

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XX

The Baron slips through the world: after paying a visit to Mount Etna he finds himself in the South Sea; visits Vulcan in his passage; gets on board a Dutchman; arrives at an island of cheese, surrounded by a sea of milk; describes some very extraordinary objects-Lose their compass; their ship slips between the teeth of a fish unknown in this part of the world; their difficulty in escaping from thence; arrive in the Caspian Sea-Starves a bear to death-A few waistcoat anecdotes-In this chapter, which is the longest, the Baron moralises upon the virtue of veracity.

Mr. Drybones' "Travels to Sicily," which I had read with great pleasure, induced me to pay a visit to Mount Etna; my voyage to this place was not attended with any circumstances worth relating. One morning early, three or four days after my arrival, I set out from a cottage where I had slept, within six miles of the foot of the mountain, determined to explore the internal parts, if I perished in the attempt. After three hours' hard labour I found myself at the top; it was then, and had been for upwards of three weeks, raging: its appearance in this state has been so frequently noticed by different travellers, that I will not tire you with descriptions of objects you are already acquainted with. I walked round the edge of the crater, which appeared to be fifty times at least as capacious as the Devil's Punch-Bowl near Petersfield, on the Portsmouth Road, but not so broad at the bottom, as in that part it resembles the contracted part of a funnel more than a punch-bowl. At last, having made up my mind, in I sprang feet foremost; I soon found myself in a warm berth, and my body bruised and burnt in various parts by the red-hot cinders, which, by their violent ascent, opposed my descent: however, my weight soon brought me to the bottom, where I found myself in the midst of noise and clamour, mixed with the most horrid imprecations; after recovering my senses, and feeling a reduction of my pain, I began to look about me. Guess, gentlemen, my astonishment, when I found myself in the company of Vulcan and his Cyclops, who had been quarrelling, for the three weeks before mentioned, about the observation of good order and due subordination, and which had occasioned such alarms for that space of time in the world above. However, my arrival restored peace to the whole society, and Vulcan himself did me the honour of applying plasters to my wounds, which healed them immediately; he also placed refreshments before me, particularly nectar, and other rich wines, such as the gods and goddesses only aspire to. After this repast was over Vulcan ordered Venus to show me every indulgence which my situation required. To describe the apartment, and the couch on which I reposed, is totally impossible, therefore I will not attempt it; let it suffice to say, it exceeds the power of language to do it justice, or speak of that kind-hearted goddess in any terms equal to her merit.

Vulcan gave me a very concise account of Mount Etna: he said it was nothing more than an accumulation of ashes thrown from his forge; that he was frequently obliged to chastise his people, at whom, in his passion, he made it a practice to throw red-hot coals at home, which they often parried with great dexterity, and then threw them up into the world to place them out of his reach, for they never attempted to assault him in return by throwing them back again. "Our quarrels," added he, "last sometimes three or four months, and these appearances of coals or cinders in the world are what I find you mortals call eruptions." Mount Vesuvius, he assured me, was another of his shops, to which he had a passage three hundred and fifty leagues under the bed of the sea, where similar quarrels produced similar eruptions. I should have continued here as an humble attendant upon Madam Venus, but some busy tattlers, who delight in mischief, whispered a tale in Vulcan's ear, which roused in him a fit of jealousy not to be appeased. Without the least previous notice he took me one

morning under his arm, as I was waiting upon Venus, agreeable to custom, and carried me to an apartment I had never before seen, in which there was, to all appearance, a *well* with a wide mouth: over this he held me at arm's length, and saying, "*Ungrateful mortal, return to the world from whence you came,*" without giving me the least opportunity of reply, dropped me in the centre. I found myself descending with an increasing rapidity, till the horror of my mind deprived me of all reflection. I suppose I fell into a trance, from which I was suddenly aroused by plunging into a large body of water illuminated by the rays of the sun!!

I could, from my infancy, swim well, and play tricks in the water. I now found myself in paradise, considering the horrors of mind I had just been released from. After looking about me some time, I could discover nothing but an expanse of sea, extending beyond the eye in every direction; I also found it very cold, a different climate from Master Vulcan's shop. At last I observed at some distance a body of amazing magnitude, like a huge rock, approaching me; I soon discovered it to be a piece of floating ice; I swam round it till I found a place where I could ascend to the top, which I did, but not without some difficulty. Still I was out of sight of land, and despair returned with double force; however, before night came on I saw a sail, which we approached very fast; when it was within a very small distance I hailed them in German; they answered in Dutch. I then flung myself into the sea, and they threw out a rope, by which I was taken on board. I now inquired where we were, and was informed, in the great Southern Ocean; this opened a discovery which removed all my doubts and difficulties. It was now evident that I had passed from Mount Etna through the centre of the earth to the South Seas: this, gentlemen, was a much shorter cut than going round the world, and which no man has accomplished, or ever attempted, but myself; however, the next time I perform it I will be much more particular in my observations.

I took some refreshment, and went to rest. The Dutch are a very rude sort of people; I related the Etna passage to the officers, exactly as I have done to you, and some of them, particularly the Captain, seemed by his grimace and half-sentence to doubt my veracity; however, as he had kindly taken me on board his vessel, and was then in the very act of administering to my necessities, I pocketed the affront.

