

CHAPTER XVII

THE JULES VERNE

The swell of the sea caused the strange-looking craft to rise and sink a little, and sometimes the water ran bubbling all around the low rim of the aperture, in the center of which the red-capped man stood, resting on some invisible support, repeating his salutations and amicable smiles, and balancing his body to the rocking of the waves with the unconscious skill of a sailor.

The Ark was running slowly, but it would very soon have left the stranger in its wake if he had not also been in motion. It was evident that the object under his feet must be a submersible vessel of some kind, although it was of a type which Captain Arms, standing beside Cosmo on the bridge, declared that he had never set eyes on before. It lay so low in the water that nothing could be seen of its motive machinery, but it kept its place alongside the Ark with the ease of a dolphin, and gradually edged in closer and closer.

When it was so near that he could be heard speaking in a voice hardly raised above the ordinary pitch, the man, first again lifting his cap with an easy gesture, addressed Cosmo Versál by name, using the English language with a scarcely perceptible accent:

"M. Versál, I offer you my felicitations upon the magnificent appearance of your Ark, and I present my compliments to the ladies and gentlemen of your company."

And then he bowed once more to the passengers, who were almost crowding each other over the side in their eagerness to both see and hear.

"Thank you," responded Cosmo, "but who are you?"

"Capitaine Yves de Beauxchamps, of the French army."

"Where's the navy, then?" blurted out Captain Arms.

De Beauxchamps glanced at the speaker a little disdainfully, and then replied gravely:

"Alas! At the bottom of the sea--with all the other navies."

"And how have you escaped?" demanded Cosmo Versál.

"As you see, in a submersible."

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Cosmo. "And you have been in the sea ever since the beginning of the flood?"

"Since the first rise of the ocean on the coast at Brest."

"Have you no companions?"

"Six--in truth, seven."

"Astonishing!" said Cosmo Versál. "But I heard nothing of the preparation of a submersible. In fact, the idea of such a thing never occurred to me. You must have made your preparations secretly."

"We did. We did not share your certainty, M. Versál, concerning the arrival of a deluge. Even when we embarked we were not sure that it would be more than an affair of the coasts."

"But you must be on the point of starvation by this time. The flood has only begun. This cessation is but for a time, while we are passing a gap in the nebula. You will come aboard the Ark. I had chosen my company, but your gallant escape, and the ability that you have shown, prove that you are worthy to aid in the re-establishment of the race, and I have no doubt that your companions are equally worthy."

The Frenchman bowed politely, and with a slight smile replied:

"I believe, M. Versál, that the Jules Verne is as safe and comfortable, and proportionately as well provisioned, as your Ark."

"So you call it the Jules Verne?" returned Cosmo, smiling in his turn.

"We were proud to give it that name, and its conduct has proved that it is worthy of it."

"But you will surely come aboard and shake hands, and let us offer you a little hospitality," said Cosmo.

"I should be extremely happy to pay my compliments to the ladies," responded De Beauxchamps, "but I must postpone that pleasure for the present. In the meantime, however, I should be glad if you would lower a landing stage, and permit me to send aboard the seventh member of our party, who, I venture to think, may find the Ark a more comfortable abode than our submersible."

"And who may that person be?"

"The King of England."

Exclamations of surprise and wonder were heard on all sides.

"Yes," resumed the Frenchman, "we picked up his majesty the first day after the deluge began to descend from the sky."

"I will lower a ladder at once," Cosmo called out, and immediately ran down to the lowest deck, commanding his men to make haste.

The Jules Verne was skillfully brought close up to the side of the Ark, so that the visible part of her rounded back was nearly in contact with the bottom of the companion-ladder when it had been lowered. The sea was so calm that there was little difficulty in executing this maneuver. De Beauxchamps disappeared in the depths of the submersible, and after a few minutes re-emerged into sight, supporting on his arm a stout, rather short man, whose face, it was evident, had once been full and ruddy, but now it was pale and worn.

