

CHAPTER VI

SELECTING THE FLOWER OF MANKIND

After a day or two, during which the ark was left open for inspection, and was visited by many thousands, Cosmo Versál announced that no more visitors would be admitted. He placed sentinels at all entrances, and began the construction of a shallow ditch, entirely inclosing the grounds. Public curiosity was intensely excited by this singular proceeding, especially when it became known that the workmen were stringing copper wires the whole length of the ditch.

"What the deuce is he up to now?" was the question on everybody's lips.

But Cosmo and his employees gave evasive replies to all inquiries. A great change had come about in Cosmo's treatment of the public. No one was any longer encouraged to watch the operations.

When the wires were all placed and the ditch was finished, it was covered up so that it made a broad flat-topped wall, encircling the field.

Speculation was rife for several days concerning the purpose of the mysterious ditch and its wires, but no universally satisfactory explanation was found.

One enterprising reporter worked out an elaborate scheme, which he ascribed to Cosmo Versál, according to which the wired ditch was to serve as a cumulator of electricity, which would, at the proper moment, launch the ark upon the waters, thus avoiding all danger of a fatal detention in case the flood should rise too rapidly.

This seemed so absurd on its face that it went far to quiet apprehension by reawakening doubts of Cosmo's sanity--the more especially since he made no attempt to contradict the assertion that the scheme was his.

Nobody guessed what his real intention was; if people had guessed, it might have been bad for their peace of mind.

The next move of Cosmo Versál was taken without any knowledge or suspicion on the part of the public. He had now established himself in his apartments in the ark, and was never seen in the city.

One evening, when all was quiet about the ark, night work being now unnecessary, Cosmo and Joseph Smith sat facing one another at a square table lighted by a shaded lamp. Smith had a pile of writing paper before him, and was evidently prepared to take copious notes.

Cosmo's great brow was contracted with thought, and he leaned his cheek upon his hand. It was clear that his meditations were troublesome. For at least ten minutes he did not open his lips, and Smith watched him

anxiously. At last he said, speaking slowly:

"Joseph, this is the most trying problem that I have had to solve. The success of all my work depends upon my not making a mistake now.

"The burden of responsibility that rests on my shoulders is such as no mortal has ever borne. It is too great for human capacity--and yet how can I cast it off?

"I am to decide who shall be saved! I, I alone, I, Cosmo Versál, hold in my hands the fate of a race numbering two thousand million souls!--the fate of a planet which, without my intervention, would become simply a vast tomb. It is for me to say whether the genus homo shall be perpetuated, and in what form it shall be perpetuated. Joseph, this is terrible! These are the functions of deity, not of man."

Joseph Smith seemed no longer to breathe, so intense was his attention. His eyes glowed under the dark brows, and his pencil trembled in his fingers. After a slight pause Cosmo Versál went on:

"If I felt any doubt that Providence had foreordained me to do this work, and given me extraordinary faculties, and extraordinary knowledge, to enable me to perform it, I would, this instant, blow out my brains."

Again he was silent, the secretary, after fidgeting about, bending and

unbending his brows, and tapping nervously upon the table, at last said solemnly:

"Cosmo, you are ordained; you must do the work."

"I must," returned Cosmo Versál, "I know that; and yet the sense of my responsibility sometimes covers me with a cloud of despair. The other day, when the ark was crowded with curiosity seekers, the thought that not one of all those tens of thousands could escape, and that hundreds of millions of others must also be lost, overwhelmed me. Then I began to reproach myself for not having been a more effective agent in warning my fellows of their peril. Joseph, I have miserably failed. I ought to have produced universal conviction that I was right, and I have not done it."

"It is not your fault, Cosmo," said Joseph Smith, reaching out his long arm to touch his leader's hand. "It is an unbelieving generation. They have rejected even the signs in the heavens. The voice of an archangel would not have convinced them."

"It is true," replied Cosmo. "And the truth is the more bitter to me because I spoke in the name of science, and the very men who represent science have been my most determined opponents, blinding the people's eyes--after willfully shutting their own."

"You say you have been weak," interposed Smith, "which you have not been; but you would be weak if you now shrank from your plain duty."

"True!" cried Cosmo, in a changed voice. "Let us then proceed. I had a lesson the other day. Amos Blank came to me, puffed with his pillaged millions. I saw then what I had to do. I told him plainly that he was not among the chosen. Hand me that book over there."

The secretary pushed a large volume within Cosmo's reach. He opened it. It was a "Year-Book of Science, Politics, Sociology, History, and Government."

