

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FRENCHMAN'S NEW SCHEME

After the disappearance of Mt. Everest, Cosmo Versál made a careful measurement of the depth of water on the peak, which he found to be forty feet, and then decided to cruise eastward with the Ark, sailing slowly, and returning after a month to see whether by that time there would be any indications of the reappearance of land.

No part of his extraordinary theory of the deluge was more revolutionary, or scientifically incredible, than this idea that the continents would gradually emerge again, owing to internal stresses set up in the crust of the earth.

This, he anticipated, would be caused by the tremendous pressure of the water, which must be ten or twelve miles deep over the greatest depressions of the old ocean-bottoms. He expected that geological movements would attend the intrusion of the water into subterranean cavities and into the heated magma under volcanic regions.

He often debated the question with the savants aboard the Ark, and, despite their incredulity, he persisted in his opinion. He could not be shaken, either, in his belief that the first land to emerge would be the Himalayas, the Pamirs, and the plateau of Tibet.

"We may have to wait some years before any considerable area is exposed," he admitted, "but it must not be forgotten that what land does first appear above the water will lie at the existing sea-level, and will have an oceanic climate, suitable for the rapid development of plants.

"We have aboard all things needed for quick cultivation, and in one season we could begin to raise crops."

"But at first," said Professor Jeremiah Moses, "only mountain tops will emerge, and how can you expect to cultivate them?"

"There is every probability," replied Cosmo, "that even the rocks of a mountain will be sufficiently friable after their submergence to be readily reduced to the state of soil, especially with the aid of the chemical agents which I have brought along, and I have no fear that I could not, in a few weeks, make even the top of Everest fertile.

"I anticipate, in fact, that it will be on that very summit that we shall begin the re-establishment of the race. Then, as the plateaus below come to the surface, we can gradually descend and enlarge the field of our operations."

"Suppose Everest should be turned into a volcano?"

"That cannot happen," said Cosmo. "A volcano is built up by the extrusion of lava and cinders from below, and these cannot break forth at the top of a mountain already formed, especially when that mountain has no volcanic chimney and no crater, and Everest had neither."

"If the lowering of the flood that caused our stranding on a mountain top in Sicily was due to the absorption of water into the interior of the crust, why may not that occur again, and thus bring the Himalayas into view, without any rising on their part?" demanded Professor Moses.

"I think," said Cosmo, "that all the water that could enter the crust has already done so, during the time that the depression of level which so surprised us was going on. Now we must wait for geologic changes, resulting from the gradual yielding of the internal mass to the new forces brought to bear upon it."

"As the whole earth has gained in weight by the condensation of the nebula upon it, its plastic crust will proportionally gain in girth by internal expansion, which will finally bring all the old continents to the surface, but Asia first of all."

Whether Cosmo Versál's hypotheses were right or wrong, he always had a reply to any objection, and the prestige which he had gained by his disastrously correct theory about the watery nebula gave him an advantage so enormous that nobody felt enough confidence in himself to stand long against anything that he might advance.

Accordingly, everybody in the Ark found himself looking forward to the re-emergence of Mount Everest almost as confidently as did their leader, Cosmo Versál.

They began their waiting voyage by sailing across the plateau of Tibet and the lofty chain of the Yung-ling Mountains out over China.

The interest of all aboard was excited to the highest degree when they found themselves sailing over the mighty domains of the Chinese President-Emperor, who had developed an enormous power, making him the ruler of the whole eastern world.

He, with his half-billion or more of subjects, now reposed at the bottom of an ocean varying from three to five or six miles in depth. Deep beneath the Ark lay the broad and once populous valleys of the Yangtse-Kiang and the Hoang-Ho, the "Scourge of China."

Finally they swung round northward and re-entered the region of Tibet, seeking once more the drowned crown of the world. In the meantime Cosmo had had the theatrical exhibitions and the concerts resumed in the evenings, and sometimes there was music, and even dancing on the long promenades, open to the outer air.

Let not that be a matter of surprise or blame, for the spirit of joy in life is unconquerable, as it should be if life is worth while. So it

happened that, not infrequently, and not with any blameworthy intention, or in any spirit of heartless forgetfulness, this remarkable company of world-wanderers drifted, in the moonlight, above the universal watery grave of the drowned millions, with the harmonies of stringed instruments stealing out upon the rippling waves, and the soft sound of swiftly shuffling feet tripping over the smooth decks.

Costaké Theriade and Sir Wilfrid Athelstone resumed their stormy efforts to talk each other down, but now even Cosmo was seldom a listener, except when he had to interfere to keep the peace.

