The Tour of the World in Eighty Days.

CHAPTER XI.—*Continued.*

Towards evening they entered the defiles of the mountains of Sutpour, which separate the territory of the Khandeish from that of Bundelcund.

The next day, the 22nd of October, Passepartout, having consulted his watch, replied to a question of Sir Francis Cromarty that it was three o'clock in the morning. In fact, this famous watch, always regulated by the meridian of Greenwich, which is nearly seventy-seven degrees west, ought to be and was four hours slow.

Sir Francis then corrected the hour given by Passepartout, and added the same remark that the latter had already heard from Fix. He tried to make him understand that he ought to regulate his watch on new meridian, and that since he was constantly going towards the east, that is, in the face of the sun, the days were shorter by as many times four minutes as he had crossed degrees. It was useless. Whether the stubborn fellow had understood the remarks of the general or not, he persisted in not putting his watch ahead, which he kept always at London time. An innocent madness at any rate, which could hurt no one.

At eight o'clock in the morning, and fifteen miles before they reached Rothal the train stopped in the midst of an immense opening, on the edge of which were some Bungalows and workmen's huts. The conductor of the train passed along the cars calling out, "The passengers will get out here!"

Phileas Fogg looked at Sir Francis Cromarty, who appeared not to understand this stop in the midst of a forest of tamarinds and acacias. Passepartout not less surprised, rushed on to the track and returned almost immediately, crying:—"Monsieur, no more railway!"

"What do you mean?" asked Sir Francis Cromarty.

"I mean that the train goes no further!"

The brigadier general immediately got out of the car. Phileas Fogg, in no hurry, followed him. Both spoke to the conductor.

"Where are we?" asked Sir Francis Cromarty.

"At the hamlet of Kholby" replied the conductor.

"We stop here?"

"Without doubt. The railway is not finished——"

"How! It is not finished?"

"No! There is still a section of fifty miles to construct between this point and Allahabad, where the track commences again."

"But the papers have announced the opening of the entire line!"

"But, general, the papers were mistaken."

"And you give tickets from Bombay to Calcutta!" replied Sir Francis Cromarty, who was beginning to be excited.

"Of course," replied the conductor; "but travellers know very well that they have to be otherwise transported from Kholby to Allahabad."

Sir Francis Cromarty was furious. Passepartout would have willingly knocked the conductor down, who could not help himself. He did not dare look at his master.

"Sir Francis," said Mr. Fogg, simply, "we will go, if you will be kind enough to see about some way of reaching Allahabad."

"Mr. Fogg, this is a delay absolutely prejudicial to your interests!"

"No, Sir Francis, it was provided for."

"What, did you know that the railway——"

"By no means, but I knew that some obstacle or other would occur sooner or later upon my route. Now, nothing is interfered with. I have gained two days which I can afford to lose. A steamer leaves Calcutta for Hong Kong at noon on the 25th. This is only the 22nd, and we shall arrive in Calcutta in time."

Nothing could be said in reply to such complete certainty.

It was only too true that the finished portion of the railway stopped at this point. The newspapers are like certain watches which have a mania of getting ahead of time, and they had announced the finishing of the line prematurely. The most of the passengers knew of this break in the line, and descending from the train, they examined the vehicles of all sorts in the village, four wheeled palkigharis, carts drawn by zebus, a sort of ox with humps, travelling cars resembling walking pagodas, palanquins, ponies, etc. Mr. Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty, after having hunted through the entire village, returned without having found anything.

"I shall go on foot," said Mr. Fogg.

Passepartout who had then rejoined his master, made a significant grimace, looking down at his magnificent but delicate slippers. Very fortunately he had also been hunting for something, and hesitating a little, he said:—

"Monsieur, I believe I have found a means of conveyance."

"What?"

"An elephant, belonging to an Indian living a hundred steps from here.

"Let us go to see the elephant," replied Mr. Fogg. Five minutes later Phileas Fogg, Sir Francis Cromarty, and Passepartout arrived at a hut which was against an enclosure of high palisades. In the hut there was an Indian, and in the enclosure an elephant. Upon their demand, the Indian took Mr. Fogg and his companions into the enclosure.

They found there a half tamed animal, which his owner was raising, not to hire out, but as a beast of combat. To this end he had commenced to modify the naturally mild conduct of the animal in a manner to lead him gradually to that paroxysm of rage called "mutah" in the Hindoo language, and that by feeding him for three months with sugar and butter. This treatment may not seem the proper one to obtain such a result, but it is none the less employed with such by their keepers.

Kiouni, the animal's name, could, like all his fellows, go rapidly on a long march, and in default of other conveyance, Phileas Fogg determined to employ him. But elephants are very expensive in India, where they are beginning to get scarce. The males, which alone are fit for circus feats, are very much sought for. These animals are rarely reproduced when they are reduced to the tame state, so that they can be obtained only by hunting. So they are the object of extreme care and when Mr. Fogg asked the Indian if he would hire him his elephant he flatly refused.