Cosmo ran over its pages, stopping to read a few lines here and there, seeming to make mental notes. After a while he pushed the book aside, looked at his companion thoughtfully, and began:

"The trouble with the world is that morally and physically it has for thousands of years grown more and more corrupt. The flower of civilization, about which people boast so much, nods over the stagnant waters of a moral swamp and draws its perilous beauty from the poisons of the miasma.

"The nebula, in drowning the earth, brings opportunity for a new birth of mankind. You will remember, Joseph, that the same conditions are said to have prevailed in the time of Noah. There was no science then, and we do not know exactly on what principles the choice was made of those who should escape; but the simple history of Noah shows that he and his friends represented the best manhood of that early age.

"But the seeds of corruption were not eliminated, and the same problem recurs to-day.

"I have to determine whom I will save. I attack the question by inquiring who represent the best elements of humanity? Let us first consider men by classes."

"And why not by races?" asked Smith.

"I shall not look to see whether a man is black, white, or yellow; whether his skull is brachycephalic or dolichocephalic," replied Cosmo.

"I shall look inside. No race has ever shown itself permanently the best."

"Then by classes you mean occupations?"

"Well, yes, for the occupation shows the tendency, the quintessence of character. Some men are born rulers and leaders; others are born followers. Both are necessary, and I must have both kinds."

"You will begin perhaps with the kings, the presidents?"

"Not at all. I shall begin with the men of science. They are the true leaders."

"But they have betrayed you--they have shut their eyes and blindfolded others," objected Joseph Smith, as if in extenuation.

"You do not understand me," said Cosmo, with a commiserating smile. "If my scientific brethren have not seen as clearly as I have done, the fault lies not in science, but in lack of comprehension. Nevertheless, they are on the right track; they have the gist of the matter in them; they are trained in the right method. If I should leave them out, the regenerated world would start a thousand years behind time. Besides, many of them are not so blind; some of them have got a glimpse of the truth."

"Not such men as Pludder," said Smith.

"All the same, I am going to save Pludder," said Cosmo Versál.

Joseph Smith fairly jumped with astonishment.

"You--are--going--to--save--Pludder," he faltered. "But he is the worst of all."

"Not from my present view-point. Pludder has a good brain; he can handle the tools; he is intellectually honest; he has done great things for science in the past. And, besides, I do not conceal from you the fact that I should like to see him convicted out of his own mouth."

"But," persisted Smith, "I have heard you say that he was--"

"No matter what you have heard me say," interrupted Cosmo impatiently.

"I say now that he shall go with us. Put down his name at the head of the list."

Dumfounded and muttering under his breath, Smith obeyed.

"I can take exactly one thousand individuals, exclusive of the crew," continued Versál, paying no attention to his confidant's repeated shaking of his head. "Good Heavens, think of that! One thousand out of two thousand millions! But so be it. Nobody would listen to me, and now it is too late. I must fix the number for each class."

"There is one thing--one curious question--that occurs to me," put in Smith hesitatingly. "What about families?"

"There you've hit it," cried Cosmo. "That's exactly what bothers me. There must be as many women as men--that goes without saying. Then, too, the strongest moral element is in the women, although they don't weigh heavily for science. But the aged people and the children--there's the difficulty. If I invite a man who possesses unquestionable qualifications, but has a large family, what am I to do? I can't crowd out others as desirable as he for the sake of carrying all of his stirpes. The principles of eugenics demand a wide field of selection."

Cosmo Versál covered his eyes, rested his big head on his hands, and his elbows on the table. Presently he looked up with an air of decision.

"I see what I must do," he said. "I can take only four persons belonging to any one family. Two of them may be children--a man, his wife, and two children--no more."

"But that will be very hard lines for them--" began Joseph Smith.

"Hard lines!" Cosmo broke in. "Do you think it is easy lines for me? Good Heavens, man! I am forced to this decision. It rends my heart to think of it, but I can't avoid the responsibility."

Smith dropped his eyes, and Cosmo resumed his reflections. In a little while he spoke again:

"Another thing that I must fix is an age limit. But that will have to be subject to certain exceptions. Very aged persons in general will not do--they could not survive the long voyage, and only in the rare instances where their experience of life might be valuable would they serve any good purpose in reëstablishing the race. Children are indispensable--but they must not be too young--infants in arms would not do at all. Oh, this is sorry work! But I must harden my heart."

Joseph Smith looked at his chief, and felt a twinge of sympathy, tempered by admiration, for he saw clearly the terrible contest in his

friend's mind and appreciated the heroic nature of the decision to which the inexorable logic of facts had driven it.

