

CHAPTER VII

THE WATERS BEGIN TO RISE

Cosmo Versál had begun the construction of his ark in the latter part of June. It was now the end of November. The terrors of the third sign had occurred in September. Since then the sky had nearly resumed its normal color, there had been no storms, but the heat of summer had not relaxed. People were puzzled by the absence of the usual indications of autumn, although vegetation had shriveled on account of the persistent high temperature and constant sunshine.

"An extraordinary year," admitted the meteorologists, "but there have been warm falls before, and it is simply a question of degree. Nature will restore the balance and in good time, and probably we shall have a severe winter."

On the 31st of November, the brassy sky at New York showed no signs of change, when the following dispatch, which most of the newspapers triple-leaded and capped with stunning headlines, quivered down from Churchill, Keewatin:

During last night the level of the water in Hudson Bay rose fully nine feet. Consternation reigned this morning when ship-owners found their wharves inundated, and vessels straining

at short cables. The ice-breaker "Victoria" was lifted on the back of a sandy bar, having apparently been driven by a heavy wave, which must have come from the East. There are other indications that the mysterious rise began with a "bore" from the eastward. It is thought that the vast mass of icebergs set afloat on Davis's Strait by the long continued hot weather melting the shore glaciers, has caused a jam off the mouth of Hudson Strait, and turned the Polar current suddenly into the bay. But this is only a theory. A further rise is anticipated.

Startling as was this news, it might not, by itself, have greatly disturbed the public mind if it had not been followed, in a few hours, by intelligence of immense floods in Alaska and in the basin of the Mackenzie River.

And the next day an etherogram from Obdorsk bordered on the grotesque, and filled many sensitive readers with horror.

It is said that in the vast tundra regions of Northern Siberia the frozen soil had dissolved into a bottomless slough, from whose depths uprose prehistoric mammoths, their long hair matted with mud, and their curved tusks of ivory gleaming like trumpets over the field of their resurrection. The dispatch concluded with a heart-rending account of the loss of a large party of ivory hunters, who, having ventured too far from the more solid land, suddenly found the ground turning to black ooze beneath their feet, and, despite their struggles, were all engulfed

within sight of their friends, who dared not try to approach them.

Cosmo Versál, when interviewed, calmly remarked that the flood was beginning in the north, because it was the northern part of the globe that was nearest the heart of the nebula. The motion of the earth being northward, that end of its axis resembled the prow of a ship.

"But this," he added, "is not the true deluge. The Arctic ice-cap is melting, and the frozen soil is turning into a sponge in consequence of the heat of friction developed in the air by the inrush of nebulous matter. The aqueous vapor, however, has not yet touched the earth. It will begin to manifest its presence within a few days, and then the globe will drink water at every pore. The vapor will finally condense into falling oceans."

"What would you advise people to do?" asked one of the reporters.

The reply was given in a perfectly even voice, without change of countenance:

"Commit suicide! They have practically done that already."

It was nearly two weeks later when the first signs of a change of weather were manifested in middle latitudes. It came on with a rapid veiling of the sky, followed by a thin, misty, persistent rain. The heat grew more oppressive, but the rain did not become heavier, and after a

few days there would be, for several consecutive hours, a clear spell, during which the sun would shine, though with a sickly, pallid light.

There was a great deal of mystification abroad, and nobody felt at ease. Still, the ebullitions of terror that had accompanied the earlier caprices of the elements were not renewed. People were getting used to these freaks.

In the middle of one of the clear spells a remarkable scene occurred at Mineola.

It was like a panorama of the seventh chapter of Genesis.

It was the procession of the beasts.

Cosmo Versál had concluded that the time was come for housing his animals in the ark. He wished to accustom them to their quarters before the voyage began. The resulting spectacle filled the juvenile world with irrepressible joy, and immensely interested their elders.

No march of a menagerie had ever come within sight of equaling this display. Many of the beasts were such as no one there had ever seen before. Cosmo had consulted experts, but, in the end, he had been guided in his choice by his own judgment. Nobody knew as well as he exactly what was wanted. He had developed in his mind a scheme for making the new world that was to emerge from the waters better in every respect

than the old one.

