

CHAPTER XXV

NEW YORK IN HER OCEAN TOMB

During the long voyage from the sunken Himalayas to still deeper sunken New York, De Beauxchamps, with his fellow-countrymen and the skilled mechanics assigned by Cosmo Versál to aid them, had finished the construction of the huge diving-bell. No one not in the secret had the slightest idea of what had been done, owing to the remote situation of the deck on which the construction was carried out.

Now, while a thousand pairs of eyes were interrogating the smooth surface of the sea, and striving to penetrate its cerulean depths, a great surprise was sprung upon the passengers. The rear gangway of the lowest deck was cleared, a heavy crane-like beam was set projecting over the water, and men began to rig a flexible cable, which had been specially prepared for the purpose of lowering the bell into the depths, and of raising it again when the adventurers should wish to return to the surface. Everybody's attention was immediately attracted to these strange preparations, and the utmost curiosity was aroused. A chorus of wondering exclamations broke out when a metallic globe, twenty feet in diameter, and polished until it shone like a giant thermometer bulb, was rolled out and carefully attached to the cable by means of a strong ring set in one side of the bell. The excitement of the passengers would soon have become uncontrollable if Cosmo had not at this point summoned the

entire ship's company into the great saloon. As soon as all were assembled he mounted his dais and began to speak.

"My fellow-citizens of the old world, which has perished, and of the new, which is to take its place," he said, "we owe to the genius of M. De Beauxchamps an apparatus which is about to enable us to inspect, by an actual visit, the remains of the vast metropolis, which we saw in all its majesty and beauty but so few months ago, and which now lies forever silent at the bottom of this universal ocean.

"If it were practicable I should wish to afford to every one of you a farewell glimpse of that mighty city, to which the hearts of so many here are bound, but you can readily understand that that would be impossible. Only six persons can go in this exploring bell, and they have been chosen; but a faithful account will be brought back to you of all that they see and learn. The adventuring company will consist of M. De Beauxchamps, M. Pujol, his first assistant, Mr. Amos Blank, King Richard, Professor Abel Able, and myself. Captain Arms has ascertained the location of the center of Manhattan Island, over which we are now floating. The quietness of the sea, the absence of any apparent current, and the serenity of the heavens are favoring circumstances, which may be relied upon to enable Captain Arms to keep the Ark constantly poised almost precisely over our point of descent. It is not possible to predict the exact duration of our absence in the depths, but it will not, in any case, exceed about twenty hours.

"Once arrived at the bottom, nearly six miles down, we shall attach the cable to some secure anchorage, by means of a radio-control, operated from within the bell, and then, with the bell free, we shall make explorations, as extensive as possible. The radio-control of which I have spoken governs also the attachment of the cable to the bell. This appliance has been prepared and tested with such care that we have no doubt of its entire efficiency. I mention these things in order to remove from your minds any fear as to the success of our enterprise.

"The bell being once detached, we shall be able to move it from point to point by means of a pair of small propellers, which you will perceive on the outside of the bell, and which are also controlled from within.

These will be used to increase our speed of descent. From a calculation of the density of the sea-water at the depth to which we shall descend, we estimate that the bell with its contents will press upon the bottom with a gravitational force of only five pounds, so that it will move with very slight effort, and may even, when in motion, float like a fish.

"For the purposes of observation we have provided, on four sides of the bell, a series of circular windows, with glass of immense thickness and strength, but of extraordinary transparency. Through these windows we shall be able to see in almost all directions. It was our intention to provide wireless telephone apparatus with which we might have kept you informed of all our doings and discoveries, but unfortunately we have found it impracticable to utilize our control for that purpose. We

shall, however, be able to send and receive signals as long as we are connected with the cable.

"I should add that the construction of the bell, although suggested by M. De Beauxchamps immediately after our departure from Mount Everest, has been carried on in secret simply because we did not wish to subject you to the immense disappointment which you would certainly have experienced if this brilliant conception of our gifted friend, after being once made known to you, had proved to be a failure. Our preparations have all been made, and within an hour we shall begin the descent."

It is quite impossible to describe the excitement of the passengers while they listened to this extraordinary communication. When Cosmo Versál had finished speaking he stood for some minutes looking at his audience with a triumphant smile. First a murmur of excited voices arose, and then somebody proposed three cheers, which were given and repeated until the levium dome rang with the reverberations. Nobody knew exactly why he was cheering, but the infectious enthusiasm carried everything before it. Then the crowd began to ask questions, addressed not to Cosmo but to one another. The wildest suggestions were made. One woman who had left some treasured heirlooms in a Fifth Avenue mansion demanded of her husband that he should commission Cosmo Versál to recover them.

