

Chapter 4: A Martian Revelation Story of Mlle. Helene Smith

- Nandor Fodor –

SCHIAPARELL'S DISCOVERY of the mysterious channels of Mars made a deep impression on the subconscious mind of humanity in the last quarter of the past century. This was particularly noticeable on the Continent, where imagination was stimulated by Camille Flammarion's popular astronomical romances. They provided an escape from reality in wonder and awe. Earlier beliefs in other planets as abodes of life were speedily scrapped. The dreamers of the race whose outlook was cramped by the confines of our planet showed rapid adaptation to the change of fashion in the Heavens.

In the sixties the hand of Victorien Sardou, the great French dramatist, "dreamed", and drew, strange architectural designs of buildings on the planet Jupiter. But he no more believed in their real existence than Swift believed in Lilliput, Campanella in the City of the Sun, or Sir Thomas More in Utopia. His mantle fell on more intrepid souls. It fell on one lady in particular, whose flights of mind disclosed rare genius and promised a new revelation. Scientists fought bitterly over her Martian Dispensation. It was the psychologic sensation of the closing century.

It originated in a chance remark which August Lemaitre, a learned Swiss professor, dropped about the planet Mars in the presence of Mlle. Helene Smith, of Geneva. She was a "somnambuliste"; now we should call her a medium. A beautiful woman at the time (1894), "she evinced," wrote Prof. Theodore Flournoy(1), "nothing of the emaciated or tragic aspect which one habitually ascribes to the sybils of tradition. She presented an air of health, of physical and mental vigour, very pleasant to behold." Professors took to her like bees to honey, and they were to witness strange happenings. Her rambling speech poured forth knowledge and conveyed information which seemed to surpass the powers of the normal mind.



Martian landscape drawn by Mlle. Helene Smith.

(1) "From India to the Planet Mars", London, 1901.

On November 25th, 18 94, in a state of trance, Mlle. Smith seemed to perceive, in the distance and at a great height, a bright light. Then she felt a tremor which almost caused her heart to cease beating, after which it

seemed to her as though her head were empty and as if she were no longer in the body. She found herself in a dense fog, which changed successively from blue to a vivid rose colour, then to grey and finally to black. She said that she was floating. The table stood up on one leg, without anyone touching it, and its movement seemed to indicate that it was floating in a very curious manner. Then she saw a star growing larger, always larger, finally becoming as large as the house. She felt that she was ascending. The table commenced rapping the letters of the alphabet:

"Lemaitre, that which you have so long desired!"

The medium, who was ill, at ease, now found herself feeling better. She distinguished three enormous globes, one of them very beautiful "On what am I walking?" - she asked. The table replied: "On a world - Mars."

Helene Smith then began a description of all the strange things which presented themselves to her view, and caused her as much surprise as amusement. Carriages without horses or wheels emitted sparks as they glided by; houses were seen with fountains on the roof; a cradle having for curtain an angel made of iron with outstretched wings, etc. She described the people as exactly like the inhabitants of our earth, save that both sexes wore the same costume, consisting of trousers, very ample, and a long blouse, drawn tight about the waist and decorated with various designs.

The Martian world, in its chief characteristics, showed a complete identity with our world, and a puerile originality in a host of minor details. Had this been all, the incident would have been speedily dismissed. But it was not. Helene Smith began to sketch the Martian landscapes and the things that were presented to her vision. The landscapes carried a suggestion of Japanese lacquer and Nankin dishes. Soon, the mystery deepened. She traced strange characters on paper, unlike any written on earth. They were revealed to be letters of the Martian alphabet. The professors sat up. Here was something promising. Their interest grew daily. With the passing of time Helene Smith actually began to talk Martian, and, by and by, furnished the translation of the sentences which the professors laboriously copied, as they were spoken or written automatically. The language bore the stamp of a natural language.

"I will add," said Prof. Flournoy, "that in speaking fluently and somewhat quickly, as Helene sometimes does in somnambulisme, it has an acoustic quality altogether its own, due to the predominance of certain sounds, and has a peculiar intonation difficult to describe."

The rumour of the strange revelation spread like wildfire. Spiritualists were jubilant. The phenomenon was bound up with "spirit control", spirit messages and reincarnation. Then Prof. Flournoy threw a bomb.

He subjected the collected fragments of the Martian language to a close and minute investigation. And it became clear to him that the inventor of the

language had never known any other idiom than French. That the Martian phonetics were an incomplete reproduction of French phonetics. That as a work of art, the subconscious construction of this language, with all its features of its own, was infantile. But as a feat of memory, it was a prodigious achievement.

This devastating criticism led to bitter acrimony. Prof. Lemaitre had already acknowledged the extra-mundane origin of the Martian language. But Prof. Henry of the Sorbonne completely vindicated Prof. Flournoy's conclusions. He showed that the Martian words, with the exception of a residue of two per cent, were derivable from known terrestrial words.

The medium and most of her friends refused to bow to this verdict. As if to eliminate the defects of the Martian revelations the entranced medium changed her stellar habitat. She described a grotesque Ultra-Martian world, the language of which differed singularly from the Martian, the tallest people of which were three feet high, with heads twice as broad as high, living in low, long cabins without windows or doors but with a tunnel about ten feet long running from them into the earth. The language had a very peculiar rhythm, and was absolutely new.