Mingled with such familiar creatures as sheep, cows, dogs, and barn-yard fowls, were animals of the past, which the majority of the onlookers had only read about or seen pictures of, or perhaps, in a few cases, heard described in childhood, by grandfathers long since sleeping in their graves.

Cosmo had rapidly collected them from all parts of the world, but as they arrived in small consignments, and were carried in closed vans, very few persons had any idea of what he was doing.

The greatest sensation was produced by four beautiful horses, which had been purchased at an enormous price from an English duke, who never would have parted with them--for they were almost the last living representatives of the equine race left on the earth--if financial stress had not compelled the sacrifice.

These splendid animals were dapple gray, with long white tails, and flowing manes borne proudly on their arching necks, and as they were led at the head of the procession, snorting at the unwonted scene about them, their eyes bright with excitement, prancing and curvetting, cries of admiration and rounds of applause broke from the constantly growing throngs of spectators.

Those who had only known the horse from pictures and sculptures were

filled with astonishment by its living beauty. People could not help saying to themselves:

"What a pity that the honking auto, in its hundred forms of mechanical ugliness, should have driven these beautiful and powerful creatures out of the world! What could our forefathers have been thinking of?"

A few elephants, collected from African zoölogical gardens, and some giraffes, also attracted a great deal of attention, but the horses were the favorites with the crowd.

Cosmo might have had lions and tigers, and similar beasts, which had been preserved, in larger numbers than the useful horse, but when Joseph Smith suggested their inclusion he shook his head, declaring that it was better that they should perish. As far as possible, he averred, he would eliminate all carnivores.

In some respects, even more interesting to the onlookers than the animals of the past, were the animals of the future that marched in the procession. Few of them had ever been seen outside the experimental stations where they had been undergoing the process of artificial evolution.

There were the stately white Californian cattle, without horns, but of gigantic stature, the cows, it was said, being capable of producing twenty times more milk than their ancestral species, and of a vastly

superior quality.

There were the Australian rabbits, as large as Newfoundland dogs, though short-legged, and furnishing food of the most exquisite flavor; and the Argentine sheep, great balls of snowy wool, moving smartly along on legs three feet in length.

The greatest astonishment was excited by the "grand astoria terrapin," a developed species of diamond-back tortoise, whose exquisitely sculptured convex back, lurching awkwardly as it crawled, rose almost three feet above the ground; and the "new century turkey," which carried its beacon head and staring eyes as high as a tall man's hat.

The end of the procession was formed of animals familiar to everybody, and among them were cages of monkeys (concerning whose educational development Cosmo Versál had theories of his own) and a large variety of birds, together with boxes of insect eggs and chrysalids.

The delight of the boys who had chased after the procession culminated when the animals began to ascend the sloping ways into the ark.

The horses shied and danced, making the metallic flooring resound like a rattle of thunder; the elephants trumpeted; the sheep baaed and crowded themselves into inextricable masses against the guard-rails; the huge new cattle moved lumberingly up the slope, turning their big white heads inquiringly about; the tall turkeys stretched their red coral necks and

gobbled with Brobdingnagian voices; and the great terrapins were ignominiously attached to cables and drawn up the side of the ark, helplessly waving their immense flappers in the air.

And when the sensational entry was finished, the satisfied crowd turned away, laughing, joking, chattering, with never a thought that it was anything more than the most amusing exhibition they had ever seen!

But when they got back in the city streets they met a flying squadron of yelling newsboys, and seizing the papers from their hands read, in big black letters:

"AWFUL FLOOD IN THE MISSISSIPPI!

"Thousands of People Drowned!

"THE STORM COMING THIS WAY!"

It was a startling commentary on the recent scene at the ark, and many turned pale as they read.

But the storm did not come in the way expected. The deluging rains appeared to be confined to the Middle West and the Northwest, while at New York the sky simply grew thicker and seemed to squeeze out moisture in the form of watery dust. This condition lasted for some time, and then came what everybody, even the most skeptical, had been secretly

dreading.

The ocean began to rise!

The first perception of this startling fact, according to a newspaper account, came in a very strange, roundabout way to a man living on the outskirts of the vast area of made ground where the great city had spread over what was formerly the Newark meadows and Newark Bay.

