

CHAPTER XIX.

Showing how Passe-partout took too great an interest in his Master, and what came of it.

Hong Kong is only an island, which fell into the possession of the English by the Treaty of Nankin, in 1843. In a few years the colonising enterprise of the British made of it an important city and a fine port--Victoria. The island is at the mouth of the Canton river, sixty miles only from Macao, upon the opposite bank. Hong Kong has beaten the other port in the struggle for commercial supremacy, and the greater traffic in Chinese merchandise finds its way to the island. There are docks, hospitals, wharfs, warehouses, a cathedral, a Government house, macadamised roads, &c., which give to Hong Kong as English an aspect as a town in Kent or Surrey, which had by some accident fallen to the antipodes.

Passe-partout, with his hands in his pockets, wandered towards Port Victoria, gazing at the people as they passed, and admiring the palanquins and other conveyances. The city appeared to him like Bombay, Calcutta, and Singapore; or like any other town colonised by the English.

At the port situated at the mouth of the Canton river was a regular

confusion of ships of all nations, commercial and warlike: junks, sempas, tankas, and even flower-boats, like floating garden-borders. Passe-partout remarked several of the natives, elderly men, clothed in nankeen; and when he went to a barber's to be shaved, he inquired of the man, who spoke pretty good English, who they were, and was informed that these men were all eighty years of age, and were therefore permitted to wear the imperial colour, namely yellow. Passe-partout, without exactly knowing why, thought this very funny.

After being shaved, he went to the quay from which the Carnatic was to start, and there he found Fix walking up and down, in a very disturbed manner.

"Ho, ho!" thought Passe-partout, "this does not look well for the Reform Club;" and with a merry smile he accosted the detective without appearing to have noticed his vexation. Fix had indeed good reasons for feeling annoyed. The warrant had not arrived. No doubt it was on its way, but it was quite impossible it could reach Hong Kong for several days, and as this was the last British territory at which Mr. Fogg would touch, he would escape if he could not be detained somehow.

"Well, Mr. Fix," said Passe-partout, "have you decided to come to America with us?"

"Yes," replied Fix, between his clenched teeth.

"Come along, then," said Passe-partout, laughing loudly; "I knew you could not leave us. Come and engage your berth."

So they went to the office, and took four places. But the clerk informed them that the Carnatic, having had her repairs completed, would sail that evening at eight o'clock, and not next morning, as previously announced.

"Very good," said Passe-partout, "that will suit my master exactly. I will go and tell him."

And now Fix determined to make a bold move. He would tell Passe-partout everything. This was perhaps the only way by which he could keep Phileas Fogg at Hong Kong.

As they quitted the office. Fix offered his companion some refreshment, which Passe-partout accepted. They saw a tavern close by, which they entered, and reached a large well-decorated room, at the end of which was a large camp-bedstead furnished with cushions. On this lay a number of men asleep. About thirty people were seated at small tables drinking beer, porter, brandy, or other liquors; and the majority of drinkers were smoking long pipes of red clay filled with little balls of opium steeped in rose-water. From time to time a smoker would subside under the table, and the waiters would carry him and place him on the bed at the end of the room. There were about twenty of these stupefied smokers altogether.

Fix and Passe-partout perceived that they had entered a smoking-house, patronised by those wretched idiots devoted to one of the most injurious vices of humanity--the smoking of opium, which the English merchants sell every year to the value of one million four hundred thousand pounds. The Chinese Government has vainly endeavoured by stringent laws to remedy the evil, but in vain. The habit has descended from the rich to the poorest classes, and now opium is smoked everywhere at all times by men and women, and those accustomed to it cannot do without it. A great smoker can consume eight pipes a day, but he dies in five years.

It was to one of these dens that Fix and Passe-partout had come for refreshment; the latter had no money, but accepted his companion's treat, hoping to return the civility at some future time. Fix ordered two bottles of port, to which the Frenchman paid considerable attention, while Fix, more cautious, watched his companion narrowly. They talked upon many subjects, and particularly respecting Fix's happy determination to sail in the Carnatic; and that put Passe-partout in mind that he ought to go and inform his master respecting the alteration in the time of the steamer's departure, which, as the bottles were empty, he proceeded to do.

"Just one moment," said Fix, detaining him.

"What do you want, Mr. Fix?"

"I want to speak to you seriously."

"Seriously!" exclaimed Passe-partout. "Well, then, let us talk to-morrow, I have no time to-day."

"You had better wait," said Fix; "it concerns your master."

Passe-partout looked closely at his companion, and as the expression of his face was peculiar he sat down again.

"What have you got to say to me?" he said.

Fix placed his hand on his companion's arm, and said, in a low voice, "You have guessed who I am, eh?"

"Rather," replied Passe-partout.

"Well, then, I am going to tell you everything."

"Yes, now that I know everything, my friend. That's pretty good. However, go on; but first let me tell you that those gentlemen have sent you on a wild-goose chase."

