

## CHAPTER X

### THE LAST DAY OF NEW YORK

While Cosmo Versál was calculating, from the measured rise of the water, the rate of condensation of the nebula, and finding that it added twenty-nine trillion two hundred and ninety billion tons to the weight of the earth every minute--a computation that seemed to give him great mental satisfaction--the metropolis of the world, whose nucleus was the island of Manhattan, and every other town and city on the globe that lay near the ordinary level of the sea, was swiftly sinking beneath the swelling flood.

Everywhere, over all the broad surface of the planet, a wail of despair arose from the perishing millions, beaten down by the water that poured from the unpitying sky. Even on the highlands the situation was little better than in the valleys. The hills seemed to have been turned into the crests of cataracts from which torrents of water rushed down on all sides, stripping the soil from the rocks, and sending the stones and bowlders roaring and leaping into the lowlands and the gorges. Farmhouses, barns, villas, trees, animals, human beings--all were swept away together.

Only on broad elevated plateaus, where higher points rose above the general level, were a few of the inhabitants able to find a kind of refuge. By seeking these high places, and sheltering themselves as best they could

among immovable rocks, they succeeded, at least, in delaying their fate. Notwithstanding the fact that the atmosphere was filled with falling water, they could yet breathe, if they kept the rain from striking directly in their faces. It was owing to this circumstance, and to some extraordinary occurrences which we shall have to relate, that the fate of the human race was not precisely that which Cosmo Versál had predicted.

We quitted the scene in New York when the shadow of night had just fallen, and turned the gloom of the watery atmosphere into impenetrable darkness. The events of that dreadful night we shall not attempt to depict. When the hours of daylight returned, and the sun should have brightened over the doomed city, only a faint, phosphorescent luminosity filled the sky. It was just sufficient to render objects dimly visible. If the enclosing nebula had remained in a cloud-like state it would have cut off all light, but having condensed into raindrops, which streamed down in parallel lines, except when sudden blasts of wind swept them into a confused mass, the sunlight was able to penetrate through the interstices, aided by the transparency of the water, and so a slight but variable illumination was produced.

In this unearthly light many tall structures of the metropolis, which had as yet escaped the effects of undermining by the rushing torrents in the streets, towered dimly toward the sky, shedding streams of water from every cornice. Most of the buildings of only six or eight stories had already been submerged, with the exception of those that stood on the high grounds in the upper part of the island, and about Spuyten Duyvil.

In the towers and upper stories of the lofty buildings still standing in the heart of the city, crowds of unfortunates assembled, gazing with horror at the spectacles around them, and wringing their hands in helpless despair. When the light brightened they could see below them the angry water, creeping every instant closer to their places of refuge, beaten into foam by the terrible downpour, and sometimes, moved by a mysterious impulse, rising in sweeping waves which threatened to carry everything before them.

Every few minutes one of the great structures would sway, crack, crumble, and go down into the seething flood, the cries of the lost souls being swallowed up in the thunder of the fall. And when this occurred within sight of neighboring towers yet intact, men and women could be seen, some with children in their arms, madly throwing themselves from windows and ledges, seeking quick death now that hope was no more!

Strange and terrible scenes were enacted in the neighborhood of what had been the water-fronts. Most of the vessels moored there had been virtually wrecked by the earlier invasion of the sea. Some had been driven upon the shore, others had careened and been swamped at their wharves. But a few had succeeded in cutting loose in time to get fairly afloat. Some tried to go out to sea, but were wrecked by running against obstacles, or by being swept over the Jersey flats. Some met their end by crashing into the submerged pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Others steered up the course of the Hudson River, but that had become a narrow sea, filled with floating

and tossing debris of every sort, and all landmarks being invisible, the luckless navigators lost their way, and perished, either through collisions with other vessels, or by driving upon a rocky shore.

The fate of the gigantic building containing the offices of the municipal government, which stood near the ancient City Hall, and which had been the culminating achievement of the famous epoch of "sky-scrappers," was a thing so singular, and at the same time dramatic, that in a narrative dealing with less extraordinary events than we are obliged to record it would appear altogether incredible.

With its twoscore lofty stories, and its massive base, this wonderful structure rose above the lower quarter of the city, and dominated it, like a veritable Tower of Babel, made to defy the flood. Many thousands of people evidently regarded it in that very light, and they had fled from all quarters, as soon as the great downpour began, to find refuge within its mountainous flanks. There were men--clerks, merchants, brokers from the downtown offices--and women and children from neighboring tenements.

