

CHAPTER XVI

MUTINY IN THE ARK

We left Cosmo Versál and his arkful of the flower of mankind in the midst of what was formerly the Atlantic Ocean, but which had now expanded over so many millions of square miles that had once been the seats of vast empires that to an eye looking at it with a telescope from Mars it would have been unrecognizable.

All of eastern North America, all of South America to the feet of the Andes, all but the highest mountains of Europe, nearly all of Africa, except some of the highlands of the south, all of northern and southwestern Asia, as well as the peninsula of India, all of China and the adjacent lands and islands except the lofty peaks, the whole of Australia, and the archipelagoes of the Pacific, had become parts of the floor of a mighty ocean which rolled unbroken from pole to pole.

The Great Deep had resumed its ancient reign, and what was left of the habitable globe presented to view only far separated islands and the serrated tops of such ranges as the Alps, the Caucasus, the Himalayas, and the Andes. The astonished inhabitants of the ocean depths now swam over the ruins of great cities, and brushed with their fins the chiseled capitals of columns that had supported the proudest structures of human hands.

We have seen how the unexpected arrest of the flood had left Cosmo uncertain as to the course that he ought to pursue. But he did not long remain in doubt. He was sure that the downpour would be resumed after an interval which at the most could not exceed a few weeks, and he resolved to continue his way toward the future land of promise in Asia.

But he thought that he would have time to turn his prow in the direction of Europe, for he felt a great desire to know by actual inspection to what height the water had attained. He was certain that it could not be less than he had estimated--the indications of his rain-gage had been too unvarying to admit of doubt on that point--but he had no means of direct measurement since he could not sound the tremendous depths beneath the Ark.

After long meditation on the probable effects of the descending columns of water which he had seen, he concluded that they might have added more rapidly than he first supposed to the increase of the general level.

Besides, he reflected that there was no proof that the general downpour might not have been greater over some parts of the earth than others. All these doubts could be dissipated if he could get a good look at some lofty mountain range, such as the Sierra Nevada of Spain, or the Pyrenees, or, if he could venture within sight of them, the Alps.

So he said to Captain Arms:

"Steer for the coast of Europe."

The fine weather had produced a good effect upon the spirits of the company. Not only were the ports and the gangways all open, but Cosmo ordered the temporary removal of rows of adjustable plates on the sides of the vessel, which transformed the broad outer gangways, running its whole length, into delightful promenade decks. There, in cozy chairs, and protected with rugs, the passengers sat, fanned by a refreshing breeze, and dazzled by the splendor of the ocean.

They recalled, by their appearance, a shipload of summer tourists bound for the wonders and pleasures of foreign parts. This likeness to a pleasure cruise was heightened by the constant attentions of the crew, under Cosmo's orders, who carried about refreshing drinks and lunches, and conducted themselves like regular ocean "stewards."

It seemed impossible to believe that the world had been drowned, and some almost persuaded themselves that the whole thing was a dream.

It must not be supposed that the thousand-odd persons who composed this remarkable ship's company were so hard-hearted, so selfish, so forgetful, so morally obtuse, that they never thought of the real horror of their situation, and of the awful calamity that had overwhelmed so many millions of their fellow-creatures. They thought of all that only too seriously and in spite of themselves. The women especially were overwhelmed by it. But they did not wish to dwell upon it, and Cosmo Versál did not wish that

they should.

At night he had musicians play in the grand saloon; he distributed books among the passengers from a large library which he had selected; and at last he had the stage set, and invited his friends, the players, to entertain the company.

But he would have no plays but those of Shakespeare.

There were, probably, not half a dozen persons in the Ark who had ever seen representations of these great dramas, and very few who had read them, so that they had the advantage of complete novelty.

The play selected for the first representation was the tragedy of "King Lear," a strange choice, it would, at first sight, seem, but Cosmo Versál had a deep knowledge of human nature. He knew that only tragedy would be endured there, and that it must be tragedy so profound and overmastering that it would dominate the feelings of those who heard and beheld it. It was the principle of immunizing therapeutics, where poison paralyzes poison.

It came out as he anticipated. The audience, unused to such depth of dramatic passion, for the plays to which they had been accustomed had been far from the Shakespearian standard, was wholly absorbed in the development of the tragedy. It was a complete revelation to them, and they were carried out of themselves, and found in the sympathy awakened by this

heart-crushing spectacle of the acme of human woe an unconscious solace for their own moral anguish.

Afterward Cosmo put upon the stage "Hamlet," and "Othello," and "Macbeth," and "Coriolanus," and "Julius Caesar," but he avoided, for the present, the less tragic dramas. And all of them, being new to the hearers, produced an enormous effect.

