

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XXVI

A feast on live bulls and kava-The inhabitants admire the European adventurers-The Emperor comes to meet the Baron, and pays him great compliments-The inhabitants of the centre of Africa descended from the people of the moon proved by an inscription in Africa, and by the analogy of their language, which is also the same with that of the ancient Scythians-The Baron is declared sovereign of the interior of Africa on the decease of the Emperor-He endeavours to abolish the custom of eating live bulls, which excites much discontent-The advice of Hilaro Frosticos upon the occasion-The Baron makes a speech to an Assembly of the states, which only excites greater murmurs-He consults with Hilaro Frosticos.

Having passed over the nearest mountains we entered a delightful vale, where we perceived a multitude of persons at a feast of living bulls, whose flesh they cut away with great knives, making a table of the creature's carcase, serenaded by the bellowing of the unfortunate animal. Nothing seemed requisite to add to the barbarity of this feast but kava, made as described in Cook's voyages, and at the conclusion of the feast we perceived them brewing this liquor, which they drank with the utmost avidity. From that moment, inspired with an idea of universal benevolence, I determined to abolish the custom of eating live flesh and drinking of kava. But I knew that such a thing could not be immediately effected, whatever in future time might be performed.

Having rested ourselves during a few days, we determined to set out towards the principal city of the empire. The singularity of our appearance was spoken of all over the country as a phenomenon. The multitude looked upon Sphinx, the bulls, the crickets, the balloons, and the whole company, as something more than terrestrial, but especially the thunder of our fire-arms, which struck horror and amazement into the whole nation.

We at length arrived at the metropolis, situated on the banks of a noble river, and the emperor, attended by all his court, came out in grand procession to meet us. The emperor appeared mounted on a dromedary, royally caparisoned, with all his attendants on foot through respect for his Majesty. He was rather above the middle stature of that country, four feet three inches in height, with a countenance, like all his countrymen, as white as snow! He was preceded by a band of most exquisite music, according to the fashion of the country, and his whole retinue halted within about fifty paces of our troop. We returned the salute by a discharge of musketry, and a flourish of our trumpets and martial music. I commanded our caravan to halt, and dismounting, advanced uncovered, with only two attendants, towards his Majesty. The emperor was equally polite, and descending from his dromedary, advanced to meet me. "I am happy," said he, "to have the honour to receive so illustrious a traveller, and assure you that everything in my empire shall be at your disposal."

I thanked his Majesty for his politeness, and expressed how happy I was to meet so polished and refined a people in the centre of Africa, and that I hoped to show myself and company grateful for his esteem, by introducing the arts and sciences of Europe among the people.

I immediately perceived the true descent of this people, which does not appear of terrestrial origin, but descended from some of the inhabitants of the moon, because the principal language spoken there, and in the centre of Africa, is very nearly the same. Their alphabet and method of writing are pretty much the same, and show the extreme antiquity of this people, and their exalted origin. I here give you a specimen of their writing [*Vide Otrckocsus de Orig. Hung.* p. 46]:- Stregnah, dna skoohtop.

These characters I have submitted to the inspection of a celebrated antiquarian, and it will be proved to the satisfaction of every one, in his next volume, what an immediate intercourse there must have been between the inhabitants of the moon and the ancient Scythians, which Scythians did not by any means inhabit a part of Russia, but the central part of Africa, as I can abundantly prove to my very learned and laborious friend. The above words, written in our characters, are *Sregnah dna skoohtop*; that is, The Scythians are of heavenly origin. The word *Sregnah*, which signifies *Scythians*, is compounded of *sreg* or *sre*, whence our present English word *sire*, or *sir*: and *nah*, or *gnah*, knowledge, because the Scythians united the essentials of nobility and learning together: *dna* signifies heaven, or belonging to the moon, from *duna*, who was anciently worshipped as goddess of that luminary. And *skoohtop* signifies the origin or beginning of anything, from *skoo*, the name used in the moon for a point in geometry, and *top* or *htop*, vegetation. These words are inscribed at this day upon a pyramid in the centre of Africa, nearly at the source of the river Niger; and if any one refuses his assent, he may go there to be convinced.

The emperor conducted me to his court amidst the admiration of his courtiers, and paid us every possible politeness that African magnificence could bestow. He never presumed to proceed on any expedition without consulting us, and looking upon us as a species of superior beings, paid the greatest respect to our opinions. He frequently asked me about the states of Europe, and the kingdom of Great Britain, and appeared lost in admiration at the account I gave him of our shipping, and the immensity of the ocean. We taught him to regulate the government nearly on the same plan with the British constitution, and to institute a parliament and degrees of nobility. His majesty was the last of his royal line, and on his decease, with the unanimous consent of the people, made me heir to the whole empire. The nobility and chiefs of the country immediately waited upon me with petitions, entreating me to accept the government. I consulted with my noble friends, Gog and Magog, &c., and after much consultation it was agreed that I should accept the government, not as actual and independent monarch of the place, but as viceroy to his Majesty of England.

