

CHAPTER V.

In which a New Kind of Investment appears on the Stock Exchange.

When Phileas Fogg quitted London, he had no doubt that his departure would create a great sensation. The report of the bet spread from the club to outsiders, and so to all the newspapers in the United Kingdom.

This question of going round the world in eighty days was commented upon, discussed, and dissected, and argued as much as the Alabama Claims had been. Some agreed with Phileas Fogg, but the majority were against him. To accomplish the tour in fact was an impossibility, under the present system of communication. It was sheer madness.

The Times, The Standard, The Morning Chronicle, and twenty other respectable journals gave their verdict against Mr. Fogg. The Daily Telegraph was the only paper that to a certain extent supported him. Phileas Fogg was generally looked upon as a maniac, and his friends at the Reform Club were much blamed for having taken up the wager, which only betrayed the want of brain of its proposer.

Extremely passionate but logical articles were written upon the question. We all know the interest that the English take in any geographical problem, and readers of every class devoured the columns

in which Mr. Fogg's expedition was debated.

For the first few days some bold spirits, principally women, espoused his cause, particularly when The Illustrated London News published his portrait, and certain gentlemen went so far as to say: "Well, why should he not after all? More extraordinary things have happened." These were chiefly readers of The Daily Telegraph, but they very soon felt that that journal itself began to waver.

On the 7th of October a long article appeared in the proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, the writer of which treated the question from all points of view, and clearly demonstrated the futility of the enterprise. According to that article, everything was against the traveller--all obstacles material and physical were against him. In order to succeed, it was necessary to admit miraculous concordance in the hours of the arrival and departure of trains and ships--a concordance which could not and did not exist. In Europe perhaps he might be able to reckon upon the punctuality of trains, but when three days are occupied in crossing India, and seven in traversing the American continent, how was it possible that he could count upon absolute success? Were not accidents to machinery, runnings off the rails, collisions, bad weather, or snowdrifts all against Phileas Fogg? On board ship in winter-time he would be at the mercy of hurricanes or contrary winds. Even the best steamers of the transoceanic lines experience a delay of sometimes two or three days. Now, if only one such delay occurred, the chain of communication would

be irreparably severed. If Phileas Fogg lost a steamer by only a few hours, he would be obliged to wait for the following boat; and that fact alone would imperil the success of the whole undertaking.

This article made a great sensation. It was copied into almost all the papers, and the "shares" of Phileas Fogg fell in proportion.

For the first few days after his departure a good deal of money was laid on the success or failure of the enterprise. Everyone knows that people in England are great gamblers; it comes natural to them. So the public all went into the speculation. Phileas Fogg became a sort of favourite, as in horse-racing. He was of a certain value on the Stock Exchange. Fogg bonds were offered at par or at a premium, and enormous speculations were entered into. But five days after his departure, subsequently to the appearance of the article above quoted, the bonds were at a discount, and they were offered to anybody who would take them.

One supporter was still left to him, and that the paralytic Lord Albemarle. This worthy gentleman, who was unable to leave his chair, would have given his whole fortune to have made the tour of the world, even in ten years, and he had laid fifty thousand pounds on Phileas Fogg; and when people explained to him at the same time the folly and uselessness of the expedition, he would merely reply: "If the thing can be done, the first man to do it ought to be an Englishman."

Now as things were, the partisans of Phileas Fogg were becoming fewer by degrees and beautifully less. Everybody, and not without reason, was against him. People would only take fifty or even two hundred to one, when, seven days after his departure, a quite unexpected incident deprived him of support at any price. In fact, at nine o'clock on the evening of the seventh day, the Chief Inspector of Metropolitan Police received the following telegram:

"From Fix, Detective, Suez,

To Rowan, Commissioner of Police, Scotland Yard.

I have traced the bank-robber, Phileas Fogg. Send immediately authority for arrest to Bombay.--Fix."

The effect of this despatch was immediately apparent. The honourable man gave place to the "bank-robber." His photograph, deposited in the Reform Club with those of other members, was narrowly scrutinised. It appeared to be, feature by feature, the very man whose description had been already furnished to the police. People now began to recollect Fogg's mysterious manner, his solitary habits, and his sudden departure. He must be the culprit, and it was evident that under the

pretext of a voyage round the world, under shelter of a ridiculous bet, he had no other end in view but to throw the detectives off the scent.