The Martian Invasion Journals of Henry James

By Robert Silverberg

Editor's Note:

Of all the treasures contained in the coffin-shaped wooden sea-chest at Harvard's Widener Library in which those of Henry James's notebooks and journals that survived his death were preserved and in the associated James archive at Harvard, only James's account of his bizarre encounter with the Martian invaders in the summer of l900 has gone unpublished until now. The rest of the material the box contained --the diaries and datebooks, the notes for unfinished novels, the variant drafts of his late plays, and so forth--has long since been made available to James scholars, first in the form of selections under the editorship of F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (*The Notebooks of Henry James,* Oxford University Press, l947), and then a generation later in the magisterial full text edited by Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (*The Complete Notebooks of Henry James,* Oxford University Press, 1987.)

Despite the superb latter volume's assertions, in its title and subtitle, of being "complete," "authoritative," and "definitive," one brief text was indeed omitted from it, which was, of course, the invasion journal. Edel and Powers are in no way to be faulted for this, since they could not have been aware of the existence of the Martian papers, which had (apparently accidentally) been sequestered long ago among a group of documents at Harvard associated with the life of James's sister Alice (1848-1892) and had either gone unnoticed by the biographers of Alice James or else, since the diary had obviously been composed some years after her death, had been dismissed by them as irrelevant to their research. It may also be that they found the little notebook simply illegible, for James had suffered severely from writer's cramp from the winter of l896-97 onward; his handwriting by l900 had become quite erratic, and many of the (largely pencilled) entries in the Martian notebook are extremely challenging even to a reader experienced in Henry James's hand, set down as they were in great haste under intensely strange circumstances.

The text is contained in a pocket diary book, four and a half inches by six, bound in a green leatherette cover. It appears that James used such books, in those years, in which to jot notes that he would later transcribe into his permanent notebook*(Houghton Journal VI, 26 October l896 to l0 February l909)* ; but this is the only one of its kind that has survived. The first entry is undated, but can be specifically identified as belonging to mid-May of l900 by its references to James's visit to London in that month. At that time James made his home at Lamb House in the pleasant Sussex town of Rye, about seventy miles

southeast of London. After an absence of nearly two years he had made a brief trip to the capital in March, l900, at which time, he wrote, he was greeted by his friends "almost as if I had returned from African or Asian exile." After seventeen days he went home to Lamb House, but he returned to London in May, having suddenly shaven off, a few days before, the beard that he had worn since the l860s, because it had begun to turn white and offended his vanity. (James was then 57.) From internal evidence, then, we can date the first entry in the Martian journals to the period between May 15 and May 25, 1900.

[*Undated*] Stepped clean-shaven from the train at Charing Cross. Felt clean and light and eerily young: I could have been forty. A miraculous transformation, so simply achieved! Alas, the sad truth of it is that it will always be I, never any younger even without the beard; but this is a good way to greet the new century nevertheless.

Called on Helena De Kay. Gratifying surprise and expressions of pleasure over my rejuvenated physiognomy. Clemens is there, that is, "Mark Twain." He has aged greatly in the three years since our last meeting. "The twentieth century is a stranger to me," he sadly declares. His health is bad: has been to Sweden for a cure. Not clear what ails him, physically, at least. He is a dark and troubled soul in any case. His best work is behind him and plainly he knows it. I pray whatever God there be that that is not to be my fate.

To the club in the evening. Tomorrow a full day, the galleries, the booksellers, the customary dismaying conference with the publishers. (The war in South Africa is depressing all trade, publishing particularly badly hit, though I should think people would read more novels at a time of such tension.) Luncheon and dinner engagements, of course, the usual hosts, no doubt the usual guests. And so on and on the next day and the next and the next. I yearn already for little restful, red-roofed, uncomplicated Rye.

June 7, LH[*Lamb House, Rye*]: Home again at long last. London tires me: that is the truth of things. I have lost the habit of it,*je crois* . How I yearned, all the while I was there, for cabless days and dinnerless nights! And of course there is work to do.*The Sacred Fount* is now finished and ready to go to the agent. A fine flight into the high fantastic, I think--fanciful, fantastic, but very close and sustained. Writing in the first person makes me uneasy--it lends itself so readily to garrulity, to a fluidity of self-revelation--but there is no questioning that such a structure was essential to this tale.

What is to be next? There is of course the great Project, the fine and major thing, which perhaps I mean to call*The Ambassadors* . Am I ready to begin it? It will call for the most supreme effort, though I think the reward will be commensurate. A masterpiece, dare I say? I might do well to set down one more sketch of it before commencing. But not immediately. There is powerful temptation to be dilatory: I find a note here from Wells, who suggests that I bicycle over to Sandgate and indulge in a bit of conversation with him. Indeed it has been a while, and I am terribly fond of him. Wells first, yes, and some serious thought about my ambassadors after that.

June 14, Sandgate. I am at Wells's this fine bright Thursday, very warm even for June. The bicycle ride in such heat across Romney Marsh to this grand new villa of his on the Kentish coast left me quite wilted, but Wells's robust hospitality has quickly restored me.

