

THE DOMINION OF THE WORLD 2: THE TRANSATLANTIC THREAT

I. The Subatlantic Railway

Several days before, the Parisian newspapers had commented, in considerable detail, on the marriage that had recently taken place between Ned Hattison, the son of the American inventor known throughout the world for his marvelous applications of electricity, and Mademoiselle Lucienne Golbert, the daughter of a highly-reputed scientist and member of the Parisian Académie des Sciences, whose recent invention of a submarine locomotive was still a matter of public discussion.

This marriage, wrote one seemingly well-informed reporter, has not taken place without serious disagreements. The young man's father, the engineer Hattison, was formally opposed to it. We know, from a reliable source, that there is discord between him and his son on the subject of Miss Aurora Boltyn, the daughter of the American billionaire whose meat-canning factories in Chicago are the foremost in the world.

It was in order to conceal his lack of enthusiasm for Miss Boltyn that the young man undertook a voyage to Europe. In Paris, he made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Lucienne Golbert, with whom he was smitten. In order to marry her, he did not hesitate to brave his father's anger. The latter even crossed the Atlantic to try to dissuade his son from that union, but neither supplications nor threats were able to weaken the young man's resolve. A violent rupture ensued. The engineer Hattison returned to America. There have also been claims that the matter is complicated by political factors.

The only son of the American scientist, the eminent engineer that Ned Hattison has now become was a brilliant pupil at West Point. His competence in matters of ballistics and pyrotechnics is indisputable. His mother, a Canadian of French origin, died while he was only a child. He seems to have inherited his love of France from her.

Mademoiselle Lucienne Golbert is a fine and serious young woman, learned and of rare beauty. Their marriage is now a fait accompli. Among those in attendance we find the name of Monsieur Olivier Coronal, the inventor of the terrestrial torpedo.

While the newspapers published the most fantastic allegations regarding the marriage, without rhyme or reason, Ned and Lucienne, full of the joy of their mutual love, had left for a brief honeymoon in Spain.

In the meantime, under Monsieur Golbert's supervision, Tom Punch, their housekeeper, completed the installation of the little villa near Paris that the young American had rented.

Along the Mediterranean coast, from Barcelona to Malaga, their voyage had been a pure delight. While winter was beginning in France with the shedding of the final leaves, the cities were buried in mist and the bare forests shivered in the northerly wind, the sky there was beautiful, the sun resplendent, the meadows and orchards full of fruit.

Ned's happiness had transfigured him. He felt truly revived since Lucienne had become his wife. His loving nature, so long confined by a rigid education under the tutelage of his father, burst forth freely in a flood of tenderness. He now loved, as one only loves once, the young woman he had chosen for her gentleness and intelligence as much as for her beauty.

As well as a spouse, Lucienne knew how to be a friend. She promised herself that she would always be a faithful and devoted companion to her husband, to encourage him in his work and his struggles, to console him in his disappointments.

Sometimes, when they were alone together, Ned was abruptly overwhelmed by sadness. A bitter frown creased his forehead. He was thinking about his father's last words, of the violence of which the aged inventor was capable. He feared for the future. Lucienne was able then to soothe his mind and chase away his apprehensions with a kiss.

In Barcelona, a cosmopolitan and industrial city, Spain's principal port, the young newlyweds stayed at the International Hotel in the heart of the city, on the Rambla del Centro. That avenue, which, while no match for the Champs Élysées, is nevertheless very beautiful, extends its centuries-

old trees as far as the docks. It has numerous kiosks where one can drink, in passing, a cup of chocolate or a glass of *aguardiente*—which, according to Spanish custom, is to be followed by a large glass of iced water.¹ At its extremity, facing the sea, is a statue of Christopher Columbus.

