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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SCIENTIST RISES ***

A Scientist Rises

By D. W. Hall

"The face of the giant
was indeed that of a
god...."



*All gazed, transfixed, at the vast form that
towered above them.*

ON that summer day the sky over New York was unflecked by clouds, and the air hung motionless, the waves of heat undisturbed. The city was a vast oven where even the sounds of the coiling traffic in its streets seemed heavy and weary under the press of heat that poured down from above. In Washington Square, the urchins of the neighborhood splashed in the fountain, and the usual midday assortment of mothers, tramps and out-of-works lounged listlessly on the hot park benches.

As a bowl, the Square was filled by the torrid sun, and the trees and grass drooped like the people on its walks. In the surrounding city, men worked in sweltering offices and the streets rumbled with the never-ceasing tide of business—but Washington Square rested.

And then a man walked out of one of the houses lining the square, and all this was changed.

He came with a calm, steady stride down the steps of a house on the north side, and those who happened to see him gazed with surprised interest. For he was a giant in size. He measured at least eleven feet in height, and his body was well-formed and in perfect proportion. He crossed the street and stepped over the railing into the nearest patch of grass, and there stood with arms folded and legs a little apart. The expression on his face was preoccupied and strangely apart, nor did it change when, almost immediately from the park bench nearest him, a woman's excited voice cried:

"Look! Look! Oh, look!"

The people around her craned their necks and stared, and from them grew a startled murmur. Others from farther away came to see who had cried out, and remained to gaze fascinated at the man on the grass. Quickly the murmur spread across the Square, and from its every part men and women and children streamed towards the center of interest—and then, when they saw, backed away slowly and fearfully, with staring eyes, from where the lone figure stood.

THERE was about that figure something uncanny and terrible. There, in the hot midday hush, something was happening to it which men would say could not happen; and men, seeing it, backed away in alarm. Quickly they dispersed. Soon there were only white, frightened faces peering from behind buildings and trees.

Before their very eyes the giant was growing.

When he had first emerged, he had been around eleven feet tall, and now, within three minutes, he had risen close to sixteen feet.

His great body maintained its perfect proportions. It was that of an elderly man clad simply in a gray business suit. The face was kind, its clear-chiselled features indicating fine spiritual

strength; on the white forehead beneath the sparse gray hair were deep-sunken lines which spoke of years of concentrated work.

No thought of malevolence could come from that head with its gentle blue eyes that showed the peace within, but fear struck ever stronger into those who watched him, and in one place a woman fainted; for the great body continued to grow, and grow ever faster, until it was twenty feet high, then swiftly twenty-five, and the feet, still separated, were as long as the body of a normal boy. Clothes and body grew effortlessly, the latter apparently without pain, as if the terrifying process were wholly natural.

The cars coming into Washington Square had stopped as their drivers sighted what was rising there, and by now the bordering streets were tangled with traffic. A distant crowd of milling people heightened the turmoil. The northern edge was deserted, but in a large semicircle was spread a fear-struck, panicky mob. A single policeman, his face white and his eyes wide, tried to straighten out the tangle of vehicles, but it was infinitely beyond him and he sent in a riot call; and as the giant with the kind, dignified face loomed silently higher than the trees in the Square, and ever higher, a dozen blue-coated figures appeared, and saw, and knew fear too, and hung back awe-stricken, at a loss what to do. For by now the rapidly mounting body had risen to the height of forty feet.

AN excited voice raised itself above the general hubbub.

"Why, I know him! I know him! It's Edgar Wesley! Doctor Edgar Wesley!"

A police sergeant turned to the man who had spoken.

"And it—he knows you? Then go closer to him, and—and—ask him what it means."

But the man looked fearfully at the giant and hung back. Even as they talked, his gigantic body had grown as high as the four-storied buildings lining the Square, and his feet were becoming too large for the place where they had first been put. And now a faint smile could be seen on the giant's face, an enigmatic smile, with something ironic and bitter in it.

"Then shout to him from here," pressed the sergeant nervously. "We've got to find out something! This is crazy—impossible! My God! Higher yet—and faster!"

