

CHAPTER XI.

Showing how Phileas Fogg purchased a "Mount" at a Fabulous Price.

The train started punctually, carrying the usual complement of travellers, including officers of the civil and military classes and merchants. Passe-partout was seated near his master, a third traveller had secured a corner opposite.

This gentleman was General Sir Francis Cromarty, one of Mr. Fogg's whist-party on board the Mongolia, who was en route to take up his command at Benares.

Sir Francis was a tall fair specimen of the British officer, about fifty years old. He had greatly distinguished himself during the Mutiny. He had been in India almost all his life, and only paid occasional visits to his native country. He was a well-informed man, and would willingly have imparted any information he possessed, had Phileas Fogg chosen to apply to him. But the latter did nothing of the kind. He never travelled. He merely made a track across country. He was a heavy body, describing an orbit around the terrestrial globe, according to certain mechanical laws. At that time he was actually engaged in calculating how many hours had passed since he left London, and he would have rubbed his hands joyfully, had he been one of those

people who indulge in these needless enthusiastic demonstrations.

Sir Francis Cromarty had already noticed the eccentricity of his companion while at whist, and had questioned seriously whether a human heart actually beat beneath that cold envelope of flesh, whether Fogg really possessed a soul alive to the beauties of nature, and subject to human failings and aspirations. That was what puzzled the gallant soldier. None of the many original characters which it had been his fortune to encounter had, in any way, resembled this product of the action of exact science upon humanity.

Phileas Fogg had not concealed from Sir Francis the object of his journey round the world, nor the conditions under which he had undertaken it. The general saw nothing in this wager but the eccentricity of its surroundings, and the want of transire beneficiendo which ought to guide any reasonable man. If this extraordinary man went on in this manner all his life, he would finally quit the world, having done absolutely nothing for his own benefit or for that of others.

An hour after leaving Bombay, the train crossed the viaduct carrying the line from Salsette to the mainland. At Callyan station they left the branch-line to Kandallah and Poona on the right, and proceeded to Panwell. Here they traversed the gorges of the Western Ghauts, composed of trap and basaltic rocks, the highest summits of which are crowned with thick trees.

Sir Francis Cromarty and Phileas Fogg occasionally exchanged a few words, and at one time the general picked up the thread of conversation by remarking:

"A few years ago, Mr. Fogg, you would have experienced a considerable impediment to your journey here, and would most likely have compromised your success."

"How do you mean, Sir Francis?"

"Because the railway did not go beyond the base of these mountains, and it was then necessary to make the journey in palanquins or on ponies as far as Kandallah on the opposite slope."

"Such an interruption would not in any way have disarranged my plans," replied Mr. Fogg. "I have taken precautions against certain obstacles."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Fogg, you very nearly had an awkward bit of business on hand in consequence of yonder fellow's adventure."

Passe-partout was fast asleep, with his feet well muffled up in the railway-rug, and was quite unconscious that he was the subject of conversation.

"The British Government is extremely strict, and with reason, upon any such offences," continued Sir Francis. "Above everything, it considers that the religious feelings of the native races should be respected, and if your servant had been arrested--"

"Well," interrupted Mr. Fogg, "well. Sir Francis, suppose he had been taken and condemned and punished, he might have returned quietly to Europe afterwards. That would not have been a reason for stopping his master."

And then the conversation again languished. During the night the train crossed the mountains, passed Nassik, and next day, the 21st October, it traversed a comparatively flat district of Kandish. The well-cultivated country was sprinkled with villages, above which the minarets of the pagodas took the place of the English church-spires. Numerous tributaries of the Godavery watered this fertile territory.

Passe-partout awoke and looked about him. He could not at first believe that he actually was crossing India in a carriage upon the G. I. P. Railway. It appeared quite incredible, but it was none the less real. The locomotive, driven by an English engineer and fed with English coal, puffed its steam over coffee, cotton, clove, and pepper plantations. The smoke curled around the palm-trees, amid which picturesque bungalows were frequently visible, and "viharis," a sort of abandoned monasteries, as well as a few temples enriched with wonderful Indian architecture, were here and there apparent. Farther

on, they passed immense tracts of land extending as far as the eye could reach, and jungles in which serpents and tigers fled scared at the roar and rattle of the train; then succeeded forests through which the line passed, the abode of elephants which, with pensive gaze, watched the speeding train.

