

CHAPTER XXVIII.

In which Passe-partout cannot make anyone listen to the Language of Reason.

The train leaving Salt Lake and Ogden Station went on northwards as far as Weber River, about nine hundred miles from San Francisco; from this point it turned to the west across the Wahsatch range. It was in this part of the State that the American engineers had found the greatest difficulty. In this portion of the line also the Government subsidy had been raised to forty-eight thousand dollars a mile, instead of the sixteen thousand dollars a mile on the plains; but the engineers, so it is said, had stolen a march on nature, turned all the difficulties instead of cutting through them, and pierced only one tunnel of fourteen thousand feet in length.

At Salt Lake the line reached its greatest altitude--from that point it took a long curve towards Bitter-creek Valley, and then rose again to the watershed between the valley and the Pacific Creeks were numerous hereabout, and Muddy Creek, Green Creek, and others were successively crossed on culverts. As they approached the end of their journey Passe-partout became more and more impatient, while Fix was very anxious to get on, for he feared delays and accidents, and was more anxious to reach England than even Phileas Fogg.

The train stopped for a short time at Fort Bridger at ten o'clock, and twenty miles farther on entered Wyoming State, formerly Dakota. The next day, the 7th of December, they stopped at Green River. Sleet had fallen during the night, but not sufficient to interfere with the traffic. However, this bad weather annoyed Passe-partout very much, for any great fall of snow would have compromised the success of the journey.

"Any way, it is absurd of my master having undertaken such a journey in winter; he might just as well have waited for fine weather and had a better chance."

But while the honest fellow was worrying himself about the weather, Mrs. Aouda was disquieted for an entirely different reason, as amongst the passengers who had alighted at Green River she recognised Colonel Stamp Proctor, who had insulted Mr. Fogg at the San Francisco meeting. She drew back, as she did not wish to be recognised, but the circumstance affected her deeply.

In fact she had become attached to the man who, notwithstanding his coldness of manner, betrayed every day the interest he took in her. No doubt she herself was not aware of the depth of the sentiment with which he inspired her, which she believed to be gratitude, but was doubtless a deeper feeling. Her heart almost ceased to beat at the moment she recognised Mr. Fogg's enemy. Evidently it was mere chance

which had led Colonel Proctor to this particular train, but he and Mr. Fogg must be kept apart at all hazards.

She took an opportunity, when Mr. Fogg was asleep, to tell them whom she had seen.

"That man Proctor on the train!" cried Fix. "Well, you may be quite easy, madam; before he sees Mr. Fogg he has to settle with me. It seems to me that in this matter I have been the most insulted of any."

"And I have a little business with him also, though he is a colonel," added Passe-partout.

"Mr. Fix," replied Mrs. Aouda, "Mr. Fogg would permit nobody to interfere with his quarrel. He has declared that he will come back to America to find out that man who insulted him. If then he sees Colonel Proctor, we cannot prevent a meeting which might have most deplorable results. They must not see each other."

"You are right, madam," replied Fix; "a meeting would spoil everything. Whether victor or not, Mr. Fogg would be delayed, and--"

"And," added Passe-partout, "that would just play into the hands of the Reform Club. In four days we shall be in New York. If during that time my master does not leave his car, the chances are he will not meet the American. At any rate, we must try to prevent a meeting."

The conversation ceased, for Mr. Fogg just then awoke and looked out of window at the snow. Shortly afterwards Passe-partout whispered to the detective, "Would you really fight for him?"

"I would do anything in the world to get him back to Europe alive," replied the detective in a determined tone.

Passe-partout shuddered, but his confidence in his master was unshaken.

And now the question was, how could they detain Mr. Fogg in the car and prevent him meeting the Colonel? It ought not to be a very difficult matter, for Phileas was naturally of a sedentary disposition. However, the detective found a way, for shortly afterwards he said to Mr. Fogg:

"The time passes very slowly."

"Yes," replied Fogg, "but it does pass."

"On board the steamer," continued the detective, "you used to like a game of whist."

"Yes," replied Fogg, "but here I have neither cards nor partners."

"Ah, we can easily purchase cards. As for partners, if madam can take a hand--"

"Certainly," replied the young lady. "I know whist, it is part of an English education."

"And," continued Fix, "I also have some little knowledge of the game, so we can play dummy."

"As you like," said Fogg, delighted to play his favourite game even in the train.

Passe-partout was immediately despatched to the steward, and he quickly returned with two packs of cards, some markers, and a board covered with cloth.

The game commenced, Mrs. Aouda played fairly well, and was complimented by Phileas. As for the detective, he was a first-rate player, and a worthy opponent of Mr. Fogg.

"Now," thought Passe-partout, "we have got him down and he won't move."

At eleven o'clock in the morning the train reached the watershed at Bridger Pass, at an elevation of seven thousand five hundred and twenty-four feet above the level of the sea. After traversing about

two hundred miles more, the travellers found themselves in one of those extensive plains which proved so convenient to the laying of the railway.

At half-past twelve the travellers got a glimpse of Fort Halleck, and in a few hours afterwards they had crossed the Rocky Mountains. They were now in hopes that no accident would imperil the journey; the snow had ceased, and the air was frosty. Some large birds, startled by the locomotive, rose up, but no wild beasts appeared; the whole plain was a desert.

