

CHAPTER XVIII

NAVIGATING OVER DROWNED EUROPE

After the English king had so strangely become a member of its company the Ark resumed its course in the direction of what had once been Europe. The spot where the meeting with the Jules Verne had occurred was west of Cape Finisterre and, according to the calculations of Captain Arms, in longitude fifteen degrees four minutes west; latitude forty-four degrees nine minutes north.

Cosmo decided to run into the Bay of Biscay, skirting its southern coast in order to get a view of the Cantabrian Mountains, many of whose peaks, he thought, ought still to lie well above the level of the water.

"There are the Peaks of Europa," said Captain Arms, "which lie less than twenty miles directly back from the coast. The highest point is eight thousand six hundred and seventy feet above sea level, or what used to be sea level. We could get near enough to it, without any danger, to see how high the water goes."

"Do you know the locality?" demanded Cosmo.

"As well as I know a compass-card!" exclaimed the captain. "I've seen the Europa peaks a hundred times. I was wrecked once on that coast, and being

of an inquiring disposition, I took the opportunity to go up into the range and see the old mines--and a curious sight it was, too. But the most curious sight of all was the shepherdesses of Tresvido, dressed just like the men, in homespun breeches that never wore out. You'd meet 'em anywhere on the slopes of the Pico del Ferro, cruising about with their flocks. And the cheese that they made! There never was any such cheese!"

"Well, if you know the place so well," said Cosmo, "steer for it as fast as you can. I'm curious to find out just how high this flood has gone, up to the present moment."

"Maybe we can rescue a shepherdess," returned the captain, chuckling. "She'd be an ornament to your new Garden of Eden."

They kept on until, as they approached longitude five degrees west, they began to get glimpses of the mountains of northern Spain. The coast was all under deep water, and also the foothills and lower ranges, but some of the peaks could be made out far inland. At length, by cautious navigation, Captain Arms got the vessel quite close to the old shore line of the Asturias, and then he recognized the Europa peaks.

"There they are," he cried. "I'd know 'em if they'd emigrated to the middle of Africa. There's the old Torre de Cerredo and the Peña Santa."

"How high did you say the main peak is?" asked Cosmo.

"She's eight thousand six hundred and seventy feet."

"From your knowledge of the coast, do you think it safe to run in closer?"

"Yes, if you're sure the water is not less than two thousand four hundred feet above the old level we can get near enough to see the water-line on the peaks, from the cro'nest, which is two hundred feet high."

"Go ahead, then."

They got closer than they had imagined possible, so close that, from the highest lookout on the Ark, they were able with their telescopes to see very clearly where the water washed the barren mountainsides at what seemed to be a stupendous elevation.

"I'm sorry about your shepherdesses," said Cosmo, smiling. "I don't think you'd find any there to rescue if you could get to them. They must all have been lost in the torrents that poured down those mountains."

"More's the pity," said Captain Arms. "That was a fine lot of women. There'll be no more cheese like what they made at Tresvido."

Cosmo inquired if the captain's acquaintance with the topography of the range enabled him to say how high that water was. The captain, after long inspection, declared that he felt sure that it was not less than four thousand feet above the old coast line.

"Then," said Cosmo, "if you're right about the elevation of what you call the Torre de Cerredo there must be four thousand six hundred and seventy feet of its upper part still out of water. We'll see if that is so."

Cosmo made the measurements with instruments, and announced that the result showed the substantial accuracy of Captain Arms's guess.

"I suspected as much," he muttered. "Those tremendous downpours, which may have been worse elsewhere than where we encountered them, have increased the rise nearly seventy per cent, above what my gages indicated. Now that I know this," he continued, addressing the captain: "I'll change the course of the Ark. I'm anxious to get into the Indian Ocean as soon as possible. It would be a great waste of time to go back in order to cross the Sahara, and with this increase of level it isn't necessary. We'll just set out across southern France, keeping along north of the Pyrenees, and so down into the region of the Mediterranean."

Captain Arms was astonished by the boldness of this suggestion, and at first he strongly objected to their taking such a course.

"There's some pretty high ground in southern France," he said. "There's the Cevennes Mountains, which approach a good long way toward the Pyrenees. Are you sure the depth of water is the same everywhere?"

"What a question for an old mariner to ask!" returned Cosmo. "Don't you

know that the level of the sea is the same everywhere? The flood doesn't make any difference. It seeks its level like any other water."

"But it may be risky steering between those mountains," persisted the captain.

"Nonsense! As long as the sky is clear you can get good observations, and you ought to be navigator enough not to run on a mountain."

Cosmo Versál, as usual, was unalterable in his resolution--he only changed when he had reasons of his own--and the course of the Ark was laid, accordingly, for the old French coast of the Landes, so low that it was now covered with nearly four thousand feet of water. The feelings of the passengers were deeply stirred when they learned that they were actually sailing over buried Europe, and they gazed in astonishment at the water beneath them, peering down into it as if they sought to discover the dreadful secrets that it hid, and talking excitedly in a dozen languages.