"I'm sure they're there," she insisted. "They were locked in the safe."

"But, don't you see," protested the poor man, "he can't get outside of that bell to get 'em."

"I don't see why he can't, if he should really try. I think it's too mean! They were my grandmother's jewels."

"But, my dear, how could he get out?"

"Well, how does he get in? What's his radio-control good for; won't that help him? What is he going down there for if he can't do a little thing like that, to oblige?"

She pouted at her husband because he persistently refused to present her request to Cosmo, and declared that she would do it herself, then, for she must have those jewels, now that they were so near.

But Cosmo was saved from this, and other equally unreasonable demands, by a warning from De Beauxchamps that all was ready, and that no time should be lost. Then everybody hastened out on the decks to watch the departure of the adventurers. Many thoughtfully shook their heads, predicting that they would never be seen again. As soon as this feeling began to prevail the enthusiasm quickly evaporated, and efforts were made to dissuade Cosmo and De Beauxchamps from making the attempt. But they were deaf to all remonstrance, and pushing out of the chattering crowd, Cosmo ordered the gangway about the bell to be cleared of all

bystanders. The opposition heated his blood a little, and he began to bear himself with an air which recalled his aspect when he quelled and punished the mutiny. This was enough to silence instantly every objector to his proceedings. Henceforth they kept their thoughts to themselves, although some muttered, under their breath such epithets as "fool" and "harebrain."

In about half an hour after Cosmo's speech the bell, with its hardy explorers safely inclosed within, was lowered away, and a minute later hundreds were craning their necks over the rails to watch the shining globe engulf itself swiftly in the sapphire depths. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when the descent was begun, and for a long time, so remarkable was the transparency of the water, they could see the bell sinking, and becoming smaller until it resembled a blue pearl. Sometimes a metallic flash shot from its polished sides like a gleam of violet lightning. But at length it passed from view, swallowed up in the tremendous watery chasm.

We turn now to trace the adventures of the bell and its inmates as they entered the awful twilight of the ocean, and, sinking deeper, passed gradually into a profundity which the sun's most powerful rays were unable to penetrate. Fortunately every one of the adventurers left a description of his experiences and sensations, so that there is no lack of authentic information to guide us.

The windows, as Cosmo had said, were so arranged that they afforded

views on all sides. These views were, of course, restricted by the combined effects of the smallness of the windows and their great thickness; the inmates were somewhat like prisoners looking out of round ports cut through massive walls, but the range of view was much widened when they placed themselves close to the glasses, because the latter were in the form of truncated cones with the base outward.

Glancing through the ports on the upper side of the bell Cosmo and his companions could perceive the huge form of the Ark, hanging like a cloud above them, but rapidly receding, while from the side ports they saw great shafts of azure sunlight, thrown into wonderful undulations by the disturbance of the water. These soon became fainter and gradually disappeared, but before the gloom of the depths settled about them they were thrilled by the spectacle of sharks and other huge fishes nosing about the outer side of the transparent cones, and sometimes opening their jaws as if trying to seize them. Most of the cone-shaped windows had flat surfaces, but a few were of spherical outline both without and within, and the radius of curvature had been so calculated that these particular windows served as huge magnifying lenses for an eye placed at a given distance. Once or twice a marine monster happened to place himself in the field of one of these magnifying windows, startling the observers almost out of their senses with his frightful appearance.

There were also four windows reserved for projecting a searchlight into the outer darkness. The inner side of the bell corresponded in curvature with the outer, so that the adventurers had no flat flooring on any side

to stand upon, but this caused little inconvenience, since the walls were abundantly provided with hand and foot holds, enabling the inmates to maintain themselves in almost any position they could wish.

After a while they passed below the range of daylight, and then they turned on the searchlight. The storage batteries which supplied energy for the searchlight and the propellers served also to operate an apparatus for clearing the air of carbonic acid, and De Beauxchamps had carefully calculated the limit of time that the air could be kept in a breathable condition. This did not exceed forty-eight hours--but as we have seen they had no intention of remaining under water longer than twenty hours at the utmost.

When the bell entered the night of the sea-depths they passed into an apparently lifeless zone, where the searchlight, projected now on one side and now on another, revealed no more of the living forms which they had encountered above, but showed only a desert of solid transparent water. Here, amid this awful isolation, they experienced for the first time a feeling of dread and terror. An overpowering sense of loneliness and helplessness came over them, and only the stout heart of Cosmo Versál, and his reassuring words, kept the others from making the signal which would have caused the bell to be hastily drawn back to the Ark.