I now in my turn began to inquire where they were bound? To which they answered, they were in search of new discoveries; "*and if,*" said they, "*your story is true, a new passage is really discovered, and we shall not return disappointed.*" We were now exactly in Captain Cook's first track, and arrived the next morning in Botany Bay. This place I would by no means recommend to the English government as a receptacle for felons, or place of punishment; it should rather be the reward of merit, nature having most bountifully bestowed her best gifts upon it.

We stayed here but three days; the fourth after our departure a most dreadful storm arose, which in a few hours destroyed all our sails, splintered our bowsprit, and brought down our topmast; it fell directly upon the box that enclosed our compass, which, with the compass, was broken to pieces. Every one who has been at sea knows the consequences of such a misfortune: we now were at a loss where to steer. At length the storm abated, which was followed by a steady, brisk gale, that carried us at least forty knots an hour for six months! [we should suppose the Baron has made a little mistake, and substituted *months* for *days*] when we began to observe an amazing change in everything about us: our spirits became light, our noses were regaled with the most aromatic effluvia imaginable: the sea had also changed its complexion, and from green became white!! Soon after these wonderful alterations we saw land, and not at any great distance an inlet, which we sailed up near sixty leagues, and found it wide and deep, flowing with milk of the most delicious taste. Here we landed, and soon found it was an island consisting of one large cheese: we discovered this by one of the company fainting away as soon as we landed: this man always had an aversion to cheese; when he recovered, he desired the cheese to be taken from under his feet: upon examination we found him perfectly

right, for the whole island, as before observed, was nothing but a cheese of immense magnitude! Upon this the inhabitants, who are amazingly numerous, principally sustain themselves, and it grows every night in proportion as it is consumed in the day. Here seemed to be plenty of vines, with bunches of large grapes, which, upon being pressed, yielded nothing but milk. We saw the inhabitants running races upon the surface of the milk: they were upright, comely figures, nine feet high, have three legs, and but one arm; upon the whole, their form was graceful, and when they quarrel, they exercise a straight horn, which grows in adults from the centre of their foreheads, with great adroitness; they did not sink at all, but ran and walked upon the surface of the milk, as we do upon a bowling-green.

Upon this island of cheese grows great plenty of corn, the ears of which produce loaves of bread, ready made, of a round form like mushrooms. We discovered, in our rambles over this cheese, seventeen other rivers of milk, and ten of wine.

After thirty-eight days' journey we arrived on the opposite side to that on which we landed: here we found some blue mould, as cheese-eaters call it, from whence spring all kinds of rich fruit; instead of breeding mites it produced peaches, nectarines, apricots, and a thousand delicious fruits which we are not acquainted with. In these trees, which are of an amazing size, were plenty of birds' nests; amongst others was a king-fisher's of prodigious magnitude; it was at least twice the circumference of the dome of St. Paul's Church in London. Upon inspection, this nest was made of huge trees curiously joined together; there were, let me see (*for I make it a rule always to speak within compass*), there were upwards of five hundred eggs in the nest, and each of them was as large as four common hogsheads, or eight barrels, and we could not only see, but hear the young ones chirping within. Having, with great fatigue, cut open one of these eggs, we let out a young one unfeathered, considerably larger than twenty full-grown vultures. Just as we had given this youngster his liberty the old kingfisher lighted, and seizing our captain, who had been active in breaking the egg, in one of her claws, flew with him above a mile high, and then let him drop into the sea, but not till she had beaten all his teeth out of his mouth with her wings.

Dutchmen generally swim well: he soon joined us, and we retreated to our ship. On our return we took a different route, and observed many strange objects. We shot two wild oxen, each with one horn, also like the inhabitants, except that it sprouted from between the eyes of these animals; we were afterwards concerned at having destroyed them, as we found, by inquiry, they tamed these creatures, and used them as we do horses, to ride upon and draw their carriages; their flesh, we were informed, is excellent, but useless where people live upon cheese and milk. When we had reached within two days' journey of the ship we observed three men hanging to a tall tree by their heels; upon inquiring the cause of their punishment, I found they had all been travellers, and upon their return home had deceived their friends by describing places they never saw, and relating things that never happened: this gave me no concern, *as I have ever confined myself to facts*.

As soon as we arrived at the ship we unmoored, and set sail from this extraordinary country, when, to our astonishment, all the trees upon shore, of which there were a great number very tall and large, paid their respects to us twice, bowing to exact time, and immediately recovered their former posture, which was quite erect.

By what we could learn of this CHEESE, it was considerably larger than the continent of all Europe!