The foreign element has an important place in the population of Barcelona. The commerce of the port attracts, in addition to Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans and Russians, a complete collection of Spaniards of the most various and picturesque types. Alongside the Catalans coiffed in the national *barrettina*,² with their clean-shaven faces, their shot jackets, cotton sashes around their hips and muscular legs encased to the knees in white stockings, the Valencians and Andalusians parade the bright colors of the silken scarves of which they are particularly fond.

One encounters mariners from all nations in the streets. Soldiers and civil guards, with their operetta costumes—waxed tricorns, yellow jackets with puffed sleeves and calf-length gaiters—rub shoulders outside shop-windows with elegant caballeros draped in the national cape and young *senoritas* with big black eyes and red lips, accompanied as they walk by severe *duennas*.

Lucienne was keenly interested by the spectacle, new to her, of that variegated crowd from which strange perfumes rose up, with melodious oaths. Like many Parisians, she had never traveled. The idea of finding herself in a foreign land, hundreds of leagues from Paris, amused her. She wanted to see everything: the port, with its continual comings and goings of shops and fishing-boats; the zoological gardens and their fine collection of wild animals; the cathedral, at the center of which was a garden.

Ned smiled at that tireless curiosity, and, because he spoke very good Spanish, appointed himself as her guide. After staying for a week in the capital of Catalonia, they continued their excursion, following the Mediterranean coast.

Separated by seas and mountains from the rest of Europe, Spain seems, due to its geographical situation, always to have remained backward, hostile to the progress effected in means of locomotion. The rare railways that it possesses are only single-track, and move with desperate slowness.

American mores have not yet penetrated the country. Much more interested in respect hallowed traditions than introducing the turbulence of unlimited activity, Spaniards are rarely in a hurry. Fervently Catholic, or at least superstitious, the peasants have lived in the same way for centuries, nonchalantly cultivating a land that they do not attempt to enrich. They have their qualities and their faults; they are playful, boastful, vain, but their sobriety is exemplary, their courage and love of the fatherland classic.

From the first-class compartment in which they were traveling alone, Ned and Lucienne gazed through lowered windows at the delightful landscape that extended to the limits of horizon beneath a clear and sunlit sky.

To the right, the orange-trees spread heady perfume of their white blossom into the atmosphere. The branches, with their dark green foliage, were weighed down by the weight of the golden fruit. Fields of maize and rice added their warm colors and green patches here and there.

On the roads they saw diligences hitched to six or eight mules filing past endlessly, amid clouds of dust. The convoys of mules dragging the heavy vehicles are the principal means of transport in Spain, more so than railways. At the head, a small donkey steers the caravan in such a way as to avoid pot-holes, and the carriages are hitched up backwards; nonchalantly lying down, the driver can devote himself to the luxury of the siesta.

Then there were forests of cork-oaks, whose thick-barked trunks resemble bloody gibbets, carob-trees, olive plantations, clumps of fig-trees and pomegranate-trees offering the temptation of their fruits.

To the left, the sea extended as far as the eye could see: a deep blue sea, scintillating as if with silver wave-crests, whose breakers gently caressed the shores of fine sand where fishermen's nets were drying in the sun. Gangs of half-naked children were disputing the small fry of a catch that men and women, waist-deep in water and forming a chain at each end of the net, had just hauled on to the shore in a silvery wriggling mass.

In the open water, traveling to Valencia or Alicante, brigs and schooners were inflating their sails in the freshening breeze, Steamers plumed with smoke were disappearing over the horizon.

¹ The authors insert a footnote to explain that *aguardiente* is anisette.

² The authors insert a footnote: "A red, blue or violet cotton bonnet reminiscent of a Phrygian cap."

The young couple did not stop at Tarragona. Along a track bordered with plane-trees the train moved on through a delightful landscape at a modest pace. That evening they stopped in Valencia, whose terraced houses were stacked up, while beneath a silver-blue moon. Valencia, the classical country of oranges, the city whose name alone evokes eternal spring, the sun always shining and nature always in bloom, is less cosmopolitan than Barcelona, with a local color that is more truly Spanish.