"M. De Beauxchamps," said Cosmo, breaking the impressive silence, "to what depth have we now descended?"

"A thousand fathoms," replied the Frenchman, consulting his automatic register.

"Good! We have been only thirty minutes in reaching this depth. We shall sink more slowly as we get deeper, but I think we can count upon reaching the bottom in not more than four hours from the moment of our departure. It will require only two hours for them to draw us back again with the powerful engines of the Ark, especially when aided by our propellers. This will leave fourteen hours for our explorations, if we stay out the limit that we have fixed."

There was such an air of confidence in Cosmo's manner and words that this simple statement did much to enhearten the others.

"The absence of life in this part of the sea," Cosmo continued cheerfully, "does not surprise me. It has long been known that the life of the ocean is confined to regions near the surface and the bottom. We shall certainly find plenty of wonderful creatures below."

When they knew that they must be near the bottom they turned the light downward, and every available window was occupied by an eager watcher. Presently a cry of "Look! Look there!" broke from several voices at once.

The searchlight, penetrating far through the clear water beneath the bell, fell in a circle round a most remarkable object--tall, gaunt, and

spectral, with huge black ribs.

"Why, it's the Metropolitan tower, still standing!" cried Amos Blank.

"Who would have believed it possible?"

"No doubt there was some lucky circumstance about its anchorage," returned Cosmo. "Although it was built so long ago, it was made immensely strong, and well braced, and as the water did not undermine it at the start, it has been favored by the very density of that which now surrounds it, and which tends to buoy it up and hold it steady. But you observe that it has been stripped of the covering of stone."

"Would it not be well to utilize it for anchoring the cable?" asked De Beauxchamps.

"We could have nothing better," said Cosmo.

De Beauxchamps immediately called to the Ark, and directed the movements of those in charge of the drum of the cable so nicely that the descent ceased at the exact moment when the bell came to rest upon a group of beams at the top of the tower. The radio-control, which is so familiar in its thousand applications to-day, was then a new thing, having been invented only a year or so before the deluge, and De Beauxchamps's form of the apparatus was crude. The underlying principle, however, was the same as that now employed--transmission through a metallic wall of impulses capable of being turned into mechanic energy. With its aid they

had no difficulty in detaching the cable from the bell, but it required some careful maneuvering to secure a satisfactory attachment to the beams of the tower. At last, however, this was effected, and immediately they set out for their exploration of drowned New York.

They began with the skeleton tower itself, which had only once or twice been exceeded in height by the famous structures of the era of skyscrapers. In some places they found the granite skin yet in situ, but almost everywhere it had been stripped off, probably by the tremendous waves which swept over it as the flood attained its first thousand feet of elevation. They saw no living forms, except a few curiously shaped phosphorescent creatures of no great size, which scurried away out of the beam of the search-light. They saw no trace of the millions of their fellow-beings who had been swallowed up in this vast grave, and for this all secretly gave thanks. The soil of Madison Square had evidently been washed away, for no signs of the trees which had once shaded it were seen, and a reddish ooze had begun to collect upon the exposed rocks. All around were the shattered ruins of other great buildings, some, like the Metropolitan tower, yet retaining their steel skeletons, others tumbled down, and lying half-buried in the ooze.

Finding nothing of great interest in this neighborhood they turned the course of the bell northward, passing everywhere over interminable ruins, and as soon as they began to skirt the ridge of Morningside Heights the huge form of the cathedral of St. John fell within the circle of projected light. It was unroofed, and some of the walls had

fallen, but some of the immense arches yet retained their upright position. Here, for the first time, they encountered the real giants of the submarine depths. De Beauxchamps, who had seen some of these creatures during his visit to Paris in the Jules Verne, declared that nothing which he had seen there was so terrifying as what they now beheld. One creature, which seemed to be the unresisted master of this kingdom of phosphorescent life, appears to have exceeded in strangeness the utmost descriptive powers of all those who looked upon it, for their written accounts are filled with ejaculations, and are more or less inconsistent with one another. The reader gathers from them, however, the general impression that it made upon their astonished minds.