What a vigorous man Wells is! Not that you would know it to look at him; his health is much improved since his great sickly time two years ago, but he is nonetheless such a flimsy little wisp of a man, with those short legs, that high squeaky voice, his somewhat absurd moustaches. And yet the mind of the man burns like a sun within that frail body! The energy comes forth in that stream of books, the marvelous fantastic tales, the time-machine story and the one about Dr. Moreau's bestial monsters and the one that I think is my favorite, the pitiful narrative of the invisible man. Now he wants to write the story of a journey to the Moon, among innumerable other projects, all of which he will probably fulfill. But of course there is much more to Wells than these outlandish if amusing fables: his recent book,*Love and Mr. Lewisham* , is not at all a scientific romance but rather quite the searching analysis of matters of love and power. Even so Wells is not just a novelist (a*mere* novelist, I came close to saying!); he is a seer, a prophet, he genuinely wishes to transform the world according to his great plan for it. I doubt very much that he will have the chance, but I wish him well. It is a trifle exhausting to listen to him go on and on about the new century and the miracles that it will bring, but it is enthralling as well. And of course behind his scientific optimism lurks a dark vision, quite contradictory, of the inherent nature of mankind. He is a fascinating man, a raw, elemental force. I wish he paid more attention to matters of literary style; but, then, he wishes that I would pay*less* . I dare say each of us is both right and wrong about the other.

We spoke sadly of our poor friend and neighbor, Crane [*Stephen Crane, the American novelist*], whose untimely death last week we both lament. His short life was chaotic and his disregard for his own health was virtually criminal; but*The Red Badge of Courage* , I believe, will surely long outlive him. I wonder what other magnificent works were still in him when he died.

We talk of paying calls the next day on some of our other literary friends who live nearby, Conrad, perhaps, or young Hueffer, or even Kipling up at Burwash. What a den of novelists these few counties possess!

A fine dinner and splendid talk afterward.

Early to bed for me; Wells, I suppose, will stay awake far into the night, writing, writing, writing.

June 14, Spade House, Sandgate. In mid-morning after a generous late breakfast Wells is just at the point of composing a note to Conrad proposing an impromptu visit--Conrad is still despondently toiling at his interminable*Lord Jim* and no doubt would welcome an interruption, Wells says--when a young fellow whom Wells knows comes riding up, all out of breath, with news that a falling star has been seen crossing the skies in the night, rushing high overhead, inscribing a line of flame visible from Winchester eastward, and that--no doubt as a consequence of that event--something strange has dropped from the heavens and landed in Wells's old town of Woking, over Surrey way. It is a tangible thunderbolt, a meteor, some kind of shaft flung by the hand of Zeus, at any rate.

So,*instanter* , all is up with our visit to Conrad. Wells's scientific curiosity takes full hold of him. He must go to Woking this very moment to inspect this gift of the gods; and, willy-nilly, I am to accompany him. "You must come, you*must!* " he cries, voice disappearing upward into an octave extraordinary even for him. I ask him why, and he will only say that there will be revelations of an earthshaking kind, of planetary dimensions. "To what are you fantastically alluding?" I demand, but he will only smile enigmatically. And, shortly afterward, off we go.

June l4, much later, Woking. Utterly extraordinary! We make the lengthy journey over from Sandgate by pony-carriage, Wells and I, two literary gentleman out for an excursion on this bright and extravagantly warm morning in late spring. I am garbed as though for a bicycle journey, my usual knickerbockers and my exiguous jacket of black and white stripes and my peaked cap; I feel ill at ease in these regalia but I have brought nothing else with me suitable for this outing. We arrive at Woking by late afternoon and plunge at once into--what other word can I use?--into madness.

The object from on high, we immediately learn, landed with an evidently violent impact in the common between Woking, Horsell, and Ottershaw, burying itself deep in the ground. The heat and fury of its impact have hurled sand and gravel in every direction and set the surrounding heather ablaze, though the fires were quickly enough extinguished. But what has fallen is no meteorite. The top of an immense metallic cylinder, perhaps thirty yards across, can be seen protruding from the pit.

Early this morning Ogilvy, the astronomer, hastened to inspect the site; and, he tells us now, he was able despite the heat emanating from the cylinder's surface to get close enough to perceive that the top of the thing had begun to rotate--as though, so he declares, there were creatures within attempting to get out!

"What we have here is a visitation from the denizens of Mars, I would hazard," says Wells without hesitation, in a tone of amazing calmness and assurance.

"Exactly so!" cries Ogilvy. "Exactly so!"

These are both men of science, and I am but a *litterateur* . I stare in bewilderment from one to the other. "How can you be so certain?" I ask them, finally.

To which Wells replies, "The peculiar bursts of light we have observed on the face of that world in recent years have aroused much curiosity, as I am sure you are aware. And then, some time ago, the sight of jets of flame leaping up night after night from the red planet, as if some great gun were being repeatedly fired--in direct consequence of which, let me propose, there eventually came the streak of light in the sky late last night, which I noticed from my study window--betokening, I would argue, the arrival here of this projectile--why, what else can it all mean, James, other than that travelers from our neighbor world lie embedded here before us on Horsell Common!"

"It can be nothing else," Ogilvy cries enthusiastically. "Travelers from Mars! But are they suffering, I wonder? Has their passage through our atmosphere engendered heat too great for them to endure?"

