

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

SUPPLEMENT

Extraordinary flight on the back of an eagle, over France to Gibraltar, South and North America, the Polar Regions, and back to England, within six-and-thirty hours.

About the beginning of his present Majesty's reign I had some business with a distant relation who then lived on the Isle of Thanet; it was a family dispute, and not likely to be finished soon. I made it a practice during my residence there, the weather being fine, to walk out every morning. After a few of these excursions I observed an object upon a great eminence about three miles distant: I extended my walk to it, and found the ruins of an ancient temple: I approached it with admiration and astonishment; the traces of grandeur and magnificence which yet remained were evident proofs of its former splendour: here I could not help lamenting the ravages and devastations of time, of which that once noble structure exhibited such a melancholy proof. I walked round it several times, meditating on the fleeting and transitory nature of all terrestrial things; on the eastern end were the remains of a lofty tower, near forty feet high, overgrown with ivy, the top apparently flat; I surveyed it on every side very minutely, thinking that if I could gain its summit I should enjoy the most delightful prospect of the circumjacent country. Animated with this hope, I resolved, if possible, to gain the summit, which I at length effected by means of the ivy, though not without great difficulty and danger; the top I found covered with this evergreen, except a large chasm in the middle. After I had surveyed with pleasing wonder the beauties of art and nature that conspired to enrich the scene, curiosity prompted me to sound the opening in the middle, in order to ascertain its depth, as I entertained a suspicion that it might probably communicate with some unexplored subterranean cavern in the hill; but having no line I was at a loss how to proceed. After revolving the matter in my thoughts for some time, I resolved to drop a stone down and listen to the echo: having found one that answered my purpose I placed myself over the hole, with one foot on each side, and stooping down to listen, I dropped the stone, which I had no sooner done than I heard a rustling below, and suddenly a monstrous eagle put up its head right opposite my face, and rising up with irresistible force, carried me away seated on its shoulders: I instantly grasped it round the neck, which was large enough to fill my arms, and its wings, when extended, were ten yards from one extremity to the other. As it rose with a regular ascent, my seat was perfectly easy, and I enjoyed the prospect below with inexpressible pleasure. It hovered over Margate for some time, was seen by several people, and many shots were fired at it; one ball hit the heel of my shoe, but did me no injury. It then directed its course to Dover cliff, where it alighted, and I thought of dismounting, but was prevented by a sudden discharge of musketry from a party of marines that were exercising on the beach; the balls flew about my head, and rattled on the feathers of the eagle like hail-stones, yet I could not perceive it had received any injury. It instantly reascended and flew over the sea towards Calais, but so very high that the Channel seemed to be no broader than the Thames at London Bridge. In a quarter of an hour I found myself over a thick wood in France, where the eagle descended very rapidly, which caused me to slip down to the back part of its head; but alighting on a large tree, and raising its head, I recovered my seat as before, but saw no possibility of disengaging myself without the danger of being killed by the fall; so I determined to sit fast, thinking it would carry me to the Alps, or some other high mountain, where I could dismount without any danger. After resting a few minutes it took wing, flew several times round the wood, and screamed loud enough to be heard across the English Channel. In a few minutes one of the same species arose out of the wood, and flew directly towards us; it surveyed me with evident marks of displeasure, and came very near me. After flying several times round, they both directed their course to the south-west. I soon observed that the one I rode upon could not keep pace with the

other, but inclined towards the earth, on account of my weight; its companion perceiving this, turned round and placed itself in such a position that the other could rest its head on its rump; in this manner they proceeded till noon, when I saw the rock of Gibraltar very distinctly. The day being clear, notwithstanding my degree of elevation, the earth's surface appeared just like a map, where land, sea, lakes, rivers, mountains, and the like were perfectly distinguishable; and having some knowledge of geography, I was at no loss to determine what part of the globe I was in.

Whilst I was contemplating this wonderful prospect a dreadful howling suddenly began all around me, and in a moment I was invested by thousands of small, black, deformed, frightful looking creatures, who pressed me on all sides in such a manner that I could neither move hand or foot: but I had not been in their possession more than ten minutes when I heard the most delightful music that can possibly be imagined, which was suddenly changed into a noise the most awful and tremendous, to which the report of cannon, or the loudest claps of thunder could bear no more proportion than the gentle zephyrs of the evening to the most dreadful hurricane; but the shortness of its duration prevented all those fatal effects which a prolongation of it would certainly have been attended with.