The creatures were of a livid hue, and had the form of a globe, as large as the bell itself, with a valvular opening on one side which was evidently a mouth, surrounded with a circle of eyelike disks, projecting shafts of self-evolved light into the water. They moved about with surprising ease, rising and sinking at will, sometimes rolling along the curve of an arch, emitting flashes of green fire, and occasionally darting across the intervening spaces in pursuit of their prey, which consisted of smaller phosphorescent animals that fled in the utmost consternation. When the adventurers in the bell saw one of the globular monsters seize its victim they were filled with horror. It had driven its prey into a corner of the wrecked choir, and suddenly it flattened itself like a rubber bulb pressed against the wall, completely covering the creature that was to be devoured, although the effect of its struggles could be perceived; and then, to the amazement of the

onlookers, the living globe slowly turned itself inside out, engulfing the victim in the process.

"Great heavens," exclaimed Professor Abel Able, "it is a gigantic hydroid polyps! That is precisely the way in which those little creatures swallow their prey; outside becomes inside, what was the surface of the body is turned into the lining of the digestive cavity, and every time they take a meal the process of introversion is repeated. This monster is nothing but a huge self-sustaining maw!"

"Très bien," exclaimed De Beauxchamps, with a slight laugh, "and he finds himself in New York, quite chez soi."

Nobody appeared to notice the sarcasm, and, in any case they would quickly have forgotten it, for no sooner had the tragic spectacle which they had witnessed been finished than they suddenly found the bell surrounded by a crowd of the globe-shaped creatures, jostling one another, and flattening themselves against its metallic walls. They pushed the bell about, rolling themselves all over it, and apparently finding nothing terrifying in the searchlight, which was hardly brighter than the phosphorescent gleams which shot from their own luminescent organs. One of them got one of its luminous disks exactly in the field of a magnifying window, and King Richard, who happened to have his eye in the focus, started back with a cry of alarm.

"I cannot describe what I saw," the king wrote in his notebook. "It was

a glimpse of fiery cones, triangles, and circles, ranged in tier behind tier with a piercing eye in the center, and the light that came from them resembled nothing that I have ever seen. It seemed to be a living emanation, and almost paralyzed me."

"We must get away from them," cried De Beauxchamps, as soon as the first overwhelming effect of the attack upon the bell had passed. And immediately he set the propellers at their highest speed.

The bell shook and half rolled over, there was a scurrying among the monsters outside, and two or three of them floated away partly in collapse, as if they had been seriously wounded by the short propeller blades.

The direction of flight chanced to carry them past the dome of the Columbia University Library, which was standing almost intact, and then they floated near the monumental tomb of General Grant, which had crowned a noble elevation overlooking the Hudson River. A portion of the upper part of this structure had been carried away, but the larger part remained in position. They saw no more of the globular creatures which had haunted the ruins of the cathedral, but, instead, there appeared around the bell an immense multitude of small luminescent animals, many of them most beautifully formed, and emitting from their light-producing organs various exquisite colors which turned the surrounding water into an all-embracing rainbow.

But a more marvelous phenomenon quickly made its appearance, causing them to gasp with astonishment. As they drew near the dismantled dome a brilliant gleam suddenly streamed into the ports on the side turned toward the monument--a gush of light so bright that the air inside the bell seemed to have been illuminated with a golden sunrise. They glanced toward the monument, and saw that it was surmounted by some vibrating object which seemed instinct with blinding fire. The colors that sprang from it changed rapidly from gold to purple, and then, through shimmering hues of bronze, to a deep rich orange. It looked like a sun, poised on the horizon. The spectacle was so dazzling, so unexpected, so beautiful, and, associated with the architectural memorial of one of the greatest characters in American history, so strangely suggestive, that even King Richard and the two Frenchmen were strongly moved, while Cosmo and his fellow-countrymen grasped each other by the hand, and the former said, in solemn tones:

"My friends, to my mind, this scene, however accidental, has something of prophecy about it. It changes the current of my thought--America is not dead; in some way she yet survives upon the earth."

Long they gazed and wondered, but at last, partly recovering from their astonishment, at the suggestion of De Beauxchamps, they drew nearer the monument. But when they had arrived within a few yards of it, the blinding light disappeared as if snuffed out, and they saw nothing but the broken gray walls of the dome. The moving object, which had been dimly visible at the beginning, and had evidently been the source of the

light, had vanished.

"The creature that produced the illumination," said Professor Abel Able, "has been alarmed by our approach, and has withdrawn into the interior."

This was, no doubt, the true explanation, but they could perceive no signs of life about the place, and they finally turned away from it with strange sensations.