A flush of sorrow and compassion rushes through me at that. It awes and flutters me to think that the red planet holds sentient life, and that an intrepid band of Martians has ventured to cross the great sea of space that separates their world from ours. To have come such an immense, and to me, unimaginable distance--only to perish in the attempt--! Can it be, as Ogilvy suggests, that this brave interplanetary venture will end in tragedy for the brave voyagers? I am racked briefly by the deepest concern.

How ironic, I suppose, in view of the dark and violent later events of this day, that I should expend such pity upon our visitors. But we could tell nothing, then, nor for some little while thereafter. Crowds of curiosity- seekers came and went, as they have done all day; workmen with digging tools now began to attempt to excavate the cylinder, which had cooled considerably since the morning; their attempts to complete the unscrewing of the top were wholly unsuccessful. Wells could not take his eyes from the pit. He seemed utterly possessed by a fierce joy that had been kindled in him by the possibility that the cylinder held actual Martians. It was, he told me several times, almost as though one of his own scientific fantasy-books were turning to reality before his eyes; and Wells confessed that he had indeed sketched out the outline of a novel about an invasion from Mars, intending to write it some two or three years

hence, but of course now that scheme has been overtaken by actual events and he shall have to abandon it. He evidences little regret at this; he appears wholly delighted, precisely as a small boy might be, that the Martians are here. I dare say that he would have regarded the intrusion of a furious horde of dinosaurs into the Surrey countryside with equal pleasure.

But I must admit that I am somewhat excited as well. Travelers from Mars! How extraordinary!*Quel phenomene!* And what vistas open to the mind of the intrepid seeker after novelty! I have traveled somewhat myself, of course, to the Continent, at least, if not to Africa or China, but I have not ruled such farther journeys completely out, and now the prospect of an even farther one becomes possible. To make the Grand Tour of Mars! To see its great monuments and temples, and perhaps have an audience at the court of the Great Martian Cham! It is a beguiling thought, if not a completely serious one. See, see, I am becoming a fantasist worthy of Wells!

(Later. The hour of sunset.) The cylinder is open. To our immense awe we find ourselves staring at a Martian. Did I expect them to be essentially human in form? Well, then, I was foolish in my expectations. What we see is a bulky ungainly thing; two huge eyes, great as saucers; tentacles of some sort; a strange quivering mouth--yes, yes, an alien being*senza dubbio* , preternaturally*other* .

Wells, unexpectedly, is appalled. "Disgusting...dreadful," he mutters. "That oily skin! Those frightful eyes! What a hideous devil it is!" Where has his scientific objectivity gone? For my part I am altogether fascinated. I tell him that I see rare beauty in the Martian's strangeness, not the beauty of a Greek vase or of a ceiling by Tiepolo, of course, but beauty of a distinct kind all the same. In this, I think, my perceptions are the superior of Wells's. There is beauty in the squirming octopus dangling from the hand of some grinning fisherman at the shore of Capri; there is beauty in the*terrifiant* bas-reliefs of winged bulls from the palaces of Nineveh; and there is beauty of a sort, I maintain, in this Martian also.

He laughs heartily. "You are ever the esthete, eh, James!"

I suppose that I am. But I will not retreat from my appreciation of the strange being who--struggling, it seems, against the unfamiliar conditions of our world--is moving about slowly and clumsily at the edge of its cylinder.

The creature drops back out of sight. The twilight is deepening to darkness. An hour passes, and nothing occurs. Wells suggests we seek dinner, and I heartily agree.

(Later still.) Horror! Just past eight, while Wells and I were dining, a delegation bearing a white flag of peace approached the pit, so we have learned--evidently in the desire to demonstrate to the Martians that we are intelligent and friendly beings. Ogilvy was in the group, and Stent, the Astronomer Royal, and some poor journalist who had arrived to report on the event. There came suddenly a blinding flash of flame from the pit, and another and another, and the whole delegation met with a terrible instant death, forty souls in all. The fiery beam also ignited adjacent trees and brought down a portion of a nearby house; and all those who had survived the massacre fled the scene in the wildest of terror.

"So they are monsters," Wells ejaculates fiercely, "and this is war between the worlds!"

"No, no," I protest, though I too am stunned by the dire news. "They are far from home--frightened, discomforted--it is a tragic misunderstanding and nothing more."

Wells gives me a condescending glance. That one withering look places our relationship, otherwise so cordial, in its proper context. He is the hard-headed man of realities who has clawed his way up from poverty and ignorance; I am the moneyed and comfortable and overly gentle literary artist, the

connoisseur of the life of the leisured classes. And then too, not for the first time, I have failed to seize the immediate horrific implications of a situation whilst concentrating on peripheral pretty responses. To brusque and self-confident Wells, in his heart of hearts, I surely must appear as something charming but effete.

I think that Wells greatly underestimates the strength of my fibre, but this is no moment to debate the point.

"Shall we pay a call on your unhappy friends from Mars, and see if they receive us more amiably?" he suggests.

I cannot tell whether he is sincere. It is always necessary to allow for Wells's insatiable scientific curiosity.

"By all means, if that is what you wish," I bravely say, and wait for his response. But in fact he is*not* serious; he has no desire to share the fate of Ogilvy and Stent; and, since it is too late now to return to Sandgate this night, we take lodgings at an inn he knows here in Woking. Clearly Wells is torn, I see, between his conviction that the Martians are here to do evil and his powerful desire to learn all that a human mind can possibly learn about these beings from an unknown world.