The music commenced, and I saw a great number of the most beautiful little creatures seize the other party, and throw them with great violence into something like a snuff-box, which they shut down, and one threw it away with incredible velocity; then turning to me, he said they whom he had secured were a party of devils, who had wandered from their proper habitation; and that the vehicle in which they were enclosed would fly with unabating rapidity for ten thousand years, when it would burst of its own accord, and the devils would recover their liberty and faculties, as at the present moment. He had no sooner finished this relation than the music ceased, and they all disappeared, leaving me in a state of mind bordering on the confines of despair.

When I had recomposed myself a little, and looking before me with inexpressible pleasure, I observed that the eagles were preparing to light on the peak of Teneriffe: they descended on the top of the rock, but seeing no possible means of escape if I dismounted determined me to remain where I was. The eagles sat down seemingly fatigued, when the heat of the sun soon caused them both to fall asleep, nor did I long resist its fascinating power. In the cool of the evening, when the sun had retired below the horizon, I was roused from sleep by the eagle moving under me; and having stretched myself along its back, I sat up, and reassumed my travelling position, when they both took wing, and having placed themselves as before, directed their course to South America. The moon shining bright during the whole night, I had a fine view of all the islands in those seas.

About the break of day we reached the great continent of America, that part called Terra Firma, and descended on the top of a very high mountain. At this time the moon, far distant in the west, and obscured by dark clouds, but just afforded light sufficient for me to discover a kind of shrubbery all around, bearing fruit something like cabbages, which the eagles began to feed on very eagerly. I endeavoured to discover my situation, but fogs and passing clouds involved me in the thickest darkness, and what rendered the scene still more shocking was the tremendous howling of wild beasts, some of which appeared to be very near: however, I determined to keep my seat, imagining that the eagle would carry me away if any of them should make a hostile attempt. When daylight began to appear, I thought of examining the fruit which I had seen the eagles eat, and as some was hanging which I could easily come at, I took out my knife and cut a slice; but how great was my surprise to see that it had all the appearance of roast beef regularly mixed, both fat and lean! I tasted it, and found it well flavoured and delicious, then cut several large slices and put in my pocket, where I found a crust of bread which I had brought from Margate; took it out, and found three musket-balls that had been lodged in it on Dover cliff. I extracted them, and cutting a few slices more, made a hearty meal of bread and cold beef fruit. I then cut down two of the largest that grew near me, and tying them together with one of my garters, hung them over the eagle's neck for another occasion,

filling my pockets at the same time. While I was settling these affairs I observed a large fruit like an inflated bladder, which I wished to try an experiment upon: and striking my knife into one of them, a fine pure liquor like Hollands gin rushed out, which the eagles observing, eagerly drank up from the ground. I cut down the bladder as fast as I could, and saved about half a pint in the bottom of it, which I tasted, and could not distinguish it from the best mountain wine. I drank it all, and found myself greatly refreshed. By this time the eagles began to stagger against the shrubs. I endeavoured to keep my seat, but was soon thrown to some distance among the bushes. In attempting to rise I put my hand upon a large hedgehog, which happened to lie among the grass upon its back: it instantly closed round my hand, so that I found it impossible to shake it off. I struck it several times against the ground without effect; but while I was thus employed I heard a rustling among the shrubbery, and looking up, I saw a huge animal within three yards of me; I could make no defence, but held out both my hands, when it rushed upon me, and seized that on which the hedgehog was fixed. My hand being soon relieved, I ran to some distance, where I saw the creature suddenly drop down and expire with the hedgehog in its throat. When the danger was past I went to view the eagles, and found them lying on the grass fast asleep, being intoxicated with the liquor they had drank. Indeed, I found myself considerably elevated by it, and seeing everything quiet, I began to search for some more, which I soon found; and having cut down two large bladders, about a gallon each, I tied them together, and hung them over the neck of the other eagle, and the two smaller ones I tied with a cord round my own waist. Having secured a good stock of provisions, and perceiving the eagles begin to recover, I again took my seat. In half an hour they arose majestically from the place, without taking the least notice of their incumbrance. Each reassumed its former station; and directing their course to the northward, they crossed the Gulf of Mexico, entered North America, and steered directly for the Polar regions, which gave me the finest opportunity of viewing this vast continent that can possibly be imagined.

