

CHAPTER V

THE VISITANT

AFTER a time Mr. Parham's interest in the psychic transparency of the human eyelid gave way to his perception of a very unusual flow of ectoplasm from the medium. It had begun quite normally as a faint self-luminous oozing from the corners of the mouth, but now it was streaming much more rapidly than it had ever done before from his neck and shoulders and arms and presently from the entire front of his vaguely outlined body. It was phosphorescent—at first with a greenish and then with a yellowish-green tint. It came so fast that either by contrast Williams seemed to shrink and shrivel, or else he did actually shrink and shrivel.

It was impossible to decide that; this outflow of matter was so arresting. This Mr. Parham felt was worth seeing. He was glad he had come. There was ectoplasm now to choke Sir Titus. Well might Sir Bussy, lost somewhere in the black darkness close at hand whisper "Gaw." The stuff was already animated matter. It did not merely gutter and flow and hang downward, in the spiritless, tallow-like forms it had hitherto assumed. It was different. It had vital force in it. It was not so much slimy as glassy. Its ends lifted and pointed out towards the observers like bulging pseudo-

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podia, like blind animalculæ, like searching fingers, like veiled phantoms.

“*Eh!*” said Sir Titus. “This beats me.”

Hereward Jackson was muttering to himself and shivering.

It was strange stuff to watch. Its blunt protrusions touched and flowed into one another. They quivered, hesitated, and advanced. With an astounding rapidity they grew. What were delicate tendrils an instant ago were now long fingers and now blunt lumps. They were transparent, or at least translucent, and one saw streams of whitish and faintly tinted matter flowing within them, as one sees in a microscope the protoplasm of an amœba streaming about in its body. They grew, they coalesced more and more.

A few seconds or a few moments since, for it was difficult to measure the time this dim process was taking, the forms of these protrusions had been tentacular, fungoid, branchingly obtuse. Now they were coalescing, running together and becoming blunter and more closely involved and more and more one consolidated lumpish labouring aggregation. The coming and going of the swirling currents within grew faster and more interwoven. The colouring became stronger. Streaks of red and purple, exquisite lines of glistening bands of a pale creamy colour became distinguishable. A sort of discipline in these movements was presently apparent.

With a shock it came into Mr. Parham's head that he was seeing bones and nerves and blood

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vessels hurrying to their appointed places in that swimming swirl. But was this possible? Why did he *feel* these were living structures? For they carried an immense conviction to his mind. As he peered and marvelled this internal circulation of the ectoplasm grew dim. A film was extending over it. At first it was perplexing to say why that swirling vesicle should be dimmed, and then came the realization that an opaque skin was forming upon the whole boiling ectoplasmic mass. It became more and more opaque, opaque at last as a body. The process so stirred Mr. Parham to behold, his own nerves and arteries thrilled with such response, that he felt almost as though he himself was being made.

Shape, a recognizable form, was now imposed upon this growth. At first merely the vague intimation of head and shoulders. Then very rapidly the appearance of a face, like a still slightly translucent mask in the front of the head lump, and then hair, ears, a complete head and shoulders rising as it were out of the chest of the collapsed medium; plainly the upper part of a strange being whose nether limbs were still fluid and dim. A cold handsome face regarded the watchers, with a firm mouth and slightly contemptuous eyes.

And yet it had a strange resemblance to a face that was very familiar indeed to Mr. Parham.

"This is beyond me altogether," said Sir Titus.

"I never hoped for anything like this," said Hereward Jackson.

Mr. Parham was altogether absorbed in the

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vision and by the mystery of its likeness. Sir Bussy was no longer equal to "Gaw."

In another moment, as it seemed, or another half hour, the newcomer was completed. He was of medium height, slenderer and taller than Napoleon the First but with something of the same Byronic beauty. He was clothed in a white silken shirt, wide open at the neck and with knee breeches, greyish stockings and shoes. He seemed to shine with a light of his own. He took a step forward, and Williams dropped like an empty sack from his chair and lay forgotten.

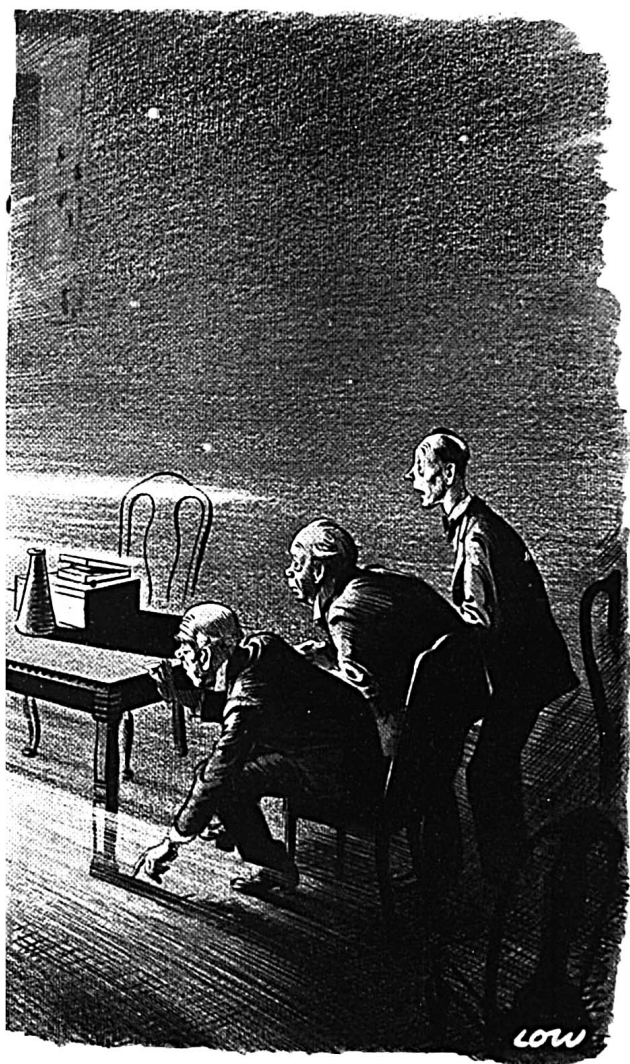
"You can turn up the lights," said a firm, clear, sweet, even voice, and stood to see its orders obeyed.