A few kilometers from the sea, its picturesque houses with wrought-iron balconies extend on the two banks of its river, their blinds half-closed, surmounted by terraces on which multicolored clothes are hung out to dry, and children in rags smoke cigarettes. Long promenades of palm-trees, aloes and cacti, bordered with sumptuous *fondas*, fill up at the time appointed for strolling with an elegant crowd that chats, smokes and makes grand gestures.

Christmas was approaching. Everyone was laying in supplies of food and drink to celebrate the birth of Christ appropriately. The streets had the animation of a feast day. In the vast square of the covered market another market had been installed in the open air. Around brilliantly-lit shops a joyful crowd accumulated. The merchants could not work fast enough to satisfy their clientele.

On Ned's arm, Lucienne was strolling through the city. "What about our good friend in France?" she said. "And Papa? And Monsieur Coronal? And god old Tom Punch, too? Admit, Ned, that we've been a trifle egotistical in deserting their company. We need to send them something from here, to show them that we haven't forgotten them.

"Definitely," Ned said. "You're always a bountiful angel. Let's see what you can buy for them."

Thanks to Lucienne's sure taste, it did not take long.

In a dusty old shop in the vicinity the second-hand clothing market where one could buy a complete suit for two pesetas, they came across a few *objets d'art* with which the old scientist, a passionate collector of antique trinkets, was sure to be delighted: a blunderbuss in curiously-damascened Moorish steel, and an armchair with a rectangular back and arms, still covered in old Cordovan leather.

As for Olivier Coronal, his bookshelves would be enriched by a marvelous copy of *Don Quixote*, illustrated by copper-plate engravings—probably the first edition. Ned was lucky enough to discover it in the shop of an old white-bearded man in a greasy caftan, who spoke to Lucienne in French and to Ned in English, and seemed ready to offer his wares in two or three other languages, if the two young people, happy with their purchases, had not moved on.

Tom Punch, in his capacity as housekeeper, received, along with a recipe for hare in chocolate, a consignment of fresh dates and pomegranates, and a varied collection of the peppers and spices without which, for the Spaniards, cooking is impossible.

"They must be thinking about us back there," said Ned. "Let them see that we're thinking about them."

They often talked about Olivier Coronal as a sure friend, a noble and generous heart.

"It was from him that I asked advice, Lucienne, when I finally felt that I was free. He doubtless loved you too, and yet he did not hesitate to put us hand in hand, to sacrifice the affection he had—but the future will prove to him that I am not ungrateful."

As they made their way back to their hotel, processions were making their way through the streets.

Christmas, in Spain, is the most important festival of the year. Alms are distributed. In some cities, great banquets are organized, in which, in a spirit of humility, noble ladies come to serve the poor and vagabonds personally. These charitable customs go back for centuries, having resisted revolutions and civil wars. At the doors of churches, beggars draping their dirty pride in rags from which the color has faded, their bare feet in hempen sandals, making broad gestures, gather ample receipts that day. Bands of children armed with noisy rattles run through the streets, installing their deafening orchestra in front of each shop until the owner has given them a bribe.

All hearts are full of joy. On that day, proud and unfortunate Spain forgets its poverty in a hymn of delight.

A few days later, having pushed on as far as Malaga, whose white houses nonchalantly cheer up the entire shore—a land of pretty Andalusians with eyes that are too large and too dark, ardently carmine lips and dainty, neatly-arched feet—Ned and Lucienne started their homeward journey, taking away visions of marvelous flowery and perfumed landscapes.

An elegant and comfortable home awaited them.

Monsieur Golbert had thought of everything. The old man's touching solicitude was evident in the smallest details.

"How happy I am to see you return, my children," he told them. "You know how selfish I am. I need to feel that you are close to me."

"Well, Papa, we shan't leave again, now," said Lucienne, embracing him tenderly. "You'll see how we're both going to pamper you." She added: "The three of us, for I hope that Monsieur Coronal will often be our guest—isn't that so, Ned?"

