

## CHAPTER IX

### THE COMPANY OF THE REPRIEVED

How did it happen that Cosmo Versál was able to inform the mob when it assailed the ark that he had no room left?

Who composed his ship's company, whence had they come, and how had they managed to embark without the knowledge of the public?

The explanation is quite simple. It was all due to the tremendous excitement that had prevailed ever since the seas began to overflow. In the universal confusion people had to think of other things nearer their doors than the operations of Cosmo Versál. Since the embarkation of the animals the crowds had ceased to visit the field at Mineola, and it was only occasionally that even a reporter was sent there. Accordingly, there were many hours every day when no curiosity-seekers were in sight of the ark, and at night the neighborhood was deserted; and this state of affairs continued until the sudden panic which led to the attack that has been described.

Cosmo Versál, of course, had every reason to conceal the fact that he was carefully selecting his company. It was a dangerous game to play, and he knew it. The consequence was that he enjoined secrecy upon his invited guests, and conducted them, a few at a time, into the ark,

assuring them that their lives might be in peril if they were recognized. And once under the domain of the fear which led them to accept his invitation, they were no less anxious than he to avoid publicity. Some of them probably desired to avoid recognition through dread of ridicule; for, after all, the flood might not turn out to be so bad as Cosmo had predicted.

So it happened that the ark was filled, little by little, and the public knew nothing about it.

And who composed the throng which, while the awful downpour roared on the ellipsoidal cover of the ark, and shook it to its center and while New York, a few miles away, saw story after story buried under the waters, crowded Cosmo's brilliantly lighted saloon, and raised their voices to a high pitch in order to be heard?

Had all the invitations which he dictated to Joseph Smith after their memorable discussion, and which were sent forth in the utmost haste, flying to every point of the compass, been accepted, and was it the famous leaders of science, the rulers and crowned heads who had passed his critical inspection that were now knocking elbows under the great dome of levium? Had kings and queens stolen incognito under the shelter of the ark, and magnates of the financial world hidden themselves there?

It would have been well for them all if they had been there. But, in fact, many of those to whom the invitations had gone did not even take

the trouble to thank their would-be savior. A few, however, who did not come in person, sent responses. Among these was the President of the United States. Mr. Samson's letter was brief but characteristic. It read:

To COSMO VERSÁL, ESQ.

Sir:

The President directs me to say that he is grateful for your invitation, and regrets that he cannot accept it. He is informed by those to whose official advice he feels bound to listen, that the recent extraordinary events possess no such significance as you attach to them.

Respectfully, FOR THE PRESIDENT,

JAMES JENKS, Secretary.

It must be remembered that this letter was written before the oceanic overflow began. After that, possibly, the President and his advisers changed their opinion. But then communication by rail was cut off, and as soon as the downpour from the sky commenced the aero express lines were abandoned. The airships would have been deluged, and blown to destruction by the tremendous gusts which, at intervals, packed the rain-choked air itself into solid billows of water.

None of the rulers of the old world responded, but about half the men of science, and representatives of the other classes that Cosmo had set down on his list, were wise enough to accept, and they hurried to New York before the means of transit by land and sea were destroyed.

Among these were Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, Germans, Austrians, Poles, people from the Balkan states, Swedes, Danes, Russians, and a few from India, China, and Japan. The clatter of their various tongues made a very Babel inside the ark, when they talked to one another in groups, but nearly all of them were able to speak English, which, after many years of experiment, had been adopted as the common language for transacting the world's affairs.

There was another letter, which Cosmo read with real regret, although hardly with surprise. It was from Professor Pludder. Instead of expressing gratitude for the invitation, as the President, trained in political blandiloquence, had done, Professor Pludder indulged in denunciation.

"You are insane," he said. "You do not know what you are talking about. Your letter is an insult to science. These inundations" (this, too, was written before the sky had opened its flood-gates) "are perfectly explicable by the ordinary laws of nature. Your talk of a nebula is so ridiculous that it deserves no reply. If any lunatic accepts your absurd invitation, and goes into your 'ark,' he will find himself in Bedlam, where he ought to be."

"I guess you were right," Cosmo remarked to Joseph Smith, after reading this outburst. "Pludder would not contribute to the regeneration of mankind. We are better off without him."

But Cosmo Versál was mistaken in thinking he had heard the last of Abiel Pludder. The latter was destined to show that he was hardly a less remarkable specimen of homo sapiens than the big-headed prophet of the second deluge himself.

As soon as it became evident that there would be room to spare in the ark, Cosmo set at work to fill up the list. He went over his categories once more, but now, owing to the pressure of time, he was obliged to confine his selections to persons within easy reach. They came, nearly all, from New York, or its vicinity; and since these last invitations went out just on the eve of the events described in the last two chapters, there was no delay in the acceptances, and the invitees promptly presented themselves in person.