Fogg persisted and offered an excessive price for the animal, ten pounds per hour. Refused. Twenty pounds. Still refused. Forty pounds. Refused again. Passepartout jumped at every advance in price. But the Indian would not be tempted. The sum was a handsome one, however. Admitting the elephant to be employed fifteen hours to reach Allahabad, it was six hundred pounds earned for his owner.

Phileas Fogg, without being at all excited, proposed then to the Indian to buy his animal, and offered him at first one thousand pounds. The Indian would not sell! Perhaps the rogue scented a large transaction.

Sir Francis Cromarty took Mr. Fogg aside and begged him to reflect before going further. Phileas Fogg replied to his companion that he was not in the habit of acting without reflection, that a bet of twenty thousand pounds was at stake, that this elephant was necessary to him, and that, should he pay twenty times his value, he would have this elephant.

Mr. Fogg went again for the Indian, whose small eyes, lit up with greed, showed that with him it was only a question of price. Phileas Fogg offered successively twelve hundred, fifteen hundred, eighteen hundred, and finally two thousand pounds. Passepartout, so rosy ordinarily, was pale with emotion.

At two thousand pounds the Indian gave up.

"By my slippers," cried Passepartout, here is a magnificent price for elephant meat.!"

The business concluded, all that was necessary was to find a guide. That was easier. A young Parsee, with an intelligent face, offered his services. Mr. Fogg accepted him, and offered him a large reward to sharpen his wits. The elephant was brought out and equipped without delay. The Parsee understood perfectly the business of "mahout," or elephant driver. He covered with a sort of saddle cloth the back of the elephant, and put on each flank two kinds of rather uncomfortable howdads.

Phileas Fogg paid the Indian in bank notes taken from the famous carpet bag. It seemed as if they were taken from Passepartout's very vitals. Then Mr. Fogg offered to Sir Francis Cromarty to convey him to Allahabad. The general accepted; one passenger more was not enough to tire this enormous animal. Some provisions were bought at Kholby. Sir Francis Cromarty took a seat in one of the howdahs, Phileas Fogg in the other. Passepartout got astride the animal, between his master and the brigadier general. The Parsee perched upon the elephant's neck, and at 9 o'clock the animal, leaving the village, penetrated the thick forest of palm trees.

CHAPTER XII.—IN WHICH PHILEAS FOGG AND HIS COMPANIONS VENTURE THROUGH THE FORESTS OF INDIA, AND WHAT FOLLOWS.

The guide, in order to shorten the distance to be gone over, left to his right the line of the road, the construction of which was still in process. This line, very crooked, owing to the capricious ramifications of the Vindhia mountains, did not follow the shortest route, which it was Phileas Fogg's interest to take. The Parsee, very familiar with the roads and paths of the country, thought to gain twenty miles by cutting through the forest, and they submitted to him.

Phileas Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty, plunged to their necks in their howdahs, were much shaken up by the rough trot of the elephant, whom his mahout urged into a rapid gait. But they bore it with the peculiar British apathy, talking very little, and scarcely seeing each other.

As for Passepartout, perched upon the animal's back, and directly subjected to the swaying from side to side, he took care, upon his master's recommendation, not to keep his tongue between his teeth, as it would have been cut short off. The good fellow, at one time thrown forward on the elephant's neck, at another thrown back upon his rump, was making leaps like a clown on a spring-board. But he joked and laughed in the midst of his somersets, and from time to time he would take from his bag a lump of sugar, which the intelligent Kiouni took with the end of his trunk, without interrupting for an instant his regular trot.

After two hours' march the guide stopped the elephant, and gave him an hour's rest. The animal devoured branches of trees and shrubs, first having quenched his thirst at a neighboring pond. Sir Francis Cromarty did not complain of this halt. He was worn out. Mr. Fogg appeared as if he had just got out of bed.

"But he is made of iron!" said the brigadier general, looking at him with admiration.

"Of wrought iron!" replied Passepartout, who was busy preparing a hasty breakfast.

At noon the guide gave the signal for starting. The country soon assumed a very wild aspect. To the large forests there succeeded copses of tamarinds and dwarf palms, then vast, arid plains, bristling with scanty shrubs, and strewn with large blocks of syenites. All this part of upper Bundelcund, very little visited by travellers, is inhabited by a fanatical population, hardened in the most terrible practices of the Hindoo religion. The government of the English could not have been regularly established over a territory subject to the influence of the rajahs, whom it would have been difficult to reach in their inaccessible retreats in the Vindhias.