Cosmo Versál was again silent for a long time. Finally he appeared to throw off the incubus, and, with a return of his ordinary decisiveness, exclaimed:

"Enough. I have settled the general principle. Now to the choice."

Then, closing his eyes, as if to assist his memory, he ran over a list of names well known in the world of science, and Smith set them down in a long row under the name of "Abiel Pludder," with which he had begun.

At last Cosmo Versál ceased his dictation.

"There," he said, "that is the end of that category. I may add to or subtract from it later. According to probability, making allowance for bachelors, each name will represent three persons; there are seventy-five names, which means two hundred and twenty-five places reserved for science. I will now make a series of other categories and assign the number of places for each."

He seized a sheet of paper and fell to work, while Smith looked on, drumming with his fingers and contorting his huge black eyebrows. For half an hour complete silence reigned, broken only by the gliding sound of Cosmo Versál's pencil, occasionally emphasized by a soft thump. At

the end of that time he threw down the pencil and held out the paper to his companion.

"Of course," he said, "this is not a complete list of human occupations. I have set down the principal ones as they occurred to me. There will be time to correct any oversight. Read it."

Smith, by force of habit, read it aloud:

| Occupation | No. of Names | Probable No. of Places |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Science (already assigned) | 75 | 225 |
| Rulers | 15 | 45 |
| Statesmen | 10 | 30 |
| Business magnates | 10 | 30 |
| Philanthropists | 5 | 15 |
| Artists | 15 | 45 |
| Religious teachers | 20 | 60 |
| School-teachers | 20 | 60 |
| Doctors | 30 | 90 |
| Lawyers | 1 | 3 |
| Writers | 6 | 18 |
| Editors | 2 | 6 |
| Players | 14 | 42 |
| Philosophers | 1 | 3 |

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----|------|
| Musicians | 12 | 36 |
| Speculative geniuses | 3 | 9 |
| "Society" | 0 | 0 |
| Agriculture and mechanics | 90 | 270 |
| Totals | 329 | 987 |
| Special reservations | | 13 |
| Grand total, places | | 1000 |

Several times while Joseph Smith was reading he raised his eyebrows, as if in surprise or mental protest, but made no remark.

"Now," resumed Cosmo when the secretary had finished, "let us begin with the rulers. I do not know them as intimately as I know the men of science, but I am sure I have given them places enough. Suppose you take this book and call them over to me."

Smith opened the "year-book," and began:

"George Washington Samson, President of the United States."

"He goes. He is not intellectually brilliant, but he has strong sense and good moral fiber. I'll save him if for no other reason than his veto of the Antarctic Continent grab bill."

"Shen Su, Son of Heaven, President-Emperor of China."

"Put him down. I like him. He is a true Confucian."

Joseph Smith read off several other names at which Cosmo shook his head.

Then he came to:

"Richard Edward, by the grace of God, King of Great--"

"Enough," broke in Cosmo; "we all know him--the man who has done more for peace by putting half the British navy out of commission than any other ruler in history. I can't leave him out."

"Achille Dumont, President of the French republic."

"I'll take him."

"William IV, German Emperor."

"Admitted, for he has at last got the war microbe out of the family blood."

Then followed a number of rulers who were not lucky enough to meet with Cosmo Versál's approval, and when Smith read:

"Alexander V, Emperor of all the Russias," the big head was violently

shaken, and its owner exclaimed:

"There will be many Russians in the ark, for tyranny has been like a lustration to that people; but I will carry none of its Romanoff seeds to my new world."

The selection was continued until fifteen names had been obtained, including that of the new, dark-skinned President of Liberia, and Cosmo declared that he would not add another one.

Then came the ten statesmen who were chosen with utter disregard to racial and national lines.

In selecting his ten business magnates, Cosmo stated his rule:

"I exclude no man simply because he is a billionaire. I consider the way he made his money. The world must always have rich men. How could I have built the ark if I had been poor?"

"Philanthropists," read Smith.

"I should have taken a hundred if I could have found them," said Cosmo.

"There are plenty of candidates, but these five [naming them] are the only genuine ones, and I am doubtful about several of them. But I must run some chances, philanthropy being indispensable."

For the fifteen representatives of art Cosmo confined his selection largely to architecture.

"The building instinct must be preserved," he explained. "One of the first things we shall need after the flood recedes is a variety of all kinds of structures. But it's a pretty bad lot at the best. I shall try to reform their ideas during the voyage. As to the other artists, they, too, will need some hints that I can give them, and that they can transmit to their children."