After a comfortable breakfast in his own car, Mr. Fogg and his companions resumed their whist. Just then a loud whistling was heard, and the train came to a stop. Passe-partout put his head out, but could see no cause for the stoppage. Mrs. Aouda and Fix were afraid that Mr. Fogg would get up and see what was the matter, but he merely told his servant to ascertain the reason of the delay.

Passe-partout jumped down. He found a number of passengers already on the ground, and amongst them Colonel Proctor.

The train had been stopped by signal. The engine-driver and guard were talking excitedly with the signalman, whom the station-master at Medicine Bow had sent down. The passengers joined in the discussion, and prominent amongst them was Colonel Proctor.

Passe-partout, as he joined the group, heard the signalman say: "You cannot pass. The bridge is unsafe, and will not bear the weight of the train."

The viaduct in question was a suspension-bridge over a rapid about a mile farther on. The signalman said that many of the supports were broken, and that it was impossible to cross; he did not exaggerate the danger, and it may be taken for granted that when an American is prudent there is good reason for not being rash.

Passe-partout did not dare to tell his master, but remained, listening with clenched teeth, motionless as a statue.

"That is all very fine," said Colonel Proctor, "but I guess we ain't going to stop here to take root in the snow."

"We have telegraphed to Omaha for a train, Colonel," said the guard; "but it can't reach Medicine Bow in less than six hours."

"Six hours!" exclaimed Passe-partout.

"Yes," replied the guard; "but it will take us that time to reach Medicine Bow on foot."

"Why, it is only a mile from here," said one of the passengers.

"Only a mile, but on the other side of the river."

"And can't we cross in a boat?" asked the Colonel.

"Quite impossible; the creek has swollen with the rains; we shall have to go round ten miles to a ford."

The Colonel vented a choice collection of oaths, condemning the company, the guard, and creation generally; and Passe-partout, who was very angry, felt inclined to join him. Here was a material obstacle which all his master's money would not be able to remove.

The disappointment of the passengers was general, for, without reckoning the delay, they found themselves obliged to walk fifteen miles in the snow. The commotion would have attracted Phileas Fogg's attention had he not been entirely absorbed in his game.

Nevertheless, Passe-partout would have told him of it if the engineer, a true Yankee, named Foster, had not said:

"Perhaps there is a way we can get over after all, gentlemen."

"Over the bridge?" asked a passenger.

"Yes."

"With the train, do you mean?" asked the Colonel.

"With the train."

Passe-partout stopped and listened anxiously for the engineer's explanation.

"But the bridge is almost broken," said the guard.

"Never mind," replied Foster: "I think that by putting on full-steam we may have a chance of getting across."

"The devil!" muttered Passe-partout.

But a certain number of the passengers were attracted by the suggestion; Colonel Proctor was particularly pleased, and thought the plan quite feasible. He related various anecdotes concerning engineers, whom he had known, who crossed over rivers without any bridges at all by merely putting on full-steam, etc. The end of it was that many of the passengers agreed with the engineer.

"The chances are fifty to a hundred about our getting over," said one.

"Sixty!" said another.

"Eighty, ninety!" said a third.

Passe-partout was dumfounded, and although he was very anxious to cross the river, he thought the proposed plan a little too American.

"Besides," he thought, "there is an easier way, which does not seem to have occurred to either of them;" so he said aloud to one of the passengers:

"The engineer's plan seems to me somewhat dangerous; but--"

"Eighty chances!" replied the person addressed, turning away.

"I know that," replied Passe-partout, as he spoke to another; "but an idea--"

"Ideas are no use," replied the American; "the engineer tells us we can cross."

"No doubt," replied Passe-partout; "but perhaps it would be more prudent--"

"What, prudent!" exclaimed Colonel Proctor, who was ready to quarrel with anyone suggesting prudence. "Do you not understand that we are going across at full speed? Do you hear, at full speed?"

"I know, I know," said Passe-partout, whom no one would allow to

finish his sentence; "but it would be, if not more prudent, since that word displeases you, at any rate more natural--"

"Who is this, what's this? Who is talking about natural?" cried the passengers on all sides.

Poor Passe-partout did not know which way to turn.

"Are you afraid?" asked Colonel Proctor.

"I afraid?" cried Passe-partout; "you think so, do you? I will show these people when a Frenchman can be as American as themselves."

"All aboard!" cried the guard.

"Yes, all get in," muttered Passe-partout; "but you cannot prevent my thinking that it would be much more natural for us to cross the bridge on foot and let the train follow."

But no one heard this wise reflection, and if so, probably no one would have acknowledged its justice.

The passengers took their places, as did Passe-partout, without saying what had happened. The whist-players were still deep in their game.

The engine-driver whistled and then backed his train for nearly a

mile, then whistling again he started forward. The speed increased to a fearful extent, and rushing along at a pace of nearly a hundred miles an hour, seemed hardly to touch the rails at all.

They passed over like a flash of lightning. No one saw anything of the bridge; the train leaped, as it were, from bank to bank, and could not be stopped till it had passed the station for some miles.

Scarcely had the train crossed the bridge when the whole structure fell with a tremendous crash into the rapids beneath!