
Babel. Morality vanished: Science pot-  
tered with household Engines. The main  
business of the time seemed to be  
World-wide War, or man-made Cata-  
strophe. Whole cities full of people were  
ignited and cooked alive.

Betwixt the wars, people drive about  
the countryside in great carriage-engines,  
which poison the air with harmful va-  
pours. These carriages have o'erlaid the  
cities with smoak, black and noxious.  
There is in the Twentieth Century nei-  
ther Beauty nor Reason, nor any other  
Mark which sheweth Man more than a  
beast.

But enough of a sad sojourn to a dis-  
mal place. I was sickened by it to near  
the point of madness. I knew I had done  
Wrong in accompanying Mr. Gates to  
his Land of Horrors, and so I devised a  
plan for cancelling my visit.

I came back to November 1762 and  
saw myself. I earnestly entreated myself  
not to attempt such a voyage—but the  
object of this entreaty was so intent on  
proving me a scoundrel and imposter  
that my arguments were in vain.

I had then but one chance left—to  
appear at the time and place in which  
my unsuspecting self was departing for  
the Future, and to stop myself, by force  
if need be. Gates and poor Johnson had  
just climbed into the Time Machine  
when I materialized. They disappeared at  
the same moment, and the combined  
Force of our multiple Fluxions destroyed  
the machine utterly. It is the first and last  
of its kind, I believe.

For some reason I cannot determine, I  
am reversed. Mr. Gates thought that  
perhaps each Time-Journey reversed all  
the atoms of one's body. If you recall,  
when Gates first appeared, he kept  
trying to shake hands with his left hand.  
Likewise the coin in his pocket was  
backwards. In my journey to Posterity, I  
was reversed. When I came back to  
speak to myself, I was put to rights  
again. Now I am again reversed.

You will not be able to include this in  
your book, I fear, unless as a Specimen  
of a madman's raving, or as a silly Fic-  
tion. Let it be a Fiction, then, or ignore  
it, but do not deride me for a Lunatic.

For I have seen the Future; that is, I  
have peered into the pit of *Hell*.

I pray you remain constant to  
Your friend,

Samuel Johnson

To Jeremy Botford, Esq.

Dear Jerry,

Sept. 15

I have not yet time to answer your let-  
ter properly. I trust Dr. J. has sent you  
or will send you his Reminiscence. I may  
say he certainly acts peculiar nowadays.  
I understand his demeanour has de-  
clined steadily over the past ten years.  
Now he is often moody and distracted,  
or seemingly laughs at nothing.

For example, he burst out laughing  
today, when I asked him his opinion on  
American taxation. He is an enigma to

Your affectionate

Timothy Scunthe

Postscript. Your miniature lies, for I have  
just today looked on the original. My  
memory may be faulty but my eyes are  
keen. The wart is on the *right*.

Yours &c.,

T. Scunthe



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