*June 15, Woking and points east.*Perhaps the most ghastly day of my life.

Just as well we made no attempt last evening to revisit the pit. Those who did--there were some such foolhardy ones--did not return, for the heat-ray was seen to flash more than once in the darkness. Great hammering noises came from the pit all night, and occasional puffs of greenish-white smoke. Devil's work, to be sure. Just after midnight a second falling star could be seen in the northwest sky. The invasion, and there is no doubt now that that is what it is, proceeds apace.

In the morning several companies of soldiers took possession of the entire common and much of the area surrounding it. No one may approach the site and indeed the military have ordered an evacuation of part of Horsell. It is a hot, close day and we have, of course, no changes of clothing with us. Rye and dear old Lamb House seem now to be half a world away. In the night I began to yearn terribly for home, but Wells's determination to remain here and observe the unfolding events was manifest from the time of our awakening. I was unwilling to be rebuked for my timidity, nor could I very well take his pony-carriage and go off with it whilst leaving him behind, and so I resolved to see it all out at his side.

But would there be any unfolding events to observe? The morning and afternoon were dull and wearying. Wells was an endless fount of scientific speculation--he was convinced that the greater gravitational pull of Earth would keep the Martians from moving about freely on our world, and that conceivably they might drown in our thicker atmosphere, et cetera, and that was interesting to me at first and then considerably less so as he went on with it. Unasked, he lectured me interminably on the subject of Mars, its topography, its climate, its seasons, its bleak and forlorn landscape. Wells is an irrepressible lecturer: there is no halting him once he has the bit between his teeth.

In mid-afternoon we heard the sound of distant gunfire to the north: evidently attempts were being made to destroy the second cylinder before it could open. But at Woking all remained in a nervewracking stasis the whole day, until, abruptly, at six in the evening there came an explosion from the common, and gunfire, and a fierce shaking and a crashing that brought into my mind the force of the eruption of

Vesuvius as it must have been on the day of the doom of Pompeii. We looked out and saw treetops breaking into flame like struck matches; buildings began to collapse as though the breath of a giant had been angrily expended upon them; and fires sprang up all about. The Martians had begun to destroy Woking.

"Come," Wells said. He had quickly concluded that it was suicidal folly to remain here any longer, and certainly I would not disagree. We hastened to the pony-carriage; he seized the reins; and off we went to the east, with black smoke rising behind us and the sounds of rifles and machine-guns providing incongruous contrapuntal rhythms as we made our way on this humid spring evening through this most pleasant of green countrysides.

We traveled without incident as far as Leatherhead; all was tranquil; it was next to impossible to believe that behind us lay a dreadful scene of death and destruction. Wells's wife has cousins at Leatherhead, and they, listening gravely and with obvious skepticism to our wild tales of Martians with heat-rays laying waste to Woking, gave us supper and evidently expected that we would be guests for the night, it now being nearly ten; but no, Wells had taken it into his head to drive all night, going on by way of Maidstone or perhaps Tunbridge Wells down into Sussex to deliver me to Rye, and thence homeward for him to Sandgate. It was lunacy, but in the frenzy of the moment I agreed to his plan, wishing at this point quickly to put as much distance between the invaders and myself as could be managed.

And so we took our hasty leave of Leatherhead. Glancing back, we saw a fearsome scarlet glow on the western horizon, and huge clots of black smoke. And, as we drove onward, there came a horrid splash of green light overhead, which we both knew must be the third falling star, bringing with it the next contingent of Martians.

Nevertheless I believed myself to be safe. I have known little if any physical danger in my life and it has a certain unreal quality to me; I cannot ever easily accept it as impinging on my existence. Therefore it came as a great astonishment and a near unhinging of my inner stability when, some time past midnight, with thunder sounding in the distance and the air portending imminent rain, the pony abruptly whinnied and reared in terror, and a moment later we beheld a titanic metal creature, perhaps one hundred feet high, striding through the young forest before us on three great metal legs, smashing aside all that lay in its way.

"Quickly!" Wells cried, and seized me by the wrist in an iron grasp and tumbled me out of the cart, down into the grass by the side of the road, just as the poor pony swung round in its fright and bolted off, cart and all, into the woods. The beast traveled no more than a dozen yards before it became fouled amidst low-lying branches and tumbled over, breaking the cart to splinters and, I am afraid, snapping its own neck in the fall. Wells and I lay huddled beneath a shrub as the colossal three-legged metal engine passed high above us. Then came a second one, following in its track, setting up a monstrous outcry as it strode along. "Aloo! Aloo!" it called, and from its predecessor came back an acknowledging "Aloo!"

"The Martians have built war-machines for themselves," Wells murmured. "That was the hammering we heard in the pit. And now these two are going to greet the companions who have just arrived aboard the third cylinder."

How I admired his cool analytical mind just then! For the thunderstorm had reached us, and we suddenly now were being wholly drenched, and muddied as well, and it was late at night and our cart was smashed and our pony was dead, the two of us alone out here in a deserted countryside at the mercy of marauding metal monsters, and even then Wells was capable of so cool an assessment of the events exploding all around us.

