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A Saucer on the Hearth

THE close proximity of Mars has lately drawn astronomers to special vigils. Their interest has been scientific; the results of their observations would seem prosaic to listeners who have been following the adventures of Jet Morgan. The Director of the Observatory at Pic du Midi, aware of popular concern, went out of his way recently to announce that nothing new had been revealed on the planet by telescope and camera. "There were certainly no canals," he said, "and no flying saucers." But the fantasies of science fiction are not so easily dismissed. Even while the Director was making his report, Thomas Hutchinson, of Northern Ireland, was telling policemen about the saucer that got away. It was quite small—only three feet high and 18 inches in diameter. Mr. Hutchinson saw the object with his own eyes; he also wrestled with it, and would have taken it to the police if it had not spun out of his reach and disappeared into the sky.

Full details of the event will no doubt be made available to those societies throughout the world whose members are collecting information about unidentified objects. For the rest of us, there is only a newspaper report, tantalisingly meagre. We would like to know more about Thomas Hutchinson. It may be supposed that he was public-spirited; he knew his duty as a citizen, and was resolved to take the saucer to a police station, where not even Martians could have outwitted a constable. Nothing has been said to suggest that his senses were in any way impaired. He was safely at home with his wife when the visitation occurred. True, it would be helpful if the circumstances were known more precisely. Were the Hutchinsons at peace with each other and with the world? Were they sitting quietly through another of those endless conversations which are sometimes said to be the true delight of marriage?

Or is it possible that Thomas, newly returned from the "local," was being subjected to wifely criticism? Cases are on record of men who have grown weary in spirit while their wives cleansed their minds of perilous matter; and men in this situation have been known to look despairingly through the window in search of relief from an eager and scolding tongue. What could have been more natural than the arrival, at such a moment, of an object, bright red in colour and egg-shaped, which symbolised a man's willingness to escape? If the object were not actually there, the mere possibility of its arrival, occurring to an imagination a little overheated by ale, could at least have provided a diversion.

If these thoughts are too sceptical, they can be corrected by Mrs. Hutchinson, whose comments have so far not been recorded. Yet it is notoriously difficult to reach the truth when a woman gives evidence in any matter which concerns her husband. By now, perhaps, she is persuaded that she saw the saucer, or even that she saw it first; and if only Thomas had listened to her instructions, instead of going about the business in his headstrong and fumbling way, the first saucer in captivity would now be a verifiable fact in history. We must resign ourselves to the possibility that an invasion from Mars is imminent only in that popular serial, *The World in Peril*. The landing in Northern Ireland may be disregarded by scientists; and if other scholars notice it they may pause merely to reflect on the size of the saucer, and to suggest that the little people who have long been found in Ireland may now be using more modern means of transport. We suspect, however, that in one household the story will not be forgotten—and that Thomas, poor fellow, will never hear the end of it.

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 28, 1956.