It became evident that Sir Titus had been preparing a surprise. From his chair he bent forward, touched a button on the floor, and the room was brightly lit by a score of electric lamps. As the darkness changed to light one saw his body bent down, and then he brought himself back to a sitting position. His face was ghastly white and awestricken; his vast forehead crumpled by a thousand wrinkles. Never was sceptic so utterly defeated; never was unbeliever so abruptly convinced. The visitant smiled and nodded at his confusion. Hereward Jackson stood beside Sir Titus, paralysed between astonishment and admiration. Sir Bussy also was standing. There was a livelier interest and less detachment in his bearing than Mr. Parham had ever seen before.

"For some years I have been seeking my way



“‘You can turn up the lights,’ said a firm, clear, sweet even voice.”



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to this world," said the Visitant, "for this world has great need of me."

Hereward Jackson spoke in the silence and his voice was faint.

"You have come from another world?"

"Mars."

They had nothing to say.

"I come from the Red Planet, the planet of blood and virility," said the Visitant; and then, after a queer still moment that was drenched with interrogation, he delivered a little speech to them.

"I am the Master Spirit who tries and who cleanses the souls of men. I am the spirit of Manhood and Dominion and Order. That is why I have come to you from that sterner planet where I rule. This world is falling into darkness and confusion, into doubt, vain experiments, moral strangeness, slackness, failure of effort, evasion of conflict, plenty without toil, security without vigilance. It has lacked guidance. Voices that might have given it guidance have found no form of utterance. Vague and foolish dreams of universal peace tempt the desires of men and weaken their wills. Life is struggle. Life is effort. I have come to rouse men to their forgotten duties. I have come to bring not peace but a sword. Not for the first time have I crossed the interplanetary gulf. I am the disturber of those waters of life that heal the souls of men. I am the banner of flame. I am the exaltation of history. I breathed in Sargon, in Alexander, in Genghis Khan, in Napoleon. Now I come among you, using you

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as my mask and servants. This time it is the English who are my chosen people. In their turn. For they are a great and wonderful people still—for all their inexpressiveness. I have come to England, trembling on the brink of decadence, to raise her and save her and lead her back to effort and glory and mastery.”

“You have come into the world to *stay?*” Hereward Jackson was profoundly respectful but also profoundly puzzled. “Master!—are you *matter?* Are you earthly matter? Are you flesh and blood?”

“Not as much as I am going to be. But that shall soon be remedied. My honest Woodcock here will see I get some food downstairs and make me free of his house. Meat—sound meat in plenty. At present I’m still depending in part upon that fellow’s nasty ectoplasm. I’m half a phantom still.”

He glanced ungratefully at Carnac Williams, who, having contributed his best, lay flat as an empty sack now upon the shaded floor of the cabinet. No one went to his assistance.

Hereward Jackson stooped forward peering. “*Is he dead?*” he asked.

“Phew! the channels one must use!” said the Master Spirit with manifest aversion. “Don’t trouble about *him*. Leave him, poor Sludge. He can lie. But you I have need of. You will be my first colleagues. Woodcock, my Crassus, the commissariat?”

“There’s food downstairs,” said Sir Bussy,

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slowly and grudgingly, but evidently unable to disobey. "There'll be one or two menservants up still. We can find you meat."

"We'll go down. Wine, have you? Red wine? Then we can talk while I eat and drink and put real substance into this still very sketchy body of mine. All night we'll have to talk and plan the things we have to do. You three and I. You brought me, you invoked me, and here I am. No good scowling and doubting now, Sir Titus; your days of blatant denial are past. So soon as I am equal to it you shall feel my pulse. Which door goes down? Oh! that's a cupboard, is it?"

Hereward Jackson went across to the door upon the passage and opened it. The passage seemed larger and more brightly lit than Mr. Parham remembered it. Everything indeed seemed larger. And that light contained rays of an intense and exalting hopefulness. The two other men followed the Master Spirit as he went. They were dumb-founded. They were astounded and docile.

But someone was missing! For some moments this shortage perplexed the mind of Mr. Parham. He counted Sir Bussy, One, Sir Titus, Two, and Hereward Jackson, Three. But there had been another. Of course!—Himself! Where was he?

His mind spun round giddily. He seemed to be losing touch with everything. Was he present at all?

And then he perceived that imperceptibly and incomprehensibly, the Master Spirit had incor-

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porated him. He realized that an immense power of will had taken possession of him, that he lived in a new vigour, that he was still himself and yet something enormously more powerful, that his mind was full and clear and certain as it had never been before. Mutely these others had accepted this stupendous and yet unobtrusive coalescence.

“We must talk,” said a voice that was his own voice made glorious, and a fine white hand came out from him, shaking its fingers, and motioned the others on.

And they obeyed! Marvelling and reluctant, perhaps, but they obeyed.