By good chance, but a few weeks before, this building had been fitted with a newly invented system of lighting, by which each story was supplied with electricity from a small dynamo of its own, and so it happened that now the lamps within were all aglow, lightening the people's hearts a little with their cheering radiance.

Up and up they climbed, the water ever following at their heels, from floor

to floor, until ten of the great stages were submerged. But there were more than twice as many stages yet above, and they counted them with unexpiring hope, telling one another, with the assurance of desperation, that long before the flood could attain so stupendous an altitude the rain would surely cease, and the danger, as far as they were concerned, would pass away.

"See! See!" cries one. "It is stopping! It is coming no higher! I've been watching that step, and the water has stopped! It hasn't risen for ten minutes!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" yells the crowd behind and above. And the glad cry is taken up and reverberated from story to story until it bursts wildly out into the rain-choked air at the very summit.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! We are saved! The flood has stopped!"

Men madly embrace each other. Women burst into tears and hug their children to their breasts, filled with a joy and thankfulness that can find no expression in words.

"You are wrong," says another man, crouching beside him who first spoke.

"It has not stopped--it is still rising."

"What! I tell you it has stopped," snaps the other. "Look at that step!

It stopped right below it."

"You've been watching the wrong step. It's rising!"

"You fool! Shut your mouth! I say it has stopped."

"No, it has not."

"It has! It has!"

"Look at that step, then! See the water just now coming over it."

The obstinate optimist stares a moment, turns pale, and then, with an oath, strikes his more clear-headed neighbor in the face! And the excited crowd behind, with the blind instinctive feeling that, somehow, he has robbed them of the hope which was but now as the breath of life to them, strike him and curse him, too.

But he had seen only too clearly.

With the steady march of fate--two inches a minute, as Cosmo Versál had accurately measured it--the water still advances and climbs upward.

In a little while they were driven to another story, and then to another.

But hope would not down. They could not believe that the glad news, which had so recently filled them with joy, was altogether false. The water must have stopped rising once; it had been seen. Then, it would

surely stop again, stop to rise no more.

Poor deluded creatures! With the love of life so strong within them, they could not picture, in their affrighted minds, the terrible consummation to which they were being slowly driven, when, jammed into the narrow chambers at the very top of the mighty structure, their remorseless enemy would seize them at last.

But they were nearer the end than they could have imagined even if they had accepted and coolly reasoned upon the facts that were so plain before them. And, after all, it was not to come upon them only after they had fought their way to the highest loft and into the last corner.

A link of this strange chain of fatal events now carries us to the spot where the United States Navy Yard in Brooklyn once existed. That place was sunk deep beneath the waters. All of the cruisers, battleships, and other vessels that had been at anchor or at moorings there had gone under. One only, the boast of the American navy, the unconquerable Uncle Sam, which, in the last great war that the world had known, had borne the starry flag to victories whose names broke men's voices and filled their eyes with tears of pride, had escaped, through the incomparable seamanship of Captain Robert Decatur, who had been her commander for thirty years.

But though the Uncle Sam managed to float upon the rising flood, she was unable to get away because of the obstructions lodged about the great bridges that spanned the East River. A curious eddy that the raging

currents formed over what was once the widest part of that stream kept her revolving round and round, never departing far in any direction, and, with majestic strength, riding down or brushing aside the floating timbers, wooden houses, and other wreckage that pounded furiously against her mighty steel sides.

Just at the time when the waters had mounted to the eighteenth story of the beleaguered Municipal Building, a sudden change occurred in these currents. They swept westward with resistless force, and the Uncle Sam was carried directly over the drowned city. First she encountered the cables of the Manhattan Bridge, striking them near the western tower, and, swinging round, wrenched the tower itself from its foundations and hurled it beneath the waters.

Then she rushed on, riding with the turbid flood high above the buried roofs, finding no other obstruction in her way until she approached the Municipal Building, which was stoutly resisting the push of the waves.

Those who were near the windows and on the balconies, on the eastern side of the building, saw the great battleship coming out of the gray gloom like some diluvian monster, and before they could comprehend what it was, it crashed, prow on, into the steel-ribbed walls, driving them in as if they had been the armored sides of an enemy.



So tremendous was the momentum of the striking mass that the huge vessel passed, like a projectile, through walls and floors and partitions. But as she emerged in the central court the whole vast structure came thundering down upon her, and ship and building together sank beneath the boiling waves.

But out of the awful tangle of steel girders, that whipped the air and the water as if some terrible spidery life yet clung to them, by one of those miracles of chance which defy all the laws of probability and reason, a small boat of levium, that had belonged to the Uncle Sam, was cast forth, and floated away, half submerged but unsinkable; and clinging to its thwarts, struggling for breath, insane with terror, were two men, the sole survivors of all those thousands.

