

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONGRESS OF NATIONS

The day appointed for the assembling of the nations in Washington opened bright and beautiful. Arrangements had been made for the reception of the distinguished guests at the Capitol. No time was to be wasted, and having assembled in the Senate Chamber, the business that had called them together was to be immediately begun. The scene in Pennsylvania Avenue, when the procession of dignitaries and royalties passed up toward the Capitol was one never to be forgotten. Bands were playing, magnificent equipages flashed in the morning sunlight, the flags of every nation on the earth fluttered in the breeze. Queen Victoria, with the Prince of Wales escorting her, and riding in an open carriage, was greeted with roars of cheers; the emperor William, following in another carriage with empress Victoria at his side, condescended to bow and smile in response to the greetings of a free people. Each of the other monarchs was received in a similar manner. The Czar of Russia proved to be an especial favorite with the multitude on account of the ancient friendship of his house for America. But the greatest applause of all came when the President of France, followed by the President of Switzerland and the First Syndic of the little republic of Andorra, made their appearance. Equally warm were the greetings extended to the representatives of Mexico and the South American States.

The crowd apparently hardly knew at first how to receive the Sultan of Turkey, but the universal good feeling was in his favor, and finally rounds of hand clapping and cheers greeted his progress along the splendid avenue.

A happy idea had apparently occurred to the Emperor of China and the Mikado of Japan, for, attended by their intermingled suites, they rode together in a single carriage. This object lesson in the unity of international feeling immensely pleased the spectators.

The scene in the Senate Chamber stirred everyone profoundly. That it was brilliant and magnificent goes without saying, but there was a seriousness, an intense feeling of expectancy, pervading both those who looked on and those who were to do the work for which these magnates of the earth had assembled, which produced an ineradicable impression. The President of the United States, of course, presided. Representatives of the greater powers occupied the front seats, and some of them were honored with special chairs near the President.

No time was wasted in preliminaries. The President made a brief speech.

"We have come together," he said, "to consider a question that equally interests the whole earth. I need not remind you that unexpectedly and without provocation on our part the people--the monsters, I should rather say--of Mars, recently came down upon the earth, attacked us in our homes and spread desolation around them. Having the advantage of

ages of evolution, which for us are yet in the future, they brought with them engines of death and destruction against which we found it impossible to contend. It is within the memory of every one within reach of my voice that it was through the entirely unexpected succor which Providence sent us that we were suddenly and effectually freed from the invaders. By our own efforts we could have done nothing.

"But, as you all know, the first feeling of relief which followed the death of our foes was quickly succeeded by the fearful news which came to us from the observatories, that the Martians were undoubtedly preparing for a second invasion of our planet. Against this we should have had no recourse and no hope but for the genius of one of my countrymen, who, as you are all aware, has perfected means which may enable us not only to withstand the attack of those awful enemies, but to meet them, and, let us hope, to conquer them on their own ground.

"Mr. Edison is here to explain to you what those means are. But we have also another object. Whether we send a fleet of interplanetary ships to invade Mars or whether we simply confine our attention to works of defense, in either case it will be necessary to raise a very large sum of money. None of us has yet recovered from the effects of the recent invasion. The earth is poor today compared to its position a few years ago; yet we can not allow our poverty to stand in the way. The money, the means, must be had. It will be part of our business here to raise a gigantic war fund by the aid of which we can construct the equipment and machinery that we shall require. This, I think, is all I need to say.

Let us proceed to business."

"Where is Mr. Edison?" cried a voice.

"Will Mr. Edison please step forward?" said the President.

There was a stir in the assembly, and the iron-grey head of the great inventor was seen moving through the crowd. In his hand he carried one of his marvelous disintegrators. He was requested to explain and illustrate its operation. Mr. Edison smiled.

"I can explain its details," he said, "to Lord Kelvin, for instance, but if Their Majesties will excuse me, I doubt whether I can make it plain to the Crown Heads."

The Emperor William smiled superciliously. Apparently he thought that another assault had been committed upon the divine right of kings. But the Czar Nicholas appeared to be amused, and the Emperor of China, who had been studying English, laughed in his sleeve, as if he suspected that a joke had been perpetrated.

"I think," said one of the deputies, "that a simple exhibition of the powers of the instrument, without a technical explanation of its method of working, will suffice for our purpose."

This suggestion was immediately approved. In response to it, Mr. Edison,

by a few simple experiments, showed how he could quickly and certainly shatter into its constituent atoms any object upon which the vibratory force of the disintegrator should be directed. In this manner he caused an inkstand to disappear under the very nose of the Emperor William without a spot of ink being scattered upon his sacred person, but evidently the odor of the disunited atoms was not agreeable to the nostrils of the Kaiser.