During the forenoon our travellers traversed the blood-stained district beyond Malligaum, sacred to the votaries of the goddess Kâli. Not far from this arose the minarets of Ellora and its pagodas, and the famous Aurungabad, the capital of the ferocious Aurung-Zeb, now the chief town of one of the detached kingdoms of the Nizam. It was in this country that Feringhea, chief of the Thugs--the King of Stranglers--exercised sway. These assassins, united in an invisible and secret association, strangled, in honour of the goddess of death, victims of every age without shedding blood, and in time there was scarcely a place where a corpse was not to be found. The English Government has succeeded in checking very considerably these wholesale massacres, but Thugs still exist and pursue their horrible vocation.

At half-past twelve the train stopped at Burhampore, and Passe-partout succeeded in obtaining a pair of slippers decorated with false pearls, which he wore with evident conceit.

The passengers ate a hurried breakfast, and the train again started for Assinghur, skirting for a moment the river Tapy, a small stream which flows into the Gulf of Cambay, near Surat.

It may now not be out of place to record Passe-partout's reflections. Until his arrival at Bombay he had cherished the idea that the journey would not be continued farther. But now that he was being carried across India he saw things in a different light. His old love of wandering returned in full force. The fantastic ideas of his youthful days came back to him again; he took his master's projects quite seriously; he began to believe in the wager, and consequently in the tour of the world to be completed in that maximum of eighty days which must not on any account be exceeded. Even now he was beginning to feel anxious about possible delays and accidents en route. He felt interested in winning, and trembled when he considered that he had actually compromised the whole thing by his stupidity on the previous day. So he was much more restless than Mr. Fogg, because less phlegmatic. He counted over and over again the days that had already passed since he had started, cursed at the stoppages at stations, found fault with the slow speed, and in his heart blamed Mr. Fogg for not having "tipped" the engine-driver. He quite overlooked the fact that, though such a thing was possible on board a steamer, it was out of question on a railroad where the time of the trains is fixed and the speed regulated.

Towards evening they penetrated the defiles of the mountains of Sutpoor, which separate the territory of Khandeish from that of Bundelcund.

Next day, the 22nd, Passe-partout replied, to a question of Sir Francis Cromarty, that it was three a.m., but, as a matter of fact, this wonderful watch was about four hours slow, as it was always kept at Greenwich time, which was then nearly seventy-seven degrees west, and the watch would of course get slower and slower.

Sir Francis corrected Passe-partout's time, respecting which he made a remark similar to that made by Mr. Fix. He endeavoured to convince the valet that he ought to regulate his watch by each new meridian, and as he was still going east the days became shorter and shorter by four minutes for every degree. But all this was useless. Whether the headstrong fellow understood the general or not, he certainly did not alter his watch, which was steadily kept at London time. At any rate it was a delusion which pleased him and hurt nobody.

At eight o'clock in the morning the train stopped about fifteen miles from Rothal, at a place where there were many bungalows and huts erected. The guard passed along the line, crying out, "All change here!"

Phileas Fogg looked at Sir Francis Cromarty, who did not appear to understand this unexpected halt.

Passe-partout, not less astonished, leaped down, and in a moment or two returned, exclaiming, "There is no railway beyond this place, sir."

"What do you mean?" inquired Sir Francis.

"I mean that the train does not go any farther."

The general immediately got out. Phileas Fogg followed quietly. Both these gentlemen accosted the guard.

"Where are we?" asked Sir Francis.

"At the village of Kholby, sir," replied the guard.

"Why do we stop here?"

"Because the line is not finished beyond."

"Not finished! How is that?"

"There are about fifty miles yet to be laid between this point and Allahabad, where we take the train again."

"The papers announced the line complete."

"I cannot help that, sir; the papers were mistaken."

"But you book people 'through' from Bombay to Calcutta," persisted Sir

Francis, who was waxing angry.

"Certainly we do; but it is an understood thing that the passengers provide their own conveyance between Kholby and Allahabad."

Sir Francis was furious. Passe-partout would have liked to have knocked the guard down, if he had been able. He did not dare to look at his master.

"We had better get on, Sir Francis," said Mr. Fogg; "we must get to Allahabad somehow; let us see how we can do so."

"It strikes me that this delay will upset your arrangements considerably, Mr. Fogg," replied Sir Francis.

"Oh dear no! all this has been discounted," replied Fogg.

"What! did you know that the line was unfinished?"

"No; but I was quite sure that some obstacles would crop up to retard me. Nothing is yet lost I have two days in reserve. The steamer does not leave Calcutta for Hong Kong until the 23rd, at mid-day. This is only the 22nd, and we shall reach Calcutta in good time even now."

