

CHAPTER XXX.

In which Phileas Fogg simply does his Duty.

Three of the travellers, including Passe-partout, had disappeared, but it was impossible to say whether they had been killed or taken prisoners.

Several were wounded, but none mortally. Colonel Proctor was one of the most severely hurt; he had fought bravely, and was carried with the other wounded into the station, where he was attended to as well as the circumstances admitted of.

Mrs. Aouda was safe, and Phileas Fogg, who had been in the midst of the fight, had not received a scratch. Fix had a flesh-wound in the arm, but Passe-partout was missing, and Aouda could not help weeping. Meanwhile the travellers all got out of the train, the wheels of which were covered with blood and jagged pieces of flesh. Red tracks were visible on the whitened plain. The Indians were disappearing in the south along the Republican River.

Mr. Fogg was standing motionless with folded arms, and Aouda looked at him without speaking, but he understood her; he had to make up his mind. If his servant were a prisoner, ought he not to rescue him from

the Indians?

"I will find him, living or dead," he said simply to Aouda.

"Oh Mr. Fogg!" exclaimed the young lady, seizing his hands, upon which her tears fell fast.

"Living," added Mr. Fogg, "if we lose no time."

By this resolution Phileas Fogg sacrificed everything, he pronounced his own ruin. A delay of even one day would lose the steamer at New York and his wager. But he thought it was his duty, and did not hesitate.

The commandant of Fort Kearney was present; his company were under arms to repel any further attack.

"Sir," said Mr. Fogg to him, "three passengers are missing."

"Dead?" asked the captain.

"Dead or prisoners," replied Fogg; "I must find out which. Is it your intention to pursue the Sioux?"

"That would be a very serious thing," replied the captain. "The Indians may retreat beyond the Arkansas, and I cannot leave the fort

undefended."

"Sir," replied Fogg, "the lives of three men are in question."

"No doubt; but can I risk fifty to save three?"

"I do not know if you can, sir; but I know you ought."

"Sir," replied the captain, "no one here is fit to teach me my duty."

"Very well," said Fogg coldly, "I will go alone."

"You, sir!" exclaimed Fix, who now approached. "Do you mean to go alone in pursuit of the Indians?"

"Do you wish me to leave that unfortunate man to perish to whom everyone here owes his life? I shall certainly go."

"No, sir, you shall not go alone," said the captain, who was moved in spite of himself. "You are a brave fellow. Now, then, thirty volunteers," he added, turning to the troops.

The whole company advanced at once. The captain had only to pick his men. Thirty were chosen, and a steady old non-commissioned officer put in command.

"Thanks, captain," said Mr. Fogg.

"You will let me go with you?" said Fix.

"You can do as you please, sir, but if you wish to do me a service you will remain with Mrs. Aouda. Should anything happen to me--"

The detective turned very pale. Should he separate from the man he had followed so persistently? Should he leave him to wander thus in the prairie? Fix gazed attentively at Mr. Fogg, and notwithstanding his suspicions and the struggle going on within him, his eyes fell before that frank look.

"I will remain," he said.

In a few moments Mr. Fogg, having shaken hands with the young lady and confided his precious bag to her care, departed with the soldiers. But before marching away he said to his escort, "My friends, I will divide a thousand pounds amongst you if we save the prisoners."

It was then a little past midday.

Mrs. Aouda retired to a waiting-room, and there she remained thinking of the generosity and courage of Phileas Fogg, who had sacrificed his fortune and was now risking his life for what he believed to be his duty. In her eyes Mr. Fogg was a hero.

But Fix's thoughts were very different; he could scarcely conceal his agitation; he walked up and down the station and soon recovered himself. Now that Fogg had gone, Fix perceived how foolish he had been to let him go. He began to accuse himself in pretty round terms, as if he had been his own inspector.

"What a fool I have been," he thought. "The fellow has gone and won't come back. How is it that I, actually with a warrant for his arrest in my pocket, could have been so played upon? Well, I am an ass!"

Thus reasoned the detective as he walked up and down the platform. He did not know what to do. Sometimes he thought he would tell Aouda everything, but he knew how she would receive his confidence. He then thought of following Fogg over the prairie, and he thought it not impossible he might find him, as the footsteps of the escort would be imprinted in the snow. But after a further fall they would soon be obliterated.