Summoning his courage, the other man cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted:

"Dr. Wesley! Can you speak and tell us? Can we help you stop it?"

The ring of people looked up breathless at the towering figure, and a wave of fear passed over them and several hysterical shrieks rose up as, very slowly, the huge head shook from side to side. But the smile on its lips became stronger, and kinder, and the bitterness seemed to leave it.

There was fear at that motion of the enormous head, but a roar of panic sounded from the watchers when, with marked caution, the growing giant moved one foot from the grass into the street behind and the other into the nearby base of Fifth Avenue, just above the Arch. Fearing harm, they were gripped by terror, and they fought back while the trembling policemen tried vainly to control them; but the panic soon ended when they saw that the leviathan's arms remained crossed and his smile kinder yet. By now he dwarfed the houses, his body looming a hundred and fifty feet into the sky. At this moment a woman back of the semicircle slumped to her knees and prayed hysterically.

"Someone's coming out of his house!" shouted one of the closest onlookers.

THE door of the house from which the giant had first appeared had opened, and the figure of a middle-aged, normal-sized man emerged. For a second he crouched on the steps, gaping up at the monstrous shape in the sky, and then he scurried down and made at a desperate run for the nearest group of policemen.

He gripped the sergeant and cried frantically:

"That's Dr. Wesley! Why don't you do something? Why don't—"

"Who are you?" the officer asked, with some return of an authoritative manner.

"I work for him. I'm his janitor. But—can't you do anything? Look at him! Look!"

The crowd pressed closer. "What do you know about this?" went on the sergeant.

The man gulped and stared around wildly. "He's been working on something—many years—I don't know what, for he kept it a close secret. All I knew is that an hour ago I was in my room upstairs, when I heard some disturbance in his laboratory, on the ground floor. I came down and knocked on the door, and he answered from inside and said that everything was all right—"

"You didn't go in?"

"No. I went back up, and everything was quiet for a long time. Then I heard a lot of noise down below—a smashing—as if things were being broken. But I thought he was just destroying something he didn't need, and I didn't investigate: he hated to be disturbed. And then, a little

later, I heard them shouting out here in the Square, and I looked out and saw. I saw him—just as I knew him—but a giant! Look at his face! Why, he has the face of—of a god! He's—as if he were looking down on us—and—pitying us...."

For a moment all were silent as they gazed, transfixed, at the vast form that towered two hundred feet above them. Almost as awe-inspiring as the astounding growth was the fine, dignified calmness of the face. The sergeant broke in:

"The explanation of this must be in his laboratory. We've got to have a look. You lead us there."

THE other man nodded; but just then the giant moved again, and they waited and watched.

With the utmost caution the titanic shape changed position. Gradually, one great foot, over thirty feet in length, soared up from the street and lowered farther away, and then the other distant foot changed its position; and the leviathan came gently to rest against the tallest building bordering the Square, and once more folded his arms and stood quiet. The enormous body appeared to waver slightly as a breath of wind washed against it: obviously it was not gaining weight as it grew. Almost, now, it appeared to float in the air. Swiftly it grew another twenty-five feet, and the gray expanse of its clothes shimmered strangely as a ripple ran over its colossal bulk.

A change of feeling came gradually over the watching multitude. The face of the giant was indeed that of a god in the noble, irony-tinged serenity of his calm features. It was as if a further world had opened, and one of divinity had stepped down; a further world of kindness and fellow-love, where were none of the discords that bring conflicts and slaughterings to the weary people of Earth. Spiritual peace radiated from the enormous face under the silvery hair, peace with an undertone of sadness, as if the giant knew of the sorrows of the swarm of dwarfs beneath him, and pitied them.

From all the roofs and the towers of the city, for miles and miles around, men saw the mammoth shape and the kindly smile grow more and more tenuous against the clear blue sky. The figure remained quietly in the same position, his feet filling two empty streets, and under the spell of his smile all fear seemed to leave the nearer watchers, and they became more quiet and controlled.