On alternate nights he substituted music for the drama, and, as this was confined to the most majestic productions of the great masters of the past, many of whose works, like those of Shakespeare, had long been neglected if not forgotten, their power over the spirits of the company was, perhaps, even more pronounced.

Cosmo Versál was already beginning the education of his chosen band of race regenerators, while he mused upon the wonders that the science of eugenics would achieve after the world should have reemerged from the waters.

One of the most singular effects of the music was that produced upon the insane billionaire, Amos Blank. He had been confined in the room that Cosmo had assigned to him, and was soothed, whenever Cosmo could find time to visit him, with pretended acquiescence in his crazed notion that the trip of the Ark was part of a scheme to "corner" the resources of the world.

Cosmo persuaded him that the secret was unknown except to themselves, and that it was essential to success that he (Blank) should remain in retirement, and accordingly the latter expressed no desire to leave his place of imprisonment, which he regarded as the headquarters of the combination, passing hours in covering sheets of paper with columns of figures, which he fancied represented the future profits of the enterprise.

One night when a symphony of Beethoven was to be played, Cosmo led Amos Blank through the crowded saloon and placed him near the musicians. He resisted at first, and when he saw the crowd he drew back, exclaiming:

"What? Not overboard yet?"

But Cosmo soothed him with some whispered promise, and he took his seat, glancing covertly around him. Then the instruments struck up, and immediately fixed his attention. As the musical theme developed his eyes gradually lost their wild look, and a softened expression took its place. He sank lower in his seat, and rested his head upon his hand. His whole soul seemed, at last, to be absorbed in the music. When it was finished Blank was a changed man.

Then Cosmo clearly explained to him all that had happened.

After the first overwhelming effect of his reawakening to the realities of his situation had passed, the billionaire was fully restored to all

his faculties. Henceforth he mingled with the other passengers and, as if the change that had come over his spirit had had greater results than the simple restoration of sanity, he became one of the most popular and useful members of Cosmo Versál's family of pilgrims.

Among the other intellectual diversions which Cosmo provided was something quite unique, due to his own mental bias. This consisted of "conferences," held in the grand saloon, afternoons, in the presence of the entire company, at which the principal speakers were his two "speculative geniuses," Costaké Theriade and Sir Wilfrid Athelstone. They did not care very much for one another and each thought that the time allotted to the other was wasted.

Theriade wished to talk continuously of the infinite energy stored up in the atoms of matter, and of the illimitable power which the release of that energy, by the system that he had all but completed, would place at the disposition of man; and at the same time Sir Athelstone could with difficulty be held in leash while he impatiently awaited an opportunity to explain how excessively near he had arrived to the direct production of protoplasm from inanimate matter, and the chemical control of living cells, so that henceforth man could people or unpeople the earth as he liked.

One evening, when everybody not on duty was in bed, Captain Arms, with his whiskers fairly bristling, entered Cosmo's cabin, where the latter was dictating to Joseph Smith, and softly approaching his chief, with a furtive glance round the room, stooped and whispered something in his ear. A

startled, though incredulous, expression appeared on Cosmo's face, and he sprang to his feet, but before speaking he obeyed a sign from the captain and told Smith to leave the room. Then he locked the door and returned to his table, where he dropped into a chair, exclaiming in a guarded voice:

"Great Heaven, can this be possible! Have you not made a mistake?"

"No," returned the captain in a stridulous whisper, "I have made no mistake. I'm absolutely sure. If something is not done instantly we are lost!"

"This is terrible!" returned Cosmo, taking his head in his hands. "You say it is that fellow Campo? I never liked his looks."

"He is the ringleader," replied the captain. "The first suspicion of what he was up to came to me through an old sailor who has been with me on many a voyage. He overheard Campo talking with another man and he listened. Trust an old sea dog to use his ears and keep himself out of notice."

"And what did they say?"

"Enough to freeze the marrow in your bones! Campo proposed to begin by throwing 'old Versál' and me into the sea, and then he said, with us gone, and nobody but a lot of muddle-headed scientists to deal with, it would be easy to take the ship; seize all the treasure in her; make everybody who would not join the mutiny walk the plank, except the women, and steer for

some place where they could land and lead a jolly life.

"You see,' says Campo, 'this flood is a fake. There ain't going to be no more flood; it's only a shore wash. But there's been enough of it to fix things all right for us. We've got the world in our fist! There's millions of money aboard this ship, and there's plenty of female beauty, and we've only got to reach out and take it."