Fix became discouraged, and felt inclined to give up the whole thing. He had now an opportunity to leave Kearney Station and pursue his way homewards. In fact about two o'clock, in the midst of a snowstorm, long whistles were heard from eastward; a great shadow was slowly advancing; no train was expected from that direction. The assistance telegraphed for could not possibly arrive so soon, and the train to San Francisco was not due till the next day. The mystery was soon

explained.

It was the runaway locomotive that was approaching. After it had left the train, it had run a long distance till the fire got low and the steam went down. Then it stopped, still bearing the half-conscious engine-driver and firemen. When they found themselves alone in the prairie they understood what had happened, and they had no doubt they would find the train somewhere on the track, helpless. The engine-driver did not hesitate. To go on to Omaha would be only prudent, while to return would be dangerous. He nevertheless built up the fire and ran back to Fort Kearney, whistling through the mist as he went.

The travellers were all delighted to see the engine attached to the train once more. They could now resume their journey, so fatally interrupted.

When the engine was coupled on, Mrs. Aouda asked the guard if he were really going to start?

"Right away, ma'am," he replied.

"But the prisoners, our unfortunate companions--"

"I cannot interrupt the service," he replied; "we are three hours late already."

"And when will the next train arrive from San Francisco?"

"To-morrow evening."

"That will be too late. It must wait."

"That is impossible. If you wish to go on, please get in."

"I will not go," replied the lady.

Fix heard this conversation. A short time before, when there was no chance of his going on, he had decided to leave Kearney, and now that it was necessary for him to take his place, something seemed to detain him. The conflict in his mind waxed fiercer, he wished to fight it out.

Meantime the passengers, some of them wounded, including Colonel Proctor, took their places in the train, which started immediately and soon disappeared, the steam mingling with the falling snow.

Fix had remained behind.

Some hours passed away. The weather was wretched and very cold. Fix remained seated, apparently asleep, on a bench. Aouda, notwithstanding the tempest, continually came out of the room set apart for her, and

walking to the extremity of the platform, attempted to penetrate the thick falling snow, as she listened intently for some sound of the return of the escort. But she saw and heard nothing, and would return chilled to the bone, only to sally forth once more in vain.

Night fell, the troops had not returned; the commandant began to feel anxious, though he did not betray his anxiety. The snow fell less thickly now, but the cold was intense; absolute silence reigned around. All night Mrs. Aouda kept wandering about, filled with the most dismal forebodings--her imagination suggested a thousand dangers, and her anxiety was terrible.

Fix remained immovable, but he did not sleep either. A man approached him once and spoke to him, but a shake of the head was the only reply he received.

Thus passed the night. At sunrise it was possible to distinguish objects at the distance of two miles; but towards the south, in which direction the party had gone, there was no sign. It was then seven o'clock.

The captain, who was now seriously alarmed, did not know what to do. Should he send a second detachment after the first, and sacrifice more men on the slender chance of saving those who had already gone? But he did not hesitate long, and was on the point of ordering a reconnoissance to be made, when the sound of firing was heard. The

soldiers rushed out of the fort and perceived the little troop returning in good order.

Mr. Fogg was marching at their head. Close to him were Passe-partout and the other two passengers, rescued from the hands of the Sioux. They had encountered the Indians ten miles from Kearney. Just before they arrived Passe-partout and his companions had turned upon their captors, three of whom the Frenchman had knocked down with his fists, when his master and the escort came to his assistance.

The party was welcomed most joyously.

Phileas Fogg distributed the promised reward to the soldiers, while Passe-partout muttered, and not without reason, "I must confess that I cost my master pretty dearly."

Fix looked at Mr. Fogg without speaking, and it would have been difficult to analyse his thoughts at that moment. Mrs. Aouda, whose feelings were too deep for expression, took Mr. Fogg's hands in hers and pressed them without speaking.

Ever since his return Passe-partout had been looking for the train; he hoped to find it there ready to start for Omaha, and trusted that the lost time might be regained.

"But where is the train?" he exclaimed.

"Gone," replied Fix.

"When is the next train due here?" asked Mr. Fogg.

"Not until this evening."

"Ah!" replied the impassible gentleman simply.