

## CHAPTER XII.

Showing what happened to Phileas Fogg and his Companions as they traversed the Forest.

The guide, hoping to shorten the journey, kept to the left of the railroad line, which would be carried in a circuitous manner through the Vindhia Mountains when completed. The Parsee, who was well acquainted with all the byways, declared that twenty miles would be saved by striking directly across the forest; so the party yielded.

Sir Francis and Mr. Fogg, buried up to their necks in the howdahs, got terribly shaken by the rough trotting of the elephant, which was urged by the driver. But they put up with the inconvenience with true British self-restraint; they spoke but seldom and scarcely looked at each other.

Passe-partout was obliged to be very careful not to keep his tongue between his teeth, else it would have been bitten off, so unmercifully was he jogged up and down. The brave fellow, sometimes thrown forward on the animal's neck, sometimes upon the croup, performed a series of vaulting movements something like a circus clown on the "spring-board." But all the time he joked and laughed at the somersaults he performed so involuntarily; occasionally he took out a

lump of sugar from his pocket and handed it to Kiouni, who took it in his trunk without slackening his pace for a second.

After proceeding thus for a couple of hours, the driver called a halt and gave the elephant an hour's rest. The animal ate all the branches and shrubs in the vicinity, as soon as he had quenched his thirst at a neighbouring spring. Sir Francis did not complain of this delay; he was terribly bruised. Mr. Fogg did not appear any more discomposed than if he had only got out of bed.

"He is a man of iron!" exclaimed the general, as he gazed at his companion admiringly.

"Of hammered iron," replied Passe-partout, who was preparing a hasty breakfast.

At noon the driver gave the signal for departure. The country soon became very wild. The dense forest was succeeded by groves of dates and palms; then came extensive arid plains dotted here and there with bushes, and sprinkled with immense blocks of syenite. The whole of this region of Bundelcund, which is seldom traversed, is inhabited by a fanatical people inured to the most fearful practices of the Hindoos. The English Government has scarcely yet entirely obtained the control over this region, which is ruled by rajahs, who are very difficult to bring to book from their almost inaccessible mountain fastnesses. Many times the travellers noticed bands of fierce natives,

who gesticulated angrily at perceiving the swift-footed elephant pass by; and the Parsee took care to give them all a wide berth. They encountered very few wild animals; even monkeys were not numerous, and they fled away with grimaces and gestures, which amused Passe-partout very much indeed.

One reflection, however, troubled Passe-partout exceedingly, and that was how would his master dispose of the elephant when they reached Allahabad? Would he take it on with him? That was scarcely possible. The price of conveyance, added to the purchase-money, would be ruinous. Would he sell the beast or set him free? No doubt the animal deserved some consideration. Suppose Mr. Fogg made him, Passe-partout, a present of the elephant? He would feel very much embarrassed. So these considerations worried the valet not a little.

At eight o'clock they had crossed the principal heights of the Vindhia chain, and at a ruined bungalow upon the southern slope of the mountains our travellers halted again.

The distance traversed was about twenty-five miles, and they had still as far to go to reach Allahabad. The night was quite chilly. A fire lighted by the Parsee was very acceptable, and the travellers made an excellent supper of the provisions they had purchased at Kholby. The intermittent conversation soon gave way to steady snoring. The guide kept watch by the elephant, which slept outside, supported by the trunk of an enormous tree.

Nothing happened to disturb the party during the night. Now and then the growls of wild animals, or the chattering of monkeys, broke the silence, but nothing more terrible was heard, and the larger animals did not disturb the occupants of the bungalow. Sir Francis Cromarty "lay like a warrior taking his rest." Passe-partout, in a restless sleep, appeared to be practising the gymnastics he had executed on the elephant's back. As for Mr. Fogg, he slept as peacefully as if he were in his quiet bed in Saville Row.

At six o'clock they resumed their journey. The guide hoped to reach Allahabad that evening. In that case Mr. Fogg would only lose a portion of the eight-and-forty hours already saved since the commencement of the trip.

They descended the last slopes of the Vindhias. The elephant resumed his rapid pace. Towards mid-day the guide passed round the village of Kallenger on the Cani, one of the small affluents of the Ganges. He appeared to avoid all inhabited places, feeling more secure in the deserted tracts. Allahabad was thence only a dozen miles off in a north-easterly direction. They halted once more under a banana-tree, the fruit of which, as wholesome as bread and "as succulent as cream," as they said, was highly appreciated by our travellers.

At two o'clock they entered a dense forest, which they had to traverse for some miles. The guide preferred to travel in the shade of the

woods. So far at any rate they had encountered nothing unpleasant, and there was every reason to suppose that the journey would be accomplished without accident, when the elephant, after a few premonitory symptoms, stopped suddenly.

It was then four o'clock in the afternoon.

"What is the matter?" asked Sir Francis Cromarty, putting his head up over the top of his howdah.

"I don't know, sir," replied the Parsee, listening intently to a confused murmuring sound which came through the thickly-interlacing branches.

Soon the sound became more defined. One might have fancied it was a concert at a great distance; composed of human voices and brass instruments all performing at once. Passe-partout was all eyes and ears. Mr. Fogg waited patiently without uttering a word.

The Parsee leaped down, fastened the elephant to a tree, and plunged into the thick underwood. In a few moments he came back, exclaiming: "A procession of Brahmins is coming this way! Let us hide ourselves if we can."