They were descending the last declivities of the Vindhias. Kiouni had resumed his rapid gait. Towards noon, the guide went round the village of Kallenger, situated on the Cani, one of the tributaries of the Ganges. He always avoided inhabited places, feeling himself safer in those desert, open stretches of country which mark the first depressions of the basin of the great river. Allahabad was not twelve miles to the northwest. Halt was made under a clump of banana trees, whose fruit, as healthy as bread, "as succulent as cream," travelers say, was very much appreciated.

At two o'clock, the guide entered the shelter of a thick forest, which he had to traverse for a space of several miles. He preferred to travel thus under cover of the woods. At all events, up to this moment there had been no unpleasant meeting, and it seemed as if the journey would be accomplished without accident when the elephant, showing some signs of uneasiness, suddenly stopped.

It was then four o'clock.

"What is the matter?" asked Sir Francis Cromarty, raising his head above his howdah.

"I do not know, officer," replied the Parsee, listening to a confused murmur which came through the thick branches.

A few moments after, this murmur became more defined. It might have been called a concert, still very distant, of human voices and brass instruments. Passepartout was all eyes, all ears. Mr. Fogg waited patiently, without uttering a word.

The Parsee jumped down, fastened the elephant to a tree, and plunged into the thickest of the undergrowth. A few minutes later he returned saying:

"A Brahmin procession coming this way. If it is possible, let us avoid being seen."

The guide unfastened the elephant, and led him into a thicket, recommending the travellers not to descend. He held himself ready to mount the elephant quickly, should flight become necessary. But he thought that the troop of the faithful would pass without noticing him, for the thickness of the foliage entirely concealed him.

The discordant noise of voices and instruments approached. Monotonous chants were mingled with the sound of the drums and cymbals. Soon the head of the procession appeared from under the trees, at fifty paces from the spot occupied by Mr. Fogg and his companions. Through the branches they readily distinguished the curious *personnel* of this religious ceremony.

In the first line were the priests, with mitres upon their heads and attired in long robes adorned with gold and silver lace. They were surrounded by men, women and children, who were singing a sort of funeral psalmody, interrupted at regular intervals by the beating of tam-tams and cymbals. Behind them on a car with large wheels, whose spokes and felloes represented serpents intertwined, appeared a hideous statue, drawn by two pairs of richly caparisoned zebus. This statue had four arms, its body colored with dark red, its eyes haggard, its hair tangled, its tongue hanging out, its lips colored with henna and betel. Its neck was encircled by a collar of skulls, around its waist a girdle of human hands. It was erect upon a prostrate giant, whose head was missing.

Sir Francis Cromarty recognised this statue.

"The goddess Kali," he murmured; "the goddess of love and death."

"Of death, I grant, but of love, never!" said Passepartout. "The ugly old woman!"

The Parsee made him a sign to keep quiet.

Around the statue there was a group of old fakirs jumping and tossing themselves about convulsively. Smeared with bands of ochre, covered with cross-like cuts, whence their blood escaped drop by drop—stupid fanatics, who, in the great Hindoo ceremonies, precipitated themselves under the wheels of the car of Juggernaut.

Behind them, some brahmins in all the magnificence of their Oriental costume, were dragging a woman who could hardly hold herself erect.

This woman was young, and as fair as a European. Her head, her neck, her shoulders, her ears, her arms, her hands, and her toes were loaded down with jewels, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and finger-rings. A tunic, embroidered with gold, covered with light muslin, displayed the outlines of her form.

Behind this young woman—a violent contrast for the eyes—were guards, armed with naked sabres fastened to their girdles and long damaskeened pistols, carrying a corpse upon a palanquin.

It was the body of an old man, dressed in the rich garments of a rajah, having, as in life, his turban embroidered with pearls, his robe woven of silk and gold, his sash of cashmere ornamented with diamonds, and his magnificent arms as an Indian prince.

Then musicians and a rearguard of fanatics, whose cries sometimes drowned the deafening noise of the instruments, closed up the cortege.

Sir Francis Cromarty looked at all this pomp with a singularly sad air, and turning to the guide, he said:—

"A suttee!"

The parsee made an affirmative sign and put his fingers on his lips. The long procession slowly came out from the trees, and soon the last of it disappeared in the depths of the forest.

Little by little the chanting died out. There were still the sounds of distant cries, and finally a profound silence succeeded all this tumult.

Phileas Fogg had heard the word uttered by Sir Francis Cromarty, and as soon as the procession had disappeared, he asked:—

"What is a suttee?"

"A suttee, Mr. Fogg," replied the brigadier-general, "is a human sacrifice, but a voluntary sacrifice. The woman that you have just seen will be burned to-morrow in the early part of the day."

"Oh the villains!" cried Passepartout, who could not prevent his cry of indignation.