I have no idea how long we remained where we were. Perhaps we even dozed a little. No more

Martians did we see. A great calmness came over me as the rain went on and on and I came to understand that I could not possibly get any wetter. At length the storm moved away; Wells aroused me and announced that we were not far from Epsom, where perhaps we might find shelter if the Martians had not already devastated it; and so, drenched to the bone, we set out on foot in the darkness. Wells prattled all the while, about the parchedness of Mars and how intensely interested the Martians must be in the phenomenon of water falling from the skies. I replied somewhat curtly that it was not a phenomenon of such great interest to me, the rain now showing signs of returning. In fact I doubted I should survive this soaking. Already I was beginning to feel unwell. But I drew on unsuspected reservoirs of strength and kept pace with the indomitable Wells as we endlessly walked. To me this excursion was like a dream, and not a pleasing one. We tottered on Epsomward all through the dreadful night, arriving with the dawn.

June 20? 21? 22? Epsom.

My doubt as to today's date is trivial in regard to my doubt over everything else. It seems that I have been in a delirium of fever for at least a week, perhaps more, and the world has tottered all about me in that time.

Wells believes that today is Thursday, the 2lst of June, l900. Our innkeeper passionately insists it is a day earlier than that. His daughter thinks we have reached Saturday or even Sunday. If we had today's newspaper we should be able to settle the question easily enough, but there are no newspapers. Nor can we wire Greenwich to learn whether the summer solstice has yet occurred, for the Observatory no doubt has been abandoned, as has all the rest of London. Civilization, it appears, has collapsed utterly in this single week. All days are Sundays now: nothing stirs, there is no edifying life.

I, too, collapsed utterly within an hour or two of the end of our night's march to Epsom, lost in a dizzying rhapsody of fatigue and exposure. Wells has nursed me devotedly. Apparently I have had nearly all of his meager ration of food. There are five of us here, the innkeeper and his wife and daughter and us, safely barricaded, so we hope, against the Martian killing-machines and the lethal black gas that they have been disseminating. Somehow this town, this inn, this little island within England where we lie concealed, has escaped the general destruction--thus far. But now comes word that our sanctuary may soon be violated; and what shall we do, Wells and I? Proceeding eastward to our homes along the coast is impossible: the Martians have devastated everything in that direction. "We must to London," Wells insists. "The great city stands empty. Only there will we find food enough to continue, and places to hide from them."

It is a source of wonder and mystery to me that all has fallen apart so swiftly, that--in southern England, at least--the comfortable structures of the society I knew have evaporated entirely, within a week, vanishing with the speed of snowflakes after a spring storm.

What has happened?*This* has happened:

Cylinders laden with Martians have continued daily to arrive from the void. The creatures emerge; they assemble their gigantic transporting-carriages; the mechanical colossi go back and forth upon the land, spreading chaos and death with their heat-rays, their clouds of poisonous black vapor, and any number of other devices of deviltry. Whole towns have been charred; whole regiments have been dropped in their tracks; whole counties have been abandoned. The government, the military, all has disintegrated. Our leaders have vanished in a hundred directions. Her Majesty and the Members of Parliament and the entire authority-wielding apparatus of the state now seem as mythical as the knights of the Round Table.

We have been thrown back into a state of nature, every man for himself.

In London, so our hosts have told us, all remained ignorantly calm through Sunday last, until news came to the capital from the south of the terror and destruction there, the giant invulnerable spider-like machines, the fires, the suffocating poisonous gas. Evidently a ring of devastation had been laid down on a great arc south of the Thames from Windsor and Staines over through Reigate, at least, and on past Maidstone to Deal and Broadstairs on the Kentish coast. Surely they were closing the net on London, and on Monday morning the populace of that great city commenced to flee in all directions. A few of those who came this way, hoping to reach friends or kin in Kent or East Sussex--there were many thousands--told Wells and the innkeeper of the furious frantic exodus, the great mobs streaming northward, and those other desperate mobs flooding eastward to the Essex shore, as the methodical Martians advanced on London, exterminating all in their path. The loss of life, in that mad rush, must have been unthinkably great.

"And we have had no Martians here?" I asked Wells.

"On occasion, yes," he replied casually, as though I had asked him about cricket-matches or rainstorms. "A few of their great machines passed through earlier in the week, bound on deadly business elsewhere, no doubt; we called no attention to ourselves, and they took no notice of us. We have been quite fortunate, James."

The landlord's daughter, though--a wild boyish girl of fourteen or fifteen--has been out boldly roving these last few days, and reports increasing numbers of Martians going to and fro to the immediate south and east of us. She says that everything is burned and ruined as far as she went in the directions of Banstead and Leatherhead, and some sort of red weed, no doubt of Martian origin, is weirdly spreading across the land. It is only a matter of time, Wells believes, before they come into Epsom again, and this time, like the randomly striking godlike beings that they seem to be, they may take it into their minds to hurl this place into ruin as well. We must be off, he says; we must to London, where we will be invisible in the vastness of the place.

"And should we not make an attempt to reach our homes, instead?" I ask.

"There is no hope of that, none," says Wells. "The Martians will have closed the entire coast, to prevent an attack through the Strait of Dover by our maritime forces. Even if we survived the journey to the coast, we should find nothing there, James, nothing but ash and rubble. To London, my friend: that is where we must go, now that you are sturdy again."

There is no arguing with Wells. It would be like arguing with a typhoon.

June 23, let us say. En route to London.

