

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XXXII

The Baron harangues the company, and they continue the pursuit- The Baron, wandering from his retinue, is taken by the savages, scalped, and tied to a stake to be roasted; but he contrives to extricate himself, and kills the savages-The Baron travels overland through the forests of North America, to the confines of Russia-Arrives at the castle of the Nareskin Rowskimowmowsky, and gallops into the kingdom of Loggerheads-A battle, in which the Baron fights the Nareskin in single combat, and generously gives him his life-Arrives at the Friendly Islands, and discourses with Omai-The Baron, with all his attendants, goes from Otaheite to the isthmus of Darien, and having cut a canal across the isthmus, returns to England.

"My friends, and very learned and profound Judiciarii," said I, "be not disheartened that Wauwau has escaped from you at present: persevere, and we shall yet succeed. You should never despair, Munchausen being your general; and therefore be brave, be courageous, and fortune shall second your endeavours. Let us advance undaunted in pursuit, and follow the fierce Wauwau even three times round the globe, until we entrap her."

My words filled them with confidence and valour, and they unanimously agreed to continue the chase. We penetrated the frightful deserts and gloomy woods of America, beyond the source of the Ohio, through countries utterly unknown before. I frequently took the diversion of shooting in the woods, and one day that I happened with three attendants to wander far from our troop, we were suddenly set upon by a number of savages. As we had expended our powder and shot, and happened to have no side-arms, it was in vain to make any resistance against hundreds of enemies. In short, they bound us, and made us walk before them to a gloomy cavern in a rock, where they feasted upon what game they had killed, but which not being sufficient, they took my three unfortunate companions and myself, and scalped us. The pain of losing the flesh from my head was most horrible; it made me leap in agonies, and roar like a bull. They then tied us to stakes, and making great fires around us, began to dance in a circle, singing with much distortion and barbarity, and at times putting the palms of their hands to their mouths, set up the war-whoop. As they had on that day also made a great prize of some wine and spirits belonging to our troop, these barbarians, finding it delicious, and unconscious of its intoxicating quality, began to drink it in profusion, while they beheld us roasting, and in a very short time they were all completely drunk, and fell asleep around the fires. Perceiving some hopes, I used most astonishing efforts to extricate myself from the cords which I was tied, and at length succeeded. I immediately unbound my companions, and though half roasted, they still had power enough to walk. We sought about for the flesh that had been taken off our heads, and having found the scalps, we immediately adapted them to our bloody heads, sticking them on with a kind of glue of a sovereign quality, that flows from a tree in that country, and the parts united and healed in a few hours. We took care to revenge ourselves on the savages, and with their own hatchets put every one of them to death. We then returned to our troop, who had given us up for lost, and they made great rejoicings on our return. We now proceeded in our journey through this prodigious wilderness, Gog and Magog acting as pioneers, hewing down the trees, &c., at a great rate as we advanced. We passed over numberless swamps and lakes and rivers, until at length we discovered a habitation at some distance. It appeared a dark and gloomy castle, surrounded with strong ramparts, and a broad ditch. We called a council of war, and it was determined to send a deputation with a trumpet to the walls of the castle, and demand friendship from the governor, whoever he might be, and an account if aught he knew of Wauwau. For this purpose our whole caravan halted in the wood, and Gog and

Magog reclined amongst the trees, that their enormous strength and size should not be discovered, and give umbrage to the lord of the castle. Our embassy approached the castle, and having demanded admittance for some time, at length the drawbridge was let down, and they were suffered to enter. As soon as they had passed the gate it was immediately closed after them, and on either side they perceived ranks of halberdiers, who made them tremble with fear. "We come," the herald proclaimed, "on the part of Hilaro Frosticos, Don Quixote, Lord Whittington, and the thrice-renowned Baron Munchausen, to claim friendship from the governor of this puissant castle, and to seek Wauwau." "The most noble the governor," replied the officer, "is at all times happy to entertain such travellers as pass through these immense deserts, and will esteem it an honour that the great Hilaro Frosticos, Don Quixote, Lord Whittington, and the thrice-renowned Baron Munchausen, enter his castle walls."

In short, we entered the castle. The governor sat with all our company to table, surrounded by his friends, of a very fierce and warlike appearance. They spoke but little, and seemed very austere and reserved, until the first course was served up. The dishes were brought in by a number of bears walking on their hind-legs, and on every dish was a fricassee of pistols, pistol-bullets, sauce of gunpowder, and aqua-vitæ. This entertainment seemed rather indigestible by even an ostrich's stomach, when the governor addressed us, and informed me that it was ever his custom to strangers to offer them for the first course a service similar to that before us; and if they were inclined to accept the invitation, he would fight them as much as they pleased, but if they could not relish the pistol-bullets, &c., he would conclude them peaceable, and try what better politeness he could show them in his castle. In short, the first course being removed untouched, we dined, and after dinner the governor forced the company to push the bottle about with alacrity and to excess. He informed us that he was the Nareskin Rowskimowmowsky, who had retired amidst these wilds, disgusted with the court of Petersburg. I was rejoiced to meet him; I recollected my old friend, whom I had known at the court of Russia, when I rejected the hand of the Empress. The Nareskin, with all his knights-companions, drank to an astonishing degree, and we all set off upon hobby horses in full cry out of the castle. Never was there seen such a cavalcade before. In front galloped a hundred knights belonging to the castle, with hunting horns and a pack of excellent dogs; and then came the Nareskin Rowskimowmowsky, Gog and Magog, Hilaro Frosticos, and your humble servant, hallooing and shouting like so many demoniacs, and spurring our hobby horses at an infernal rate until we arrived in the kingdom of Loggerheads. The kingdom of Loggerheads was wilder than any part of Siberia, and the Nareskin had here built a romantic summer-house in a Gothic taste, to which he would frequently retire with his company after dinner. The Nareskin had a dozen bears of enormous stature that danced for our amusement, and their chiefs performed the *minuet de la cour* to admiration. And here the most noble Hilaro Frosticos thought proper to ask the Nareskin some intelligence about Wauwau, in quest of whom we had travelled over such a tract of country, and encountered so many dangerous adventures, and also invited the Nareskin Rowskimowmowsky to attend us with all his bears in the expedition. The Nareskin appeared astonished at the idea; he looked with infinite hauteur and ferocity on Hilaro, and affecting a violent passion asked him, "Did he imagine that the Nareskin Rowskimowmowsky could condescend to take notice of a Wauwau, let her fly what way she would! Or did he think a chief possessing such blood in his veins could engage in such a foreign pursuit? By the blood and by the ashes of my great grandmother, I would cut off your head!"