Mr. Edison also explained in general terms the principle on which the instrument worked. He was greeted with round after round of applause, and the spirit of the assembly rose high.

Next the workings of the electrical ship were explained, and it was announced that after the meeting had adjourned an exhibition of the flying powers of the ship would be given in the open air.

These experiments, together with the accompanying explanations, added to what had already been disseminated through the public press, were quite sufficient to convince all the representatives who had assembled in Washington that the problem of how to conquer the Martians had been solved. The means were plainly at hand. It only remained to apply them. For this purpose, as the President had pointed out, it would be necessary to raise a very large sum of money.

"How much will be needed?" asked one of the English representatives.

"At least ten thousand millions of dollars," replied the President.

"It would be safer," said a Senator from the Pacific Coast, "to make it twenty five thousand millions."

"I suggest," said the King of Italy, "that the nations be called in alphabetical order, and that the representatives of each name a sum which he is ready and able to contribute."

"We want the cash or its equivalent," shouted the Pacific Coast Senator.

"I shall not follow the alphabet strictly," said the President, "but shall begin with the larger nations first. Perhaps, under the circumstances, it is proper that the United States should lead the way. Mr. Secretary," he continued, turning to the Secretary of the Treasury, "how much can we stand?"

"At least a thousand millions," replied the Secretary of the Treasury.

A roar of applause that shook the room burst from the assembly. Even some of the monarchs threw up their hats. The Emperor Tsait'ien smiled from ear to ear. One of the Roko Tuis, or native chiefs, from Fiji, sprang up and brandished a war club.

The President then proceeded to call the other nations, beginning with Austria-Hungary and ending with Zanzibar, whose Sultan, Hamoud bin

Mahomed, had come to the congress in the escort of Queen Victoria. Each contributed liberally.

Germany, coming in alphabetical order just before Great Britain, had named, through its chancellor, the sum of \$500,000,000, but when the First Lord of the British Treasury, not wishing to be behind the United States, named double that sum as the contribution of the British Empire, the Emperor William looked displeased. He spoke a word in the ear of the Chancellor who immediately raised his hand.

"We will give a thousand million dollars," said the Chancellor.

Queen Victoria seemed surprised, though not displeased. The First Lord of the Treasury met her eye, and then, rising in his place, said:

"Make it fifteen hundred million for Great Britain."

Emperor William consulted again with his Chancellor, but evidently concluded not to increase his bid.

But, at any rate, the fund had benefited to the amount of a thousand millions by this little outburst of imperial rivalry.

The greatest surprise of all, however, came when the King of Siam was called upon for his contribution. He had not been given a foremost place in the Congress, but when the name of his country was pronounced he rose

by his chair, dressed in a gorgeous specimen of the peculiar attire of his country, then slowly pushed his way to the front, stepped up to the President's desk and deposited upon it a small box.

"This is our contribution," he said in broken English.

The cover was lifted, and there darted, shimmering in the half-gloom of the Chamber, a burst of iridescence from the box.

"My friends of the Western world," continued the King of Siam, "will be interested in seeing this gem. Only once before has the eye of a European been blessed with the sight of it. Your books will tell you that in the seventeenth century a traveller, Tavernier, saw in India an unmatched diamond which afterward disappeared like a meteor, and was thought to have been lost from the earth. You all know the name of that diamond and its history. It is the Great Mogul, and it lies before you. How it came into my possession I shall not explain. At any rate, it is honestly mine, and I freely contribute it here to aid in protecting my native planet against those enemies who appear determined to destroy it."

When the excitement which the appearance of this long lost treasure, that had been the subject of so many romances and of such long and fruitless search, had subsided, the President continued calling the list, until he had completed it.

Upon taking the sum of the contributions (the Great Mogul was reckoned at three millions) it was found to be still one thousand millions short of the required amount.

The secretary of the Treasury was instantly on his feet.

"Mr. President," he said, "I think we can stand that addition. Let it be added to the contribution of the United States of America."

When the cheers that greeted the conclusion of the business were over, the President announced that the next affair of the Congress was to select a director who should have entire charge of the preparations for the war. It was the universal sentiment that no man could be so well suited for this post as Mr. Edison himself. He was accordingly selected by the unanimous and enthusiastic choice of the great assembly.

"How long a time do you require to put everything in readiness?" asked the President.

