

ROUND THE MOON.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOMENT OF EXCITEMENT. This phenomenon, curious but explainable, was happening under these strange conditions.

Every object thrown from the projectile would follow the same course and never stop until it died. There was a subject for conversation which the whole evening could not exhaust.

Besides, the excitement of the three travelers increased as they drew near the end of their journey. They expected unforeseen incidents, and new phenomena; and nothing would have astonished them in the frame of mind which they were in.

Their over-extended imagination went faster than the projectile, whose speed was evidently diminishing, though insensibly to themselves. But the moon grew larger to their eyes, and they fancied if they stretched out their hands they could seize it.

The next day, the 5th of November, at five in the morning, all three were on foot. That day was to be the last of their journey, if all calculations were true. That very night at twelve o'clock in eighteen hours, exactly at the full moon, they would reach its brilliant disc. The next midnight would see that journey ended, the most extraordinary of ancient or modern times.

Thus from the first of the morning, through the centuries silvered by its rays, they saluted the orb of night with a confident and joyous hurra.

The moon was advancing majestically along the stary firmament. A few more degrees, and she would reach the exact point where her meeting with the projectile was to take place.

According to his own observations, Barbicane reckoned that they would land on her northern hemisphere, where stretch immense plains, and where mountains are rare. A favorable circumstance if, as they thought, the lunar atmosphere were stored only in its depths.

"Besides," observed Michel Ardan, "a plain is easier to disembark upon than a mountain. A Selimite, deposited in Europe on the summit of Mount Blanc, or in Asia on the top of the Himalayas, would not be quite in the right place."

"And," added Captain Nichol, "on a flat ground, the projectile will remain motionless when it has once touched; whereas on a declivity it would roll like an avalanche, and not being secured it should not come out safe and sound. So it is all for the best."

Indeed the success of the audacious attempt no longer appeared doubtful. But Barbicane was preoccupied with one thought; and he was not wishing to make his companions uneasy, he kept silence on the subject.

The direction the projectile was taking towards the moon's northern hemisphere, showed that her course had been slightly altered. The discharge, mathematically calculated, would carry the projectile to the very center of the lunar disc. If it did not land there, there must have been some deviation. What had caused it? Barbicane could neither imagine, nor determine the importance of the deviation, for they were no pilots.

"Hid, however, that it would have no other result than bringing them near the upper border of the moon, a region more suitable for landing.

Without imparting his uneasiness to his companions, Barbicane contented himself with constantly observing the moon in order to see whether the course of the projectile would not be altered; for the situation would have been terrible if it had failed in its aim, and being carried beyond the disc should be launched into interplanetary space.

At that moment the moon, instead of appearing like a disc, showed its convexity. If the sun's rays had struck it obliquely, the shadow thrown would have brought out the high mountains, which would have been clearly detached. The eye might have gazed into the crater's geyring abyss, and followed the capricious fissures which wound through the immense plains. But all relief was as yet veiled in an intense brilliancy. They could scarcely distinguish those large spots which give to the moon the appearance of a human face.

"Face, indeed!" said Michel Ardan, "but I am sorry for the amiable sister of Apollo. A very pitted face!" But the travelers, now so near the end, were incessantly observing this new world. They imagined themselves walking through the unknown country, climbing its highest peaks, descending into its lowest depths. Here and there they fancied they saw vast seas, scarcely kept together under so rarified an atmosphere, and water courses emptying the mountain tabularies. Leaving over the abyss, they hoped to catch some sounds from that orb forever mute in the solitude of space. That last day left them.

They took down the most trifling details. A vague uneasiness took possession of them as they neared the end. This uneasiness would have been doubled had they felt how their speed had decreased. It would have seemed to them quite insufficient to carry them to the end. It was because the projectile then weighed! almost nothing. Its weight was over decreasing, and would be entirely annihilated on that line where the lunar and terrestrial attractions would neutralize each other.

But in spite of his pre-occupation, Michel Ardan did not forget the morning report with his accustomed punctuality. They ate with a good appetite. Nothing was so excellent as the soup liquified by the heat of the gas; nothing better than the preserved meat. Some glasses of good French wine crowned the repast, causing Michel Ardan to remark that the lunar vines warmed by that radiant sun, ought to distill even more generous wines; that if, they existed. In any case the far-seeing Frenchman had taken care not to forget in his collection some precious cuttings of the Medoc and Cote d'Or, upon which he founded his hopes.

Reid and Regnault's apparatus worked with great regularity. Not an atom of carbonic acid resisted the potash; and as to the oxygen, Captain Nichol said, "it was of the first quality." The little vapor enclosed in the projectile mixed with the

air tempered the dryness; and many apartments in London, Paris or New York, and many theatres are not in such a healthy condition. But that it might act with regularity, the apparatus must be kept in perfect order; so each morning Michel visited the escape regulators, tried the traps, and regulated the heat of the gas by the pyrometer. Everything had gone well up to that time, and the travelers, imitating the worthy Joseph T. Maston, began to acquire a degree of ebullient which would have rendered them unrecognizable if their imprisonment had been prolonged to some months. In a word they behaved like chickens in a coop; they were getting fat.