"It is he!" exclaimed an English member of Cosmo's company to some of his fellow-countrymen who had forced their way to the front.

"It is the king!"

And then occurred a singular thing, inspired by the marvelous circumstances of this meeting of the sovereign of a drowned kingdom, upon the bosom of the waters that had destroyed it, with the mere handful which remained alive out of all the millions of his subjects.

These loyal Englishmen bared their heads (and there were three women among them) and sang, with a pathos that surely the old hymn had never expressed before, their national anthem: "God Save the King."

The effect was immense. Every head aboard the Ark was immediately uncovered. De Beauxchamps removed his cap, and one or two bared heads could be seen peering out of the interior of the submersible below him. As the

king was steadied across to the bottom of the companion-ladder, the voices of the singers rose louder, and many of the other passengers, moved by sympathy, or carried away by epidemic feeling, joined in the singing. Never had any monarch a greeting like that! Its recipient was moved to the depths of his soul, and but for the aid given him would have been unable to ascend the swaying steps.

As he was assisted upon the deck, the song ceased and a great cheer broke forth. There were tears in his eyes, and he trembled in every limb, when he returned the welcoming pressure of Cosmo Versál's hand.

The moment he saw that the king was safely aboard the Ark, De Beauxchamps, with a farewell salutation, disappeared into the interior of the Jules Verne, and the submersible sank out of sight as gently as if it had been a huge fish that had come to the top of the sea to take a look about.

After the sensation caused by the arrival of the English monarch aboard the Ark had somewhat quieted down, and after his majesty had had an opportunity to recover himself, Cosmo Versál invited his new guest to tell the story of his escape. They were seated in Cosmo's cabin, and there were present Joseph Smith, Professor Jeremiah Moses, Professor Abel Able, and Amos Blank, beside several other members of the ship's company, including two of the loyal Englishmen who quite naturally had been the first to strike up the national anthem on seeing their rescued king.

Richard Edward, or Richard IV as he was officially entitled, was one of the

best kings England ever had. He was popular not only because of his almost democratic manners and the simplicity of his life, but more because he was a great lover of peace. We have already seen how he was chosen, solely on that account, to be of the number of the rulers invited to go in the Ark. He had not even replied to Cosmo's invitation, but that was simply because, like everybody about him in whom he placed confidence, he regarded Cosmo Versál as a mere mountebank, and thought that there was no more danger of a flood that would cover the earth than of the fall of the moon out of the sky.

Before responding to Cosmo's request he made a gracious reference to the indifference with which he had formerly treated his present host.

"I am sorry, Mr. Versál," he said, with a deprecatory smile, "that I did not sooner recognize the fact that your knowledge surpassed that of my scientific advisers."

"Your majesty was not alone," replied Cosmo gravely, turning with his finger a small globe that stood on his desk. "From all these deep-sunken continents" (waving his hand toward the globe), "if the voices once heard there could now speak, there would arise a mighty sound of lament for that great error."

The king looked at him with an expression of surprise. He glanced from Cosmo's diminutive figure to his great overhanging brow, marked with the lines of thought, and a look of instinctive deference came into his eyes.

"But," continued Cosmo Versál, "it is bootless to speak of these things now. I beg that your majesty will condescend to enlighten us concerning the fate of that great kingdom, of ancient renown, over which you so worthily reigned."

An expression of deepest pain passed across the face of Richard Edward. For some moments he remained buried in a mournful silence, and many sighs came from his breast. All looked at him with profound commiseration. At last he raised his head, and said, sorrowfully and brokenly:

"My kingdom is drowned--my subjects have perished, almost to the last soul--my family, my gracious consort, my children--all, all--gone!"

Here he broke down, and could speak no more. Not a word was heard, for a time in the room, and the two Englishmen present wept with their unfortunate king.

