

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAREWELL TO THE BALTIMORE GUN CLUB.

The intense interest of our extraordinary but most veracious history having reached its culmination at the end of the last chapter, our absorbing chronicle might with every propriety have been then and there concluded; but we can't part from our gracious and most indulgent reader before giving him a few more details which may be instructive perhaps, if not amusing.

No doubt he kindly remembers the world-wide sympathy with which our three famous travellers had started on their memorable trip to the Moon. If so, he may be able to form some idea of the enthusiasm universally excited by the news of their safe return. Would not the millions of spectators that had thronged Florida to witness their departure, now rush to the other extremity of the Union to welcome them back? Could those innumerable Europeans, Africans and Asiatics, who had visited the United States simply to have a look at M'Nicholl, Ardan and Barbican, ever think of quitting the country without having seen those wonderful men again? Certainly not! Nay, more--the reception and the welcome that those heroes would everywhere be greeted with, should be on a scale fully commensurate with the grandeur of their own gigantic enterprise. The Sons of Earth who had fearlessly quitted this terrestrial globe and who had succeeded in returning after accomplishing a journey inconceivably wonderful, well deserved to be received with every

extremity of pride, pomp and glorious circumstance that the world is capable of displaying.

To catch a glimpse of these demi-gods, to hear the sound of their voices, perhaps even to touch their hands--these were the only emotions with which the great heart of the country at large was now throbbing.

To gratify this natural yearning of humanity, to afford not only to every foreigner but to every native in the land an opportunity of beholding the three heroes who had reflected such indelible glory on the American name, and to do it all in a manner eminently worthy of the great American Nation, instantly became the desire of the American People.

To desire a thing, and to have it, are synonymous terms with the great people of the American Republic.

A little thinking simplified the matter considerably: as all the people could not go to the heroes, the heroes should go to all the people.

So decided, so done.

It was nearly two months before Barbican and his friends could get back to Baltimore. The winter travelling over the Rocky Mountains had been very difficult on account of the heavy snows, and, even when they found themselves in the level country, though they tried to travel as privately as possible, and for the present positively declined all

public receptions, they were compelled to spend some time in the houses of the warm friends near whom they passed in the course of their long journey.

The rough notes of their Moon adventures--the only ones that they could furnish just then--circulating like wild fire and devoured with universal avidity, only imparted a keener whet to the public desire to feast their eyes on such men. These notes were telegraphed free to every newspaper in the country, but the longest and best account of the "Journey to the Moon" appeared in the columns of the New York Herald, owing to the fact that Watkins the reporter had had the adventurers all to himself during the whole of the three days' trip of the Susquehanna back to San Francisco. In a week after their return, every man, woman, and child in the United States knew by heart some of the main facts and incidents in the famous journey; but, of course, it is needless to say that they knew nothing at all about the finer points and the highly interesting minor details of the astounding story. These are now all laid before the highly favored reader for the first time. I presume it is unnecessary to add that they are worthy of his most implicit confidence, having been industriously and conscientiously compiled from the daily journals of the three travellers, revised, corrected, and digested very carefully by Barbican himself.

It was, of course, too early at this period for the critics to pass a decided opinion on the nature of the information furnished by our travellers. Besides, the Moon is an exceedingly difficult subject. Very few newspaper men in the country are capable of offering a single

opinion regarding her that is worth reading. This is probably also the reason why half-scientists talk so much dogmatic nonsense about her.

