

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In which Phileas Fogg's Name is once again at a Premium on the Exchange.

It is now time to say something of the change which English opinion underwent when the true bank robber, one James Strand, was arrested in Edinburgh on the 17th of December.

Three days before Fogg was a criminal, followed by the police; now he was a gentleman, who had only been taking an eccentric journey round the world. There was great discussion in the papers, and those who had laid wagers for or against Mr. Fogg rose once more as if by magic. The "Fogg Bonds" were once more negotiated, and Phileas Fogg's name was at a premium.

The members of the Reform Club passed those three days in great discomfort. Would Phileas Fogg, whom they had forgotten, return? Where was he on that 17th of December, which was the seventy-sixth day after his departure, and they had had no news of him? Had he given in, and renounced the struggle, or was he continuing the journey at a more reasonable rate, and would he appear on Saturday, the 21st of December, at a quarter to nine in the evening, as agreed upon?

We cannot depict the intense agitation which moved all classes of society during those three days. Telegrams were sent to America and Asia for news of Mr. Fogg, and people were sent, morning and night, to Saville Row; but there was no news. Even the police did not know what had become of Fix. But all these things did not prevent bets being made, even to a greater amount than formerly. Bonds were quoted no longer at a hundred per cent. discount, but went up to ten and five; and even old Lord Albemarle was betting at evens.

So that Saturday night a great crowd was assembled in Pall Mall and the Reform Club. Traffic was impeded; disputes, arguments, and bets were raging in every direction. The police had the greatest difficulty to keep back the crowd, and as the hour when Mr. Fogg was due approached, the excitement rose to fever-heat.

That evening that gentleman's five friends had assembled in the drawing-room of the club. There were the two bankers, John Sullivan and Samuel Fallentin; Andrew Stuart, the engineer; Gauthier Ralph, the director of the Bank of England; and Thomas Flanagan, the brewer; all awaiting Mr. Fogg's return with the greatest anxiety.

At twenty minutes past eight Stuart rose and said: "Gentlemen, in twenty-five minutes the time agreed upon will have expired."

"At what time was the last train due from Liverpool?" asked Flanagan.

"At 7.23," replied Ralph; "and the next does not arrive till past midnight."

"Well, then, gentlemen," replied Stuart, "if Mr. Fogg had arrived by the 7.23, he would have been here before now, so we may look upon the bet as won."

"Do not be in too great a hurry," replied Fallentin. "You know that our friend is very eccentric, and his punctuality is proverbial. I, for one, shall be astonished if he does not turn up at the last minute."

"For my part," said Stuart, who was very nervous, "if I should see him I could not believe it was he."

"In fact," replied Flanagan, "Mr. Fogg's project was insane. No matter how punctual he may be, he cannot prevent some delay; and a day or two would throw all his arrangements out of gear."

"And you will remark besides," said Sullivan, "that we have not received any news from him all the time he has been away, although there are telegraphs all along his route."

"He has lost, gentlemen," said Stuart, "a hundred times over. The only ship he could have come by and been in time was the China, and she arrived yesterday. Here is a list of the passengers, and Phileas

Fogg's name is not included. On the most favourable computation our friend can scarcely have reached America. I do not expect him for the next twenty days, and my Lord Albemarle will lose his five thousand pounds."

"Then we have nothing to do," replied Ralph, "but to present his cheque at Baring's to-morrow."

The hands of the clock were then pointing to twenty minutes to nine.

"Five minutes more," said Stuart.

The five friends looked at each other. One could almost hear their hearts beating, for it must be confessed that even for such seasoned players the stakes were pretty high, but they did not wish their anxiety to be remarked, and on Fallentin's suggestion they sat down to whist.

"I would not give up my four thousand pounds," said Stuart as he sat down, "if anyone were to offer me three thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine."

The clock pointed to eighteen minutes to nine.

The players took up their cards, but kept looking at the clock. No matter how safe they felt, the minutes had never appeared so long.

"8.43," said Flanagan, as he cut the pack Ralph passed to him.

At that moment the silence was profound, but the cries of the crowd outside soon rose again. The clock beat out the seconds with mathematical regularity, and each of the players checked every tick of the pendulum.

"8.44," said Sullivan, in a voice which betrayed his nervousness.

One minute more and they would have won their bet. They laid down their cards and counted the seconds.

At the fortieth second no news; at the fiftieth still nothing. At the fifty-fifth second a loud roar was heard from the street mingled with cheers and oaths.

All the players rose simultaneously.

At the fifty-seventh second the door of the room was thrust open, and before the pendulum had marked the minute Phileas Fogg advanced into the room, followed to the door by an excited crowd who had forced their way in, and he said in his usual calm tone,

"Here I am, gentlemen."