

CHAPTER XXIII.

In which Passe-partout's Nose gets immeasurably long.

Next morning, Passe-partout, very tired and very hungry, began to think that he ought to eat something, and the sooner the better. He still had his watch, which he could sell, but he would rather die of hunger than do that; so now or never, he must make use of his powerful, if not melodious, voice, with which nature had endowed him. He knew several French and English songs, and resolved to make the attempt. The Japanese were no doubt fond of music, since they were always beating cymbals, tomtoms, and drums, and they would no doubt appreciate European talent.

But perhaps it was somewhat early to start a concert, and the dilettanti, awakened inopportunately, would not, perhaps, pay him in current coin of the realm. So Passe-partout decided to wait; and meantime it occurred to him that he might as well change his clothes for some more in keeping with his present position, and afterwards he might be able to purchase something to eat.

He immediately set about to carry out the idea, and after a long search he discovered a dealer in old clothes, with whom he made an exchange, and left the shop dressed in a Japanese robe and discoloured

turban; but he had some money in his pocket also.

"All right," he thought; "I must only fancy myself at a carnival."

Passe-partout's first care was to enter a quiet-looking tea-house, and then, with a portion of fowl and some rice, he breakfasted like a man who had not yet solved the problem as to where dinner was to come from.

"Now," he thought, after a hearty meal, "I must consider what I am about. All I can do now is to sell this dress for another still more Japanese. I must think of some means of quitting this Country of the Sun as quickly as possible, and I shall not have a very pleasant recollection of it."

He accordingly went to look at the steamers about to sail to America, for he intended to offer himself as a cook or steward, in exchange for his passage and food. Once at San Francisco he would manage to get on. The important thing was to cross the ocean. He was not the man to think about a thing very long, so he went at once to the docks; but his project, which had appeared so simple in idea, was not so easy to execute. What need was there for a cook or steward on board an American mail-boat? And how could they trust him in his present costume? What reference or recommendation could he offer?

As he was turning these questions over in his mind his gaze fell upon

a placard, which a circus clown was carrying through the streets. The notice was in English, and read as follows:

THE
HONOURABLE WILLIAM BATULCAR'S TROUPE
OF
JAPANESE ACROBATS.

POSITIVELY THE LAST REPRESENTATIONS, PRIOR TO THEIR
DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA,

OF THE

LONG - NOSES - LONG - NOSES.

Under the Special Patronage of the God Tingou.

GREAT ATTRACTION!

"The United States of America!" exclaimed Passe-partout; "that suits me all round."

He followed the "sandwich-man," and was soon in the Japanese quarter once again. In about a quarter of an hour they stopped before a large hut, adorned with flags, upon which a troupe of jugglers were depicted, without any attempt at perspective.

This was the establishment of the Honourable Mr. Batulcar, a sort of Barnum, a director of a troupe of acrobats and jugglers, who were giving their last representations, prior to their departure to the United States. Passe-partout entered and asked for the proprietor. Mr. Batulcar appeared in person.

"What do you want?" he said to Passe-partout, whom he took for a native.

"Do you need a servant, sir?" asked Passe-partout.

"A servant!" echoed the Barnum, as he stroked his beard; "I have two, obedient and faithful, who have never left me, and serve me for nothing but nourishment; and here they are," he added, as he extended his brawny arms, on which the great veins stood out like whipcord.

"So I can be of no use to you, then?"

"Not the least."

"The devil! It would have been very convenient if I could have sailed with you."

"Ah, yes," said the Honourable Batulcar; "you are just about as much a Japanese as I am a baboon, I guess. What are you dressed up like that for?"

"One is obliged to dress as one can."

"That's a fact. You are a Frenchman, ain't you?"

"Yes; a Parisian."

"Then I suppose you know how to make grimaces?"

"Well," replied Passe-partout, somewhat vexed that his nationality should provoke such a question. "It is true that we Frenchmen do know how to make grimaces, but no better than Americans."

"That's so. Well, if I cannot take you as a servant I can engage you as a clown. You see, my lad, this is how it is: in France they exhibit foreign clowns, and in foreign countries French clowns."

"I see."

"You are pretty strong, I suppose?"

"More particularly when I get up after dinner."

