

THE DOMINION OF THE WORLD 1: THE PLUTOCRATIC PLOT

I. William Boltyn's Projects

The sumptuous house that the billionaire William Boltyn occupied at number C Seventh Avenue in Chicago was in turmoil that evening. The master of the house, hiding his anxiety beneath an apparent coolness, refused to abandon the solid gold receiver of the telephone that linked his study to the assembly hall of the Capitol in Washington.

In vain, the electric bell had informed him that the evening meal was served; in vain the kitchen director and dining room supervisor, Tom Punch had come to see him in person. Tom Punch was celebrated throughout America for his vast corpulence, his inexhaustible gaiety, his almost incredible ability to absorb liquids, and his understanding of all things edible. In spite of all the favor he enjoyed in his employer's eyes, he was only greeted by a rather brutal rebuff.

Even William Boltyn's daughter, Miss Aurora, had been no more successful.

Aurora was a tall and earnest young woman, slender and blonde, who had been devoted since the most tender age to all sports, from cycling to photography and tennis to yachting. "Father," she said, with a resolute air, "I know how important your preoccupations are, but it would be a good idea to take a little nourishment. It's now nine o'clock in the evening, and you haven't eaten anything since this morning.

"I shan't eat anything until I know the result of the session."

"But what if it goes on all night, Father?"

"Too bad."

"I could have something served here in your study," Aurora said, softly.

"I'm not hungry!" he said, with a hint of anger in his voice and without letting go of the receiver. "Do you think I could have an appetite when I see our compatriots behaving in such a cowardly fashion? If it were up to our representatives, Monroe's fine words, 'America for the Americans!' would no longer be anything but derisory. The States of the Union would have been pillaged and robbed by the French, the English, the Germans and all the parasites of the Old World. You ought to understand that Aurora—I've tried to make you a true American, at any cost."

The young woman did not persist any further.

While her father devoted himself entirely to the communication that seemed to irritate him so much, Aurora went to her bedroom, which was decorated in white satin with silver lace, centrally lit by a monstrous display of orchids in polychromatic glass vases, illuminated from within by minuscule Edison lamps. The vitrified bush spread a very soft light in which blue, green, pink and orange were pleasantly mingled.

As soon as she was inside, Aurora sat down, and was not long delayed in absorbing herself in reading a voluminous periodical illustrated with photographs, which offered accounts and detailed explanations of the most recent scientific discoveries—X-rays, color photography, the artificial manufacture of diamonds—and the results of the latest research in aviation. One feature article was devoted to argentorium, a kind of artificial gold obtained from silver, which was impossible to distinguish from real gold.

But who was William Boltyn? How had he obtained his billions? That is certainly worth an explanation.

Physically, he was a gentleman of tall stature, with a florid complexion, a straight and bony nose, a square jaw, further accentuated by a red-tinted beard trimmed in the Yankee fashion, prominent cheekbones, and eyes with a harsh metallic gleam. With an eminently cold and focused mind and an extremely lucid intelligence when it came to numbers and business matters, he had a talent for realizing, in a practical manner, the most daring enterprises. To judge by his always-equal stride and the almost automatic rigidity of his movements, one might have thought that all his actions were determined by an interior mechanism. He was a perfect specimen of an energetic man.

Holding the whole of the fine arts and literature in extreme scorn, he only had paintings or sculptures in his house in order not to be upstaged by other billionaires, and by way of good

investments. He did not want to know about anything but business; nothing else interested him. Toward all those surrounding him he displayed a mathematical justice, rendering everyone his due to the nearest cent, and nothing more. To him, all of life was a bargain, which he weighed up, haggled over and bought at the best price, without miserliness or generosity.

He only relaxed this industrial rigor in favor of two individuals: his daughter Aurora, for whom he professed a veritable worship, and who had caused him to commit the only follies—which is to say, prodigalities—of his existence, and his cellar-master Tom Punch, toward whom he displayed an excessive indulgence.

The cellar-master was, in fact, one of the rare people who had the gift of amusing the billionaire—and indeed, the sight of Tom Punch could not give rise to melancholy. Six feet tall, and almost as broad, he was somewhat reminiscent of one beer-barrel (the belly) mounted on two smaller ones (the legs), the whole being surmounted by a rubicund head whose jowls, the color of wine lees, hung down beneath a trunk-like nose the color of an over-ripe tomato. Over his lips, as spacious as the mouth of a trumpet, strayed a perpetual smile that uncovered thirty-two dazzling white teeth—for Tom Punch had an appetite as vast as his thirst.

Let us add that he did not lack intelligence. His small gray eyes glittered with mischief. He always had a new funny story to tell, or some eccentric practical joke to plan. One day, when his master invited two rich Englishmen to dinner, who were his rivals in some big deal, Tom Punch had persuaded them to drink so much that they were unable to leave the house for an entire week. When they emerged, the deal had been concluded to their disadvantage. They left Chicago cursing, but could not help agreeing that they had never feasted as magnificently, and never laughed as much.

Tom Punch had other talents too. He played the American kind of guitar known as a banjo delightfully. The instrument in question, essentially composed of a Basque tambourine equipped with a neck and strings, makes a horribly monotonous sound.