Under the head of religious teachers, Cosmo remarked that he had tried to be fair to all forms of genuine faith that had a large following. The school-teachers represented the principal languages, and Cosmo selected the names from a volume on "The Educational Systems of the World," remarking that he ran some risk here, but it could not easily be avoided.

"Doctors--they get a rather liberal allowance, don't they?" asked Smith.

"Not half as large as I'd like to have it," was the response. "The doctors are the salt of the earth. It breaks my heart to have to leave out so many whose worth I know."

"And only one lawyer!" pursued Joseph. "That's curious."

"Not in the least curious. Do you think I want to scatter broadcast the

seeds of litigation in a regenerated world? Put down the name of Chief Justice Good of the United States Supreme Court. He'll see that equity prevails."

"And only six writers," continued Smith.

"And that's probably too many," said Cosmo. "Set down under that head Peter Inkson, whom I will engage to record the last scenes on the drowning earth; James Henry Blackwitt, who will tell the story of the voyage; Jules Bourgeois, who can describe the personnel of the passengers; Sergius Narishkoff, who will make a study of their psychology; and Nicolao Ludolfo, whose description of the ark will be an invaluable historic document a thousand years hence."

"But you have included no poets," remarked Smith.

"Not necessary," responded Cosmo. "Every human being is a poet at bottom."

"And no novelists," persisted the secretary.

"They will spring up thicker than weeds before the waters are half gone--at least, they would if I let one aboard the ark."

"Editors--two?"

"That's right. And two too many, perhaps. I'll take Jinks of the Thunderer, and Bullock of the Owl."

"But both of them have persistently called you an idiot."

"For that reason I want them. No world could get along without some real idiots."

"I am rather surprised at the next entry, if you will permit me to speak of it," said Joseph Smith. "Here you have forty-two places reserved for players."

"That means twenty-eight adults, and probably some youngsters who will be able to take parts," returned Cosmo, rubbing his hands with a satisfied smile. "I have taken as many players as I conscientiously could, not only because of their future value, but because they will do more than anything else to keep up the spirits of everybody in the ark. I shall have a stage set in the largest saloon."

Joseph Smith scowled, but held his peace. Then, glancing again at the paper, he remarked that there was but one philosopher to be provided for.

"It is easy to name him," said Cosmo. "Kant Jacobi Leergeschwätz."

"Why he?"

"Because he will harmlessly represent the metaphysical genus, for nobody will ever understand him."

"Musicians twelve?"

"Chosen for the same reason as the players," said Cosmo, rapidly writing down twelve names because they were not easy to pronounce, and handing them to Smith, who duly copied them off.

When this was done Cosmo himself called out the next category--"speculative geniuses."

"I mean by that," he continued, "not Wall Street speculators, but foreseeing men who possess the gift of looking into the 'seeds of time,' but who never get a hearing in their own day, and are hardly ever remembered by the future ages which enjoy the fruits whose buds they recognized."

Cosmo mentioned two names which Joseph Smith had never heard, and told him they ought to be written in golden ink.

"They are sui generis, and alone in the world. They are the most precious cargo I shall have aboard," he added.

Smith shrugged his shoulders and stared blankly at the paper, while

Cosmo sank into a reverie. Finally the secretary said, smiling with evident approval this time:

"'Society' zero."

"Precisely, for what does 'society' represent except its own vanity?"

"And then comes agriculture and mechanics."

For this category Cosmo seemed to be quite as well prepared as for that of science. He took from his pocket a list already made out and handed it to Joseph Smith. It contained forty names marked "cultivators, farmers, gardeners," and fifty "mechanics."

"At the beginning of the twentieth century," he said, "I should have had to reverse that proportion--in fact, my entire list would then have been top-heavy, and I should have been forced to give half of all the places to agriculture. But thanks to our scientific farming, the personnel employed in cultivation is now reduced to a minimum while showing maximum results. I have already stored the ark with seeds of the latest scientifically developed plants, and with all the needed agricultural implements and machinery."

"There yet remain thirteen places 'specially reserved,'" said Smith, referring to the paper.

"I shall fill those later," responded Cosmo, and then added with a thoughtful look, "I have some humble friends."

"The next thing," he continued, after a pause, "is to prepare the letters of invitation. But we have done enough for to-night. I will give you the form to-morrow."

And all this while half the world had been peacefully sleeping, and the other half going about its business, more and more forgetful of recent events, and if it had known what those two men were about it would probably have exploded in a gust of laughter.