"Give me carte blanche," replied Mr. Edison, "and I believe I can have a hundred electric ships and three thousand disintegrators ready within six months."

A tremendous cheer greeted this announcement.

"Your powers are unlimited," said the President, "draw on the fund for

as much money as you need," whereupon the Treasurer of the United States was made the disbursing officer of the fund, and the meeting adjourned.

Not less than 5,000,000 people had assembled at Washington from all parts of the world. Every one of this immense multitude had been able to listen to the speeches and the cheers in the Senate Chamber, although not personally present there. Wires had been run all over the city, and hundreds of improved telephonic receivers provided, so that everyone could hear. Even those who were unable to visit Washington, people living in Baltimore, New York, Boston, and as far away as New Orleans, St. Louis and Chicago, had also listened to the proceedings with the aid of these receivers. Upon the whole, probably not less than 50,000,000 people had heard the deliberations of the great congress of the nations.

The telegraph and the cable had sent the news across the oceans to all the capitols of the earth. The exultation was so great that the people seemed mad with joy.

The promised exhibition of the electrical ship took place the next day. Enormous multitudes witnessed the experiment, and there was a struggle for places in the car. Even Queen Victoria, accompanied by the Prince of Wales, ventured to take a ride in it, and they enjoyed it so much that Mr. Edison prolonged the journey as far as Boston and the Bunker Hill monument.

Most of the other monarchs also took a high ride, but when the turn of

the Emperor of China came he repeated a fable which he said had come down from the time of Confucius:

"Once upon a time there was a Chinaman living in the valley of the Hoang-Ho River, who was accustomed frequently to lie on his back, gazing at, and envying, the birds that he saw flying away in the sky. One day he saw a black speck which rapidly grew larger and larger, until as it got near he perceived that it was an enormous bird, which overshadowed the earth with its wings. It was the elephant of birds, the roc. 'Come with me,' said the roc, 'and I will show you the wonders of the kingdom of the birds.' The man caught hold of its claw and nestled among its feathers, and they rapidly rose high in the air, and sailed away to the Kuen-Lun Mountains. Here, as they passed near the top of the peaks, another roc made its appearance. The wings of the two great birds brushed together, and immediately they fell to fighting. In the midst of the melee the man lost his hold and tumbled into the top of a tree, where his pigtail caught on a branch, and he remained suspended. There the unfortunate man hung helpless, until a rat, which had its home in the rocks at the foot of the tree, took compassion upon him, and, climbing up, gnawed off the branch. As the man slowly and painfully wended his weary way homeward, he said: 'This teaches me that creatures to whom nature has given neither feathers nor wings should leave the kingdom of the birds to those who are fitted to inhabit it.'"

Having told this story, Tsait'ien turned his back on the electrical ship.

After the exhibition was finished, and amid the fresh outburst of enthusiasm that followed, it was suggested that a proper way to wind up the Congress and give suitable expression to the festive mood which now possessed mankind would be to have a grand ball. This suggestion met with immediate and universal approval.

But for so gigantic an affair it was, of course, necessary to make special preparations. A convenient place was selected on the Virginia side of the Potomac; a space of ten acres was carefully levelled and covered with a polished floor, rows of columns one hundred feet apart were run across it in every direction, and these were decorated with electric lights, displaying every color of the spectrum.

Above this immense space, rising in the center to a height of more than a thousand feet, was anchored a vast number of balloons, all aglow with lights, and forming a tremendous dome, in which brilliant lamps were arranged in such a manner as to exhibit, in an endless succession of combinations, all the national colors, ensigns and insignia of the various countries represented at the Congress. Blazing eagles, lions, unicorns, dragons and other imaginary creatures that the different nations had chosen for their symbols appeared to hover high above the dancers, shedding a brilliant light upon the scene.

Circles of magnificent thrones were placed upon the floor in convenient locations for seeing. A thousand bands of music played, and tens of

thousands of couples, gayly dressed and flashing with gems, whirled together upon the polished floor.

The Queen of England led the dance, on the arm of the President of the United States.

The Prince of Wales led forth the fair daughter of the President, universally admired as the most beautiful woman on the great ballroom floor.

The Emperor William, in his military dress, danced with the beautiful Princess Masaco, the daughter of the Mikado, who wore for the occasion the ancient costume of the women of her country, sparkling with jewels, and glowing with quaint combinations of color like a gorgeous butterfly.

The Chinese Emperor, with his pigtail flying high as he spun, danced with the Empress of Russia.

The King of Siam essayed a waltz with the Queen Ranavalona of Madagascar, while the Sultan of Turkey basked in the smiles of a Chicago heiress to a hundred millions.