Enough, however, had appeared in the notes to warrant the general opinion that Barbican's explorations had set at rest forever several pet theories lately started regarding the nature of our satellite. He and his friends had seen her with their own eyes, and under such favorable circumstances as to be altogether exceptional. Regarding her formation, her origin, her inhabitability, they could easily tell what system should be rejected and what might be admitted. Her past, her present, and her future, had been alike laid bare before their eyes. How can you object to the positive assertion of a conscientious man who has passed within a few hundred miles of Tycho, the culminating point in the strangest of all the strange systems of lunar oreography? What reply can you make to a man who has sounded the dark abysses of the Plato crater? How can you dare to contradict those men whom the vicissitudes of their daring journey had swept over the dark, Invisible Face of the Moon, never before revealed to human eye? It was now confessedly the privilege and the right of these men to set limits to that selenographic science which had till now been making itself so very busy in reconstructing the lunar world. They could now say, authoritatively, like Cuvier lecturing over a fossil skeleton: "Once the Moon was this, a habitable world, and inhabitable long before our Earth! And now the Moon is that, an uninhabitable world, and uninhabitable ages and ages ago!"

We must not even dream of undertaking a description of the grand fête by which the return of the illustrious members of the Gun Club was to be

adequately celebrated, and the natural curiosity of their countrymen to see them was to be reasonably gratified. It was one worthy in every way of its recipients, worthy of the Gun Club, worthy of the Great Republic, and, best of all, every man, woman, and child in the United States could take part in it. It required at least three months to prepare it: but this was not to be regretted as its leading idea could not be properly carried out during the severe colds of winter.

All the great railroads of the Union had been closely united by temporary rails, a uniform gauge had been everywhere adopted, and every other necessary arrangement had been made to enable a splendid palace car, expressly manufactured for the occasion by Pullman himself, to visit every chief point in the United States without ever breaking connection. Through the principal street in each city, or streets if one was not large enough, rails had been laid so as to admit the passage of the triumphal car. In many cities, as a precaution against unfavorable weather, these streets had been arched over with glass, thus becoming grand arcades, many of which have been allowed to remain so to the present day. The houses lining these streets, hung with tapestry, decorated with flowers, waving with banners, were all to be illuminated at night time in a style at once both the most brilliant and the most tasteful. On the sidewalks, tables had been laid, often miles and miles long, at the public expense; these were to be covered with every kind of eatables, exquisitely cooked, in the greatest profusion, and free to everyone for twelve hours before the arrival of the illustrious guests and also for twelve hours after their departure. The idea mainly aimed at was that, at the grand national banquet about to take place, every

inhabitant of the United States, without exception, could consider Barbican and his companions as his own particular guests for the time being, thus giving them a welcome the heartiest and most unanimous that the world has ever yet witnessed.

Evergreens were to deck the lamp-posts; triumphal arches to span the streets; fountains, squirting eau de cologne, to perfume and cool the air; bands, stationed at proper intervals, to play the most inspiring music; and boys and girls from public and private schools, dressed in picturesque attire, to sing songs of joy and glory. The people, seated at the banquetting tables, were to rise and cheer and toast the heroes as they passed; the military companies, in splendid uniforms, were to salute them with presented arms; while the bells pealed from the church towers, the great guns roared from the armories, feux de joie resounded from the ships in the harbor, until the day's wildest whirl of excitement was continued far into the night by a general illumination and a surpassing display of fireworks. Right in the very heart of the city, the slowly moving triumphal car was always to halt long enough to allow the Club men to join the cheering citizens at their meal, which was to be breakfast, dinner or supper according to that part of the day at which the halt was made.

The number of champagne bottles drunk on these occasions, or of the speeches made, or of the jokes told, or of the toasts offered, or of the hands shaken, of course, I cannot now weary my kind reader by detailing, though I have the whole account lying before me in black and white, written out day by day in Barbican's own bold hand. Yet I should like to

give a few extracts from this wonderful journal. It is a perfect model of accuracy and system. Whether detailing his own doings or those of the innumerable people he met, Caesar himself never wrote anything more lucid or more pointed. But nothing sets the extraordinary nature of this great man in a better light than the firm, commanding, masterly character of the handwriting in which these records are made. The elegant penmanship all through might easily pass for copper plate engraving--except on one page, dated "Boston, after dinner," where, candor compels me to acknowledge, the "Solid Men" appear to have succeeded in rendering his iron nerves the least bit wobbly.