Before we entered the frigid zone the cold began to affect me; but piercing one of my bladders, I took a draught, and found that it could make no impression on me afterwards. Passing over Hudson's Bay, I saw several of the Company's ships lying at anchor, and many tribes of Indians marching with their furs to market.

By this time I was so reconciled to my seat, and become such an expert rider, that I could sit up and look around me; but in general I lay along the eagle's neck, grasping it in my arms, with my hands immersed in its feathers, in order to keep them warm.

In those cold climates I observed that the eagles flew with greater rapidity, in order, I suppose, to keep their blood in circulation. In passing Baffin's Bay I saw several large Greenlandmen to the eastward, and many surprising mountains of ice in those seas.

While I was surveying these wonders of nature it occurred to me that this was a good opportunity to discover the north-west passage, if any such thing existed, and not only obtain the reward offered by government, but the honour of a discovery pregnant with so many advantages to every European nation. But while my thoughts were absorbed in this pleasing reverie I was alarmed by the first eagle striking its head against a solid transparent substance, and in a moment that which I rode experienced the same fate, and both fell down seemingly dead.

Here our lives must inevitably have terminated, had not a sense of danger, and the singularity of my situation, inspired me with a degree of skill and dexterity which enabled us to fall near two miles perpendicular with as little inconveniency as if we had been let down with a rope: for no sooner did I perceive the eagles strike against a frozen cloud, which is very common near the poles, than (they being close together) I laid myself along the back of the foremost, and took hold of its wings to keep them extended, at the same time stretching out my legs behind to support the wings of the other. This had the desired effect, and we descended very safe on a mountain of ice, which I supposed to be about three miles above the level of the sea.

I dismounted, unloaded the eagles, opened one of the bladders, and administered some of the liquor to each of them, without once considering that the horrors of destruction seemed to have conspired against me. The roaring of waves, crashing of ice, and the howling of bears, conspired to form a scene the most awful and tremendous: but notwithstanding this, my concern for the recovery of the eagles was so great, that I was insensible of the danger to which I was exposed. Having rendered them every assistance in my power, I stood over them in painful anxiety, fully sensible that it was only by means of them that I could possibly be delivered from these abodes of despair.

But suddenly a monstrous bear began to roar behind me, with a voice like thunder. I turned round, and seeing the creature just ready to devour me, having the bladder of liquor in my hands, through fear I squeezed it so hard, that it burst, and the liquor flying in the eyes of the animal, totally deprived it of sight. It instantly turned from me, ran away in a state of distraction, and soon fell over a precipice of ice into the sea, where I saw it no more.

The danger being over, I again turned my attention to the eagles, whom I found in a fair way of recovery, and suspecting that they were faint for want of victuals, I took one of the beef fruit, cut it into small slices, and presented them with it, which they devoured with avidity.

Having given them plenty to eat and drink, and disposed of the remainder of my provision, I took possession of my seat as before. After composing myself, and adjusting everything in the best manner, I began to eat and drink very heartily; and through the effects of the mountain wine, as I called it, was very cheerful, and began to sing a few verses of a song which I had learned when I was a boy: but the noise soon alarmed the eagles, who had been asleep, through the quantity of liquor which they had drank, and they rose seemingly much terrified. Happily for me, however, when I was feeding them I had accidentally turned their heads towards the south-east, which course they pursued with a rapid motion. In a few hours I saw the Western Isles, and soon after had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing Old England. I took no notice of the seas or islands over which I passed.

The eagles descended gradually as they drew near the shore, intending, as I supposed, to alight on one of the Welsh mountains; but when they came to the distance of about sixty yards two guns were fired at them, loaded with balls, one of which took place in a bladder of liquor that hung to my waist; the other entered the breast of the foremost eagle, who fell to the ground, while that which I rode, having received no injury, flew away with amazing swiftness.

This circumstance alarmed me exceedingly, and I began to think it was impossible for me to escape with my life; but recovering a little, I once more looked down upon the earth, when, to my inexpressible joy, I saw Margate at a little distance, and the eagle descending on the old tower whence it had carried me on the morning of the day before. It no sooner came down than I threw myself off, happy to find that I was once more restored to the world. The eagle flew away in a few minutes, and I sat down to compose my fluttering spirits, which I did in a few hours.

I soon paid a visit to my friends, and related these adventures. Amazement stood in every countenance; their congratulations on my returning in safety were repeated with an unaffected degree of pleasure, and we passed the evening as we are doing now, every person present paying the highest compliments to my COURAGE and VERACITY.

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