I now thought it high time to do away the custom of eating of live flesh and drinking of kava, and for that purpose used every persuasive method to wean the majority of the people from it. This, to my astonishment, was not taken in good part by the nation, and they looked with jealousy at those strangers who wanted to make innovations among them.

Nevertheless, I felt much concern to think that my fellow-creatures could be capable of such barbarity. I did everything that a heart fraught with universal benevolence and good will to all mankind could be capable of desiring. I first tried every method of persuasion and incitement. I did not harshly reprove them, but I invited frequently whole thousands to dine, after the fashion of Europe, upon roasted meat. Alas, 'twas all in vain! my goodness nearly excited a sedition. They murmured among themselves, spoke of my intentions, my wild and ambitious views, as if I, O heaven! could have had any personal interested motive in making them live like men, rather than like crocodiles and tigers. In fine, perceiving that gentleness could be of no avail, well knowing that when complaisance can effect nothing from some spirits, compulsion excites respect and veneration, I prohibited, under the pain of the severest penalties, the drinking of kava, or eating of live flesh, for the space of nine days, within the districts of Angalinar and Paphagalna.

But this created such an universal abhorrence and detestation of my government, that my ministers, and even myself, were universally pasquinadoed; lampoons, satires, ridicule, and insult, were showered upon the name of Munchausen wherever it was mentioned; and in fine, there never was a government so much detested, or with such little reason.

In this dilemma I had recourse to the advice of my noble friend Hilaro Frosticos. In his good sense I now expected some resource, for the rest of the council, who had advised me to the former method,

had given but a poor specimen of their abilities and discernment, or I should have succeeded more happily. In short, he addressed himself to me and to the council as follows:-

"It is in vain, most noble Munchausen, that your Excellency endeavours to compel or force these people to a life to which they have never been accustomed. In vain do you tell them that apple-pies, pudding, roast beef, minced pies, or tarts, are delicious, that sugar is sweet, that wine is exquisite. Alas! they cannot, they will not comprehend what deliciousness is, what sweetness, or what the flavour of the grape. And even if they were convinced of the superior excellence of your way of life, never, never would they be persuaded; and that if for no other reason, but because force or persuasion is employed to induce them to it. Abandon that idea for the present, and let us try another method. My opinion, therefore, is, that we should at once cease all endeavours to compel or persuade them. But let us, if possible, procure a quantity of *fudge* from England, and carelessly scatter it over all the country; and from this disposal of matters I presume-nay, I have a moral certainty, that we shall reclaim this people from horror and barbarity."

Had this been proposed at any other time, it would have been violently opposed in the council; but now, when every other attempt had failed, when there seemed no other resource, the majority willingly submitted to they knew not what, for they absolutely had no idea of the manner, the possibilities of success, or how they could bring matters to bear. However, 'twas a scheme, and as such they submitted. For my part, I listened with ecstasy to the words of Hilaro Frosticos, for I knew that he had a most singular knowledge of human kind, and could humour and persuade them on to their own happiness and universal good. Therefore, according to the advice of Hilaro, I despatched a balloon with four men over the desert to the Cape of Good Hope, with letters to be forwarded to England, requiring, without delay, a few cargoes of fudge.

The people had all this time remained in a general state of ferment and murmur. Everything that rancour, low wit, and deplorable ignorance could conceive to asperse my government, was put in execution. The most worthy, even the most beneficent actions, everything that was amiable, were perverted into opposition.

The heart of Munchausen was not made of such impenetrable stuff as to be insensible to the hatred of even the most worthless wretch in the whole kingdom; and once, at a general assembly of the states, filled with an idea of such continued ingratitude, I spoke as pathetic as possible, not, methought, beneath my dignity, to make them feel for me: that the universal good and happiness of the people were all I wished or desired; that if my actions had been mistaken, or improper surmises formed, still I had no wish, no desire, but the public welfare, &c. &c. &c.

Hilario Frosticos was all this time much disturbed; he looked sternly at me-he frowned, but I was so engrossed with the warmth of my heart, my intentions, that I understood him not: in a minute I saw nothing but as if through a cloud (such is the force of amiable sensibility)- lords, ladies, chiefs-the whole assembly seemed to swim before my sight. The more I thought on my good intentions, the lampoons which so much affected my delicacy, good nature, tenderness-I forgot myself-I spoke rapid, violent-beneficence-fire-tenderness-alas! I melted into tears!

"Pish! pish!" said Hilario Frosticos.

Now, indeed, was my government lampooned, satirised, carribonadoed, bepickled, and bedevilled. One day, with my arm full of lampoons, I started up as Hilario entered the room, the tears in my eyes: "Look, look here, Hilario!-how can I bear all this? It is impossible to please them; I will leave the government-I cannot bear it! See what pitiful anecdotes-what surmises: I will make my people feel for me-I will leave the government!"

"Pshaw!" says Hilaro. At that simple mono-syllable I found myself changed as if by magic! for I ever looked on Hilaro as a person so experienced—such fortitude, such good sense. "There are three sails, under the convoy of a frigate," added Hilaro, "just arrived at the Cape, after a fortunate passage, laden with the fudge that we demanded. No time is to be lost; let it be immediately conducted hither, and distributed through the principal granaries of the empire."

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