As he spoke he loosed the elephant and led him into a thicket, bidding the travellers to stay where they were. He was ready to remount should

flight be necessary, but he thought that the procession would pass without noticing the party, for the thick foliage completely concealed them.

The discordant sounds kept approaching--a monotonous kind of chant, mingled with the beating of tom-toms and the clash of cymbals. The head of the procession soon became visible beneath the trees about fifty paces off, and Mr. Fogg and his party easily distinguished the curious individuals who composed it.

The priests, wearing mitres and long robes trimmed with lace, marched in front. They were surrounded by a motley crowd of men, women, and children, who were chanting a sort of funeral hymn, broken at intervals by the sound of the various instruments. Behind these came, on a car (the large wheels of which, spokes and all, were ornamented with the similitude of serpents), a hideous figure drawn by four richly-caparisoned zebus. This idol had four arms, the body was painted a dusky red, with staring eyes, matted hair, a protruding tongue, and lips tinted with henna and betel. Round its neck was hung a necklace of skulls, and it was girt with a zone of human hands; it stood upright upon the headless trunk of a giant figure.

Sir Francis Cromarty recognised the idol at once.

"That is the goddess Káli," he whispered; "the goddess of love and of death."

"Of death I can understand, but not of love," muttered Passe-partout;  
"what a villainous hag it is!"

The Parsee signed to him to hold his tongue.

Around the idol a number of fakirs danced and twirled about.

These wretches were daubed with ochre, and covered with wounds, from which the blood issued drop by drop; absurd idiots, who would throw themselves under the wheels of Juggernaut's chariot had they the opportunity.

Behind these fanatics marched some Brahmins, clad in all their oriental sumptuousness of garb, dragging a woman along, who faltered at each step.

This female was young, and as white as a European. Her head, neck, shoulders, ears, arms, hands, and ankles were covered with jewels, bracelets, or rings. A gold-laced tunic, over which she wore a thin muslin robe, revealed the swelling contours of her form.

Behind this young woman, and in violent contrast to her, came a guard, armed with naked sabres and long damascened pistols, carrying a dead body in a palanquin.

The corpse was that of an old man clothed in the rich dress of a rajah; the turban embroidered with pearls, the robe of silk tissue and gold, the girdle of cashmere studded with diamonds, and wearing the beautiful weapons of an Indian prince.

The musicians brought up the rear with a guard of fanatics, whose cries even drowned the noise of the instruments at times. These closed the cortége.

Sir Francis Cromarty watched the procession pass by and his face wore a peculiarly saddened expression. Turning to the guide, he said:

"Is it a suttee?"

The Parsee made a sign in the affirmative, and put his fingers on his lips. The long procession wended its way slowly amongst the trees, and before long the last of it disappeared in the depths of the forest. The music gradually died away, occasionally a few cries could be heard, but soon they ceased, and silence reigned around.

Phileas Fogg had heard what Sir Francis had said, and as soon as the procession had passed out of sight, he said:

"What is a suttee?"

"A suttee," replied the general, "is a human sacrifice--but a



voluntary one. That woman you saw just now will be burned to-morrow morning at daylight."

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed Passe-partout, who could not repress his indignation.

"And that dead body?" said Mr. Fogg.

"Is that of her husband--a prince," replied the guide. "He was an independent rajah in Bundelcund."

"Do you mean to say that these barbarous customs still obtain in India--under British rule?" said Mr. Fogg, without betraying any emotion whatever.

"In the greater portion of India," replied Sir Francis Cromarty, "these sacrifices do not take place; but we have no authority in the savage districts, one of the principal of which is Bundelcund. The entire district north of the Vindhia range is the theatre of pillage and murder."

"Poor creature," exclaimed Passe-partout; "burned alive!"

"Yes," continued the general, "burned alive; and if she was not, you have no idea to what a wretched condition she would be reduced by her relatives. They would shave off her hair, feed her very scantily upon

rice, and hold no communication with her, for she would be regarded as unclean, and would die like a dog. The prospect of such treatment, even more strongly than affection or religious fanaticism, often urges the widows to submit themselves to suttee. Sometimes, however, the act is really voluntary, and energetic interference by the Government is necessary to prevent it. Some years ago, when I was in Bombay, a young widow asked the governor's leave to be burned with her late husband's body. As you may imagine, he refused her request. Then the disconsolate widow left the town, took refuge with an independent rajah, and burned herself, to the satisfaction of all concerned."

As the general proceeded, the guide nodded in assent to the truthfulness of the relation, and when the speaker had finished, the Parsee said:

"But the suttee to take place to-morrow is not voluntary."

"How do you know?"

"Everyone in Bundelcund knows that," replied the guide.

"Yet the unfortunate woman offered no resistance," said Sir Francis Cromarty.

"Because she was drugged with hemp and opium," replied the Parsee.

"But whither are they taking her?"

"To the Pagoda of Pillaji, two miles away from here. There she will pass the night, and wait for the hour appointed for the sacrifice."

"And the sacrifice will take place?"

"At dawn to-morrow."

As he spoke, the guide led forth the elephant and clambered up to his seat on its neck; but just as he was about to whistle to the animal to proceed, Mr. Fogg stopped him, and said to Sir Francis Cromarty, "Suppose we save this woman?"

"Save her!" exclaimed the general.

"I have still twelve hours to spare," continued Fogg; "I can devote that time to the purpose."

"Well, I declare you are a man with a heart in the right place," cried Sir Francis.

"Sometimes it is," replied Mr. Fogg, smiling grimly, "when I have time!"