As we have said, William Boltyn greatly appreciated Tom Punch's culinary and other talents, all the more so because he had not always been the illustrious billionaire that we have just introduced our readers. He was, as they say in France, the child of his endeavors, and he had arrived in Chicago wearing clogs. The son of poor Kentucky cotton-planters, ruined by the War of Secession, he had been orphaned at seven, without resources, family or friends—but he had the energy and tenacity to accomplish great things.

He had served apprenticeships in a hundred various trades: coke-hauler in a gas factory, photographer's assistant, bartender, machine-operator in a calico factory, prospector, and so on. He had not yet found his path. Finally, in the course of a journey he made to the Far West as a commercial traveler for a company manufacturing chemical fertilizers, he conceived the idea of the large-scale speculation in livestock that made him rich.

Finding an outlet for the immense herds of the Western prairies, which, for want of consumers, were sold at derisory prices—that was the problem. William Boltyn solved it, after six years of hard work. Everyone is familiar with the town-sized abattoirs that he possesses in Chicago, which are the largest in the world. There, day and night, entire trains pour out livestock from every corner of America. The animals, seized as soon as they arrive by automatic steel hooks and moved by enormous machines, are slaughtered, scalded, skinned and butchered in a matter of minutes. The hides, electrically depilated, are heaped up in an immense hall, while the blood and the entrails are steered by means of a special gutter to a factory situated some distance away, where they are transformed into fertilizer. As for the meat, a large fraction is sent to be eaten fresh in neighboring cities. The remainder is canned, or converted into concentrated soups and dried or smoked preparations that can be stored for years.

In Chicago, a monstrous city, the terminus of sixty-two railway lines improvised in a few years, William Boltyn was the owner, in addition to his house and his abattoirs, over a number of buildings between twelve and fifteen stories high. These buildings have nothing in common with those that can be seen in Europe. Immense cubic blocks pierce with square holes, devoid of grace and ornamentation, they consist of a very solid steel frame whose intervals are simply filled in with light brick walls. The weight of the edifice is thus borne by the metal cage and not the walls—with the consequence that once the steel frame is installed, construction can begin at the top and the bottom simultaneously—and it is not unusual for Europeans finding themselves confronted by one of these edifices for the first time to see the upper floors complete while the lower ones are still mere shells.

Equipped with elevators and telephones, heated and lighted by electricity, each of these buildings is an integral whole in which one finds, without going out, a butcher, a baker, a tailor, sometimes even a church, and an open-air concert hall established on the highest platform. The lowest floors are taken up by garages and store-rooms; it is not rare to see stables installed on the second and third floors. Every morning and every evening the horses are taken up in the elevator, along with the other inhabitants of the building.

One can take account, by means of the preceding details, of William Boltyn's princely fortune. He had no rivals in wealth save for Mackay, nicknamed the pope of gold, and Vanderbilt, the Railway King. Canned goods bearing his imprint were sold by the thousand throughout the entire world. He was also the supplier of several European armies. But he would have liked even more. For some time, he had taken significant steps, and spent money in profusion, with the aim of creating an America an ideological movement in favor of war, obsessed by a particular motive.

William Boltyn dreamed of making the United States the most powerful nation in the world. Immeasurably ambitious, having a clear consciousness of the strength that his billions gave him, he hoped for nothing less than one day becoming a sort of Emperor of Capital, to whom the entire world would bow down respectfully.

His theories on this point were clearly formulated.

"We Yankees," he said, "are the most industrialized and most productive people in the world. Thanks to our activity, our practical know-how and our commercial genius—in a word, thanks to our extremely highly-developed qualities as men of action—we have succeeded, in less than a century, in giving our industry and commerce a sophistication that has never been achieved by any European nation. Our civilization is established on solid foundations, and we are not hindered by the lumber of backward ideas to which the people of the Old World pay homage. Thus, the future is ours. The products of our factories are inundating the world. We have only to desire it, and we shall be the masters of the world."

It was precisely with respect to this subject that William Boltyn accused his compatriots of lacking energy and decisiveness.

"How," he asked, "can Congress meekly accept our products being subject to exorbitant taxation on their arrival on European soil? It does not have the audacity to impose the commercial treaties that we require in order to give free extension to our production."

"But," said the statesmen, "we're not in a position to support our pretensions and enforce our will. The last colonial war, from which we only emerged victorious at the cost of much effort and sacrifice, demonstrated the inferiority of our army and our fleet. If we adopt a bellicose attitude, the European powers will unite. We would have to fight against the combined armies and fleets of Russia, England, France and Germany; it would be folly to put ourselves in that situation. Let us limit ourselves, to begin with, to fighting on the economic battlefield."

"What about our billions?" William Boltyn cried, exasperated by that reasoning. "Don't they count for anything? An army! A fleet! To have our rights respected! We'll have them when we want them; we would have had them a long time ago if the men making up Congress were true Yankees, resolute and audacious. It's not dollars that we lack! Our engineers are as clever and experienced as those of the Old World. Well then, let's vote them funds, let's construct arsenals and naval ports, and let's finally take a hard line with the Europeans; let's no longer give the appearance of trembling in the presence of those powers, which are our inferiors from every point of view."

