

CHAPTER II

HOW SIR BUSSY RESORTED TO METAPSYCHICS

BUT the real business we have in hand in this book is to tell of the Master Spirit. A certain prelude has been necessary to our story, but now that we are through with it we can admit it was no more than a prelude. Here at the earliest possible moment the actual story starts. There shall be nothing else but story-telling now right to the end of the book.

Mr. Parham's metapsychic experiences were already beginning before the conversation recorded in the previous section. They began, or at least the seed of them was sown, in a train bringing Sir Bussy and a party of friends back to London from Oxford after one of Mr. Parham's attempts to impose something of the ripeness and dignity of that ancient home of thought upon his opulent friend. It was the occasion of Lord Fluffingdon's great speech on the imperial soul. They had seen honorary degrees conferred upon a Royal Princess, an Indian Rajah, the expenditure secretary of a wealthy American millionaire and one of the most brilliant and successful collectors of honours in the world, three leading but otherwise undistinguished conservative politicians, and a Scotch comedian. It had been a perfect day in the sunshine, rich late Gothic, old gardens, robes,

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smiles, and mellow compliments. The company had been the picked best of *Who's Who* dressed up for the occasion, and Lord Fluffingdon had surpassed expectation. In the compartment with Sir Bussy and Mr. Parham were Hereward Jackson, just in the enthusiastic stages of psychic research, and Sir Titus Knowles, and the spacious open-mindedness of Sir Oliver Lodge, slow, conscientious, and lucid, ruled the discussion.

Hereward Jackson started the talk about psychic phenomena. Sir Titus Knowles was fiercely and vulgarly sceptical and early lost his always very thin and brittle temper. Sir Bussy said little.

Nearly six years of intermittent association had lit no spark of affection between Sir Titus and Mr. Parham. For Mr. Parham Sir Titus combined all that is fearful in the medical man, who at any moment may tell you to take off everything and be punched about anywhere, and all that is detestable in the scientist. They rarely talked, and when they did contradictions flew like sparks from the impact.

"The mediums as a class are rogues and tricksters," said Sir Titus. "It's common knowledge."

"Ah, *there!*" said Mr. Parham, cutting in, "there you have the positivism and assurance of—if you will pardon the adjective—old-fashioned science."

"Precious few who haven't been caught at it," said Sir Titus, turning from Hereward Jackson to this new attack upon his flank.

THE AUTOCRACY OF MR. PARHAM

“On some occasions, but not on *all* occasions,” said Mr. Parham. “We have to be logical even upon such irritating questions as this.”

Normally he would have kept himself smilingly aloof and sceptical. It was his genuine hatred for the harsh mentality of Sir Titus that had drawn him in. But there he was, before he knew it taking up a position of open-minded inquiry close to Sir Oliver’s, and much nearer to Jackson’s omnivorous faith, than to doubt and denial. For a time Sir Titus was like a baited badger. “Look at the facts!” he kept barking. “Look at the actual facts!”

“That’s just what I *have* looked at,” said Hereward Jackson. . . .

It did not occur to Mr. Parham that he had let himself in for more than a stimulating discussion until Sir Bussy spoke to him and the others, but chiefly to him, out of his corner.

“I didn’t know Parham was open-minded like this,” he said.

And presently: “Have you ever seen any of this stuff, Parham? We ought to go and see some, if you think like that.”

If Mr. Parham had been alert he might have nipped the thing in the bud then and there, but he was not alert that afternoon. He hardly realized that Sir Bussy had pinned him.

And so all that follows followed.