One of them was a seaman who had taken refuge, with a crowd of comrades, in the boat before the battleship rushed down upon the building. All of his comrades had been hurled out and lost when the blow came, while his present companion was swept in and lodged against the thwarts. And so those two waifs drove off in the raging waves. Both of them were bleeding from many wounds, but they had no fatal hurts.

The boat, though filled with water, was so light that it could not sink. Moreover, it was ballasted, and amid all its wild gyrations it kept right side up. Even the ceaseless downpour from the sky could not drive it beneath the waves.

After a while the currents that had been setting westward changed their direction, and the boat was driven toward the north. It swept on past toppling skyscrapers until it was over the place where Madison Square once spread its lawns, looked down upon by gigantic structures, most of which had now either crumbled and disappeared or were swaying to their fall. Here there was an eddy, and the boat turned round and round amid floating debris until two other draggled creatures, who had been clinging to floating objects, succeeded by desperate efforts in pulling themselves into it. Others tried but failed, and no one lent a helping hand. Those who were already in the boat neither opposed nor aided the efforts of those who battled to enter it. No words were heard in the fearful uproar--only inarticulate cries.

Suddenly the current changed again, and the boat, with its dazed occupants, was hurried off in the direction of the Hudson. Night was now beginning once more to drop an obscuring curtain over the scene, and under that curtain the last throes of drowning New York were hidden. When the sun again faintly illuminated the western hemisphere the whole Atlantic seaboard was buried under the sea.

As the water rose higher, Cosmo Versál's Ark at last left its cradle, and cumbrously floated off, moving first eastward, then turning in the direction of Brooklyn and Manhattan. Cosmo had his engines in operation, but their full power was not developed as soon as he had expected, and the great vessel drifted at the will of the currents and the wind, the latter coming now from one side and now from another, rising at times to

hurricane strength and then dying away until only a spanking breeze swept the ever-falling rain into swishing sheets. Occasionally the wind failed entirely, and for many minutes at a time the water fell in vertical streams.

At length the motive power of the Ark was developed, and it began to obey its helm. From the shelter of a "captain's bridge," constructed at the forward end of the huge levium dome that covered the vessel, Cosmo Versál, with Captain Arms, a liberally bewhiskered, veteran navigator in whose skill he confided, peered over the interminable waste of waters. There was nothing in sight except floating objects that had welled up from the drowned city and the surrounding villages. Here and there the body of an animal or a human being was seen in the tossing waves, and Cosmo Versál sadly shook his head as he pointed them out, but the stout mariner at his side chewed his tobacco, and paid attention only to his duties, shouting orders from time to time through a speaking-tube, or touching an electric button.

Cosmo Versál brought a rain-gage and again and again allowed it to fill itself. The story was always the same--two inches per minute, ten feet per hour, the water mounted.

The nebula had settled down to regular work, and, if Cosmo's calculations were sound, there would be no intermission for four months.

After the power of the propellers had been developed the Ark was steered

southeastward. Its progress was very slow. In the course of eight hours it had not gone more than fifty miles. The night came on, and the speed was reduced until there was only sufficient way to insure the command of the vessel's movements. Powerful searchlights were employed as long as the stygian darkness continued.

With the return of the pallid light, at what should have been daybreak, Cosmo and his navigator were again at their post. In fact, the former had not slept at all, keeping watch through the long hours, with Captain Arms within easy call.

As the light became stronger, Cosmo said to the captain:

"Steer toward New York. I wish to see if the last of the tall buildings on the upper heights have gone under."

"It will be very dangerous to go that way," objected Captain Arms. "There are no landmarks, and we may strike a snag."

"Not if we are careful," replied Cosmo. "All but the highest ground is now buried very deep."

"It is taking a fool's risk," growled Captain Arms, through his brush, but nevertheless he obeyed.

It was true that they had nothing to go by. The air was too thick with

water, and the light too feeble for them to be able to lay their course by sighting the distant hills of New Jersey which yet remained above the level of the flood. Still, by a kind of seaman's instinct, Captain Arms made his way, until he felt that he ought to venture no farther. He had just turned to Cosmo Versál with the intention of voicing his protest when the Ark careened slightly, shivered from stem to stern, and then began a bumping movement that nearly threw the two men from their feet.

"We are aground!" cried the captain, and instantly turned a knob that set in motion automatic machinery which cut off the engines from the propellers, and at the same time slowed down the engines themselves.