

The Second Deluge

By

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FOREWORD

What is here set down is the fruit of long and careful research among disjointed records left by survivors of the terrible events described.

The writer wishes frankly to say that, in some instances, he has followed the course which all historians are compelled to take by using his imagination to round out the picture. But he is able conscientiously to declare that in the substance of his narrative, as well as in every detail which is specifically described, he has followed faithfully the accounts of eyewitnesses, or of those who were in a position to know the truth of what they related.

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CHAPTER I

COSMO VERSÁL

An undersized, lean, wizen-faced man, with an immense bald head, as round and smooth and shining as a giant soap-bubble, and a pair of beady black eyes, set close together, so that he resembled a gnome of amazing brain capacity and prodigious power of concentration, sat bent over a writing desk with a huge sheet of cardboard before him, on which he was swiftly drawing geometrical and trigonometrical figures. Compasses, T-squares, rulers, protractors, and ellipsographs obeyed the touch of his fingers as if inspired with life.

The room around him was a jungle of terrestrial and celestial globes, chemists' retorts, tubes, pipes, and all the indescribable apparatus that modern science has invented, and which, to the uninitiated, seems as incomprehensible as the ancient paraphernalia of alchemists and astrologers. The walls were lined with book shelves, and adorned along the upper portions with the most extraordinary photographs and drawings. Even the ceiling was covered with charts, some representing the sky, while many others were geological and topographical pictures of the face of the earth.

Beside the drawing-board lay a pad of paper, and occasionally the little man nervously turned to this, and, grasping a long pencil, made

elaborate calculations, covering the paper with a sprinkling of mathematical symbols that looked like magnified animalcula. While he worked, under a high light from a single window placed well up near the ceiling, his forehead contracted into a hundred wrinkles, his cheeks became feverous, his piercing eyes glowed with inner fire, and drops of perspiration ran down in front of his ears. One would have thought that he was laboring to save his very soul and had but a few seconds of respite left.

Presently he threw down the pencil, and with astonishing agility let himself rapidly, but carefully, off the stool on which he had been sitting, keeping the palms of his hands on the seat beside his hips until he felt his feet touch the floor. Then he darted at a book-shelf, pulled down a ponderous tome, flapped it open in a clear space on the floor, and dropped on his knees to consult it.

After turning a leaf or two he found what he was after, read down the page, keeping a finger on the lines, and, having finished his reading, jumped to his feet and hurried back to the stool, on which he mounted so quickly that it was impossible to see how he managed it--without an upset. Instantly he made a new diagram, and then fell to figuring furiously on the pad, making his pencil gyrate so fast that its upper end vibrated like the wing of a dragon-fly.

At last he threw down the pencil, and, encircling his knees with his clasped arms, sank in a heap on the stool. The lids dropped over his

shining eyes, and he became buried in thought.

When he reopened his eyes and unbent his brows, his gaze happened to be directed toward a row of curious big photographs which ran like a pictured frieze round the upper side of the wall of the room. A casual observer might have thought that the little man had been amusing himself by photographing the explosions of fireworks on a Fourth of July night; but it was evident by his expression that these singular pictures had no connection with civic pyrotechnics, but must represent something of incomparably greater importance, and, in fact, of stupendous import.

The little man's face took on a rapt look, in which wonder and fear seemed to be blended. With a sweep of his hand he included the whole series of photographs in a comprehensive glance, and then, settling his gaze upon a particularly bizarre object in the center, he began to speak aloud, although there was nobody to listen to him.

"My God!" he said. "That's it! That Lick photograph of the Lord Rosse Nebula is its very image, except that there's no electric fire in it.

The same great whirl of outer spirals, and then comes the awful central mass--and we're going to plunge straight into it. Then quintillions of tons of water will condense on the earth and cover it like a universal cloudburst. And then good-bye to the human race--unless--unless--I, Cosmo Versál, inspired by science, can save a remnant to repeople the planet after the catastrophe."

Again, for a moment, he closed his eyes, and puckered his hemispherical brow, while, with drawn-up knees, he seemed perilously balanced on the high stool. Several times he slowly shook his head, like a dreaming owl, and when his eyes reopened their fire was gone, and a reflective film covered them. He began to speak, more deliberately than before, and in a musing tone:

"What can I do? I don't believe there is a mountain on the face of the globe lofty enough to lift its head above that flood. Hum, hum! It's no use thinking about mountains! The flood will be six miles deep--six miles from the present sea-level; my last calculation proves it beyond all question. And that's only a minimum--it may be miles deeper, for no mortal man can tell exactly what'll happen when the earth plunges into a nebula.

"We'll have to float; that's the thing. I'll have to build an ark. I'll be a second Noah. But I'll advise the whole world to build arks.