Cosmo Versál's brow darkened as he listened, and a look that would have cowed the mutineers if they could have seen it came into his eyes. His hand nervously clutched a paper-knife which broke in his grasp, as he said in a voice trembling with passion:

"They don't know me--you don't know me. Show me the proofs of this conspiracy. Who are the others? Campo and his friend can't be alone."

"Alone!" exclaimed the captain, unconsciously raising his voice. "There's a dozen as black-handed rascals in it as ever went unswung."

"Do you know them?"

"Jim Waters does."

"Why haven't you told me sooner? How long has it been going on?"

"Almost ever since the deluge stopped, I think; but it was only last night

that Waters got on the track of it, and only now that he told me. This fellow that Waters heard Campo talking to is plainly a new recruit. I say there are a dozen, because Waters has found out that number; but I don't know but that there may be a hundred."

"How did these wretches get aboard?" demanded Cosmo, fiercely opening and shutting his fists.

"Excuse me," said the captain, "but that is up to you to say."

"So it is," replied Cosmo, with a grim look; "and it's 'up to me' to say what'll become of them. I see how it is, they must have got in with the last lot that I took--under assumed names, very likely. I've been more than once on the point of calling that man Campo up and questioning him. I was surprised by his hangdog look the first time I saw him. But I have been so busy."

"You'll have to get busy in another sense if you mean to save this ship and your life," said the captain earnestly.

"So I shall. Are you armed? No? Then take these--and use 'em when I give the word."

He handed the captain two heavy automatic pistols, and put a pair in his own side pockets.

"Now," he continued, "the first thing is to make sure that we've got the right men--and all of them. Call in Joseph Smith."

The captain went to the door, and as he approached it there was a knock. He turned the key and cautiously opened a crack to look out. The door was instantly slammed in his face, and six men rushed in, with Campo, a burly, black-browed fellow, at their head. Three of the men threw the captain on his back, and pinioned his hands before he could draw a weapon, while Campo and the others sprang toward Cosmo Versál, Campo pointing a pistol at his head.

"It's all up, Mr. Versál!" cried Campo with a sneer. "I'll take command of this ship, and you'll go fish for nebulas."

Cosmo had one advantage; he was behind his desk, and it was a broad and long one, and placed almost against the wall. They could not get at him without getting round the desk. Campo did not fire, though he might have shot Cosmo in his tracks; but evidently he was nourishing the idea of making him walk the plank. With a sign he commanded his co-conspirators to flank the desk at each end, while he kept Cosmo covered with his pistol.

But with a lightning movement, Cosmo dropped under the desk, and, favored by his slight form and his extreme agility, darted like a cat past Campo's legs, and, almost before the latter could turn round, was out of the open door. Campo fired at the retreating form, but the bullet went wide of the

mark. The pistol was practically noiseless, and the sound reached no ears in the staterooms.

It happened that a switch controlling the lights in the gangway was on the wall by Cosmo's door, and in passing he swiftly reached up and turned it off. Thus he was in complete darkness, and when Campo darted out of the door he could not see the fugitive. He could hear his footsteps, however, and with two of his companions he rushed blindly after him, firing two or three shots at random. But Cosmo had turned at the first cross passage, and then at the next, this part of the Ark being a labyrinth of corridors, and the pursuers quickly lost all trace of him.

Campo and his companions made their way back to Cosmo's cabin, where their fellows were guarding Captain Arms. They found the switch in the passage and turned on the light. They were almost immediately joined by several other conspirators conducting Joseph Smith, bound and gagged. They held a short consultation, and Campo, with many curses, declared that Cosmo Versál must be caught at all hazards.

"The big-headed fiend!" he cried, gnashing his teeth. "Let me get my grippers on him and I'll squelch him like a bug!"

They threw Joseph Smith into the room beside the helpless captain, after taking the latter's pistols, locked the door from the outside, and hurried off on their search. In the passages they encountered several more of their friends. They now numbered fifteen, all armed. This may

seem a small number to undertake to capture the Ark; but it must be remembered that among the thousand-odd inmates, exclusive of the crew, only about one in three was a man, and the majority of these were peaceable scientists who, it was to be presumed, had no fight in them.

At any rate, Campo, with the reckless courage of his kind, felt confident that if he could get Cosmo Versál, with the captain and Joseph Smith, out of the way, he could easily overmaster the others. He had not much fear of the crew, for he knew that they were not armed, and he had succeeded in winning over three of their number, the only ones he had thought at all dangerous, because he had read their character. More than half the crew were employed about the engines or on the animal deck, and most of the others were simply stewards who would not stand before the pistols.