After sailing three months we knew not where, being still without compass, we arrived in a sea which appeared to be almost black: upon tasting it we found it most excellent wine, and had great difficulty to keep the sailors from getting drunk with it: however, in a few hours we found ourselves surrounded by whales and other animals of an immense magnitude, one of which appeared to be too large for the eye to form a judgment of: we did not see him till we were close to him. This monster drew our ship,

with all her masts standing, and sails bent, by suction into his mouth, between his teeth, which were much larger and taller than the mast of a first-rate man-of-war. After we had been in his mouth some time he opened it pretty wide, took in an immense quantity of water, and floated our vessel, which was at least 500 tons burthen, into his stomach; here we lay as quiet as at anchor in a dead calm. The air, to be sure, was rather warm, and very offensive. We found anchors, cables, boats, and barges in abundance, and a considerable number of ships, some laden and some not, which this creature had swallowed. Everything was transacted by torch-light; no sun, no moon, no planet, to make observations from. We were all generally afloat and aground twice a-day; whenever he drank, it became high water with us; and when he evacuated, we found ourselves aground; upon a moderate computation, he took in more water at a single draught than is generally to be found in the Lake of Geneva, though that is above thirty miles in circumference. On the second day of our confinement in these regions of darkness, I ventured at low water, as we called it when the ship was aground, to ramble with the Captain, and a few of the other officers, with lights in our hands; we met with people of all nations, to the amount of upwards of ten thousand; they were going to hold a council how to recover their liberty; some of them having lived in this animal's stomach several years; there were several children here who had never seen the world, their mothers having lain in repeatedly in this warm situation. Just as the chairman was going to inform us of the business upon which we were assembled, this plaguy fish, becoming thirsty, drank in his usual manner; the water poured in with such impetuosity, that we were all obliged to retreat to our respective ships immediately, or run the risk of being drowned; some were obliged to swim for it, and with difficulty saved their lives. In a few hours after we were more fortunate, we met again just after the monster had evacuated. I was chosen chairman, and the first thing I did was to propose splicing two main-masts together, and the next time he opened his mouth to be ready to wedge them in, so as to prevent his shutting it. It was unanimously approved. One hundred stout men were chosen upon this service. We had scarcely got our masts properly prepared when an opportunity offered; the monster opened his mouth, immediately the top of the mast was placed against the roof, and the other end pierced his tongue, which effectually prevented him from shutting his mouth. As soon as everything in his stomach was afloat, we manned a few boats, who rowed themselves and us into the world. The daylight, after, as near as we could judge, three months' confinement in total darkness, cheered our spirits surprisingly. When we had all taken our leave of this capacious animal, we mustered just a fleet of ninety-five ships, of all nations, who had been in this confined situation.

We left the two masts in his mouth, to prevent others being confined in the same horrid gulf of darkness and filth. Our first object was to learn what part of the world we were in; this we were for some time at a loss to ascertain: at last I found, from former observations, that we were in the Caspian Sea! which washes part of the country of the Calmuck Tartars. How we came here is was impossible to conceive, as this sea has no communication with any other. One of the inhabitants of the Cheese Island, whom I had brought with me, accounted for it thus:-that the monster in whose stomach we had been so long confined had carried us here through some subterraneous passage; however, we pushed to shore, and I was the first who landed. Just as I put my foot upon the ground a large bear leaped upon me with its fore-paws; I caught one in each hand, and squeezed him till he cried out most lustily; however, in this position I held him till I starved him to death. You may laugh, gentlemen, but this was soon accomplished, as I prevented him licking his paws. From hence I travelled up to St. Petersburg a second time: here an old friend gave me a most excellent pointer, descended from the famous bitch before-mentioned, that littered while she was hunting a hare. I had the misfortune to have him shot soon after by a blundering sportsman, who fired at him instead of a covey of partridges which he had just set. Of this creature's skin I have had this waistcoat made (showing his waistcoat), which always leads me involuntarily to game if I walk in the fields in the proper season, and when I come within shot, *one of the buttons constantly flies off, and lodges upon the spot where the sport is*; and as the birds rise, being always primed and cocked, I never miss them. Here are now but three buttons left. I shall have a new set sewed on against the shooting season

commences.

When a covey of partridges is disturbed in this manner, by the button falling amongst them, they always rise from the ground in a direct line before each other. I one day, by forgetting to take my ramrod out of my gun, shot it straight through a leash, as regularly as if the cook had spitted them. I had forgot to put in any shot, and the rod had been made so hot with the powder, that the birds were completely roasted by the time I reached home.

Since my arrival in England I have accomplished what I had very much at heart, viz., providing for the inhabitant of the Cheese Island, whom I had brought with me. My old friend, Sir William Chambers, who is entirely indebted to me for all his ideas of Chinese gardening, by a description of which he has gained such high reputation; I say, gentlemen, in a discourse which I had with this gentlemen, he seemed much distressed for a contrivance to light the lamps at the new buildings, Somerset House; the common mode with ladders, he observed, was both dirty and inconvenient. My native of the Cheese Island popped into my head; he was only nine feet high when I first brought him from his own country, but was now increased to ten and a half: I introduced him to Sir William, and he is appointed to that honourable office. He is also to carry, under a large cloak, a utensil in each coat pocket, instead of those four which Sir William has *very properly* fixed for private purposes in so conspicuous a situation, the great quadrangle.

He has also obtained from Mr. PITT the situation of messenger to his Majesty's lords of the bed-chamber, whose principal employment will *now* be, divulging the secrets of the Royal household to their *worthy* Patron.

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