"It is evident that you do not know how large the sum in question is," said Fix.

"Oh yes, but I do," said Passe-partout, "it is twenty thousand pounds."

"Fifty-five thousand," replied Fix, shaking the Frenchman's hand.

"What!" exclaimed Passe-partout, "has Mr. Fogg risked fifty-five thousand pounds? Well, then, all the more reason we should not lose any time," he added, as he rose from his chair.

"Fifty-five thousand pounds," continued Fix, pressing his companion into his seat again, as a flask of brandy was placed before them; "and if I succeed I shall get a percentage of two thousand pounds. If you will assist me I will give you five hundred."

"Assist you!" exclaimed Passe-partout, as he stared wildly at the detective.

"Yes, assist me to keep Mr. Fogg here for some hours longer."

"What is that you say?" said Passe-partout. "Not content with tracking my master, do these gentlemen suspect his good face and wish to put obstacles in his way? I am ashamed of them."

"What are you talking about?" said Fix.

"I say it is a piece of meanness; they might just as well pick Mr. Fogg's pocket."

"That is just the very thing we want to do."

"Then it is a conspiracy, is it?" exclaimed Passe-partout, who was getting excited by the brandy which he unconsciously had swallowed, "a regular conspiracy; and they call themselves gentlemen and friends!"

Fix began to feel very puzzled.

"Friends!" exclaimed Passe-partout, "members of the Reform Club, indeed! Do you know, Mr. Fix, that my master is an honest man, and when he has made a bet he wins it fairly?"

"But can you guess who I am?" said Fix, looking steadily at Passe-partout.

"An agent of the members of the club, whose business it is to hinder my master; and a dirty job it is, too; so although I have found you out long ago, I did not like to betray you to Mr. Fogg."

"Then he knows nothing about it," said Fix quickly.

"Nothing," replied Passe-partout, emptying his glass once more.

The detective passed his hand over his eyes and considered what he was to do. Passe-partout appeared sincere, and this rendered his plan all the more difficult; he evidently was not his master's accomplice. "He will, therefore, help me," said Fix to himself.

There was no time to lose. At any risk Fogg must be stopped at Hong Kong.

"Listen," said Fix, in a sharp tone; "I am not what you think me."

"Bah!" said Passe-partout.

"I am a detective, sent out by the police authorities in London."

"You a detective?"

"Yes, I can prove it. Here is my authority;" and drawing a paper from his pocketbook, he exhibited his instructions to the stupefied Passe-partout, who was unable to utter a word.

"This wager of Mr. Fogg's," continued Fix, "is merely to blindfold you and his colleagues at the Reform Club. He had a motive in securing your unconscious complicity."

"But why?" said Passe-partout.

"For this reason. On the 28th of last September, the sum of fifty-five thousand pounds was stolen from the Bank of England, by a person whose description is fortunately known. That description tallies exactly with Mr. Fogg's appearance."

"Absurd," exclaimed Passe-partout, striking the table with his fist; "my master is the most honest man in the world."

"What do you know about it?" replied Fix. "You only entered his service on the day he left on a mad excursion, without luggage, and carrying an immense sum in bank-notes; and do you dare to maintain that he is an honest man?"

"Yes, yes," repeated the other mechanically.

"Do you wish to be arrested as an accomplice?"

Passe-partout clutched his head with both hands; he was stupefied. He did not dare to look at the detective. Phileas Fogg a robber! This brave, generous man, the rescuer of Aouda, a thief? And yet circumstantial evidence was strong. Passe-partout did not wish to believe it. He could not believe in his master's guilt.

"Well, then, what do you want me to do?" he said, with an effort.

"Look here," said Fix: "I have tracked Mr. Fogg so far, but as yet I

have not received a warrant, which I asked to be sent from London. You must help me to keep your master in Hong Kong."

"But I--"

"If so, I will share with you the reward of two thousand pounds promised by the bank."

"Never!" replied Passe-partout, who attempted to rise, but fell back utterly exhausted and stupefied.

"Mr. Fix," he stammered, "even if you have told the truth, supposing my master is the thief you are searching for--which I deny--I have been, I am still in his service; he is kind and generous to me, and I will never betray him for all the gold in the world."

"You refuse, then?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, then," said Fix, "forget all I have said. And now let us have a drink."

"Yes, let us have another glass."

Passe-partout felt that the liquor was overcoming him more and more.

Fix having made up his mind that he must be separated from his master at any price, determined to finish the matter. On the table were some pipes of opium. Fix handed one of these to Passe-partout, who took a few puffs and fell back perfectly insensible.

"At last," muttered Fix, as Passe-partout collapsed. "Mr. Fogg will not hear of the change of time for the sailing of the Carnatic, and if so, he will have to go without this infernal Frenchman."

Then paying the score, he quitted the tavern.