How strange this once-familiar landscape seems! I feel almost as though I have been transported to Mars and my old familiar life has been left behind on some other star.

We are just outside Wimbledon. Everything is scorched and blackened to our rear; everything seems scorched and blackened ahead of us. We have seen things too terrible to relate, signs of the mass death that must have been inflicted here. Yet all is quiet now. The weather continues fiercely hot and largely dry, and the red Martian weed, doubtless finding conditions similar to those at home, has spread

everywhere. It reminds me of the enormous cactus plants one sees in southern Italy, but for its somber brick-red hue and the great luxuriance of its habit of growth: it is red, red,*red* , as far as the eye can see. A dreamlike transformation, somber and depressing in its morbid implications, and of course terrifying. I am certain I will never see my home again, which saddens me. It seems pure insanity to me to be going on into London, despite all the seemingly cogent reasons Wells expresses.

And yet, and yet! Behind the terror and the sadness, how wonderfully exhilarating all this is, really! Shameful of me to say so, but I confess it only to my notebook: this is the great adventure of my life, the wondrous powerful action in which I have everlonged to be involved. At last I am fully*living* ! My heart weeps for the destruction I see all about me, for the fall of civilization itself, but yet--I will not deny it--I am invigorated far beyond my considerable years by the constant peril, by the demands placed upon my formerly coddled body, above all, by the sheer*strangeness* of everything within my ken. If I survive this journey and live to make my escape to some unblighted land I shall dine out on these events forever.

We are traveling, to my supreme astonishment, by*motor-car* . Wells found one at a house adjacent to the inn, fully stocked with petrol, and he is driving the noisy thing, very slowly but with great perseverance, with all the skill of an expert*chauffeur* . He steers around obstacles capably; he handles sharp and frightening turns in the road with supreme aplomb. It was only after we had been on the road for over an hour that he remarked to me, in an offhand way, "Do you know, James, I have never driven one of these machines before. But there's nothing at all to it, really! Nothing!" Wells is extraordinary. He has offered to give me a chance at the wheel; but no, no, I think I shall let him be the driver on this journey.

(Later.) An astonishing incident, somewhere between Wimbledon and London, unforgettably strange.

Wells sees the cupola of a Martian walking-machine rising above the treetops not far ahead of us, and brings the motor-car to a halt while we contemplate the situation. The alien engine stands completely still, minute after minute; perhaps it has no tenant, or possibly even its occupant was destroyed in some rare successful attempt at a counterattack. Wells proposes daringly but characteristically that we go up to it on foot and take a close look at it, after which, since we are so close to London and ought not to be drawing the Martians' attention to ourselves as we enter a city which presumably they occupy, we should abandon our motor-car and slip into the capital on foot, like the furtive fugitives that we are.

Naturally I think it's rash to go anywhere near the Martian machine. But Wells will not be gainsaid. And so we warily advance, until we are no more than twenty yards from it; whereupon we discover an amazing sight. The Martians ride in a kind of cabin or basket high up above the great legs of their machines. But this one had dismounted and descended somehow to the ground, where it stands fully exposed in a little open space by the side of a small stream just beyond its mechanical carrier, peering reflectively toward the water for all the world as though it were considering passing the next hour with a bit of angling.

The Martian was globular in form, a mere ambulatory head without body--or a body without head, if you will--a yard or more in diameter, limbless, with an array of many whip-like tentacles grouped in two bunches by its mouth. As we breathlessly watched, the creature leaned ponderously forward and dipped a few of these tentacles into the stream, holding them there a long while in evident satisfaction, as though it were a Frenchman and this was a river of the finest claret passing before it, which could somehow be enjoyed and appreciated in this fashion. We could not take our eyes from the spectacle. I saw Wells glance toward a jagged rock of some size lying nearby, as though he had it in mind to attempt some brutal act of heroism against the alien as it stood with its back to us; but I shook my head, more out of an unwillingness to see him take life than out of fear of the consequences of such an attack, and he let the rock be.

How long did this interlude go on? I could not say. We were rooted, fascinated, by our encounter with *the other* . Then the Martian turned--with the greatest difficulty--and trained its huge dark eyes on us. Wells and I exchanged wary glances. Should we finally flee? The Martian seemed to carry no weapons; but who knew what powers of the mind it might bring to bear on us? Yet it simply studied us, dispassionately, as one might study a badger or a mole that has wandered out of the woods. It was a magical moment, of a sort: beings of two disparate worlds face to face (so to speak) and eye to eye, and no hostile action taken on either side.

The Martian then uttered a kind of clicking noise, which we took to be a threat, or a warning. "Time for us to be going," Wells said, and we backed hastily out of the clearing. The clicking sound, we saw, had notified the Martian's transport-mechanism that it wished to be re-seated in the cupola, and a kind of cable quickly came down, gathered it up, and raised it to its lofty perch. Now the Martian was in full possession of its armaments again, and I was convinced that my last moments had arrived. But no; no. The thing evinced no interest in murdering us. Perhaps it too had felt the magic of our little encounter; or it may be that we were deemed too insignificant to be worth slaughtering. In any event the great machine lumbered into life and went striding off toward the west, leaving Wells and me gaping slackjawed at each other like two men who had just experienced the company of some basilisk or chimera or banshee and had lived to tell the tale.