THE group of policemen and the janitor made a dash for the house from which the giant had come. They ascended the steps, went in, and found the door of the laboratory locked. They broke the door down. The sergeant looked in.

"Anyone in here?" he cried. Nothing disturbed the silence, and he entered, the others following.

A long, wide, dimly-lit room met their eyes, and in its middle the remains of a great mass of apparatus that had dominated it.

The apparatus was now completely destroyed. Its dozen rows of tubes were shattered, its intricate coils of wire and machinery hopelessly smashed. Fragments lay scattered all over the floor. No longer was there the least shape of meaning to anything in the room; there remained merely a litter of glass and stone and scrap metal.

Conspicuous on the floor was a large hammer. The sergeant walked over to pick it up, but, instead, paused and stared at what lay beyond it.

"A body!" he said.

A sprawled out dead man lay on the floor, his dark face twisted up, his sightless eyes staring at the ceiling, his temple crushed as with a hammer. Clutched tight in one stiff hand was an automatic. On his chest was a sheet of paper.

The captain reached down and grasped the paper. He read what was written on it, and then he read it to the others:

THERE was a fool who dreamed the high dream of the pure scientist, and who lived only to ferret out the secrets of nature, and harness them for his fellow men. He studied and worked and thought, and in time came to concentrate on the manipulation of the atom, especially the possibility of contracting and expanding it—a thing of greatest potential value. For nine years he worked along this line, hoping to succeed and give new power, new happiness, a new horizon to mankind. Hermetically sealed in his laboratory, self-exiled from human contacts, he labored hard.

There came a day when the device into which the fool had poured his life stood completed and a success. And on that very day an agent for a certain government entered his laboratory to steal the device. And in that moment the fool realized what he had done: that, from the apparatus he had invented, not happiness and new freedom would come to his fellow men, but instead slaughter and carnage and drunken power increased a hundredfold. He realized, suddenly, that men had not yet learned to use fruitfully the precious, powerful things given to them, but as yet could only play with them like

greedy children—and kill as they played. Already his invention had brought death. And he realized—even on this day of his triumph—that it and its secret must be destroyed, and with them he who had fashioned so blindly.

For the scientist was old, his whole life was the invention, and with its going there would be nothing more.

And so he used the device's great powers on his own body; and then, with those powers working on him, he destroyed the device and all the papers that held its secrets.

Was the fool also mad? Perhaps. But I do not think so. Into his lonely laboratory, with this marauder, had come the wisdom that men must wait, that the time is not yet for such power as he was about to offer. A gesture, his strange death, which you who read this have seen? Yes, but a useful one, for with it he and his invention and its hurtful secrets go from you; and a fitting one, for he dies through his achievement, through his very life.

But, in a better sense, he will not die, for the power of his achievement will dissolve his very body among you infinitely; you will breathe him in your air; and in you he will live incarnate until that later time when another will give you the knowledge he now destroys, and he will see it used as he wished it used.—E. W.

THE sergeant's voice ceased, and wordlessly the men in the laboratory looked at each other. No comment was needed. They went out.

They watched from the steps of Edgar Wesley's house. At first sight of the figure in the sky, a new awe struck them, for now the shape of the giant towered a full five hundred feet into the sun, and it seemed almost a mirage, for definite outline was gone from it. It shimmered and wavered against the bright blue like a mist, and the blue shone through it, for it was quite transparent. And yet still they imagined they could discern the slight ironic smile on the face, and the peaceful, understanding light in the serene eyes; and their hearts swelled at the knowledge of the spirit, of the courage, of the fine, far-seeing mind of that outflung titanic martyr to the happiness of men.

The end came quickly. The great misty body rose; it floated over the city like a wraith, and then it swiftly dispersed, even as steam dissolves in the air. They felt a silence over the thousands of watching people in the Square, a hush broken at last by a deep, low murmur of awe and wonderment as the final misty fragments of the vast sky-held figure wavered and melted imperceptibly—melted and were gone from sight in the air that was breathed by the men whom Edgar Wesley loved.

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