The palace car had been so constructed that, by turning a few cranks and pulling out a few bolts, it was transformed at once into a highly decorated and extremely comfortable open barouche. Marston took the seat usually occupied by the driver: Ardan and M'Nicholl sat immediately under him, face to face with Barbican, who, in order that everyone might be able to distinguish him, was to keep all the back seat for himself, the post of honor.

On Monday morning, the fifth of May, a month generally the pleasantest in the United States, the grand national banquet commenced in Baltimore, and lasted twenty-four hours. The Gun Club insisted on paying all the expenses of the day, and the city compromised by being allowed to celebrate in whatever way it pleased the reception of the Club men on their return.

They started on their trip that same day in the midst of one of the

grandest ovations possible to conceive. They stopped for a little while at Wilmington, but they took dinner in Philadelphia, where the splendor of Broad Street (at present the finest boulevard in the world, being 113 feet wide and five miles long) can be more easily alluded to than even partially described.

The house fronts glittered with flowers, flags, pictures, tapestries, and other decorations; the chimneys and roofs swarmed with men and boys cheerfully risking their necks every moment to get one glance at the "Moon men"; every window was a brilliant bouquet of beautiful ladies waving their scented handkerchiefs and showering their sweetest smiles; the elevated tables on the sidewalks, groaning with an abundance of excellent and varied food, were lined with men, women, and children, who, however occupied in eating and drinking, never forgot to salute the heroes, cheering them lustily as they slowly moved along; the spacious street itself, just paved from end to end with smooth Belgian blocks, was a living moving panorama of soldiers, temperance men, free masons, and other societies, radiant in gorgeous uniforms, brilliant in flashing banners, and simply perfect in the rhythmic cadence of their tread, wings of delicious music seeming to bear them onward in their proud and stately march.

A vast awning, spanning the street from ridge to ridge, had been so prepared and arranged that, in case of rain or too strong a glare from the summer sun, it could be opened out wholly or partially in the space of a very few minutes. There was not, however, the slightest occasion for using it, the weather being exceedingly fine, almost paradisiacal,

as Marston loved to phrase it.

The "Moon men" supped and spent the night in New York, where they were received with even greater enthusiasm than at Philadelphia. But no detailed description can be given of their majestic progress from city to city through all portions of the mighty Republic. It is enough to say that they visited every important town from Portland to San Francisco, from Salt Lake City to New Orleans, from Mobile to Charleston, and from Saint Louis to Baltimore; that, in every section of the great country, preparations for their reception were equally as enthusiastic, their arrival was welcomed with equal furore, and their departure accompanied with an equal amount of affectionate and touching sympathy.

The New York Herald reporter, Mr. Watkins, followed them closely everywhere in a palace car of his own, and kept the public fully enlightened regarding every incident worth regarding along the route, almost as soon as it happened. He was enabled to do this by means of a portable telegraphic machine of new and most ingenious construction. Though its motive power was electricity, it could dispense with the ordinary instruments and even with wires altogether, yet it managed to transmit messages to most parts of the world with an accuracy that, considering how seldom it failed, is almost miraculous. The principle actuating it, though guessed at by many shrewd scientists, is still a profound secret and will probably remain so for some time longer, the Herald having purchased the right to its sole and exclusive use for fifteen years, at an enormous cost.

Who shall say that the apotheosis of our three heroes was not worthy of them, or that, had they lived in the old prehistoric times, they would not have taken the loftiest places among the demi-gods?

As the tremendous whirl of excitement began slowly to die away, the more thoughtful heads of the Great Republic began asking each other a few questions:

Can this wonderful journey, unprecedented in the annals of wonderful journeys, ever lead to any practical result?

Shall we ever live to see direct communication established with the Moon?

Will any Air Line of space navigation ever undertake to start a system of locomotion between the different members of the solar system?

Have we any reasonable grounds for ever expecting to see trains running between planet and planet, as from Mars to Jupiter and, possibly afterwards, from star to star, as from Polaris to Sirius?