But, while the mutineers were hurriedly searching the corridors, Cosmo had run straight to the bridge, where he found two of his men in charge, and whence he sent an electric call to all the men employed in the navigation of the vessel. They came running from various directions, but a dozen of them were caught in the passages by the mutineers and bound before they could comprehend what had happened. Seven, however, succeeded in reaching the bridge, and among these was Jim Waters.

"There's a mutiny," said Cosmo. "We've got to fight for our lives. Have you got arms?"

Not one had a weapon except Waters, who displayed a pistol half as long

as his arm.

"Here, Peterson, take this," said Cosmo, handing a pistol to one of the two mariners who had been on the bridge. "They will be here in a minute. If Campo had been a sailor, he'd have had possession here the first thing. I'll turn off all lights."

With that he pressed a button which put out every lamp in the ark. But there was a full moon, and they concealed themselves in the shadows.

Presently they heard the mutineers approaching, stumbling and cursing in the darkness. Cosmo directed Peterson and Waters to place themselves at his side, and told them to fire when he gave the word.

The next instant four men appeared crossing a moonlit place at the foot of the steps on the outside of the dome.

"Wait," whispered Cosmo. "The pistols go at a pull. We can sweep down a dozen in ten seconds. Let them all get in sight first."

Half a minute later there were twelve men climbing the steps and cautiously looking up.

"Fire!" cried Cosmo, setting the example, and three streams of blue flame pulsated from the bridge. The sound of the bullets striking made more noise than the explosions.

Five or six of the men below fell, knocking down their comrades, and a loud curse burst from the lips of Campo, who had a bullet through his arm.

The mutineers tumbled in a heap at the bottom, and instantly Cosmo, switching on all lights, led the way down upon them. His men, who had no arms, seized anything they could get their hands on that would serve to strike a blow, and followed him.

The conspirators were overwhelmed by the suddenness and fury of the attack.

Four of them were killed outright and five were wounded, one so severely that he survived only a few hours.

Cosmo's quick and overwhelming victory was due to the fact that the mutineers, in mounting the steps, could not see him and his men in the shadows, and when the automatic weapons, which fired three shots per second by repeated pressure of the trigger, from a chamber containing twenty-one cartridges, once opened on them they could do nothing in the hail of missiles, especially when crowded together on the steps.

Campo was the only one who had any fight left in him. He struck Cosmo a blow on the head that felled him, and then darted out upon the forepart of the dome, running on the cleats, and made his way to the top.

Cosmo was on his feet in a second and rushing in pursuit, closely followed

by Jim Waters. The fugitive ran for the ratlines leading to the lookout on the central mast. He climbed them like a squirrel, and the man in the crow's nest, amazed at the sight below him, stared at the approaching mutineer, unable to utter a cry. Campo, who, as the moonbeams showed, now had a knife in his teeth, rapidly approached, and the lookout shrank in terror. But before Campo could reach the crow's nest, a blinding light dazzled his eyes. Cosmo had shouted an order to Peterson to run back to the bridge and turn a searchlight upon the mast. Then Campo heard a thundering voice below him:

"Take another step and I'll blow you into the sea!"

He glanced below, and saw Cosmo and Waters covering him with their pistols.

"Not another step!" roared Cosmo again. "Come down, and I'll give you a trial for your life."

Campo hesitated; but, seeing that he could be shot down, and finding a gleam of hope in Cosmo's words, he turned and came slowly down. The moment he touched the bottom he was seized by Waters and another man, and, under Cosmo's directions, his hands were bound behind his back.

Ten minutes later the members of the crew who had been caught by the mutineers in the gangways were all unbound, and then Cosmo broke open the door of his cabin, the key having been lost or thrown away by Campo, and

the captain and Joseph Smith were released.

"Well, we've got 'em," said Cosmo grimly to the captain. "The mutiny is at an end, and there'll never be another."

In the meantime many of the passengers had been aroused by the unaccustomed noises, although the pistols had not made enough sound to be heard from the place where they were fired. Nightcapped heads appeared on all sides, and some, in scanty clothing, were wandering in the passageways, demanding what the trouble was. Cosmo, the captain, and Joseph Smith reassured them, saying that there was no danger, and that something had happened which would be explained in the morning.

The prisoners--and the whole fifteen were finally captured--were locked up in a strong room, and a surgeon was sent to dress their wounds. Cosmo Versál and the captain resumed their accustomed places on the bridge, where they talked over the affair, and Cosmo explained his plans for the morrow.