In the conversations he had with the most influential statesmen in the Union, William Boltyn did not say everything he thought. He did not confess his dreams of world domination. He spoke in the name of the American people, when in reality he cared little about the welfare of his compatriots. Egotism was profound rooted within him. In this matter, one thing above all interested him: if the United States took the road of armaments, and if the taxes imposed on American goods when they entered Europe were suppressed, he could expand his canneries vastly; in a short time, he would double his fortune, and then multiply it tenfold. That was his sole dream: to be the richest man in the world, the man who could turn the world upside-down at will, and whose ambition would know no obstacles.

Thus, he never lost an opportunity to spread his ideas, to inflame his compatriots with a hatred of Europeans. The resistance that he encountered in the Senate and the House of Representatives in

Washington enraged him. He had sworn to vanquish it, and for more than a year now, all his efforts had been directed toward that end.

Sowing dollars by the handful, Boltyn hoped to excite public opinion. Journalists in his pay had undertaken a campaign in the principal newspapers of the Union. He had organized conferences and meetings in all the cities in the United States, at which eloquent orators had preached, in every accent, the necessity of constructing arsenals and augmenting the power of the forces on land and at sea.

Finally, in Congress itself, he had been clever enough to ensure the collaboration—self-interested, to be sure—of a certain number of honorable representatives, who had sold their eloquence. In a back room of the house on Seventh Avenue, the billionaire often conferred with them, with regard to the means to employ for the direction of the political campaign. Those secret meetings often went on far into the night.

In the last few days, especially, the agitation stirred up by William Boltyn had suddenly increased. Thanks to the maneuvers of the politicians in his pay, Congress was about to discuss the famous bill. It was a matter of voting a credit of two hundred million dollars to create a fleet and organize an army, with a view to a total modification of American politics with regard to Europe,

That morning, according to the reports of his intermediaries, William Boltyn had believed that he was sure of success, but for several hours, with his ear glued to the telephone receivers, he had been anxiously following the debate, and his conviction was gradually ebbing away.

As midnight was about to sound on the electric clock in his study, the billionaire interrupted the communication and uttered a formidable oath.

The bill had been defeated.

William Boltyn was not a man to waste time lamenting his failure, though. After ten minutes of reflection, he had recovered all his self-composure. It was with an air of absolute calm and with a tranquil appetite that he ate the collation of roast beef and cheese, tea and sandwiches, that had been prepared for him by Tom Punch.

As he was about to go up to his bedroom, whose walls and ceiling were decorated with as much luxury as good taste, he felt a small hand descend upon his shoulder. It was Aurora's.

Very intelligent and earnest, with an admirable knowledge of her father's business affairs, she had been unable to go to sleep without knowing the result of the important vote. She begged her father to give her a few minutes.

"Well, Father, did we win?"

"No, my love," said the billionaire, in a grave one. "The bill was defeated."

"Oh!" said Aurora, without giving any further sign of astonishment or disappointment.

"Yes," the billionaire continued, gradually becoming more animated, "the Congress of the United States is in the process of becoming an Assembly like all the rest. Those making it up no longer have any audacity, ambition, or common sense. Instead of protecting the products of American industry—the richest and most flourishing in the world—and imposing them on backward countries, they're making pacts with the other States and treating foreign industrialists on the same footing as ours. After the defeat I've just suffered, many will sack their workers, demolish their factories and go to live in Europe. But let it not be said that William Boltyn was ever prevented from doing what he wanted."

"I understand your resentment perfectly, Father. If I can help, you know that neither hard work nor travel would deter me."

"My love, I am indeed counting on you."

"What are you going to do?"

"Until tomorrow, that's my secret."

"Very well, Father."

"By the way, tell Tom Punch to come to my room immediately."

Aurora withdrew.

When William Boltyn went into his bedroom, Tom Punch was already there. The billionaire made a sign inviting him to sit down at a vast desk, on which there was a typewriter. A few moments later, the following communication was mechanically reproduced ten times:

*Mr. William Boltyn has the honor of informing Mr. *** that he expects him today and that he begs him to drop everything in order to respond to the invitation that is made to him in a matter of common interest.*

Cordially,

*William Boltyn,
No. C, Seventh Avenue.*

To the billionaire's dictation, Tom Punch—who, as is evident, was as much a confidant as a cook, addressed the summons to a dozen individuals, all great industrialists and property magnates.

Their names were:

Harry Madge, owner of vast cotton plantations and director of a spiritualist organization.

Fred Wikilson, manufacturer of torpedoes and president of the American Steel Company.

Staps-Barker, railway entrepreneur.

Wood-Waller, holder of the electric lighting concession in several large cities.

Sips-Rothson, distiller.

Philips Adam, timber merchant.

Samson Myr and Juan Herald, both proprietors of gold-mines in the Far West.

Only one of the individuals that William Boltyn had invited was honored by a letter personally signed by the billionaire. That was the famous Hattison, the electrical inventor known throughout America and the entire world.