About three o'clock in the morning, this man, who it appears was a policeman off duty, was awakened by scurrying sounds in the house. He struck a light, and seeing dark forms issuing from the cellar, went down to investigate. The ominous gleam of water, reflecting the light of his lamp, told him that the cellar was inundated almost to the top of the walls.

"Come down here, Annie!" he shouted to his wife. "Sure 'tis Cosmo Versál is invadin' the cellar with his flood. The rats are lavin' us."

Seeing that the slight foundation walls were crumbling, he hurried his family into the street, and not too soon, for within ten minutes the house was in ruins.

Neighbors, living in equally frail structures, were awakened, and soon other undermined houses fell. Terror spread through the quarter, and gradually half the city was aroused.

When day broke, residents along the water-front in Manhattan found their cellars flooded, and South and West Streets swimming with water, which was continually rising. It was noted that the hour was that of flood-tide, but nobody had ever heard of a tide so high as this.

Alarm deepened into terror when the time for the tide to ebb arrived and there was no ebbing. On the contrary, the water continued to rise. The government observer at the Highlands telephoned that Sandy Hook was submerged. Soon it was known that Coney Island, Rockaway, and all the seaside places along the south shore of Long Island were under water. The mighty current poured in through the Narrows with the velocity of a mill-race. The Hudson, set backward on its course, rushed northward with a raging bore at its head that swelled higher until it licked the feet of the rock chimneys of the Palisades.

But when the terror inspired by this sudden invasion from the sea was at its height there came unexpected relief. The water began to fall more rapidly than it had risen. It rushed out through the Narrows faster than it had rushed in, and ships, dragged from their anchorage in the upper harbor, were carried out seaward, some being stranded on the sandbanks and shoals in the lower bay.

Now again houses standing on made ground, whose foundations had been undermined, fell with a crash, and many were buried in the ruins.

Notwithstanding the immense damage and loss of life, the recession of the waters immediately had a reassuring effect, and the public, in general, was disposed to be comforted by the explanation of the weather officials, who declared that what had occurred was nothing more than an unprecedentedly high tide, probably resulting from some unforeseen disturbance out at sea.

The phenomenon had been noted all along the Atlantic coast. The chief forecaster ventured the assertion that a volcanic eruption had occurred somewhere on the line from Halifax to Bermuda. He thought that the probable location of the upheaval had been at Munn's Reef, about halfway between those points, and the more he discussed his theory the readier he became to stake his reputation on its correctness, for, he said, it was impossible that any combination of the effects of high and low pressures could have created such a surge of the ocean, while a volcanic wave, combining with the regular oscillation of the tide, could have done it easily.

But Cosmo Versál smiled at this explanation, and said in reply:

"The whole Arctic ice-cap is dissolved, and the condensation of the nebula is at hand. But there is worse behind. When the wave comes back it will rise higher."

As the time for the next flood-tide grew near, anxious eyes were on the watch to see how high the water would go. There was something in the

mere manner of its approach that made the nerves tingle.

It speeded toward the beaches, combing into rollers at an unwonted distance from shore; plunged with savage violence upon the sands of the shallows, as if it would annihilate them; and then, spreading swiftly, ran with terrific speed up the strand, seeming to devour everything it touched. After each recoil it sprang higher and roared louder and grew blacker with the mud that it had ground up from the bottom. Miles inland the ground trembled with the fast-repeated shocks.

Again the Hudson was hurled backward until a huge bore of water burst over the wharves at Albany. Every foot of ground in New York less than twenty feet above the mean high tide level was inundated. The destruction was enormous, incalculable. Ocean liners moored along the wharves were, in some cases, lifted above the level of the neighboring streets, and sent crashing into the buildings along the water-front.

Etherograms told, in broken sentences, of similar experiences on the western coasts of Europe, and from the Pacific came the news of the flooding of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, Tacoma, Seattle, and, in fact, every coast-lying town. On the western coast of South America the incoming waves broke among the foothills of the Andes.

It was as if the mighty basins of the world's two greatest oceans were being rocked to and fro, sending the waters spinning from side to side.

