

The background of the book cover is composed of three vertical panels. The left panel is a grayscale abstract pattern of overlapping, organic shapes. The middle panel is a vibrant purple abstract pattern with similar organic, flowing shapes. The right panel is a bright red abstract pattern with the same organic, flowing shapes. The title 'The Croquet Player' is written in a large, bold, green font with a black outline, centered across the top half of the cover.

The Croquet Player

H. G. Wells

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1. THE CROQUET PLAYER INTRODUCES HIMSELF

I have been talking to two very queer individuals and they have produced a peculiar disturbance of my mind. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that they have infected me and distressed me with some very strange and unpleasant ideas. I want to set down what it is they have said to me in the first place for my own sake, so as to clear up my thoughts about it. What they told me was fantastic and unreasonable but I shall feel surer about that if I set it down in writing. Moreover I want to get my story into a shape that will enable one or two sympathetic readers to reassure me about the purely imaginative quality of what these two men had to say.

It is a sort of ghost story they unfolded. But it is not an ordinary ghost story. It is much more realistic and haunting and disturbing than any ordinary ghost story. It is not a story of a haunted house or a haunted churchyard or anything so limited. The ghost they told me about was something much larger than that, a haunting of a whole countryside, something that began as an uneasiness and grew into a fear and became by slow degrees a spreading presence. And still it grew—in size, in power and intensity. Until it became a continual overshadowing dread. I do not like this ghost that grows and spreads, even though it does so only in the mind. But I had better begin at the beginning and tell about this story as far as I can, and the manner in which it came to me.

But first I had better give a few particulars about myself. Of course I would rather I did not, but I doubt if you will realize my position without it. I am probably one of the best croquet players alive, and that I am not a bit ashamed of saying. I am also a first-rate archer. One is neither of these things without a considerable amount of discipline and balance in one's make-up. Many people, I know, find me a trifle effeminate and ridiculous because I make croquet my game; they say as much behind my back and at times they betray it to my face, and I admit there have been moments when I have been inclined to agree with them. But on the other hand quite a lot of people seem to like me, everybody calls me Georgie in an affectionate manner, and on the whole I am inclined to like myself. It takes all sorts to make a world and I see no sense in pretending to be the human norm when one is not. Regarded from a certain angle I am no doubt a soft, but all the same I can keep my head and temper at croquet and make a wooden ball perform like a trained animal. Even at tennis I can make some of the fiercer sort extremely cross and silly. And I can do sleight-of-hand tricks, for which you certainly need nerve and complete self-possession, as well as most professionals.