"And you know how to sing?"

"Yes," replied Passe-partout, who at one time had sung in the street concerts.

"But can you sing standing on your head with a top spinning on the sole of your left foot, and a sword balanced on your right foot?"

"Something of that sort," replied Passe-partout, who recalled the acrobatic performances of his youth.

"Well, that is the whole business," replied the Honourable Mr. Batulcar.

And the engagement was ratified there and then.

At length Passe-partout had found something to do. He was engaged to make one of a celebrated Japanese troupe. This was not a high position, but in eight days he would be on his way to San Francisco.

The performance was advertised to commence at three o'clock, and although Passe-partout had not rehearsed the "business," he was obliged to form one of the human pyramid composed of the "Long-Noses of the God Tingou." This was the great attraction, and was to close the performance.

The house was crowded before three o'clock by people of all races, ages, and sexes. The musicians took up their positions, and performed vigorously on their noisy instruments.

The performance was very much the same as all acrobatic displays; but it must be stated that the Japanese are the cleverest acrobats in the world. One of them, with a fan and a few bits of paper, did the butterfly and flower trick; another traced in the air with the smoke of his pipe a compliment to the audience; another juggled with some lighted candles which he extinguished successively as they passed his mouth, and which he relit one after the other without for a moment ceasing his sleight-of-hand performances; another produced a series of spinning-tops which, in his hands, played all kinds of pranks as they whirled round--they ran along the stems of pipes, on the edges of swords, upon wires, and even on hairs stretched across the stage; they spun round crystal goblets, crossed bamboo ladders, ran into all the corners of the stage, and made strange music, combining various tones, as they revolved. The jugglers threw them up in the air, knocked them from one to the other like shuttlecocks, put them into their pockets and took them out again, and all the time they never ceased to spin.

But after all the principal attraction was the performance of the "Long-Noses," which has never been seen in Europe.

These "Long-Noses" were the select company under the immediate

patronage of the god Tingou. Dressed in a costume of the Middle Ages, each individual wore a pair of wings; but they were specially distinguished by the inordinate length of their noses and the uses they made of them. These noses were simply bamboos from five to ten feet long, some straight, some curved, some ribbed, and some with warts painted on them. On these noses, which were firmly fixed on their natural ones, they performed their acrobatic feats. A dozen of these artists lay upon their backs, while their comrades, dressed to represent lightning-conductors, leaped from one to the other of their friends' noses, performing the most skilful somersaults.

The whole was to conclude with the "Pyramid," as had been announced, in which fifty "Long-Noses" were to represent the "Car of Juggernaut." But instead of forming the pyramid on each other's shoulders, these artistes mounted on each others noses. Now one of them, who used to act as the base of the car, had left the troupe, and as only strength and adroitness were necessary for the position, Passe-partout had been selected to fill it on this occasion.

That worthy fellow felt very melancholy when he had donned his costume, adorned with parti-coloured wings, and had fixed his six-foot nose to his face; but, at any rate, the nose would procure him something to eat, and he made up his mind to do what he had to do.

He went on the stage and joined his colleagues; they all lay down on their backs, and then another party placed themselves on the long

noses of the first, another tier of performers climbed up on them, then a third and a fourth; and upon the noses a human monument was raised almost to the flies.

Then the applause rose loud and long. The orchestra played a deafening tune, when suddenly the pyramid shook, one of the noses at the base fell out, and the whole pyramid collapsed like a house of cards!

It was all owing to Passe-partout. Clearing himself from the scramble, and leaping over the footlights, without the aid of his wings, he scaled the gallery, and fell at the feet of one of the spectators, crying out, as he did so, "Oh my master, my master!"

"You!"

"Yes, it is I."

"Well then, under those circumstances you had better go on board the steamer."

So Mr. Fogg, Aouda, who accompanied him, and Passe-partout hastened out of the theatre. At the door they met the Honourable Mr. Batulcar, who was furious, and demanded damages for the breaking of the "Pyramid." Mr. Fogg quickly appeased him by handing him a roll of notes.

At half-past six, the appointed hour for the sailing of the vessel, Mr. Fogg, Mrs. Aouda, and Passe-partout, who still wore his wings and long nose, stepped upon the deck of the American mail-steamer.