The Ark progressed slowly, making not more than five or six knots, and on the second day after they dropped the Peñas de Europa they were passing along the northern flank of the Pyrenees and over the basin in which had lain the beautiful city of Pau. The view of the Pyrenees from this point had always been celebrated before the deluge as one of the most remarkable in the world.

Now it had lost its beauty, but gained in spectacular grandeur. All of

France, as far as the eye extended, was a sea, with long oceanic swells slowly undulating its surface. This sea abruptly came to an end where it met the mountains, which formed for it a coast unlike any that the hundreds of eyes which wonderingly surveyed it from the Ark had ever beheld.

Beyond the drowned vales and submerged ranges, which they knew lay beneath the watery floor, before them, rose the heads of the Pic du Midi, the Pic de Ger, the Pic de Bigorre, the Massif du Gabizos, the Pic Monné, and dozens of other famous eminences, towering in broken ranks like the bearskins of a "forlorn hope," resisting to the last, in pictures of old-time battles.

Here, owing to the configuration of the drowned land it was possible for the Ark to approach quite close to some of the wading mountains, and Cosmo seized the opportunity to make a new measure of the height of the flood, which he found to be surely not less than his former estimates had shown.

Surveying with telescopes the immense shoulders of the Monné, the Viscos, the d'Ardiden, and the nearer heights, when they were floating above the valley of Lourdes, Cosmo and the captain saw the terrible effects that had been produced by the torrents of rain, which had stripped off the vegetation whose green robe had been the glory of the high Pyrenees on the French side.

Presently their attention was arrested by some moving objects, and at a second glance they perceived that these were human beings.

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Cosmo Versál. "There are survivors here. They have climbed the mountains, and found shelter among the rocks. I should not have thought it possible."

"And there are women among them," said Captain Arms, lowering his telescope. "You will not leave them there!"

"But what can I do?"

"Lower away the boats," replied the captain. "We've got plenty of them."

"There may be thousands there," returned Cosmo, musing. "I can't take them all."

"Then take as many as you can. By gad, sir, I'll not leave 'em!"

By this time some of the passengers who had powerful glasses had discovered the refugees on the distant heights, and great excitement spread throughout the Ark. Cries arose from all parts of the vessel:

"Rescue them!" "Go to their aid!" "Don't let them perish!"

Cosmo Versál was in a terrible quandary. He was by no means without humanity, and was capable of deep and sympathetic feeling, as we have seen, but he already had as many persons in the Ark as he thought ought to be

taken, considering the provision that had been made, and, besides, he could not throw off, at once, his original conviction of the necessity of carefully choosing his companions. He remained for a long time buried in thought, while the captain fumed with impatience and at last declared that if Cosmo did not give the order to lower away the boats he would do it himself.

At length Cosmo, yielding rather to his own humane feelings than to the urging of others, consented to make the experiment. Half a dozen levium launches were quickly lowered and sent off, while the Ark, with slowed engines, remained describing a circle as near the mountains as it was safe to go. Cosmo himself embarked in the leading boat.

The powerful motors of the launches carried them rapidly to the high slopes where the unfortunates had sought refuge, and as they approached, and the poor fugitives saw that deliverance was at hand, they began to shout, and cheer, and cry, and many of them fell on their knees upon the rocks and stretched their hands toward the heavens.

The launches were compelled to move with great caution when they got near the ragged sides of the submerged mountains (it was the Peyre Dufau on which the people had taken refuge), but the men aboard them were determined to effect the rescue, and they regarded no peril too closely. At last Cosmo's launch found a safe landing, and the others quickly followed it.

When Cosmo sprang out on a flat rock a crowd of men, women, and children,

weeping, crying, sobbing, and uttering prayers and blessings, instantly surrounded him. Some wrung his hands in an ecstasy of joy, some embraced him, some dropped on their knees before him and sought to kiss his hands. Cosmo could not restrain his tears, and the crews of the launches were equally affected.

Many of these people could only speak the patois of the mountains, but some were refugees from the resorts in the valleys below, and among these were two English tourists who had been caught among the mountains by the sudden rising of the flood. They exhibited comparative sang froid, and served as spokesmen for the others.

"Bah Jove!" exclaimed one of them, "but you're welcome, you know! This has been a demnition close call! But what kind of a craft have you got out there?"

"I'm Cosmo Versál."

"Then that's the Ark we've heard about! 'Pon honor, I should have recognized you, for I've seen your picture often enough. You've come to take us off, I suppose?"

"Certainly," replied Cosmo. "How many are there?"

"All that you see here; about a hundred, I should say. No doubt there are others on the mountains round. There must have been a thousand of us when

we started, but most of them perished, overcome by the downpour, or swept away by the torrents. Lord Swansdown (indicating his companion, who bowed gravely and stiffly) and myself--I'm Edward Whistlington--set out to walk over the Pyrenees from end to end, after the excitement about the great darkness died out, and we got as far as the Marboré, and then running down to Gavarnie we heard news of the sea rising, but we didn't give too much credit to that, and afterward, keeping up in the heights, we didn't hear even a rumor from the world below.