"Millions might save themselves that way, for the flood is not going to last forever. We'll get through the nebula in a few months, and then the waters will gradually recede, and the high lands will emerge again. It'll be an awful long time, though; I doubt if the earth will ever be just as it was before. There won't be much room, except for fish--but there won't be many inhabitants for what dry land there is."

Once more he fell into silent meditation, and while he mused there came

a knock at the door. The little man started up on his seat, alert as a squirrel, and turned his eyes over his shoulder, listening intently. The knock was repeated--three quick sharp raps. Evidently he at once recognized them.

"All right," he called out, and, letting himself down, ran swiftly to the door and opened it.

A tall, thin man, with bushy black hair, heavy eyebrows, a high, narrow forehead, and a wide, clean shaven mouth, wearing a solemn kind of smile, entered and grasped the little man by both hands.

"Cosmo," he said, without wasting any time on preliminaries, "have you worked it out?"

"I have just finished."

"And you find the worst?"

"Yes, worse than I ever dreamed it would be. The waters will be six miles deep."

"Phew!" exclaimed the other, his smile fading. "That is indeed serious. And when does it begin?"

"Inside of a year. We're within three hundred million miles of the

watery nebula now, and you know that the earth travels more than that distance in twelve months."

"Have you seen it?"

"How could I see it--haven't I told you it is invisible? If it could be seen all these stupid astronomers would have spotted it long ago. But I'll tell you what I have seen."

Cosmo Versál's voice sank into a whisper, and he shuddered slightly as he went on:

"Only last night I was sweeping the sky with the telescope when I noticed, in Hercules and Lyra, and all that part of the heavens, a dimming of some of the fainter stars. It was like the shadow of the shroud of a ghost. Nobody else would have noticed it, and I wouldn't if I had not been looking for it. It's knowledge that clarifies the eyes and breeds knowledge, Joseph Smith. It was not truly visible, and yet I could see that it was there. I tried to make out the shape of the thing--but it was too indefinite. But I know very well what it is. See here"--he suddenly broke off--"Look at that photograph." (He was pointing at the Lord Rosse Nebula on the wall). "It's like that, only it's coming edgewise toward us. We may miss some of the outer spirals, but we're going smash into the center."

With fallen jaw, and black brows contracted, Joseph Smith stared at the

photograph.

"It doesn't shine like that," he said at last.

The little man snorted contemptuously.

"What have I told you about its invisibility?" he demanded.

"But how, then, do you know that it is of a watery nature?"

Cosmo Versál threw up his hands and waved them in an agony of impatience. He climbed upon his stool to get nearer the level of the other's eyes, and fixing him with his gaze, exclaimed:

"You know very well how I know it. I know it because I have demonstrated with my new spectroscope, which analyzes extra-visual rays, that all those dark nebulae that were photographed in the Milky Way years ago are composed of watery vapor. They are far off, on the limits of the universe. This one is one right at hand. It's a little one compared with them--but it's enough, yes, it's enough! You know that more than two years ago I began to correspond with astronomers all over the world about this thing, and not one of them would listen to me. Well, they'll listen when it's too late perhaps.

"They'll listen when the flood-gates are opened and the inundation begins. It's not the first time that this thing has happened. I haven't

a doubt that the flood of Noah, that everybody pretends to laugh at now, was caused by the earth passing through a watery nebula. But this will be worse than that; there weren't two thousand million people to be drowned then."

For five minutes neither spoke. Cosmo Versál swung on the stool, and played with an ellipsograph; Joseph Smith dropped his chin on his breast and nervously fingered the pockets of his long vest. At last he raised his head and asked, in a low voice:

"What are you going to do, Cosmo?"

"I'm going to get ready," was the short reply.

"How?"

"Build an ark."

"But will you give no warning to others?"

"I'll do my best. I'll telephone to all the officials, scientific and otherwise, in America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. I'll write in every language to all the newspapers and magazines. I'll send out circulars. I'll counsel everybody to drop every other occupation and begin to build arks--but nobody will heed me. You'll see. My ark will be the only one, but I'll save as many in it as I can. And I depend upon

you, Joseph, to help me. From all appearances, it's the only chance that the human race has of survival.

"If I hadn't made this discovery they would all have been wiped out like miners in a flooded pit. We may persuade a few to be saved--but what an awful thing it is that when the truth is thrust into their very faces people won't believe, won't listen, won't see, won't be helped, but will die like dogs in their obstinate ignorance and blindness."

"But they will, they must, listen to you," said Joseph Smith eagerly.

"They won't, but I must make them," replied Cosmo Versál.

"Anyhow, I must make a few of the best of them hear me. The fate of a whole race is at stake. If we can save a handful of the best blood and brain of mankind, the world will have a new chance, and perhaps a better and higher race will be the result. Since I can't save them all, I'll pick and choose. I'll have the flower of humanity in my ark. I'll at least snatch that much from the jaws of destruction."