King Richard and Amos Blank, however, usually heard them out, but it was evident from their expressions that they enjoyed the prospective fisticuffs rather more than the exposition of strange scientific doctrines.

Perhaps the happiest man aboard was Captain Arms. At last he could make as many and as certain observations as he chose, and he studied the charts of Asia until he declared that now he knew the latitude and longitude of the mountains better than he did those of the seaports of the old oceans.

He had not the least difficulty in finding the location of Mount Everest again, and when he announced that they were floating over it, Cosmo immediately prepared to make another measurement of the depth of water on the peak. The result was hardly gratifying. He found that it had

diminished but four inches. He said to Captain Arms:

"The range is rising, but less rapidly than I hoped. Even if the present rate should be doubled it would require five years for the emergence of the highest point. Instead of remaining in this part of the world we shall have an abundance of time to voyage round the earth, going leisurely, and when we get back again perhaps there will be enough land visible to give us a good start."

"Mr. Versál," said the captain, "you remember that you promised me that I should drop my anchor on the head of Mount Everest if I worked a traverse across Beluchistan."

"Certainly I remember it; and also that you were not much disposed to undertake the task. However, you did it well, and I suppose that now you want me to fulfill the bargain?"

"Exactly," replied the captain. "I'd just like to get a mud-hook in the top-knot of the earth. I reckon that that'll lay over all the sea yarns ever spun."

"Very well," returned Cosmo. "Try it, if you've got cable enough."

"Enough and to spare," cried the captain, "and I'll have the Gaurisankar, as the Frenchman calls it, hooked in a jiffy."

This was an operation which called everybody to the rails to watch it. Hundreds of eyes tried to follow the anchor as it descended perpendicularly upon the mountain-top, nearly forty feet beneath. Through the clear water they could dimly see the dark outline of the summit below, and they gazed at it with wonder, and a sort of terror.

Somehow they felt that never before had they fully appreciated the awful depths over which they had been floating. The anchor steadily dropped until it rested on the rock.

It got a hold finally, and in a few minutes the great vessel was swinging slowly round, held by a cable whose grasp was upon the top of the world! When the sensation had been sufficiently enjoyed the anchor was tripped, and the nose of the Ark was turned northwestward. Cosmo Versál announced his intention to circumnavigate the drowned globe.

The news of what they were about to do was both welcome and saddening to the inmates of the vessel. They wished to pass once more over the lands where they had first seen the light, and at the same time they dreaded the memories that such a voyage would inevitably bring back with overwhelming force. But, at any rate, it would be better than drifting for years over Tibet and China.

While everybody else was discussing the prospects of the new voyage, and wondering how long it would last, Yves de Beauxchamps was concentrating all his attention upon a new project which had sprung up in his active

mind as soon as Cosmo's intention was announced. He took Cosmo aside and said to him:

"M. Versál, the dearest memory that I have treasured in my heart is that of the last sight of my drowned home, my beautiful dead Paris. It may be that the home-loving instincts of my race arouse in me a melancholy pleasure over such a sight which would not be shared by you, of a different blood; but if, perchance, you do share my feelings on this subject I believe that I can promise you a similar visit to the great metropolis where your life began, and where you executed those labors whose result has been to preserve a remnant of humanity to repeople the earth."

Cosmo Versál's quick intelligence instantly comprehended the Frenchman's design, but it startled him, and apparently insuperable difficulties at once occurred to his mind.

"M. De Beauxchamps," he responded, grasping his friend warmly by the hand, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your amiable intention, and I assure you that nothing could afford me greater satisfaction than to see once more that mighty city, even though it can now be but an awful ruin, tenanted by no life except the terrible creatures of the deep. But, while I foresee what your plan must be, I can hardly conceive that its execution could be possible. You are thinking, of course, of constructing a diving apparatus capable of penetrating to a depth of nearly six miles in the sea. Setting aside the

question whether we could find in the stores of the Ark the materials that would be needed, it appears to me most improbable that we could make the apparatus of sufficient strength to withstand the pressure, and could then cause it to sink to so great a depth, and afterward bring it safely to the surface."

The Frenchman smiled.

"M. Versál," he replied, "I have taken the liberty to look over the stock of materials which you have so wisely prepared for possible repairs to the Ark and for use after the Ark lands, and I know that among them I can find all that I shall need. You yourself know how completely you are provided with engineering tools and machines of all kinds. You have even an electric foundry aboard. With the aid of your mechanical genius, and the skill of your assistants, together with that of my own men, who are accustomed to work of this kind, I have not the faintest doubt that I can design and construct a diving-bell, large enough to contain a half-dozen persons, and perfectly capable of penetrating to any depth. Of course I cannot make it of levium, but you have a sufficient supply of herculeum steel, the strength of which is so immense that the walls of the bell can be made to remit the pressure even at a depth of six miles. From my previous experiments I am confident that there will be no difficulty in sinking and afterward raising this apparatus. It is only necessary that the mean specific gravity of the bell shall be greater than that of the water at a given depth, and you know that as far back as the end of the nineteenth

century your own countrymen sent down sounding apparatus more than six miles in the Pacific Ocean, near the island of Guam."

