

Afterword

In *Journey to the Center of the Earth* the insistence upon scientific data is constant. Although Harry is responsible for the clue which breaks the code of the old map, he is anything but a stalwart hero such as a conventional adventure story usually demands. Indeed, it is his very reluctance to be drawn into Professor Hardwigg's enthusiastic preparation for the proposed quest which provides a believable realism for the journey.

As with Holmes and Watson, Harry is present to ask the proper questions at the right moments. Even his vehement protests have value when they demand "scientific" answers as one discovery after another is made.

Such a well-known reaction as man's ancient fear of the dark is evoked for profit when Harry loses first himself and then his torch in the depths of the earth tunnels, adding a familiar stress to be shared by the reader.

The vivid and graphic snatches of discovery hold full attention. Certainly the tapping of the wall to release the boiling stream of water as Hans does it, the trip across the place of skeletons with the unexpected find of human remains among them, the thrilling battle of the monsters in the unknown sea, and, last of all, the escape by the aid of a lava stream from an erupting volcano, are still exciting reading, and must have been doubly so to the generation Verne was interested in both teaching and entertaining.

His continued insistence upon inserting scientific details might slow the action, but it also provided the shadow of realism. This skilled combination of quest, travel, science, and adventure opened to his first readers whole new worlds.

The period of his writing overlapped that of H. G.

Wells, the other giant of the science-fiction field, but their chosen styles are very different. Verne's characters go through their adventures rather stolidly, the accent is placed on their learning, rather than their feeling. From this approach there has sprung the type of story known today as "hard" science fiction, as opposed to the stories in which action or interaction outweighs knowledge or the discovery of knowledge alone. The discovery is more important than development of character. It is to Verne that, three generations later, writers such as Hugo Gernsback turned consciously or unconsciously for inspiration.

On the other hand, H. G. Wells was primarily interested in human reaction to unusual discoveries, the ability of mankind to adjust to new demands. Verne's people, for all their physical participation in exciting action, were, at heart, only spectator-reporters, while Wells's were subject to inner stress.

These two very different approaches became a combined foundation in time. Later writers fused into one pattern both ways of handling futuristic and fantastic material. The quests of Verne were for the new men who might have been shaped by such knowledge. Two gifts appearing to differ were really complementary to each other.

—ANDRE NORTON