"I'm counting on it."

Life in the villa soon settled into a routine.

Monsieur Golbert had assured his daughter of a dowry of a hundred thousand francs. Ned still had twenty thousand dollars, none of which remained in America, which would permit him to wait for a few years for the situation that he hoped to create by means of his labor.

Although Tom Punch was not much use, Ned had not wanted to send him away. William Boltyn's former butler had given him numerous proofs of attachment. In that restricted environment, however, that bourgeois and neatly-organized interior, which bore no resemblance to the sumptuous residence of his former master, Tom Punch felt ill at ease. He began to get bored, all the more so because, without admitting it to anyone, he missed Paris and the brasseries of Montmartre, where his talents as a drinker and banjo-player had enjoyed so much success.

Ned was too busy to pay attention to him. In a large building annexed to the villa he had installed a laboratory. His father-in-law's plans for a submarine locomotive interested him greatly.

The scientist had dealt with all the objections. He had demonstrated mathematically to his son-in-law that, apart from two or three matters of secondary importance, the only thing lacking to carry the enterprise forward was capital.

"The establishment of a submarine line between Europe and America is by no means impossible," he said. "Protected by a solid breakwater, one would begin by establishing its departure from the shore. Only there are tempests to be feared. At a depth of twenty-five meters, the sea is always calm. To work under water is child's play nowadays. In addition to the usual diving-bell, we would make use of the engineer Pratti de Pozzo's captive submarine balloon, which would permit us to descend to any depth. As you know though, the calcareous plateau that links the two continents beneath the Ocean lies at a near-constant depth, save for a few accidents of terrain."

"But what about the establishment of the rails? What metal will you employ for the construction of the train, so that the sea water won't oxidize it?"

"You've hit on the weak point, my dear Ned. I can't answer that yet."

A week later, on coming into the laboratory, Monsieur Golbert learned that Ned had just solved the problem.

"I thought of using chromium to armor all the submerged parts," the young man said. "Now, I've just found a means of obtaining that metal in large quantities and very cheaply." The young engineer handed him a chemical formula. "See for yourself," he said—but placed his finger on his lips and said: "Shh! This must be a secret from everyone. It's necessary that no one gets ahead of us."

A few days later, Olivier Coronal, who had at first only come to the villa occasionally, yielded to the pleas of his friends and moved into it permanently, bringing with him the Bellevillois Léon Goupit, Tom Punch's great friend. The latter was not displeased, in the midst of that atmosphere of science and austerity, to rediscover a cheerful companion of the stripe of Olivier Coronal's servant.

To celebrate Coronal's arrival, an intimate dinner was arranged. That day, Tom Punch was less bored. The champagne sparkling in the glasses reminded him of the sumptuous dinners of yore.

They drank to the success of the enterprise for which the three elite minds were combining their intelligence: the triumph of the submarine locomotive.

With patriotic intent, Monsieur Golbert had initially offered the exploitation of his idea to the French government. After the unfavorable conclusions of a committee of enquiry, the Minister had refused to make the necessary credit available. Without recriminations, Monsieur Golbert had taken back his plans.

Abroad, however, the affair had attracted a good deal of attention. An English company had sent a delegate to the scientist offering to buy his discovery, to put him in charge of the endeavor, and to give

him a share of the profits. With their practical instincts, the English industrialists had rapidly understood the enormous advantages that might be obtained from a railway permitting convoys of passengers and goods from one continent to the other in total safety and at a speed well in excess of that of an express train.

Monsieur Golbert had, however, refused the advances of the British capitalist. Although deeply perplexed as to the matter of the means that he would employ for realizing his endeavor, he could not bring himself to sign a contract that would rob him of all moral benefit. That preoccupied the old scientist to a great extent. Disdained by his compatriots, solicited by foreigners, without sufficient capital to act on his own behalf, he did not know what to do. Ned was no less anxious.