And to add to the horror of the situation, every volcano on the globe seemed to burst simultaneously into activity, probably through the effects of the invasion of sea water into the subterranean fire, while the strain of the unwonted weight thrown upon the coasts broke open the tectonic lines of weakness in the earth's crust, causing the most terrible earthquakes, which destroyed much that the water could not reach.

From Alaska to Patagonia, from Kamchatka through Japan to the East Indies, from Mount Hecla to Vesuvius, Etna, and Teneriffe, the raging oceans were bordered with pouring clouds of volcanic smoke, hurled upward in swift succeeding puffs, as if every crater had become the stack of a stupendous steam-engine driven at its maddest speed; while immense rivers of lava flamed down the mountain flanks and plunged into the invading waters with reverberated roarings, hissings, and explosions that seemed to shake the framework of the globe.

During the second awful shoreward heave of the Atlantic a scene occurred off New York Bay that made the stoutest nerves quiver. A great crowd had collected on the Highlands of the Navesink to watch the ingress of the tidal wave.

Suddenly, afar off, the smoke of an approaching ocean liner was seen. It needed but a glance to show that she was struggling with tremendous surges. Sometimes she sank completely out of sight; then she reappeared, riding high on the waves. Those who had glasses recognized her. Word ran

from mouth to mouth that it was the great Atlantis, the mightiest of the ocean monarchs, of a hundred thousand tons register, coming from Europe, and bearing, without question, many thousands of souls.

She was flying signals of distress, and filling the ether with her inarticulate calls for help, which quavered into every radiograph station within a radius of hundreds of miles.

But, at the same time, she was battling nobly for herself and for the lives of her passengers and crew. From her main peak the Stars and Stripes streamed in the tearing wind. There were many in the watching throngs who personally knew her commander, Captain Basil Brown, and who felt that if any human being could bring the laboring ship through safely, he could. Aid from land was not to be thought of for a moment.

As she swiftly drew nearer, hurled onward by the resistless surges with the speed of an express train, the captain was recognized on his bridge, balancing himself amid the lurches of the vessel; and even at that distance, and in those terrible circumstances, there was something in his bearing perceptible to those who breathlessly watched him, through powerful glasses, which spoke of perfect self-command, entire absence of fear, and iron determination to save his ship or die with her under his feet.

It could be seen that he was issuing orders and watching their execution, but precisely what their nature was, of course, could only be

guessed. His sole hope must be to keep the vessel from being cast ashore. There was no danger from the shoals, for they were by this time deeply covered by the swelling of the sea.

Slowly, slowly, with a terrific straining of mechanic energies, which pressed the jaws of the watchers together with spasmodic sympathy, as if their own nervous power were cooperating in the struggle, the gallant ship bore her head round to face the driving waves. From the ten huge, red stacks columns of inky black smoke poured out as the stokers crammed the furnaces beneath. It was man against nature, human nerve and mechanical science against blind force.

It began to look as if the Atlantis would win the battle. She was now fearfully close to the shore, but her bow had been turned into the very eye of the sea, and one could almost feel the tension of her steel muscles as she seemed to spring to the encounter. The billows that split themselves in quick succession on her sharp stem burst into shooting geysers three hundred feet high.

The hearts of the spectators almost ceased to beat. Their souls were wrapped up with the fate of the brave ship. They forgot the terrors of their own situation, the peril of the coming flood, and saw nothing but the agonized struggle before their eyes. With all their inward strength they prayed against the ocean.

Such a contest could not last long. Suddenly, as the Atlantis

swerved a little aside, a surge that towered above her loftiest deck rushed upon her. She was lifted like a cockleshell upon its crest, her huge hull spun around, and the next minute, with a crash that resounded above the roar of the maddened sea, she was dashed in pieces.

At the very last moment before the vessel disappeared in the whirling breakers, to be strewn in broken and twisted bits of battered metal upon the pounding sands, Captain Basil Brown was seen on the commander's bridge.

No sooner had this tragedy passed than the pent-up terror broke forth, and men ran for their lives, ran for their homes, ran to do something--something, but what?--to save themselves and their dear ones.

For now, at last, they believed!