Cosmo's warning to them of the necessity of secrecy was superfluous, for the selfishness of human nature never had a better illustration than they afforded. The lucky recipients of the invitations stole away without a word of farewell, circumspectly disappearing, generally at night, and often in disguise; and when the attack occurred on the ark, there were, behind the portholes, many anxious eyes cautiously staring out and recognizing familiar faces in the mob, while the owners of those

eyes trembled in their shoes lest their friends might succeed in forcing an entrance. After all, it was to be doubted if Cosmo Versál, with all his vigilance, had succeeded in collecting a company representing anything above the average quality of the race.

But there was one thing that did great credit to his heart. When he found that he had room unoccupied, before adding to his lists he consented to take more than two children in a family. It was an immense relief, for--it must be recorded--there were some who, in order to qualify themselves, had actually abandoned members of their own families! Let it also be said, however, that many, when they found that the conditions imposed were inexorable, and that they could only save themselves by leaving behind others as dear to them as their own lives, indignantly refused, and most of these did not even reply to the invitations.

It was another indication of Cosmo's real humanity, as well as of his shrewdness, that, as far as they were known, and could be reached, the persons who had thus remained true to the best instincts of nature were the first to receive a second invitation, with an injunction to bring their entire families. So it happened that, after all, there were aged men and women, as well as children in arms, mingled in that remarkable assemblage.

It will be recalled that thirteen places had been specially reserved, to be filled by Cosmo Versál's personal friends. His choice of these

revealed another pleasing side of his mind. He took thirteen men and women who had been, in one capacity or another, employed for many years in his service. Some of them were old family servants that had been in his father's house.

"Every one of these persons," he said to Joseph Smith, "is worth his weight in gold. Their disinterested fidelity to duty is a type of character that almost became extinct generations ago, and no more valuable leaven could be introduced into the society of the future. Rather than leave them, I would stay behind myself."

Finally there was the crew. This comprised one hundred and fifty members, all of them chosen from the body of engineers, mechanics, and workmen who had been employed in the construction of the ark. Cosmo himself was, of course, the commander, but he had for his lieutenants skilled mariners, electrical and mechanical engineers, and men whom he himself had instructed in the peculiar duties that would fall to them in the navigation and management of the ark, every detail of which he had laboriously worked out with a foresight that seemed all but superhuman.

All of the passengers and crew were aboard when the baffled mob retreated from Mineola, and some, when that danger was past, wished to descend to the ground, and go and look at the rising waters, which had not yet invaded the neighborhood. But Cosmo absolutely forbade any departures from the ark. The condensation of the nebula, he declared, was likely to begin any minute, and the downpour would be so fierce that

a person might be drowned in the open field.

It came even sooner than he had anticipated, with the results that we have already noted in New York. At first many thought that the ark itself would be destroyed, so dreadful was the impact of the falling water. The women and children, and some of the men, were seized with panic, and Cosmo had great difficulty in reassuring them.

"The flood will not reach us for several hours yet," he said. "The level of the water must rise at least a hundred feet more before we shall be afloat. Inside here we are perfectly safe. The ark is exceedingly strong and absolutely tight. You have nothing to fear."

Then he ordered an ingenious sound-absorbing screen, which he had prepared, to be drawn over the great ceiling of the saloon, the effect of which was to shut out the awful noise of the water roaring upon the roof of the ark. A silence that was at first startling by contrast to the preceding din prevailed as soon as the screen was in place.

Amid a hush of expectancy, Cosmo now mounted a dais at one end of the room. Never before had the intellectual superiority of the man seemed so evident. His huge "dome of thought," surmounting his slight body, dominated the assembly like the front of Jove. Chairs near him were occupied by Professor Jeremiah Moses, Professor Abel Able, Professor Alexander Jones, and the two "speculative geniuses" whom he had named to Joseph Smith. These were Costaké Theriade, of Rumania, a tall, dark,



high-browed thinker, who was engaged in devising ways to extract and recover interatomic energy; and Sir Wilfred Athelstone, whose specialty was bio-chemistry, and who was said to have produced amazing results in artificial parthenogenesis and the production of new species.

As soon as attention was concentrated upon him, Cosmo Versál began to speak.

"My friends," he said, "the world around us is now sinking beneath a flood that will not be arrested until America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia have disappeared. We stand at the opening of a new age. You alone who are here assembled, and your descendants, will constitute the population of the new world that is to be.

"In this ark, which owes its existence to the foreseeing eye of science, you will be borne in safety upon the bosom of the battling waters, and we will disembark upon the first promising land that reappears, and begin the plantation and development of a new society of men and women, which, I trust, will afford a practical demonstration of the principles of eugenics.

"I have, as far as possible, and as far as the pitiful blindness of mankind permitted me to go, selected and assembled here representatives of the best tendencies of humanity. You are a chosen remnant, and the future of this planet depends upon you.

"I have been fortunate in securing the companionship of men of science who will be able to lead and direct. The ark is fully provisioned for a period which must exceed the probable duration of the flood. I have taken pains not to overcrowd it, and every preparation has been made for any contingencies which may arise.