Cosmo Versál was no less deeply moved than the others. He sat, for a while, in complete silence. Then he arose and, going to the king, put his hand upon his shoulder, and talked to him long, in a low, consoling voice. At last the broken-spirited monarch was able to suppress his emotions sufficiently to recite, but with many interruptions while he remastered his feelings, the story of his woes and of his marvelous escape.

"Sir Francis Brook," he said, "prepared a barge, when the water invaded

London, and in that barge we escaped--her royal majesty, our children, and a number of members of the royal household. The barge was the only vessel of levium that existed in England. Sir Francis had furnished and provisioned it well, and we did not think that it would be necessary to go farther than to some high point in the interior. Sir Francis was of the opinion that Wales would afford a secure refuge.

"It was a terrible thing to see the drowning of London, the sweeping of the awful bore that came up the Thames from the sea, the shipping wrecked by the tearing waves, the swirl of the fast-rising water round the immense basin in which the city lay, the downfall of the great buildings--Westminster Abbey was one of the first that succumbed--the overturned boats, and even great vessels floating on their sides, or bottom up, the awful spectacle of the bodies of the drowned tossing in the waves--all these sights were before our horrified eyes while the vast eddy swept us round and round until the water rose so high that we were driven off toward the southwest.

"That we should have escaped at all was a miracle of miracles. It was the wonderful buoyancy of the levium barge that saved us. But the terrors of that scene can never fade from my memory. And the fearful sufferings of the queen! And our children--but I cannot go on with this!"

"Calm yourself, your majesty," said Cosmo sympathetically. "The whole world has suffered with you. If we are spared and are yet alive, it is through the hand of Providence--to which all of us must bow."

"We must have passed over Surrey and Hampshire," the king resumed, "the invasion of the sea having buried the hills."

"I am surprised at that," said Cosmo. "I did not think that the sea had anywhere attained so great an elevation before the nebula condensed. At New York the complete drowning of the city did not occur until the downpour from the sky began."

"Oh! that deluge from the heavens!" cried the king. "What we had suffered before seemed but little in comparison. It came upon us after night; and the absolute darkness, the awful roaring, the terrific force of the falling water, the sense of suffocation, the rapid filling of the barge until the water was about our necks--these things drove us wild with despair."

"I tried to sustain my poor queen in my arms, but she struggled to seize the children and hold them above the water, and in her efforts she escaped from my hands, and henceforth I could find her no more. I stumbled about, but it was impossible to see; it was impossible to hear. At last I fell unconscious face downward, as it afterward appeared, upon a kind of bench at the rear end of the barge, which was covered with a narrow metallic roofing, and raised above the level of the bulwarks. It was there that I had tried to shelter the queen and the children."

"In some way I must have become lodged there, under the awning, in such a

position that the pitching of the barge failed to throw me off. I never regained consciousness until I heard a voice shouting in my ear, and felt some one pulling me, and when I had recovered my senses, I found myself in the submersible."

"And all your companions were gone?" asked Cosmo, in a voice shaking with pity.

"Yes, oh, Lord! All! They had been swept overboard by the waves--and would that I had gone with them!"

The poor king broke down again and sobbed. After a long pause Cosmo asked gently:

"Did the Frenchman tell you how he came upon the barge?"

"He said that in rising to the surface to find out the state of things there the submersible came up directly under the barge, canting it in such a way that I was rolled out and he caught me as I was swept close to the opening."

"But how was it that the downpour, entering the submersible, when the cover was removed, did not fill it with water?"

"He had the cover so arranged that it served as an almost complete protection from the rain. Some water did enter, but not much."

"A wonderful man, that Frenchman," said Cosmo. "He would be an acquisition for me. What did he say his name was? Oh, yes, De Beauxchamps--I'll make a note of that. I shouldn't wonder if we heard of him again."

Cosmo Versál was destined to encounter Yves de Beauxchamps and his wonderful submersible Jules Verne sooner, and under more dramatic circumstances than he probably anticipated.