

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER X

Pays a visit during the siege of Gibraltar to his old friend General Elliot—Sinks a Spanish man-of-war—Wakes an old woman on the African coast—Destroys all the enemy's cannon; frightens the Count d'Artois, and sends him to Paris—Saves the lives of two English spies with the identical sling that killed Goliath; and raises the siege.

During the late siege of Gibraltar I went with a provision-fleet, under Lord Rodney's command, to see my old friend General Elliot, who has, by his distinguished defence of that place, acquired laurels that can never fade. After the usual joy which generally attends the meeting of old friends had subsided, I went to examine the state of the garrison, and view the operations of the enemy, for which purpose the General accompanied me. I had brought a most excellent refracting telescope with me from London, purchased of Dollond, by the help of which I found the enemy were going to discharge a thirty-six pounder at the spot where we stood. I told the General what they were about; he looked through the glass also, and found my conjectures right. I immediately, by his permission, ordered a forty-eight pounder to be brought from a neighbouring battery, which I placed with so much exactness (having long studied the art of gunnery) that I was sure of my mark.

I continued watching the enemy till I saw the match placed at the touch-hole of their piece; at that very instant I gave the signal for our gun to be fired also.

About midway between the two pieces of cannon the balls struck each other with amazing force, and the effect was astonishing! The enemy's ball recoiled back with such violence as to kill the man who had discharged it, by carrying his head fairly off, with sixteen others which it met with in its progress to the Barbary coast, where its force, after passing through three masts of vessels that then lay in a line behind each other in the harbour, was so much spent, that it only broke its way through the roof of a poor labourer's hut, about two hundred yards inland, and destroyed a few teeth an old woman had left, who lay asleep upon her back with her mouth open. The ball lodged in her throat. Her husband soon after came home, and endeavoured to extract it; but finding that impracticable, by the assistance of a rammer he forced it into her stomach. Our ball did excellent service; for it not only repelled the other in the manner just described, but, proceeding as I intended it should, it dismantled the very piece of cannon that had just been employed against us, and forced it into the hold of the ship, where it fell with so much force as to break its way through the bottom. The ship immediately filled and sank, with above a thousand Spanish sailors on board, besides a considerable number of soldiers. This, to be sure, was a most extraordinary exploit; I will not, however, take the whole merit to myself; my judgment was the principal engine, but chance assisted me a little; for I afterwards found, that the man who charged our forty-eight pounder put in, by mistake, a double quantity of powder, else we could never have succeeded so much beyond all expectation, especially in repelling the enemy's ball.

General Elliot would have given me a commission for this singular piece of service; but I declined everything, except his thanks, which I received at a crowded table of officers at supper on the evening of that very day.

As I am very partial to the English, who are beyond all doubt a brave people, I determined not to take my leave of the garrison till I had rendered them another piece of service, and in about three weeks an opportunity presented itself. I dressed myself in the habit of a *Popish priest*, and at about one

o'clock in the morning stole out of the garrison, passed the enemy's lines, and arrived in the middle of their camp, where I entered the tent in which the Prince d'Artois was, with the commander-in-chief, and several other officers, in deep council, concerting a plan to storm the garrison next morning. My disguise was my protection; they suffered me to continue there, hearing everything that passed, till they went to their several beds. When I found the whole camp, and even the sentinels, were wrapped up in the arms of Morpheus, I began my work, which was that of dismounting all their cannon (above three hundred pieces), from forty- eight to twenty-four pounders, and throwing them three leagues into the sea. Having no assistance, I found this the hardest task I ever undertook, except swimming to the opposite shore with the famous Turkish piece of ordnance, described by Baron de Tott in his Memoirs, which I shall hereafter mention. I then piled all the carriages together in the centre of the camp, which, to prevent the noise of the wheels being heard, I carried in pairs under my arms; and a noble appearance they made, as high at least as the rock of Gibraltar. I then lighted a match by striking a flint stone, situated twenty feet from the ground (in an old wall built by the Moors when they invaded Spain), with the breach of an iron eight-and-forty pounder, and so set fire to the whole pile. I forgot to inform you that I threw all their ammunition-waggons upon the top.

Before I applied the lighted match I had laid the combustibles at the bottom so judiciously, that the whole was in a blaze in a moment. To prevent suspicion I was one of the first to express my surprise. The whole camp was, as you may imagine, petrified with astonishment: the general conclusion was, that their sentinels had been bribed, and that seven or eight regiments of the garrison had been employed in this horrid destruction of their artillery. Mr. Drinkwater, in his account of this famous siege, mentions the enemy sustaining a great loss by a fire which happened in their camp, but never knew the cause; how should he? as I never divulged it before (though I alone saved Gibraltar by this night's business), not even to General Elliot. The Count d'Artois and all his attendants ran away in their fright, and never stopped on the road till they reached Paris, which they did in about a fortnight; this dreadful conflagration had such an effect upon them that they were incapable of taking the least refreshment for three months after, but, chameleon-like, lived upon the air.

If any gentleman will say he doubts the truth of this story, I will fine him a gallon of brandy and make him drink it at one draught.

About two months after I had done the besieged this service, one morning, as I sat at breakfast with General Elliot, a shell (for I had not time to destroy their mortars as well as their cannon) entered the apartment we were sitting in; it lodged upon our table: the General, as most men would do, quitted the room directly; but I took it up before it burst, and carried it to the top of the rock, when, looking over the enemy's camp, on an eminence near the sea-coast I observed a considerable number of people, but could not, with my naked eye, discover how they were employed. I had recourse again to my telescope, when I found that two of our officers, one a general, the other a colonel, with whom I spent the preceding evening, and who went out into the enemy's camp about midnight as spies, were taken, and then were actually going to be executed on a gibbet. I found the distance too great to throw the shell with my hand, but most fortunately recollecting that I had the very sling in my pocket which assisted David in slaying Goliath, I placed the shell in it, and immediately threw it in the midst of them: it burst as it fell, and destroyed all present, except the two culprits, who were saved by being suspended so high, for they were just turned off: however, one of the pieces of the shell fled with such force against the foot of the gibbet, that it immediately brought it down. Our two friends no sooner felt *terra firma* than they looked about for the cause; and finding their guards, executioner, and all, had taken it in their heads to die first, they directly extricated each other from their disgraceful cords, and then ran down to the sea-shore, seized a Spanish boat with two men in it, and made them row to one of our ships, which they did with great safety, and in a few minutes after, when I was relating to General Elliot how I had acted, they both took us by the hand, and after mutual congratulations we retired to spend the day with festivity.

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