What could be urged against such an assured reply as this? It was only too evident that the railway ceased at that point. Newspapers are so

fond of anticipating, and in this case they had been decidedly premature in announcing the completion of the line. The majority of the passengers had been made aware of the existing state of things, and provided themselves with conveyance accordingly, whatever they could obtain--"palkigharies" with four wheels, waggons drawn by zebus, a sort of brahma ox, palanquins, ponies, &c. So it happened that there was nothing left for Mr. Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty.

"I shall walk," said Phileas Fogg. Passe-partout, who was close to his master, made a very expressive grimace when he gazed at his elegant but very thin slippers. Fortunately he had made a discovery, but hesitated a little to announce it.

"Sir," he said at length, "I think I have found means for our transport."

"What is it?"

"An elephant. It belongs to a native who lives close by."

"Let us go and see this animal," said Mr. Fogg. Five minutes later Sir Francis and Mr. Fogg, accompanied by Passe-partout, reached the hut, which was surrounded by a palisade. In the hut resided the native; inside the palisade the elephant lived. The former introduced the new arrivals to the latter, at their particular request.

They found that the animal was half domesticated; it had originally been purchased for a fighting elephant, not for carrying purposes. With this end in view, the owner had begun to alter the naturally placid disposition of the beast by irritating him, and getting him gradually up to that pitch of fury called "mutsh" by the Hindoos, and this is done by feeding the elephant on sugar and butter for three months. This at first sight would appear scarcely the treatment likely to conduce to such an object, but it is successfully employed.

Fortunately, however, for Mr. Fogg, the elephant in question had not been subjected to this treatment for a very long time, and the "mutsh" had not appeared.

Kiouni--for so was the animal called--was no doubt quite competent to perform the journey required, and in the absence of other conveyance, Phileas Fogg determined to hire him.

But elephants in India are dear, for they are becoming somewhat scarce. The males, which only are suited to the circus training, are much in request. They seldom breed when in a domesticated state, so they can only be procured by hunting. They are, therefore, the objects of much solicitude, and when Mr. Fogg asked the owner what he could hire his elephant for, the man declined point-blank to lend him at all.

Fogg persisted, and offered ten pounds an hour for the beast! It was

refused. Twenty? Still refused. Forty? Declined with thanks.

Passe-partout actually jumped at each "bid." But the native would not yield to the temptation.

Nevertheless the price tendered was a handsome one. Supposing that the elephant took fifteen hours to reach Allahabad, the price would amount to six hundred pounds!

Phileas Fogg, without betraying the least irritation, then proposed to the owner that he should sell the animal outright, and offered one thousand pounds for him.

But the Hindoo declined; perhaps he thought he would make more by so doing.

Sir Francis Cromarty then took Mr. Fogg aside, and requested him to reflect ere he bid higher. Mr. Fogg replied that he was not in the habit of acting on impulse, that a bet of twenty thousand pounds depended upon the accomplishment of the journey, that the elephant was absolutely necessary, and if he paid twenty times the value of the animal, it must be had.

So Mr. Fogg returned to the Indian, who perceived it was only a question of asking. Phileas offered in quick succession twelve hundred, fifteen hundred, eighteen hundred, and finally two thousand pounds. Passe-partout, usually so ruddy, was now pale with emotion. At

two thousand pounds the native yielded. "I declare by my slippers, that's a pretty price for an elephant!" exclaimed Passe-partout.

This business over, there was nothing but to obtain a guide. That was easily done. A young and intelligent-looking Parsee offered his services. Mr. Fogg engaged him, and promised him a good reward, which would naturally increase his intelligence.

The elephant was got ready without delay. The Parsee was quite skilled in the business of a "mahout." He placed a sort of saddle on the elephant's back, and at each end of it he fixed a small howdah.

Mr. Fogg paid the native the two thousand pounds in bank-notes, which he took from the inexhaustible carpet-bag. Passe-partout writhed as they were paid over. Then Mr. Fogg offered Sir Francis Cromarty a seat on the elephant, which the general gratefully accepted. One traveller more or less would not signify to such an animal.

Provisions were purchased. Sir Francis and Mr. Fogg each occupied a howdah, while Passe-partout sat astride between them. The Parsee seated himself upon the elephant's neck, and at nine o'clock they quitted the village, the elephant taking a short cut through the thick palm-forest.