The Czar chose for his partner a dark-eyed beauty from Peru, but King Malietoa, of Samoa, was suspicious of civilized charmers and, avoiding all of their allurements, expressed his joy and gave vent to his enthusiasm in a pas seul. In this he was quickly joined by a band of

Sioux Indian chiefs, whose whoops and yells so startled the leader of a German band on their part of the floor that he dropped his baton, and followed by the musicians, took to his heels.

This incident amused the good-natured Emperor of China more than anything else that had occurred.

"Make muchee noisee," he said, indicating the fleeing musicians with his thumb. "Allee samee muchee flaid noisee," and then his round face dimpled into another laugh.

The scene from the outside was even more imposing than that which greeted the eye within the brilliantly lighted enclosure. Far away in the night, rising high among the stars, the vast dome of illuminated balloons seemed, like some supernatural creation, too grand and glorious to have been constructed by the inhabitants of the earth.

All around it, and from some of the balloons themselves, rose jets and fountains of fire, ceaselessly playing, and blotting out the constellations of the heavens by their splendor.

The dance was followed by a grand banquet, at which the Prince of Wales proposed a toast to Mr. Edison:

"It gives me much pleasure," he said, "to offer, in the name of the nations of the Old World, this tribute of our admiration for, and our

confidence in, the genius of the New World. Perhaps on such an occasion as this, when all racial differences and prejudices ought to be, and are, buried and forgotten, I should not recall anything that might revive them; yet I cannot refrain from expressing my happiness in knowing that the champion who is to achieve the salvation of the earth has come forth from the bosom of the Anglo-Saxon race."

Several of the great potentates looked grave upon hearing the Prince of Wales' words, and the Czar and the Kaiser exchanged glances; but there was no interruption to the cheers that followed. Mr. Edison, whose modesty and dislike to display and to speechmaking were well known, simply said:

"I think we have got the machine that can whip them. But we ought not to be wasting any time. Probably they are not dancing on Mars, but are getting ready to make us dance."

These words instantly turned the current of feeling in the vast assembly. There was no longer any disposition to expend time in vain boastings and rejoicings. Everywhere the cry now became, "Let us make haste! Let us get ready at once! Who knows but the Martians have already embarked, and are now on their way to destroy us?"

Under the impulse of this new feeling, which, it must be admitted, was very largely inspired by terror, the vast ballroom was quickly deserted. The lights were suddenly put out in the great dome of balloons, for

someone had whispered:

"Suppose they should see that from Mars? Would they not guess what we were about, and redouble their preparations to finish us?"

Upon the suggestion of the President of the United States, an executive committee, representing all the principal nations, was appointed, and without delay a meeting of this committee was assembled at the White House. Mr. Edison was summoned before it, and asked to sketch briefly the plan upon which he proposed to work.

I need not enter into the details of what was done at this meeting. Let it suffice to say that when it broke up, in the small hours of the morning, it had been unanimously resolved that as many thousands of men as Mr. Edison might require should be immediately placed at his disposal; that as far as possible all the great manufacturing establishments of the country should be instantly transformed into factories where electrical ships and disintegrators could be built, and upon the suggestion of Professor Sylvanus P. Thompson, the celebrated English electrical expert, seconded by Lord Kelvin, it was resolved that all the leading men of science in the world should place their services at the disposal of Mr. Edison in any capacity in which, in his judgement, they might be useful to him.

The members of this committee were disposed to congratulate one another on the good work which they had so promptly accomplished, when at the

moment of their adjournment, a telegraphic dispatch was handed to the President from Professor George E. Hale, the director of the great Yerkes Observatory, in Wisconsin. The telegram read:

"Professor Barnard, watching Mars tonight with the forty-inch telescope, saw a sudden outburst of reddish light, which we think indicates that something has been shot from the planet. Spectroscopic observations of this moving light indicated that it was coming earthward, while visible, at the rate of not less than one hundred miles a second."

Hardly had the excitement caused by the reading of this dispatch subsided, when others of a similar import came from the Lick Observatory, in California; from the branch of the Harvard Observatory at Arequipa, in Peru, and from the Royal Observatory, at Potsdam.

When the telegram from this last named place was read the Emperor William turned to his Chancellor and said:

"I want to go home. If I am to die I prefer to leave my bones among those of my imperial ancestors and not in this vulgar country, where no king has ever ruled. I don't like this atmosphere. It makes me limp."

And now, whipped on by the lash of alternate hope and fear, the earth sprang to its work of preparation.