



Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea

Jules Verne (1828 - 1905), Translated by Frederick P. Walter

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“The year 1866 was signalled by a remarkable incident, a mysterious and puzzling phenomenon, which doubtless no one has yet forgotten”* So it begins: a 69,000 mile voyage across and around the world’s oceans in the submersible ship Nautilus, a voyage on which no one who embarks ever forgets. It is refreshing to read science fiction in the form that noted author and reviewer of the genre Gary Westfahl recalls in citing Hugo Gernsback’s definition: “Let me clarify the term science-fiction. When I speak of it, I mean the truly scientific, prophetic science-fiction with the full accent on science. I emphatically do not mean the fairy tale brand, the weird or fantastic type which mistakenly masquerades

under the name of science-fiction today.”In his introduction to *The Works of Jules Verne*, Editor Charles F. Horne, PhD, cites the following from Verne himself: “I base my groundwork on groundwork of actual fact.”

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea first appeared in book form in 1869, the sixth in the series of fifty-four novels known as the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. It stands in sharp contrast to today’s popular apocalyptic sci-fi scenarios, which usually spell doomsday for mankind or, at best, come as a call to prepare for the dystopian nightmare future. What is forgotten is the wondrous anticipation that science and its potential for bettering the human condition once held. Unlike snide anti-science social commentary dressed as science fiction or reworked mythology marketed as “science fantasy” to an audience ignorant of or opposed to a classical education, Verne’s points to the traditional values of honesty, courage, virtue, honor, and the hope that a scientifically empowered mankind will be well-guided to realize its noblest dreams.

Jules Verne was born in France at Nantes in Brittany on February 8, 1828. The son of a lawyer, he went to Paris to study law but was soon sidetracked by the appeal of the Bohemian lifestyle. He was befriended by the son of Alexander Dumas, whose father advised and guided him. On a trip to Armiens in 1857 he met a young widow of twenty-six with two young children, Mme. de Vianne (Honorinede Viane Morel) and they were married on January 10, 1857. In 1860, Verne met Pierre-Jules Hetzel, publisher of Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, and Émile Zola. In 1863 Hetzel published Verne’s first novel, *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, which was a tremendous success on both sides of the Atlantic. Verne’s ensuing contract with Hetzel committed him to producing two volumes per year for twenty years. The result was a series of fifty-four novels (the *Voyages Extraordinaires*) published between 1863 and 1905. In 1870 the couple returned to Amiens where he spent the rest of his life. Jules Verne died on March 24, 1905, in his home from complications associated with diabetes.