Uranus was the subject of similar exploration. The curious hieroglyphs of its writing did not express letters but words. The ideograms, however, showed no resemblance to the objects which they represented. In this Prof. Flournoy found another proof of infantile imagination. This essential characteristic of ideographic writing was omitted because the medium strove to create something defying all analysis.

Against the second searching analysis the medium found refuge in the Moon. The Lunarian revelations, however, were no longer submitted to Prof. Flournoy. Deeply wounded in her vanity, Mlle. Helene Smith broke with him and the world of science.

This was a great loss. The planetary revelations disclosed but a single facet of Helene Smith's amazing personality. There were other mysteries which no scientific ingenuity had elucidated.

Lifeless things stirred and moved about in her presence. Raps sounded on the furniture. Distant instruments played by themselves. Objects of unknown origin dropped from the air: shells filled with sand and still wet from the sea, a Chinese vase full of water with a rose in it, Chinese coins, branches of trees, flowers, and leaves of ivy which bore in legible characters the name of the spirit control who claimed to achieve these miracles.

Prof. Flournoy was a psychologist. He could not explain the physical phenomena, so he pushed them aside. And as they were discouraged, they waned and soon completely vanished. What remained was sufficient to perplex a whole gathering of scientists. Helene Smith could find lost objects, she could predict the future, she saw spirits who announced their name

audibly to her hearing, and she saw visions which disclosed the intimate past.

"Speaking for myself alone," wrote Prof. Flournoy, "I was greatly surprised to recognize in scenes which passed before my eyes events which had occurred in my own family prior to my birth. Whence could the medium, whom I had never met before, have derived the knowledge of events belonging to a remote past, of a private nature, and utterly unknown to any living person?"

He would not bow to spirits. In respect of "Leopold" (alias Cagliostro), the chief of the invisible group, he conceded that "it would be impossible to imagine a being more independent and more different from Mlle. Smith herself, having a more personal character, and individuality more marked, or a more certain actual existence."

But he would not admit his real presence behind the automatism of Mlle. Smith. The theory of a secondary personality made to him a much stronger appeal.

He adopted a similar attitude towards the great trance romance of the "Royal Cycle". This began by the announcement that Helene was the reincarnation of Marie Antoinette. Periodically, the medium seemed to sink back into this historic personality and enacted the role of the queen in a brilliant manner. The supernormal element was comparatively scarce in this impersonation, but it abounded in the "Oriental Cycle". In this the medium was said to be Simandini, daughter of an Arab sheik in the sixth century, and wife of Prince-Sivrouka Nayaka, lord of the fortress of Tchandranguiri, built in the province of Kanara, Hindustani, in 1401. After many years of married-life she was burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre. To the amazement of all, Helene Smith actually spoke Hindustani in this phase of her personality, and wrote a few words in good Arabic. She used Sanscrit words well adapted to the situation. They expressed a personal thought and were not merely a series of senseless phrases.

After a long and laborious research, Prof. Flournoy found an old history of India which confirmed the main facts. They were unrecorded in other history books. So Prof. Flournoy saw himself forced to admit that the precise historical information given by Leopold and the language spoken by Simandini defied normal explanation.

Helene Smith died in 1929. Her correspondence and other papers were posthumously analysed by Prof. W. Deonna, of Geneva, in a bulky volume(1). Full particulars were revealed of a new, religious phase in which Helene Smith kept herself aloof from science and spiritualism alike. She painted huge religious tableaux; visions in which Christ, the Virgin, the Apostles and the Archangels play dominant roles. This is, in her own words, how they were done:

"On the days when I am to paint I am always roused very early - generally between five and six in the morning - by three loud knocks at my bed. I open my eyes and see my bedroom brightly illuminated, and immediately understand that I have to stand up and work. I dress myself by the beautiful iridescent light, and wait a few moments, sitting in my armchair, until the feeling comes that I have to work. It is never delayed. All at once I stand up and walk to the picture. When about two steps before it I feel a strange sensation, and probably fall asleep at the same moment. I know later on that I must have slept because I notice that my fingers are covered with different colours, and I have no remembrance of having used them, though when a picture is being begun I am ordered to prepare colours on my palette every evening, and have it near my bed."

(1) De la Planete Mars en Terre Sainte, Paris, 1932.

She seldom made use of a brush. She put on the first coating of paint with her three middle fingers in the same way as if she was pressing an electric bell. For the second coating she moved the same fingers very lightly from right to left and back, thus producing a very smooth surface. The outlines were made by the nails, and the sky with the palm of the hand.

Prof. Deonna admits the remarkable qualities of the paintings and says that they are far above anything she could normally produce. He makes no attempt to explain one incredible feature. It was a habit of Helene Smith to have photographs taken of the successive stages of the pictures. To her utter despair some of the negatives of the painting "Judas" were spoiled. Her guardian angel appeared and announced that she would witness a miracle. Two days later the portrait began to fade out. The beard, the moustache, the tears of Judas and other details gradually disappeared until the painting returned to the stage when it was last successfully photographed. Then an inscription appeared: "God's will, November 18, 1913". The photographs were taken again. The inscription vanished and Helene Smith finished the picture as before.

Incidentally, objective proof was discovered that the visions which she painted were accompanied by luminous phenomena. Helene Smith exposed photographic plates which were found among her effects. These seem to show that a ball of light had illuminated the room, as recorded in her correspondence. But, of course, the proof rests on the good faith of the medium alone.