Even to-day these are exceedingly puzzling questions, and, with all our much vaunted scientific progress, such as "no fellow can make out." But if we only reflect a moment on the audacious go-a-headiveness of the Yankee branch of the Anglo Saxon race, we shall easily conclude that the American people will never rest quietly until they have pushed to its last result and to every logical consequence the astounding step so

daringly conceived and so wonderfully carried out by their great countryman Barbican.

In fact, within a very few months after the return of the Club men from the Continental Banquet, as it was called in the papers, the country was flooded by a number of little books, like Insurance pamphlets, thrust into every letter box and pushed under every door, announcing the formation of a new company called The Grand Interstellar Communication Society. The Capital was to be 100 million dollars, at a thousand dollars a share: J.P. BARBICAN, ESQ., P.G.C. was to be President; Colonel JOSHUA D. M'NICHOLL, Vice-President; Hon. J.T. MARSTON, Secretary; Chevalier MICHAEL ARDAN, General Manager; JOHN MURPHY, ESQ., Chief Engineer; H. PHILLIPS COLEMAN, ESQ. (Philadelphia lawyer), Legal Adviser; and the Astrological Adviser was to be Professor HENRY of Washington. (Belfast's blunder had injured him so much in public estimation, his former partisans having become his most merciless revilers, that it was considered advisable to omit his name altogether even in the list of the Directors.)

From the very beginning, the moneyed public looked on the G.I.C.S, with decided favor, and its shares were bought up pretty freely. Conducted on strictly honorable principles, keeping carefully aloof from all such damaging connection as the Credit Mobilier, and having its books always thrown open for public inspection, its reputation even to-day is excellent and continually improving in the popular estimation. Holding out no utopian inducements to catch the unwary, and making no wheedling promises to blind the guileless, it states its great objects with all

their great advantages, without at the same time suppressing its enormous and perhaps insuperable difficulties. People know exactly what to think of it, and, whether it ever meets with perfect success or proves a complete failure, no one in the country will ever think of casting a slur on the bright name of its peerless President, J.P. Barbican.

For a few years this great man devoted every faculty of his mind to the furthering of the Company's objects. But in the midst of his labors, the rapid approach of the CENTENNIAL surprised him. After a long and careful consultation on the subject, the Directors and Stockholders of the G.I.C.S. advised him to suspend all further labors in their behalf for a few years, in order that he might be freer to devote the full energies of his giant intellect towards celebrating the first hundredth anniversary of his country's Independence--as all true Americans would wish to see it celebrated--in a manner every way worthy of the GREAT REPUBLIC OF THE WEST!

Obeying orders instantly and with the single-idea'd, unselfish enthusiasm of his nature, he threw himself at once heart and soul into the great enterprise. Though possessing no official prominence--this he absolutely insists upon--he is well known to be the great fountain head whence emanate all the life, order, dispatch, simplicity, economy, and wonderful harmony which, so far, have so eminently characterized the magnificent project. With all operations for raising the necessary funds--further than by giving some sound practical advice--he positively refused to connect himself (this may be the reason why subscriptions to

the Centennial stock are so slow in coming in), but in the proper apportionment of expenses and the strict surveillance of the mechanical, engineering, and architectural departments, his services have proved invaluable. His experience in the vast operations at Stony Hill has given him great skill in the difficult art of managing men. His voice is seldom heard at the meetings, but when it is, people seem to take a pleasure in readily submitting to its dictates.

In wet weather or dry, in hot weather or cold, he may still be seen every day at Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, leisurely strolling from building to building, picking his steps quietly through the bustling crowds of busy workmen, never speaking a word, not even to Marston his faithful shadow, often pencilling something in his pocket book, stopping occasionally to look apparently nowhere, but never, you may be sure, allowing a single detail in the restless panorama around him to escape the piercing shaft of his eagle glance.

He is evidently determined on rendering the great CENTENNIAL of his country a still greater and more wonderful success than even his own world-famous and never to be forgotten JOURNEY through the boundless fields of ether, and ALL AROUND THE MOON!

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