

CHAPTER XVI.

Fix does not at all understand what is said to him.

The Rangoon, one of the P. and O. Company's vessels, plying between India, China, and Japan, was an iron screw steamer of about one thousand seven hundred and seventy tons, with engines of four hundred horse-power. She was as fast but not so comfortable as the Mongolia, and Mrs. Aouda was scarcely as well accommodated as Phileas Fogg would have wished. But as the voyage was only three thousand five hundred miles, that is to say eleven or twelve days' steaming, and the young lady was not difficult to please, it was no great matter.

During the first portion of the voyage she became well acquainted with Phileas Fogg, and gave expression to her great gratitude on every occasion. That phlegmatic gentleman listened to her protestations with the most unmoved exterior, not an expression, not a movement evidenced the slightest emotion; but he took care that the young lady should want for nothing. He saw her at certain hours every day, if not to talk, at least to listen to her conversation; he exhibited towards her the greatest politeness, but the politeness of an automaton. Mrs. Aouda did not know what to think of him, though Passe-partout had given her a few hints about his eccentric master, and had told her of the wager about going round the world. Mrs. Aouda had rather ridiculed

the idea, but after all did she not owe him her life? And Mr. Fogg would not lose by being regarded through the glasses of gratitude.

Mrs. Aouda confirmed the Parsee guide's explanation of her past history. She was, in fact, of the highest native caste.

Many Parsee merchants had made great fortunes in cotton in India. One of them, Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, has been made a baronet by the English Government, and Mrs. Aouda was connected with this personage, who was then living in Bombay. It was a cousin of his whom she hoped to join at Hong Kong, and with whom she trusted to find protection. She could not say whether she would be received or not; but Mr. Fogg told her not to trouble herself, as all would come mathematically square. These were the words he used. It was uncertain whether the young lady quite understood him. She fixed her great eyes--"those eyes as limpid as the sacred lakes of the Himalayas"--upon him; but Mr. Fogg was as impassive as ever, and did not show any disposition to throw himself into those lakes.

The first portion of the voyage passed very pleasantly. Everything was favourable. The Rangoon soon sighted the great Andaman, with its picturesque mountain called Saddle Peak, two thousand four hundred feet high, a landmark for all sailors. They skirted the coast, but they saw none of the inhabitants. The appearance of the islands was magnificent. Immense forests of palm, teak, and gigantic mimosas (tree-ferns), covered the foreground of the landscape, while at the

back rose the undulating profile of the hills. The cliffs swarmed with that species of swallows which build the edible nests so prized in China.

But the islands were soon passed, and the Rangoon rapidly steamed towards the Straits of Malacca, which give access to the Chinese Sea.

Now what is Fix doing all this time? Having left instructions for the transmission of the warrant to Hong Kong, he had embarked on board the Rangoon without being perceived by Passe-partout, and was in hopes to be able to keep out of sight until the steamer should have reached her destination. In fact, it would be difficult to explain his presence on board without awakening the suspicions of Passe-partout, who thought him in Bombay. But fate obliged him to resume acquaintance with the lad, as we shall see later.

All the aspirations and hopes of the detective were now centred in Hong Kong, for the steamer would not stop at Singapore long enough for him to do anything there. It was at Hong Kong that the arrest must be made, or the thief would escape, and, so to speak, for ever.

Hong Kong, in fact, was English territory, but the last British territory which they would see on the route. Beyond that, China, Japan, and America would offer an almost secure asylum to Mr. Fogg. If they should find the warrant of arrest at Hong Kong, Fix could hand Fogg over to the local police, and have done with him. But after

leaving the island a simple warrant would not be sufficient; a warrant of extradition would be necessary, which would give rise to delays of all kinds, and of which the criminal might take advantage and escape; so if he did not arrest him at Hong Kong, he might give up the idea altogether.

"Now," said Fix to himself, "either the warrant will be at Hong Kong, and I shall arrest my man, or it will not be there; and this time I must delay his departure at any cost. I have failed both at Bombay and Calcutta, and if I make a mess of it at Hong Kong, my reputation is gone. I must succeed, at any cost; but what means shall I adopt to stop him if the worst comes to the worst?"

Fix then, as a last resource, made up his mind to tell Passe-partout everything, and what sort of a man his master was, for he was not his accomplice evidently. Passe-partout would no doubt under those circumstances assist him (Fix). But in any case this was a dangerous expedient, and one not to be employed except under pressure. A hint from Passe-partout to his master would upset the whole thing at once.

The detective, therefore, was very much embarrassed, and the presence of Mrs. Aouda on board gave him more food for thought. Who was this woman? and how did it happen that she was in Fogg's society? They must have met between Bombay and Calcutta, but at what place? Was it by chance, or had he purposely gone to seek this charming woman? for she was charming no doubt--Fix had seen as much in the court at Calcutta.

He was puzzled, and began to think that perhaps there had been an elopement. He was certain of it. This idea now took complete possession of Fix, and he began to think what advantage he could gain from the circumstance: whether the young lady was married or not, there was still the elopement; and he might make it so unpleasant for Mr. Fogg at Hong Kong that he would not be able to get away by paying money.

But the Rangoon had to get to Hong Kong first, and could he wait? for Fogg had an unpleasant habit of jumping from one steamer to another, and might be far away before anything had been settled. The thing to do, therefore, was to give notice to the English authorities, and to signal the Rangoon before she arrived. This was not difficult, as the steamer stopped at Singapore, and he could telegraph thence to Hong Kong.

In any case, before taking decisive action, he determined to question Passe-partout. He knew it was not difficult to make the lad talk, and Fix decided to make himself known. There was no time to lose, for the steamer would reach Singapore the following day.

That afternoon, therefore. Fix left his cabin, and seeing Passe-partout on deck, the detective rushed towards him, exclaiming:

"What, you on board the Rangoon?"

"Mr. Fix, is it really you?" said Passe-partout, as he recognised his fellow voyager of the Mongolia. "Why, I left you at Bombay, and here you are on the way to Hong Kong. Are you also going round the world?"

"No," replied Fix, "I think of stopping at Hong Kong for a few days, at any rate."

"Ah!" said Passe-partout, "but how is it I have not seen you on board since we left Calcutta?"

"The fact is I have not been very well, and obliged to stay below. The Bay of Bengal does not suit me as well as the Indian Ocean. And how is your master, Mr. Phileas Fogg?"

"Oh, quite well, and as punctual to his time as ever; but Mr. Fix, you do not know that we have got a young lady with us."

"A young lady?" repeated the detective, who pretended not to understand what was said.

Passe-partout nodded, and immediately proceeded to give him the history of the business at the pagoda, the purchase of the elephant, the suttee, the rescue of Aouda, the judgment of the Calcutta court, and their release on bail. Fix, who was quite familiar with the last incidents, pretended to be ignorant of all, and Passe-partout was

quite delighted to have such an interested listener.

"But," said Fix, when his companion had ceased, "does your master wish to carry this young lady to Europe?"

"By no means, Mr. Fix, by no means. We are simply going to Hong Kong, to place her under the care of a relative of hers, a rich merchant there."

"Nothing to be done on that line," said the detective to himself, as he concealed his disappointment. "Come and have a glass of gin, monsieur."

"With all my heart, Mr. Fix; the least we can do is to have a friendly glass to our meeting on board the Rangoon."