The following day, whichever one that may be. We are in London, having entered the metropolis from the south by way of the Vauxhaull Bridge after a journey on foot that makes my old trampings in Provence and the Campagna and the one long ago over the Alps into Italy seem like the merest trifling strolls. And yet I feel little weariness, for all my hunger and the extreme physical effort of these days past. It is the strange exhilaration, still, that drives me onward, muddied and tattered though I am, and with my banished beard, alas, re-emerging in all its dread whiteness.

Here in the greatest of cities the full extent of the catastrophe comes home with overwhelming impact. There is no one here. We could not be more alone were we on Crusoe's island. The desolation is magnified by the richness of the amenities all about us, the grand hotels, the splendid town-houses, the rich shops, the theaters. Those still remain: but whom do they serve? We see a few corpses lying about here and there, no doubt those who failed to heed the warning to flee; the murderous black powder, apparently no longer lethal, covers much of the city like a horrid dark snowfall; there is some sign of looting, but not really very much, so quickly did everyone flee. The stillness is profound. It is the stillness of Pompeii, the stillness of Agamemnon's Mycenae. But those are bleached ruins; London has the look of a vibrant city, yet, except that there is no one here.

So far as we can see, Wells and I are the only living things, but for birds, and stray cats and dogs. Not even the Martians are in evidence: they must be extending their conquests elsewhere, meaning to return in leisure when the job is done. We help ourselves to food in the fine shops of Belgravia, whose doors stand mostly open; we even dare to refresh ourselves, guiltlessly, with a bottle of three-guinea Chambertin, after much effort on Wells's part in extracting the cork; and then we plunge onward past Buckingham Palace--empty, empty!--into the strangely bleak precincts of Mayfair and Piccadilly.

Like some revenant wandering through a dream-world I revisit the London I loved. Now it is Wells who feels the outsider, and I who am at home. Here are my first lodgings at Bolton St., in Picadilly; here are the clubs where I so often dined, pre-eminent among them for me the Reform Club, my dear refuge and sanctuary in the city, where when still young I was to meet Gladstone and Tennyson and Schliemann of Troy. What would Schliemann make of London now? I invite Wells to admire my little*pied-a-terre* at the Reform, but the building is sealed and we move on. The city is ours. Perhaps we will go to Kensington, where I can show him my chaste and secluded flat at De Vere Mansions with its pretty view of the park;

but no, no, we turn the other way, through the terrifying silence, the tragic solitude. Wells wishes to ascertain whether the British Museum is open. So it is up Charing Cross Road for us, and into Bloomsbury, and yes, amazingly, the museum door stands ajar. We can, if we wish, help ourselves to the Elgin Marbles and the Rosetta Stone and the Portland Vase. But to what avail? Everything is meaningless now. Wells stations himself before some battered pharaoh in the hall of Egyptian sculpture and cries out, in what I suppose he thinks is a mighty and terrible voice, "I am Ozymandias, King of Kings! Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

What, I wonder, shall we do? Wander London at will, until the Martians come and slay us as they have slain the others? There is a certain wonderful*frisson* to be had from being the last men in London; but in truth it is terrible, terrible, terrible. What is the worth of having survived, when civilization has perished?

Cold sausages and stale beer in a pub just off Russell Square. The red weed, we see, is encroaching everywhere in London as it is in the countryside. Wells is loquacious; talks of his impoverished youth, his early ambitions, his ferociously self-imposed education, his gradual accretion of achievement and his ultimate great triumph as popular novelist and philosopher. He has a high opinion of his intellect, but there is nothing offensive in the way he voices it, for his self-approbation is well earned. He is a remarkable man. I could have done worse for a companion in this apocalypse. Imagine being here with poor gloomy tormented Conrad, for example!

A terrifying moment toward nightfall. We have drifted down toward Covent Garden; I turn toward Wells, who has been walking a pace or two behind me peering into shop-windows, and suggest that we appropriate lodgings for ourselves at the Savoy or the Ritz. No Wells! He has vanished like his own Invisible Man!

"Wells?" I cry. "Wells, where are you?"

Silence.*Calma come la tomba* . Has he plunged unsuspecting into some unguarded abyss of the street? Or perhaps been snatched away by some silent machine of the Martians? How am I to survive without him in this dead city? It is Wells who has the knack of breaking into food shops and such, Wells who will meet all the practical challenges of our strange life here: not I.

"*Wells!*" I call again. There is panic in my voice, I fear.

But I am alone. He is utterly gone. What shall I do? Five minutes go by; ten, fifteen. Logic dictates that I remain right on this spot until he reappears, for how else shall we find each other in this huge city? But night is coming; I am suddenly afraid; I am weary and unutterably sad; I see my death looming before me now. I will go to the Savoy. Yes. Yes. I begin to walk, and then to run, as my terror mounts, along Southampton Street.

Then I am at the Strand, at last. There is the hotel; and there is Wells, arms folded, calmly waiting outside it for me.

"I thought you would come here," he says.

"Where have you been? Is this some prank, Wells?" I hotly demand.

"I called to you to follow me. You must not have heard me. Come: I must show you something, James."

