

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END.

It will be remembered that immense sympathy accompanied the three travellers upon their departure. If the beginning of their enterprise had caused such excitement in the old and new world, what enthusiasm must welcome their return! Would not those millions of spectators who had invaded the Floridian peninsula rush to meet the sublime adventurers? Would those legions of foreigners from all points of the globe, now in America, leave the Union without seeing Barbicane, Nicholl, and Michel Ardan once more? No, and the ardent passion of the public would worthily respond to the grandeur of the enterprise. Human beings who had left the terrestrial spheroid, who had returned after their strange journey into celestial space, could not fail to be received like the prophet Elijah when he returned to the earth. To see them first, to hear them afterwards, was the general desire.

This desire was to be very promptly realised by almost all the inhabitants of the Union.

Barbicane, Michel Ardan, Nicholl, and the delegates of the Gun Club returned without delay to Baltimore, and were there received with indescribable enthusiasm. The president's travelling notes were ready to be given up for publicity. The New York Herald bought this manuscript

at a price which is not yet known, but which must have been enormous. In fact, during the publication of the Journey to the Moon they printed 5,000,000 copies of that newspaper. Three days after the travellers' return to the earth the least details of their expedition were known. The only thing remaining to be done was to see the heroes of this superhuman enterprise.

The exploration of Barbicane and his friends around the moon had allowed them to control the different theories about the terrestrial satellite. These savants had observed it de visu and under quite peculiar circumstances. It was now known which systems were to be rejected, which admitted, upon the formation of this orb, its origin, and its inhabitability. Its past, present, and future had given up their secrets. What could be objected to conscientious observations made at less than forty miles from that curious mountain of Tycho, the strangest mountain system of lunar orography? What answers could be made to savants who had looked into the dark depths of the amphitheatre of Pluto? Who could contradict these audacious men whom the hazards of their enterprise had carried over the invisible disc of the moon, which no human eye had ever seen before? It was now their prerogative to impose the limits of that selenographic science which had built up the lunar world like Cuvier did the skeleton of a fossil, and to say, "The moon was this, a world inhabitable and inhabited anterior to the earth! The moon is this, a world now uninhabitable and uninhabited!"

In order to welcome the return of the most illustrious of its members

and his two companions, the Gun Club thought of giving them a banquet; but a banquet worthy of them, worthy of the American people, and under such circumstances that all the inhabitants of the Union could take a direct part in it.

All the termini of the railroads in the State were joined together by movable rails. Then, in all the stations hung with the same flags, decorated with the same ornaments, were spread tables uniformly dressed. At a certain time, severely calculated upon electric clocks which beat the seconds at the same instant, the inhabitants were invited to take their places at the same banquet.

During four days, from the 5th to the 9th of January, the trains were suspended like they are on Sundays upon the railways of the Union, and all the lines were free.

One locomotive alone, a very fast engine, dragging a state saloon, had the right of circulating, during these four days, upon the railways of the United States.

This locomotive, conducted by a stoker and a mechanic, carried, by a great favour, the Honourable J.T. Maston, Secretary of the Gun Club.

The saloon was reserved for President Barbicane, Captain Nicholl, and Michel Ardan.

The train left the station of Baltimore upon the whistle of the engine-driver amidst the hurrahs and all the admiring interjections of the American language. It went at the speed of eighty leagues an hour. But what was that speed compared to the one with which the three heroes had left the Columbiad?

Thus they went from one town to another, finding the population in crowds upon their passage saluting them with the same acclamations, and showering upon them the same "bravaes." They thus travelled over the east of the Union through Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, and New Brunswick; north and west through New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin; south through Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana; south-east through Alabama and Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas; they visited the centre through Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and Indiana; then after the station of Washington they re-entered Baltimore, and during four days they could imagine that the United States of America, seated at one immense banquet, saluted them simultaneously with the same hurrahs.

This apotheosis was worthy of these heroes, whom fable would have placed in the ranks of demigods.

And now would this attempt, without precedent in the annals of travels, have any practical result? Would direct communication ever be established with the moon? Would a service of navigation ever be founded across space for the solar world? Will people ever go from planet to

planet, from Jupiter to Mercury, and later on from one star to another, from the Polar star to Sirius, would a method of locomotion allow of visiting the suns which swarm in the firmament?

No answer can be given to these questions, but knowing the audacious ingenuity of the Anglo-Saxon race, no one will be astonished that the Americans tried to turn President Barbicane's experiment to account.

Thus some time after the return of the travellers the public received with marked favour the advertisement of a Joint-Stock Company (Limited), with a capital of a hundred million dollars, divided into a hundred thousand shares of a thousand dollars each, under the name of National Company for Interstellar Communication--President, Barbicane; Vice-President, Captain Nicholl; Secretary, J.T. Maston; Director, Michel Ardan--and as it is customary in America to foresee everything in business, even bankruptcy, the Honourable Harry Trollope, Commissary Judge, and Francis Dayton were appointed beforehand assignees.

THE END.