The final plans were ready. In everyone's opinion, including that of Olivier Coronal, they could stand up to any criticism. It only remained to put them into execution.

Often, in the evening, gathered around a lamp, drinking the tea that Lucienne had just served, the three men discussed the matter.

"It's the way things are nowadays," said Olivier. "It's typical of our era that hundreds of millions are spent every year on armaments of all kinds, founding new cannon, developing new explosives and keeping thousands of workers under arms. On the other hand, an endeavor like ours, designed to increase social wealth, to hasten human evolution by facilitating communication between peoples, can't find a Statesman to take an interest in it or a capitalist to support it."

"But it's quite natural that no one wants to admit our idea," said Ned. "What would become of the powerful shipping companies, on the day when we have rendered their equipment, which represents enormous sums, unnecessary and dangerous. Let's make no mistake—to arrive at our goal, we'll have to vanquish more than one resistance and thwart more than one conspiracy."

"Well, there are three of us to fight," said Monsieur Golbert. "Let's have confidence in the future. Isn't it the case, Lucienne, that one must never despair?"

"Oh, certainly not, Father! We must never despair, even of seeing our brave Tom Punch become cheerful again. I don't know what's wrong with him these days. One might think that he was considering getting married."

Everyone burst out laughing. They knew that marriage terrified the butler.

Lucienne also knew how to bring back smiles to faces darkened by a situation that seemed inextricable, by means of a joyous word.

In the scientific journals there was much discussion of Monsieur Golbert and his invention. In America, especially, not a week went by without a periodical devoting an article to the submarine locomotive. The French press, by contrast, seemed to have forgotten that it existed, and that it was on the point of being constructed. That silence was the object of sharp criticism on the part of Yankee journalists. They took advantage of it to demonstrate once again the inferiority of the French, their lack of initiative and practicality.

Here, they wrote, this bold project to establish a railway across the Atlantic would have rallied plenty of support. The capitalists would have flooded into it. The work would already have begun.

Every time one of these articles came to his attention, Monsieur Golbert became thoughtful. He came to the conclusion that he would have more chance of finding shareholders in America than anywhere else. For more than a month, his thoughts dwelt on that relentlessly. He resolved to mention it to Ned and Olivier Coronal and to ask their opinion.

"Do you read the New York papers, my dear Ned?" he asked, one evening.

The three men were just finishing dinner. Outside, a northerly wind was lashing the windows.

"Certainly," Ned said.

"What do you think about their articles on our locomotive? They affirm that there would be no lack of capital there—that the project would already be under way."

"There's truth in what they say."

"Then you think we'd have a chance of success?"

"Almost certainly."

Monsieur Golbert seemed to reflect on that. "I really don't know what to do. I would have preferred not to take my discovery abroad. However, if I wait for a minister here to take our plans under consideration, I might have to wait for a long time."

"Will you permit me to give you my opinion?" asked Olivier Coronal.

"Of course, my dear friend."

“Well, I consider that, in such an issue, patriotism, laudable as it is, doesn’t come into it. You want to endow humankind with new wealth. Of all the natural forces, the Ocean is the one that humans have hardly been able to tame. By reducing the duration of the journey from Europe to New York to less than three days, avoiding the continual danger of tempests and shipwrecks, you will enhance communication between peoples. Whether the money you need comes from France or America, I consider to be unimportant.”

“Olivier is right,” said Lucienne. “After more than ten years of study and late nights, you ought to receive the compensation of a success.”

The scientist had no valid reason to oppose them; he allowed himself to be convinced. It was decided, that evening, to leave for New York without unnecessary delay.

The winter—an icy and foggy winter—was coming to an end. The trees in the garden were covering themselves with buds; a few sparrows were beginning to chirp again. Already, amid the grass and the moss, the first violets were announcing the renewal. During the days that followed, the house was in turmoil.

On learning that it was a matter of going to New York, Tom Punch had pulled a face. *Decidedly*, Ned thought, *America no longer appeals to him*.