"And this corpse?" asked Mr. Fogg.

"It is that of the prince, her husband," replied the guide, "an independent rajah of Bundelcund.

"How," replied Phileas Fogg, without his voice betraying the least emotion, "do these barbarous customs still exist in India, and have not the English been able to extirpate them?"

"In the largest part of India," replied Sir Francis Cromarty, "these sacrifices do not come to pass; but we have no influence over these wild countries, and particularly over this territory of Bundelcund. All the northern slope of the Vindhias is the scene of murders and incessant robberies."

"The unfortunate," murmured Passepartout, "burned alive!"

"Yes," replied the general, "burned, and if she was not you would not believe to what a miserable condition she would be reduced by her near relatives. They would shave her hair; they would scarcely feed her with a few handsful of rice; they would reputise her; she would be considered as an unclean creature, and would die in some corner like a sick dog. So that the prospect of this frightful existence frequently drives these unfortunates to the sacrifice much more than love of religious fanaticism. Sometimes, however, the sacrifice is really voluntary and the energetic intervention of the government is necessary to prevent it. Some years ago, I was living at Bombay, when a young widow came to the Governor to ask his authority for her to be burned with the body of her husband. As you may think, the Governor refused. Then the widow left the city, took refuge with an independent rajah, and there she accomplished the sacrifice."

During the narrative of the general, the guide shook his head, and when he was through, said—

"The sacrifice which takes place tomorrow is not voluntary."

"How do you know?"

"It is a story which every body in Bundelcund knows," replied the guide.

"But this unfortunate did not seem to make any resistance," remarked Sir Francis Cromarty.

"Because she was intoxicated with the fumes of hemp and opium."

"But where are they taking her?"

"To the pagoda of Pillaji, two miles from here. There she will pass the night in waiting for the sacrifice."

"And this sacrifice will take place?—"

"At the first appearance of day."

After this answer, the guide brought the elephant out of the dense thicket, and jumped on his neck. But at the moment that he was going to start him off by a peculiar whistle, Mr. Fogg stopped him and addressing Sir Francis Cromarty, said: "If we could save this woman?"

"Save this woman, Mr. Fogg!" cried the brigadier-general.

"I have still twelve hours to spare. I can devote them to her."

"Why, you are a man of heart!" said Sir Francis Cromarty.

"Sometimes," replied Phileas Fogg, simply, "when I have time."

CHAPTER XIII.—IN WHICH PASSEPARTOUT PROVES AGAIN THAT FORTUNE SMILES UPON THE BOLD.

The design was bold, full of difficulties, perhaps impracticable. Mr. Fogg was going to risk his life, or at least his liberty, and consequently the success of his plans, but he did not hesitate. He found, besides, a decided ally in Sir Francis Cromarty.

As to Passepartout, he was ready and could be depended upon. His master's idea excited him. He felt that there was a heart and a soul under this icy covering. He almost loved Phileas Fogg.

Then there was the guide. What part would he take in the matter? Would he not be with the Indians? In default of his aid, it was at least necessary to be sure of his neutrality.

Sir Francis Cromarty put the question to him frankly.

"Officer," replied the guide, "I am a Parsee, and that woman is a Parsee. Make use of me."

"Very well, guide," replied Mr. Fogg.

"However, do you know," replied the Parsee, "that we not only risk our lives, but horrible punishments if we are taken. So see."

"That is seen," replied Mr. Fogg. "I think that we shall have to wait for night to act?"

"I think so too," replied the guide.

The brave Hindoo then gave some details as to the victim. She was an Indian of celebrated beauty, of the Parsee race, the daughter of a rich merchant of Bombay. She had received in the city an absolutely Hindoo education and from her manners and captivation she would have been thought a European. Her name was Aouda.

An orphan, she was married against her will to this old rajah of Bundelcund. Three months after she was a widow. Knowing the fate that awaited her, she fled, was retaken immediately, and the relatives of the rajah, who had an interest in her death, devoted her to this sacrifice from which it seemed that she could not escape.

This narrative could only strengthen Mr. Fogg and his companions in their generous resolution. It was decided that the guide should turn the elephant towards the pagoda of Pillaji, which he should approach as near as possible.

A half hour afterwards a halt was made under a thick clump of trees, five hundred paces from the pagoda, which they could not see, but they heard distinctly the yellings of the fanatics.

The means of reaching the victim were then discussed. The guide was acquainted with the pagoda, in which he asserted that the young woman was imprisoned. Could they enter by one of the doors, when the whole band was plunged in the sleep of drunkenness, or would they have to make a hole through the wall? This could be decided only at the moment and the place. But there could be no doubt that the abduction must be accomplished this very night, and not when daylight arrived, the victim would be led to the sacrifice. Then no human intervention could save her.

[To be continued.]

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