Avoiding the neighborhood of the cathedral, they steered the bell down the former course of the Hudson, but afterward ventured once more over the drowned city until they arrived at the site of the great station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which they found completely unroofed. They sank the bell into the vast space where the tunnels entered from underneath the old river bed, and again they had a startling experience. Something huge, elongated, and spotted, and provided with expanding claw-like limbs, slowly withdrew as their light streamed upon the reddish ooze covering the great floor. The nondescript retreated backward into the mouth of a tunnel. They endeavored, cautiously, to follow it, turning a magnifying window in its direction, and obtaining a startling view of glaring eyes, but the creature hastened its retreat, and the last glimpse they had was of a grotesque head, which threw out piercing rays of green fire as it passed deeper into the tunnel.

"This is too terrible," exclaimed King Richard, shuddering. "In Heaven's name, let us go no farther."

"We must visit Wall Street," said Amos Blank. "We must see what the former financial center of the world now looks like."

Accordingly they issued from the ruined station, and, resuming their course southward, arrived at length over the great money center. The tall buildings which had shouldered each other in that wonderful district, turning the streets into immense gorges, had, to a certain extent, protected one another against the effects of the waves, and the skeletons of many were yet standing. In the midst of them the dark spire of old Trinity still pointed stoutly upward, as if continuing its hopeless struggle against the spirit of worldly grandeur whose aspiring creations, though in ruins, yet dwarfed this symbol of immortality. At the intersection of the Wall and Broad Street cañons they found an enormous steel edifice, which had been completed a short time before the deluge, tumbled in ruins upon the classic form of the old Stock Exchange, the main features of whose front were yet recognizable. The weight of the fallen building had been so great that it had crushed the roof of the treasure vaults which had occupied its ground floor, and the fragments of safes with their contents had been hurled over the northern expanse of Broad Street. The red ooze had covered most of the wasted wealth there heaped up, but in places piles of gold showed through the covering. Amos Blank became greatly excited at this. His old proclivities seemed to resume their sway and his former madness to return, and he buried his finger nails in his clenched palms as he pressed his face against a window, exclaiming:

"My gold! MY GOLD! Let me out of this! I must have it!"

"Nobody can get out of the bell, Mr. Blank," said Cosmo soothingly. "And the gold is now of no use to anybody."

"I tell you," cried Blank, "that that is my gold. It comes from my vaults, and I must get out!" And he dashed his fists wildly against the glass until his knuckles were covered with blood. Then he sought about for some implement with which to break the glass. They were compelled to seize him, and a dreadful struggle followed in the restricted space within the bell. In the midst of it Blank's face became set, and his eyes stared wildly out of a window.

The others followed the direction of his gaze, and they were almost frozen into statues. Close beside the bell, which had, during the struggle, floated near to the principal heap of mingled treasure and ruin, heavily squatted on the very summit of the pile, was such a creature as no words could depict--of a ghastly color, bulky and malformed, furnished with three burning eyes that turned now green, now red with lambent flame, and great shapeless limbs, which it uplifted one after the other, striking awkward, pawing blows at the bell! It seemed to the horrified onlookers to be the very demon of greed defending its spoil. Blank sank helpless on the bottom side of the bell, and the others remained for a time petrified, and unable to speak. Suddenly the dreadful creature, making a forward lunge from its perch, struck the

bell a mighty blow that sent it spinning in a partly upward direction. The inmates were tumbled over one another, bruised and cut by the projections that served for hand and foot holds. So great had been the impact of the blow that the bell continued to revolve for several minutes, and they could do nothing to help themselves, except to seize the holds as they came within their grasp, and hang on for dear life. The violent shaking up roused Blank from his trance, and he hung on desperately with the others.

After a while the bell ceased to spin, and began to sink again toward the bottom. De Beauxchamps, who had recovered some degree of self-command, instantly began to operate the control governing the propellers, and in a few minutes he had the bell moving in a fixed direction.

"This way, this way," cried Cosmo, glancing out of the windows to orient himself. "We have seen enough! We must get back to the cable, and return to the Ark!"

They were terror-stricken now, and pushing the propellers to their utmost, they fled toward the site of the Metropolitan tower. On their way, although for a time they passed over the course of the East River, they saw no signs of the great bridges except the partly demolished but yet beautiful towers of the oldest of them, which had been constructed of heavy granite blocks. They found the cable attached as they had left it, and, although they were yet nervous from their recent experience,

they had no great difficulty in re-attaching it to the bell. Then, with a sigh of relief, they signaled, and shouted through the telephone to the Ark.

But no answer came, and there was no responsive movement of the cable! They signaled and called again, but without result.

"My God!" said Cosmo, in a faltering voice. "Can anything have happened to the cable?"

They looked at each other with blanched cheeks, and no man found a word to reply.