"The sky opened on us like a broadside from an aerial squadron, and how we ever managed to get here I'm sure I can hardly tell. We were actually carried down the mountainsides by the water, and how it failed to drown us will be an everlasting mystery. Somehow, we found ourselves among these people, who were trying to go up, assuring us that there was nothing but water below. And at last we discovered some sort of shelter here--and here we've been ever since."

"You cannot have had much to eat," said Cosmo.

"Not too much, I assure you," replied the Englishman, with a melancholy smile. "But these people shared with us what little they had, or could find--anything and everything that was eatable. They're a devilish fine lot, I tell you!

"When the terrible rain suddenly ceased and the sky cleared," he resumed, "we managed to get dry, after a day or two, and since then we've been

chewing leather until there isn't a shoe or a belt left. We thought at first of trying to build rafts--but then where could we go? It wasn't any use to sail out over a drowned country, with nothing in sight but the mountains around us, which looked no better than the one we were barely existing on."

"Then I must get you aboard the Ark before you starve," said Cosmo.

"Many have died of starvation already," returned Whistlington. "You can't get us off a moment too quick."

Cosmo Versál had by this time freed himself of every trace of the reluctance which he had at first felt to increasing the size of his ship's company by adding recruits picked up at random. His sympathies were thoroughly aroused, and while he hastened the loading and departure of the launches, he asked the Englishmen who, with the impassive endurance of their race, stayed behind to the last, whether they thought that there were other refugees on the mountains whom they could reach.

"I dare say there are thousands of the poor devils on these peaks around us, wandering among the rocks," replied Edward Whistlington, "but I fancy you couldn't reach 'em."

"If I see any I'll try," returned Cosmo, sweeping with his powerful telescope all the mountain flanks within view.

At last, on the slopes of the lofty Mont Aigu across the submerged valley toward the south, he caught sight of several human figures, one of which was plainly trying to make signals, probably to attract attention from the Ark. Immediately, with the Englishmen and the remainder of those who had been found on the Peyre Dufau, he hastened in his launch to the rescue.

They found four men and three women, who had escaped from the narrow valley containing the bains de Gazost, and who were in the last stages of starvation. These were taken aboard, and then, no more being in sight, Cosmo returned to the Ark, where the other launches had already arrived.

And these were the last that were rescued from the mighty range of the Pyrenees, in whose deep valleys had lain the famous resorts of Cauterets, the Eaux Bonnes, the Eaux Chaudes, the Bagnières de Luchon, the Bagnières de Bigorre, and a score of others. No doubt, as the Englishmen had said, thousands had managed to climb the mountains, but none could now be seen, and those who may have been there were left to perish.

There was great excitement in the Ark on the arrival of the refugees. The passengers overwhelmed them with kind attentions, and when they had sufficiently recovered, listened with wonder and the deepest sympathy to their exciting tales of suffering and terror.

Lord Swansdown and Edward Whistlington were amazed to find their king aboard the Ark, and the English members of the company soon formed a sort of family party, presided over by the unfortunate monarch. The rescued

persons numbered, in all, one hundred and six.

The voyage of the Ark was now resumed, skirting the Pyrenees, but at an increasing distance. Finally Captain Arms announced that, according to his observations, they were passing over the site of the ancient and populous city of Toulouse. This recalled to Cosmo Versál's memory the beautiful scenes of the fair and rich land that lay so deep under the Ark, and he began to talk with the captain about the glories of its history.

He spoke of the last great conqueror that the world had known, Napoleon, and was discussing his marvelous career, and referring to the fact that he had died on a rock in the midst of that very ocean which had now swallowed up all the scenes of his conquests, when the lookout telephoned down that there was something visible on the water ahead.

In a little while they saw it--a small moving object, which rapidly approached the Ark. As it drew nearer both exclaimed at once:

"The Jules Verne!"

There could be no mistaking it. It was riding with its back just above the level of the sea; the French flag was fluttering from a small mast, and already they could perceive the form of De Beauxchamps, standing in his old attitude, with his feet below the rim of the circular opening at the top.

Cosmo ordered the Stars and Stripes to be displayed in salute, and, greatly pleased over the encounter, hurried below and had the companion-ladder made

ready.

"He's got to come aboard this time, anyhow!" he exclaimed. "I'll take no refusal. I want to know that fellow better."

But this time De Beauxchamps had no thought of refusing the hospitalities of the Ark. As soon as he was within hearing he called out:

"My salutations to M. Versál and his charming fellow-voyagers. May I be permitted to come aboard and present myself in person? I have something deeply interesting to tell."

Everybody in the Ark who could find a standing-place was watching the Jules Verne and trying to catch a glimpse of its gallant captain, and to hear what he said; and the moment his request was preferred a babel of voices arose, amid which could be distinguished such exclamations as:

"Let him come!" "A fine fellow!" "Welcome, De Beauxchamps!" "Hurrah for the Jules Verne!"

King Richard was in the fore rank of the spectators, waving his hand to his preserver.

"Certainly you can come aboard," cried Cosmo heartily, at the same time hastening the preparations for lowering the ladder. "We are all glad to see you. And bring your companions along with you."