"It is inexpressibly sad to part thus with the millions of our fellow-beings who would not heed the warnings that were lavished upon them; but, while our hearts may be rent with the thought, it is our duty to cast off the burden of vain regrets and concentrate all our energies upon the great work before us.

"I salute," he continued, raising his voice and lifting a glass of wine from the little table before him, "the world of the past--may its faults be forgotten--and the world of the future--may it rise on the wings of science to nobler prospects!"

He poured out the wine like a libation; and as his voice ceased to echo, and he sank into his seat, an uncontrollable wave of emotion ran over the assembly. Many of the women wept, and the men conversed in whispers. After a considerable interval, during which no one spoke above his breath, Professor Able Abel arose and said:

"The gratitude which we owe to this man"--indicating Cosmo Versál--"can best be expressed, not in words, but by acts. He has led us thus far; he must continue to lead us to the end. We were blind, while he was full of

light. It will become us hereafter to heed well whatever he may say. I now wish to ask if he can foresee where upon the re-emerging planet a foothold is first likely to be obtained. Where lies our land of promise?"

"I can answer that question," Cosmo replied, "only in general terms. You are all aware that the vast table-land of Tibet is the loftiest region upon the globe. In its western part it lies from fourteen to seventeen or eighteen thousand feet above the ordinary level of the sea. Above it rise the greatest mountain peaks in existence. Here the first considerable area is likely to be uncovered. It is upon the Pamirs, the 'Roof of the World,' that we shall probably make our landing."

"May I ask," said Professor Abel Able, "in what manner you expect the waters of the flood to be withdrawn, after the earth is completely drowned?"

"That," was the reply, "was one of the fundamental questions that I examined, but I do not care to enter into a discussion of it now. I may simply say that it is not only upon the disappearance of the waters that our hopes depend, but upon circumstances that I shall endeavor to make clear hereafter. The new cradle of mankind will be located near the old one, and the roses of the Vale of Cashmere will canopy it."

Cosmo Versál's words made a profound impression upon his hearers, and awoke thoughts that carried their minds off into strange reveries. No

more questions were asked, and gradually the assemblage broke up into groups of interested talkers.

It was now near midnight. Cosmo, beckoning Professor Abel Able, Professor Alexander Jones, and Professor Jeremiah Moses to accompany him, made his way out of the saloon, and, secretly opening one of the gangway doors, they presently stood, sheltering themselves from the pouring rain, in a position which enabled them to look toward New York.

Nothing, of course, was visible through the downpour; but they were startled at hearing fearful cries issuing out of the darkness. The rural parts of the city, filled with gardens and villas, lay round within a quarter of a mile of the ark, and the sound, accelerated by the water-charged atmosphere, struck upon their ears with terrible distinctness. Sometimes, when a gust of wind blew the rain into their faces, the sound deepened into a long, despairing wail, which seemed to be borne from afar off, mingled with the roar of the descending torrent--the death-cry of the vast metropolis!

"Merciful Heaven, I cannot endure this!" cried Professor Moses.

"Go to my cabin," Cosmo yelled in his ear, "and take the others with you. I will join you there in a little while. I wish to measure the rate of rise of the water."

They gladly left him, and fled into the interior of the ark. Cosmo

procured an electric lamp; and the moment its light streamed out he perceived that the water had already submerged the great cradle in which the ark rested, and was beginning to creep up the metallic sides. He lowered a graduated tape into it, provided with an automatic register. In a few minutes he had completed his task, and then he went to rejoin his late companions in his cabin.

"In about an hour," he said to them, "we shall be afloat. The water is rising at the rate of one-thirtieth of an inch per second."

"No more than that?" asked Professor Jones with an accent of surprise.

"That is quite enough," Cosmo replied. "One-thirtieth of an inch per second means two inches in a minute, and ten feet in an hour. In twenty-four hours from now the water will stand two hundred and forty feet above its present level, and then only the tallest structures in New York will lift their tops above it, if, indeed, they are not long before overturned by undermining or the force of the waves."

"But it will be a long time before the hills and highlands are submerged," suggested Professor Jones. "Are you perfectly sure that the flood will cover them?"

Cosmo Versál looked at his interlocutor, and slowly shook his head.

"It is truly a disappointment to me," he said at length, "to find that,

even now, remnants of doubt cling to your minds. I tell you that the nebula is condensing at its maximum rate. It is likely to continue to do so for at least four months. In four months, at the rate of two inches per minute, the level of the water will rise 28,800 feet. There is only one peak in the world which is surely known to attain a slightly greater height than that--Mount Everest, in the Himalayas. Even in a single month the rise will amount to 7,200 feet. That is 511 feet higher than the loftiest mountain in the Appalachians. In one month, then, there will be nothing visible of North America east of the Rockies. And in another month they will have gone under."

Not another word was said. The three professors sat, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, staring at Cosmo Versál, whose bald head was crowned with an aureole by the electric light that beamed from the ceiling, while, with a gold pocket pencil, he fell to figuring upon a sheet of paper.