"I'll give him his trial, as I promised," Cosmo said in conclusion, "and you'll see what it will be. Mutiny aboard this Ark!" And he struck the rail a violent blow with his fist.

The next morning directly after breakfast Cosmo called all passengers and crew into the grand saloon, where many wondering looks were exchanged and many puzzling questions asked. When the mutineers, with hands tied behind

their backs and their many bandages on arms and legs, were led in, exclamations of astonishment were heard, and some of the timid ones shrank away in fear.

Cosmo lost no time with preliminaries.

"These men," he said, taking his stand upon the platform, "have mutinied and tried to capture the Ark. This fellow"--pointing to Campo--"was the concocter and leader of the plot. He intended to throw me and Captain Arms, and all of you whom he did not wish to retain for his fiendish purposes, into the sea. But Heaven has delivered them into our hands. I have promised them a trial, and they shall have it. But it will be a trial in which justice shall not be cheated. I find that a moral poison has stolen into this selected company, and I will eliminate it for once and all."

The expressions of amazement and alarm redoubled in intensity.

"Professor Abel Able, Professor Jeremiah Moses, Sir Wilfrid Athelstone, Costaké Theriade," Cosmo continued, "you will please come forward to act as members of the jury, of which I name myself also a member. I shall be both judge and juror here, but I will hear what the rest of you may have to say."

The men named stepped forward with some evidences of embarrassment, and Cosmo gravely gave them seats beside him. Then he commanded that the

prisoners should confront the jury, and, heavily guarded, they were led to the front.

The brutishness of Campo's face had never struck the passengers who had seen him before as it did now. He looked a veritable jailbird. At the same time he was evidently in terror for his life. He muttered something which nobody understood.

Cosmo, who had informed himself of all the circumstances from Waters, and by privately questioning the others, had satisfied himself that the entire scheme of the mutiny was of Campo's contrivance, and that they had been led into it solely by his persuasion and threats, ordered Waters to speak. The seaman told a straight story of what he had heard and seen. Cosmo himself then related the events of the night. When he had finished he turned to Campo and demanded what he had to say.

Campo again muttered under his breath, but made no attempt to defend himself, simply saying:

"You promised me a trial."

"And haven't I given you a trial?" demanded Cosmo with flashing eyes. "You thought you held the world in your grasp. It is I that hold it in my grasp, and you, too! You were going to make us 'walk the plank.' It is you who are going to walk it! Is that the verdict?" (turning to the four jurymen).

Some of them nodded, some simply stared at Cosmo, surprised by the vehemence of his manner.

"Enough," he said. "As to you," addressing the other prisoners, "you have had your lesson; see that you don't forget it! Release them, and lead Campo to the promenade deck."

Nobody thought that Cosmo would literally execute his threat to make the mutineer walk the plank, but, as he had told Captain Arms, they didn't know him. They were about to see that in Cosmo Versál they had not only a prophet, a leader, and a judge, but an inexorable master also.

A plank was prepared and placed sloping from the rail.

"Walk!" said Cosmo firmly.

To everybody's surprise Campo, with blinded eyes, started immediately up the plank, followed its full length with quick, unfaltering step, and plunging from the end, disappeared in the sea.

Many had turned away, unable to look, but many also saw the tragedy to the end. Then a profound sigh was heard from the whole company of the spectators. As they turned away, talking in awed voices, they felt, as never before, that the world had shrunk to the dimensions of the Ark, and that Cosmo Versál was its dictator.

That same afternoon Cosmo arranged one of his "conferences," and nobody dared to be absent, although all minds were yet too much excited to follow the discussions which few could understand. But at length Costaké Theriade concentrated their attention by a wild burst of eloquence about the wonders of the inter-atomic forces. Sir Athelstone, unable to endure the applause that greeted his rival, abruptly sprang to his feet, his round face red with anger, and shouted:

"I say, you know, this is twaddle!"

"Will the Englishman interrupt not?" cried Theriade, with his eyes ablaze.

"Shall I project not the Sir Englishman to the feeshes?"

He looked as if he were about to try to execute his threat, and Sir Athelstone assumed a boxing attitude; but before hostilities could begin a loud shout from the deck, followed by cries and exclamations, caused everybody to rush out of the saloon.

Those who succeeded in getting a glimpse over the shoulders of the members of the crew, who were already lined up along the only portion of the bulwarks available for seeing the part of the ocean on which attention seemed to be fixed, stared open-mouthed at a round-backed mass of shining metal, with a circular aperture on the top, the cover of which was canted to one side, and there stood a man, waving a gold-laced red kepi, and bowing and smiling with great civility.