In looking through the scottish Barbicane saw the spectre of the dog, and other divers objects which had been thrown from the projectile obstinately following them. Diana howled lugubriously on seeing the remains of Satelet, which seemed as motionless as if they represented on the solid earth.

"Do you know my friends," said Michel Ardan, "that if one of us had succumbed to the shock consequent on departure, we should have had a great deal of trouble to bury him? What am I saying! to stieris him, as here they take the place of earth. You see the opening body would have followed us into space like a remora."

"That would have been said," said Nichol.

"Ah!" continued Michel, "what I regret is not being able to take a walk under this radiant ether, to bathe oneself in it, to wrap oneself in the sun's pure rays. If Barbicane had only thought of furnishing us with a diving apparatus and an air pump, I could have ventured out and assumed fanciful attitudes of feigned monsters on the top of the projectile."

"Well, old Michel," replied Barbicane, "you would not have made a feigned monster long, for in spite of your diver's dress, availed by the expansion of air within you, you would have burst like a shell, or rather like a balloon which has risen too high. So do not regret it, and do not forget this as long as we float in space, all sentimental walks beyond the projectile is forbidden."

"I do not know," exclaimed Michel, "with a fellow which provoked a sonorous echo in the projectile."

"No, I have not even thought about it," retorted Barbicane, in the same loud tone.

"Well, I know," replied Michel, "it was you, my friend, Nichol, who could no longer contain the growling of his voice."

"I shall speak if it suits me," exclaimed Michel, seizing his companions, arms by violence.

"It must suit you," said Barbicane, "with an eye on fire, and a stammering mouth, as if you who draw us into this frightful journey, and we want to know what for."

"Yes," said the captain, "now that I do not know where I am going, I want to know why I am going."

"Why? I am going, Michel, jumping a yard high, why? To take possession of the moon in the name of the United States; to add a fourth State to the Union; to colonize the lunar regions; to cultivate them, to people them, to transport there the arts and industry; to civilize the Selimite, unless they are more civilized than we are; and to constitute them a republic, if they are not already one."

"And if there are no Selimite?" retorted Nichol, who, under the influence of this unaccountable intoxication, was very contradictory.

"Who said that there were no Selimite?" exclaimed Michel in a threatening tone.

"I do," howled Nichol.

"Captain," said Michel, "do not repeat thy insolence. I will knock your teeth down your throat!"

The two adversaries were about to fall upon each other, and the incoherent discussion threatened to merge into a fight, when Barbicane intervened with one word.

"Stop, miserable men," said he, separating his two companions; "if there are no Selimite, we will do without them. We have only to wait Selimite. Down with the Selimite!"

"The empire of the moon belongs to us," said Nichol, "let us three constitute the PATENT OFFICE OF THE MOON."

"I will be the congress," cried Michel.

"And I the senate," retorted Nichol.

"And Barbicane, the president," howled Michel.

"Not a president elected by the nation," replied Nichol.

"Very well, a president elected by the congress," cried Michel, "and as I am the congress, you are unanimously elected!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! for President Barbicane," exclaimed Nichol.

"Hip! hip! hip!" vociferated Michel Ardan.

Then the President and the Senate struck up in a tremendous voice the popular song "Yankee Doodle," whilst from the Congress resounded the masculine tones of the "Marseillaise."

Then they struck up a frantic dance, with musical gestures, idiotic stammerings, and somersaults like those of the bonbons shown in the circus. Diana, joining in the dance, had set their respiratory apparatus on fire, fell motionless to the bottom of the projectile.

the Columbiad still buried in the soil of Florida? Is cotton and nitric acid wanted where with to manufacture the pyroxyle? Will not the moon again pass to the zenith of Florida? In eight days' time will not occupy exactly the same place as to-day?"

"Yes," continued Michel, "yes Maston will come, and with him our friends Elphinstone, Blonsberg, all the members of the Gun Club, and they will be well received. And by and by they will run trains of projectiles between the earth and the moon!"

"Hurrah for J. T. Maston!"

It is probable that, if the Hon. J. T. Maston did not hear the hurrahs uttered in his honor, his ears at least tingled. What was he doing then? Doubtless peering at the Rocky Mountains, at the station of Long's Peak, he was trying to find the invisible projectile gravitating in space. If he was thinking of his dear companions, we must allow that they were not far behind him; and that under the influence of a strange excitement, they were devoting to him their best thoughts.

But whence this excitement, which was evidently growing upon the tenants of the projectile? Their sobriety could not be doubted. This strange irritation of the brain, which he attributed to the peculiar circumstances under which they found themselves, to their proximity to the orb of night, from which only a few hours separated them, by some secret influence of the moon acting upon their nervous system? Their faces were as rosy as if they had been exposed to the roiling flames of an oven; their voices resounded in loud accents; their words escaped like champagne corks driven out by carbonic acid; their gestures became wanton; they wanted to be amused; they none of them noticed this great tension of the mind.

"Now," said Nichol in a short tone, "now that I do not know whether we shall ever return from the moon, I want to know what we are going to do there?"

"What are we going to do there?" replied Barbicane, stamping with his foot as if he was in a fencing school; "I do not know."

"I do not know," exclaimed Michel, "with a fellow which provoked a sonorous echo in the projectile."

"No, I have not even thought about it," retorted Barbicane, in the same loud tone.

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