

SCIENCE FICTION

STORIES

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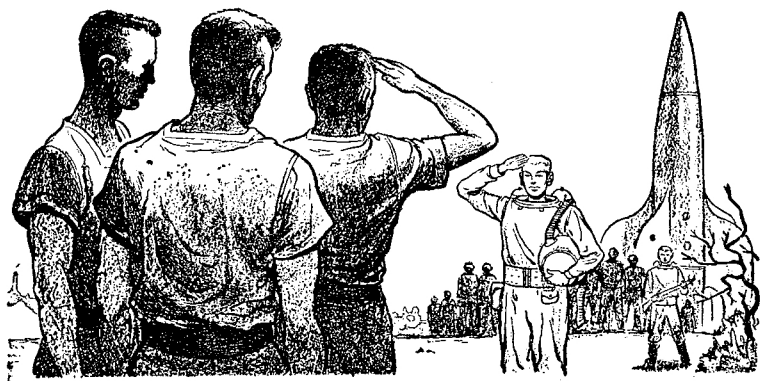
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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, Second Edition, published by Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, N.Y. Copyright 1954 by Columbia Publications, Inc. Printed in the U.S.A.

As Immanuel Kant put it: "What may be the nature of objects considered as things in themselves and without reference to the receptivity of our sensibility is quite unknown to us."

To See Ourselves

by ROBERT F. YOUNG



TRANSSCRIPT of John P. Willoughby's report of the first Ter-ran-Martian meeting:

Mare Erythraeum Sector, Mars, Jan. 16, 1990— *They are like us!*

That one amazing fact stands head and shoulders above all the others facts this expedition has amassed. Martians are not green; they are not multi-pedal; they are not Lilliputian—in short, they possess none of those outre characteristics accredited to them by the impulsive science fiction writers who thrived several decades ago.

Martians are *human!*

We landed on the fringe of one of the geometric agricultural tracts (once referred to as "canals" by those same writers!) that crisscross the habitable areas of Mars; the Martians arrived a short time later.

When Captain Berg, Astrogator Welles, Pilot Rollins and myself descended from the lock, they came toward us across the irrigated field that separated their copter-like vehicle from our ship.

At first we could not believe our eyes, for in spite of our better judgement, and in spite of the Terran-like cities we had viewed during orbital descent, we had been expecting some teratological life form with far too many limbs and eyes and of a hue ranging from lurid purple to vivid green.

And all we saw were three tall, bronzed humans!

The foremost member of the welcoming party (for such it turned out to be) stepped forward with outstretched hand, and Captain Berg, capable officer that he is, arose to the occasion. Concealing his consternation, he accepted the Martian's hand, fulfilling the age-old (galaxy-wide, perhaps!) gesture of friendship. Welles and Rollins and I stood by open-mouthed, overwhelmed by the revelation that one of our traditional human mannerisms had the same social significance on Mars as it did on Terra.

It was a moment none of us shall ever forget.

The Martian said something in a rather sibilant tongue, and Captain Berg responded in English. As his words deserve to go down in history, I have carefully recorded them and I hereby present them to civilization for the first time:

"We have conquered the abysmal wilderness of space and stand confident on the threshold of a new civilization. As spokesman for Terra, I salute you, men of Mars!"

And stepping back, after the handclasp, he did just that, drawing his body taut in the traditional manner and raising his right hand slowly to his right eyebrow, then cutting the salute smartly and whipping his hand back to his side.

What followed is almost as remarkable as the astonishing resemblance of our fourth planet neighbors to ourselves. For the Martian reciprocated! He drew himself as taut as Captain Berg and delivered a salute that would have satisfied the most exacting of military men.

The other two Martians seemed as incredulous as Welles, Rollins and myself. They stood there with their mouths slightly open, their eyes wide. One of them had a pad and pencil in his hand and after recovering from his surprise he began to write quite furiously. I surmised then that he was the Martian equivalent of a reporter. He and I shall have much to discuss later.

The historic moment over, the foremost Martian pointed toward the copter-like vehicle and indicated that we were to accompany him.

I obtained permission from Captain Berg, first, to return to the ship and transmit this report. In a moment I shall rejoin the others, who already have boarded the Martian aircraft and are awaiting me.

More later!

TRANSSCRIPT of Slissir 'Tsis' report of the first Martian-Terran meeting:

Most Hallowed Ososososo, Four, the 63rd rotation of 10,000th orbit, 21st cycle— I was delegated to accompany His Most Sacred Highness, Thisis-Ssis, First Administrator to our Most Hallowed City, and His Sacred Highness, Ptitus-Ris, Second Administrator to our Most Hallowed City, on their mission of contact with the inhabitants of the first third planet ship-entity. The information I have to report is incredible.

They are like us!

Such a statement is difficult to assimilate. We of Most Hallowed Ososososo have been overly influenced by the spate of speculative fiction that has invaded our literature during the past several orbits and have come to regard our third planet neighbors as being anything but human.

But they *are* human.

Second Administrator Ptitus-Ris landed the tiff some distance from the ship-entity and we extended to the ground. Then we watched while the humans from Three *extended* to the ground. At first we could not accept our retinal images, for despite our determination to be objective we had expected some teratological form of life with far too few limbs and eyes, and of a color ranging from white to black. One of the more sensational of our speculative fiction writers has predicated a race of bipeds on Three, and that, more than anything else, tended to pervert our better judgements.

And all we saw were four tentacled, elongated humans!

We extended rather slowly across the field which separated us from the ship-entity, fearing that a too pronounced rapidity of movement might frighten our visitors. They were not at all frightened, however, and when First Administrator Thisis-Ssis extended forward, tentatively projecting his sanctified tentacle, one of the Thirds, undoubtedly a First Administrator, extended *himself* forward, projecting *his* sanctified tentacle, *and the two humans proceeded to entangle feelers in the cycle-old gesture of affiliation to Ososososo!*

I believe that what First Administrator Thisis-Ssis articulated is

worth recording for future generations, and I am happy to be able to recall it verbatim:

"Welcome to Four, men of Three. Most Hallowed Ososososo, greatest of the City-Entities, awaits you."

The Third articulated something in an odd fang, totally lacking in euphonious sibilance. He retracted his tentacle, then, stiffening his body in an attitude of striking humility, he raised the same tentacle to his hood, held it there briefly, then retracted it again.

I could sense that First Administrator Thisis-Ssis was as astonished as I was. Not so much because of the Third's uncanny familiarity with our religion, but because of his almost unbelievable devotion to a City-Entity he had never served—a devotion so profound that it would lead him to dedicate himself and his companions for consumption before any of them had reached the compulsory age-limit! First Administrator Thisis-Ssis recovered quickly, however, and authorized the dedication by a similar symbolical gesture.

The dedication being thus consummated, nothing remained but for the two Administrators to fulfill it. So the four Threes were immediately transported to an available alimentary apartment and Most Hallowed Ososososo began the leisurely process of assimilating them.

I hope that I am not being sacrilegious in wishing that our first visitors from space had been less fanatically observant of their religious obligations. We have long been curious about our neighbors on Three, and this would have been an excellent opportunity to study them.

But perhaps more will come.