"But the air inside the bell--" Cosmo began.

"Excuse me," interrupted De Beauxchamps, "but that air need be under no greater pressure than at the surface. I shall know how to provide for that. Remember the Jules Verne. Simply give me carte blanche in this matter, let me have the materials to work with, afford me the advantage of your advice and assistance whenever I shall need them, and I promise you that by the time we have arrived over the site of New York we shall be prepared for the descent."

Cosmo was deeply impressed by the Frenchman's enthusiastic self-confidence. He had a great admiration for the constructor of the Jules Verne, and, besides, the proposed adventure was exactly after his own heart. After meditating a while, he said heartily:

"Well, M. De Beauxchamps, I give my consent. Everything you wish shall be at your disposal, and you can begin as soon as you choose. Only, let the thing be kept a secret between us and the workmen who are employed. If it should turn out a failure it would not do that the people in the Ark should be aware of it. I can give you a working room on one of the lower decks, where there will be no interference with your proceedings, and no knowledge of what you are about can leak out."

"That is exactly what I should wish," returned De Beauxchamps, smiling with delight, "and I renew my promise that you shall not be disappointed."

So, without a suspicion of what was going on entering the minds of any person in the great company outside the small company of men who were actually employed in the work, the construction of De Beauxchamps's great diving-bell was begun, and pushed with all possible speed, consistent with the proper execution of the work. In the meantime the Ark continued its course toward the west.

They ran slowly, for there was no hurry, and the Ark had now become to its inhabitants as a house and a home--their only foothold on the whole round earth, and that but a little floating island of buoyant metal.

They crossed the Pamirs and the Hindu-Kush, the place where the Caspian Sea had been swallowed up in the universal ocean, and ran over Ararat, which three months before had put them into such fearful danger, but whose loftiest summit now lay twelve thousand feet beneath their keel.

At length, after many excursions toward the north and toward the south, in the halcyon weather that had seldom failed since the withdrawal of the nebula, they arrived at the place (or above it) which had stood during centuries for a noon-mark on the globe.

It was midday when Captain Arms, having made his observations, said to Cosmo and the others on the bridge:

"Noon at Greenwich, and noon on the Ark. Latitude, fifty-one degrees thirty minutes. That brings you as nearly plumb over the place as you'd be likely to hit it. Right down there lies the old observatory that set the chronometers of the world, and kept the clocks and watches up to their work."

King Richard turned aside upon hearing the captain's words. They brought a too vivid picture of the great capital, six miles under their feet, and a too poignant recollection of the disastrous escape of the royal family from overwhelmed London seven months before.

As reckoned by the almanac, it was the 15th of September, more than sixteen months since Cosmo had sent out his first warning to the public, when the Ark crossed the meridian of seventy-four degrees west, in about forty-one degrees north latitude, and the adventurers knew that New York was once more beneath them.

There was great emotion among both passengers and crew, for the majority of them had either dwelt in New York or been in some way associated with its enterprises and its people, and, vain as must be the hope of seeing any relic of the buried metropolis, every eye was on the alert.

They looked off across the boundless sea in every direction, interrogating every suspicious object on the far horizon, and even peering curiously into the blue abyss, as if something might suddenly

appear there which would speak to them like a voice from the past.

But they saw only shafts of sunlight running into bottomless depths, and occasionally some oceanic creature floating lazily far below. The color of the sea was wonderful. It had attracted their attention after the submergence of Mount Everest, but at that time it had not yet assumed its full splendor.

At first, no doubt, there was considerable dissolved matter in the water, but gradually this settled, and the sea became bluer and bluer--not the deep indigo of the old ocean, but a much lighter and more brilliant hue--and here, over the site of New York, the waters were of a bright, luminous sapphire, that dazzled the eye.

Cosmo declared that the change of the sea-color was undoubtedly due to some quality in the nebula from whose condensation the water had been produced, but neither his own analyses, nor those of the chemists aboard the Ark, were able to detect the subtle element to whose presence the peculiar tint was due.

But whatever it may have been, it imparted to the ocean an ethereal, imponderous look, which was sometimes startling. There were moments when they almost expected to see it expand back into the nebulous form and fly away.