Hilario Frosticos resented this oration, and in short a general riot commenced. The bears, together with the hundred knights, took the part of the Nareskin, and Gog and Magog, Don Quixote, the Sphinx, Lord Whittington, the bulls, the crickets, the judges, the matrons, and Hilario Frosticos, made noble warfare against them.

I drew my sword, and challenged the Nareskin to single combat. He frowned, while his eyes sparkled fire and indignation, and bracing a buckler on his left arm, he advanced against me. I made a blow at

him with all my force, which he received upon his buckler, and my sword broke short.

Ungenerous Nareskin; seeing me disarmed, he still pushed forward, dealing his blows upon me with the utmost violence, which I parried with my shield and the hilt of my broken sword, and fought like a game-cock.

An enormous bear at the same time attacked me, but I ran my hand still retaining the hilt of my broken sword down his throat, and tore up his tongue by the roots. I then seized his carcase by the hind-legs, and whirling it over my head, gave the Nareskin such a blow with his own bear as evidently stunned him. I repeated my blows, knocking the bear's head against the Nareskin's head, until, by one happy blow, I got his head into the bear's jaws, and the creature being still somewhat alive and convulsive, the teeth closed upon him like nutcrackers. I threw the bear from me, but the Nareskin remained sprawling, unable to extricate his head from the bear's jaws, imploring for mercy. I gave the wretch his life: a lion preys not upon carcases.

At the same time my troop had effectually routed the bears and the rest of their adversaries. I was merciful, and ordered quarter to be given.

At that moment I perceived Wauwau flying at a great height through the heavens, and we instantly set out in pursuit of her, and never stopped until we arrived at Kamschatka; thence we passed to Otaheite. I met my old acquaintance Omai, who had been in England with the great navigator, Cook, and I was glad to find he had established Sunday schools over all the islands. I talked to him of Europe, and his former voyage to England. "Ah!" said he, most emphatically, "the English, the cruel English, to murder me with goodness, and refine upon my torture—took me to Europe, and showed me the court of England, the delicacy of exquisite life; they showed me gods, and showed me heaven, as if on purpose to make me feel the loss of them."

From these islands we set out, attended by a fleet of canoes with fighting-stages and the chiefest warriors of the islands, commanded by Omai. Thus the chariot of Queen Mab, my team of bulls and the crickets, the ark, the Sphinx, and the balloons, with Hilario Frosticos, Gog and Magog, Lord Whittington, and the Lord Mayor's show, Don Quixote, &c., with my fleet of canoes, altogether cut a very formidable appearance on our arrival at the Isthmus of Darien. Sensible of what general benefit it would be to mankind, I immediately formed a plan of cutting a canal across the isthmus from sea to sea.

For this purpose I drove my chariot with the greatest impetuosity repeatedly from shore to shore, in the same track, tearing up the rocks and earth thereby, and forming a tolerable bed for the water. Gog and Magog next advanced at the head of a million of people from the realms of North and South America, and from Europe, and with infinite labour cleared away the earth, &c., that I had ploughed up with my chariot. I then again drove my chariot, making the canal wider and deeper, and ordered Gog and Magog to repeat their labour as before. The canal being a quarter of a mile broad, and three hundred yards in depth, I thought it sufficient, and immediately let in the waters of the sea. I did imagine, that from the rotatory motion of the earth on its axis from west to east the sea would be higher on the eastern than the western coast, and that on the uniting of the two seas there would be a strong current from the east, and it happened just as I expected. The sea came in with tremendous magnificence, and enlarged the bounds of the canal, so as to make a passage of some miles broad from ocean to ocean, and make an island of South America. Several sail of trading vessels and men-of-war sailed through this new channel to the South Seas, China, &c., and saluted me with all their cannon as they passed.

I looked through my telescope at the moon, and perceived the philosophers there in great commotion. They could plainly discern the alteration on the surface of our globe, and thought

themselves somehow interested in the enterprise of their fellow-mortals in a neighbouring planet. They seemed to think it admirable that such little beings as we men should attempt so magnificent a performance, that would be observable even in a separate world.

Thus having wedded the Atlantic Ocean to the South Sea, I returned to England, and found Wauwau precisely in the very spot whence she had set out, after having led us a chase all round the world.

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