"Now? For the love of God, Wells, I'm ready to drop!" But he will hear no protests, of course. He has me by the wrist; he drags me*away* from the hotel, back toward Covent Garden, over to little Henrietta

Street. And there, pushed up against the facade of a shabby old building--Number l4, Henrietta Street--is the wreckage of some Martian machine, a kind of low motor-car with metallic tentacles, that has smashed itself in a wild career through the street. A dead Martian is visible through the shattered window of the passenger carriage. We stare a while in awe. "Do you see?" he asks, as though I could not. "They are not wholly invulnerable, it seems!" To which I agree, thinking only of finding a place where I can lie down; and then he allows us to withdraw, and we go to the hotel, which stands open to us, and esconce ourselves in the most lavish suites we can find. I sleep as though I have not slept in months.

*A day later yet.*It is beyond all belief, but the war is over, and we are, miraculously, free of the Martian terror!

Wells and I discovered, in the morning, a second motionless Martian machine standing like a sentinel at the approach to the Waterloo Bridge. Creeping fearlessly up to it, we saw that its backmost leg was frozen in flexed position, so that the thing was balanced only on two; with one good shove we might have been able to push the whole unstable mechanism over. Of the Martian in its cabin we could see no sign.

All during the day we roamed London, searching out the Martians. I felt strangely tranquil. Perhaps it was only my extreme fatigue; but certainly we were accustomed now to the desolation, to the tangles of the red weed, the packs of newly wild dogs.

Between the Strand and Grosvenor Square we came upon three more Martian machines: dead, dead, all dead. Then we heard a strange sound, emanating from the vicinity of the Marble Arch: "Ulla, ulla, ulla," it was, a mysterious sobbing howl. In the general silence that sound had tremendous power. It drew us; instead of fleeing, as sane men should have done, we approached. "Ulla, ulla!" A short distance down the Bayswater Road we saw a towering Martian fighting-machine looming above Hyde Park: the sound was coming from it. A signal of distress? A call to its distant cohorts, if any yet lived? Hands clapped to our ears--for the cry was deafening--we drew nearer still; and, suddenly, it stopped. There seemed an emphatic permanence to that stoppage. We waited. The sound did not begin anew.

"Dead," Wells said. "The last of them, I suspect. Crying a requiem for its race."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What our guns could not do, the lowly germs of Earth have achieved--I'll wager a year's earnings on that! Do you think, James, that the Martians had any way of defending themselves against our microbes? I have been waiting for this! I knew it would happen!"

Did he? He had never said a word.

*July 7, Lamb House.*How sweet to be home!

And so it has ended, the long nightmare of the interplanetary war. Wells and I found, all over London, the wrecked and useless vehicles of the Martians, with their dead occupants trapped within. Dead, all dead, every invader. And as we walked about, other human beings came forth from hiding places, and we embraced one another in wild congratulation.

Wells's hypothesis was correct, as we all have learned by now. The Martians have perished in mid-conquest, victims of our terrestrial bacteria. No one has seen a living one anywhere in the past two

weeks, the red weed, too, has already begun to die. We fugitive humans have returned to our homes; the wheels of civilization have begun to turn once more.

We are safe, yes--and yet we are not. Whether the Martians will return, fortified now against our microorganisms and ready to bend us once more to their wishes, we cannot say. But it is clear now to me that the little sense of security that we of Earth feel, most especially we inhabitants of England in the sixty-third year of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, is a pathetic illusion. Our world is no impregnable fortress. We stand open to the unpredictable sky. If Martians can come one day, Venusians may come another, or Jovians, or warlike beings from some wholly unknown star. The events of these weeks have been marvelous and terrible, and without shame I admit having derived great rewards even from my fear and my exertions; but we must all be aware now that we are at great risk of a reprise of these dark happenings. We have learned, now, that we are far from being the masters of the cosmos, as we like to suppose. It is a bitter lesson to be given at the outset of this glorious new century.

I discussed these points with Wells when he called here yesterday. He was in complete agreement.

And, as he was taking his leave, I went on, somewhat hesitantly, to express to him the other thought that had been forming in my mind all this past week. "You said once," I began, "that you had had some scheme in mind, even before the coming of the Martians, for writing a novel of interplanetary invasion. Is that still your intent now that fantasy has become fact, Wells?"

He allowed that it was.

"But it would not now be," I said, "your usual kind of fantastic fiction, would it? It would be more in the line of*reportage* , would you not say? An account of the responses of certain persons to the true and actual extreme event?"

"Of course it would, of necessity," he said. I smiled expressively and said nothing. And then, quickly divining my meaning, he added: "But of course I would yield,*cher maitre* , if it were*your* intention to--"

"It is," I said serenely.

He was quite graceful about it, all in all. And so I will set to work tomorrow.*The Ambassadors* may perhaps be the grandest and finest of my novels, but it will have to wait another year or two, I suppose, for there is something much more urgent that must be written first.

James's notebooks indicate that he did not actually begin work on his classic novel of interplanetary conflict,*The War of the Worlds,* until the 28th of July, l900. The book was finished by the l7th of November, unusually quickly for James, and after serialization in*The Atlantic Monthly* (August-December, l90l) was published in England by Macmillan and Company in March, l902 and in the United States by Harper & Brothers one month later. It has remained his most popular book ever since and has on three occasions been adapted for motion pictures. Wells never did write an account of his experiences during the Martian invasion, though those experiences did, of course, have a profound influence on his life and work thereafter.

--The Editor.

END

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