The little man was growing very earnest and his eyes were aglow with the fire of enthusiastic purpose. As he dropped his head on one side, it looked too heavy for the stemlike neck, but it conveyed an impression of immense intellectual power. Its imposing contour lent force to his words.

"The flower of humanity," he continued after a slight pause. "Who

composes it? I must decide that question. Is it the billionaires? Is it the kings and rulers? Is it the men of science? Is it the society leaders? Bah! I'll have to think on that. I can't take them all, but I'll give them all a chance to save themselves--though I know they won't act on the advice."

Here he paused.

"Won't the existing ships do--especially if more are built?" Joseph Smith suddenly asked, interrupting Cosmo's train of thought.

"Not at all," was the reply. "They're not suited to the kind of navigation that will be demanded. They're not buoyant enough, nor manageable enough, and they haven't enough carrying capacity for power and provisions. They'll be swamped at the wharves, or if they should get away they'd be sent to the bottom inside a few hours. Nothing but specially constructed arks will serve. And there's more trouble for me--I must devise a new form of vessel. Heavens, how short the time is! Why couldn't I have found this out ten years ago? It's only to-day that I have myself learned the full truth, though I have worked on it so long."

"How many will you be able to carry in your ark?" asked Smith.

"I can't tell yet. That's another question to be carefully considered. I shall build the vessel of this new metal, levium, half as heavy as

aluminum and twice as strong as steel. I ought to find room without the slightest difficulty for a round thousand in it."

"Surely many more than that!" exclaimed Joseph Smith. "Why, there are ocean-liners that carry several times as many."

"You forget," replied Cosmo Versál, "that we must have provisions enough to last for a long time, because we cannot count on the immediate re-emergence of any land, even the most mountainous, and the most compressed food takes space when a great quantity is needed. It won't do to overcrowd the vessel, and invite sickness. Then, too, I must take many animals along."

"Animals," returned Smith. "I hadn't thought of that. But is it necessary?"

"Absolutely. Would you have less foresight than Noah? I shall not imitate him by taking male and female of every species, but I must at least provide for restocking such land as eventually appears above the waters with the animals most useful to man. Then, too, animals are essential to the life of the earth. Any agricultural chemist would tell you that. They play an indispensable part in the vital cycle of the soil. I must also take certain species of insects and birds. I'll telephone Professor Hergeschmitberger at Berlin to learn precisely what are the capitally important species of the animal kingdom."

"And when will you begin the construction of the ark?"

"Instantly. There's not a moment to lose. And it's equally important to send out warnings broadcast immediately. There you can help me. You know what I want to say. Write it out at once; put it as strong as you can; send it everywhere; put it in the shape of posters; hurry it to the newspaper offices. Telephone, in my name, to the Carnegie Institution, to the Smithsonian Institution, to the Royal Society, to the French, Russian, Italian, German, and all the other Academies and Associations of Science to be found anywhere on earth.

"Don't neglect the slightest means of publicity. Thank Heaven, the money to pay for all this is not lacking. If my good father, when he piled up his fortune from the profits of the Transcontinental Aerial Company, could have foreseen the use to which his son would put it for the benefit--what do I say, for the benefit? nay, for the salvation--of mankind, he would have rejoiced in his work."

"Ah, that reminds me," exclaimed Joseph Smith. "I was about to ask, a few minutes ago, why airships would not do for this business. Couldn't people save themselves from the flood by taking refuge in the atmosphere?"

Cosmo Versál looked at his questioner with an ironical smile.

"Do you know," he asked, "how long a dirigible can be kept afloat? Do

you know for how long a voyage the best aeroplane types can be provisioned with power? There's not an air-ship of any kind that can go more than two weeks at the very uttermost without touching solid earth, and then it must be mighty sparing of its power. If we can save mankind now, and give it another chance, perhaps the time will come when power can be drawn out of the ether of space, and men can float in the air as long as they choose.

"But as things are now, we must go back to Noah's plan, and trust to the buoyant power of water. I fully expect that when the deluge begins people will flock to the high-lands and the mountains in air-ships--but alas! that won't save them. Remember what I have told you--this flood is going to be six miles deep!"

The second morning after the conversation between Cosmo Versál and Joseph Smith, New York was startled by seeing, in huge red letters, on every blank wall, on the bare flanks of towering sky-scrapers, on the lofty stations of aeroplane lines, on bill-boards, fences, advertising-boards along suburban roads, in the Subway stations, and fluttering from strings of kites over the city, the following announcement:

THE WORLD IS TO BE DROWNED!

Save Yourselves While It Is Yet Time!

Drop Your Business: It Is of No Consequence!

Build Arks: It Is Your Only Salvation!

The Earth Is Going To Plunge into a Watery

Nebula: There Is No Escape!

Hundreds of Millions Will Be Drowned: You Have

Only a Few Months To Get Ready!

For Particulars Address: Cosmo Versál,

3000 Fifth Avenue.