On the contrary, Léon Goupit was full of enthusiasm. To cross the Atlantic had always been his dream. Perhaps, deep inside, the Bellevillois even retained the secret hope of one day becoming the king of a savage tribe, like the hero of one of his favorite serial novels.

The preparations for the departure were not very complicated. The furniture and scientific collections would remain in the villa. They would only take with them what was indispensable, and the plans for the railway whose construction they wanted to attempt.

With a forlorn expression and his breast inflated by enormous sighs, the melancholy Tom Punch, aided by Léon, packed clothing, underwear and laboratory apparatus into vast trunks.

“Well, we’re going to see America again!” said Ned, who was passing.

“Yes, you’re going to see America again,” the butler replied, with a desolate glance.

“What do you mean, *you*? I assume that you’re coming with us! What’s the matter? My word, one might think that your eyes were moist.”

Indeed, large tears were forming in Tom Punch’s round eyes, on the edges of his eyelashes, as he looked at the engineer with a contrite expression.

“Listen, Mr. Ned—you’ve always been good to me, but I can’t stay with you any longer.”

“Good God, why not? Have you some complaint to make about me?”

“Oh, no—quite the contrary. But I’m bored, you see. And then...”

“Go on, speak. What’s up? Doubtless another silly idea. I know you well enough to know that it won’t succeed, any more than the others.”

The butler’s comical adventures—among others, the idea he had once had of concocting turtle syrup with philanthropic motives (the liquor, he claimed, was a sovereign remedy for all maladies)—had won him a well-deserved reputation as a fantasist, which often attracted gibes. Ordinarily, he became red-faced with annoyance. This time, he did not rise to the mockery. “No,” he said, “I confess that I haven’t always been fortunate in the choice of my ideas. Today, it’s serious. Read this.” He took a letter out of his pocket. “The director of the Folies-Montmartroises, one of the greatest Paris stages, is offering me a brilliant engagement as a banjo-player: fifty francs a night. It’s true that one would have to go a long way to find my peer, but still, it’s nice. You’ll understand that, having been a burden to you for a long time, I can’t refuse the offer.”

“Have you gone mad? Has anyone ever said that to you? You’d give me pleasure by leaving your director here and coming with us.”

Monsieur Golbert and Olivier Coronal could not change his mind any more than Ned could. He was determined to stay in Paris.

Even the Bellevillois made much of their friendship, reminding him about their collective escapades and painting a future without bright colors for him, but could not weaken his obstinacy. “Well, old chap,” he said, “you must have become more Parisian than me, not to be able to take a step away from it, since you’ve been told that we’re coming back.”

Among his other qualities, however, Tom Punch was as stubborn as a mule. That was, at least, the opinion of Léon Goupit—who ended up, before his obstinacy, turning on his heel and calling him a clodhopper and an old fogey, among other distinguished expressions.

On the day of their departure, Ned was genuinely distressed at being separated thus from his factotum. In spite of numerous annoyances, during the year that he had lived with him, Tom Punch had often demonstrated attachment in his regard. The young man made another attempt to persuade him to come with him to New York, to no avail. William Boltyn's former butler had made up his mind; he wanted to make his debut at the Folies-Montmartroises. He promised to write to his master, and accompanied them all to the station.

In her traveling costume, Lucienne was adorable in elegance and beauty.

Olivier Coronal supervised the transportation of the trunks and packages.

As for Monsieur Golbert, who was rather excited, his face expressed an intense joy. He was leaving Europe, it is true, for the first time, but he was taking with him his daughter, now Madame Hattison—and, supported by men as valorous as Ned and Olivier Coronal, he was going to lay the foundations of his gigantic endeavor, to realize his most cherished projects.

“Full speed ahead for New York, my children!” he exclaimed, taking his place in the carriage that would take them to Le Havre. “Let's hope that when we return...”

“It will be in our submarine locomotive,” Lucienne put in.