

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Baron makes a speech to the National Assembly, and drives out all the members—Routs the fishwomen and the National Guards—Pursues the whole rout into a Church, where he defeats the National Assembly, &c., with Rousseau, Voltaire, and Beelzebub at their head, and liberates Marie Antoinette and the Royal Family.

Passing through Switzerland on my return from India, I was informed that several of the German nobility had been deprived of the honours and immunities of their French estates. I heard of the sufferings of the amiable Marie Antoinette, and swore to avenge every look that had threatened her with insult. I went to the cavern of these Anthropophagi, assembled to debate, and gracefully putting the hilt of my sword to my lips—"I swear," cried I, "by the sacred cross of my sword, that if you do not instantly reinstate your king and his nobility, and your injured queen, I will cut the one half of you to pieces."

On which the President, taking up a leaden inkstand, flung it at my head. I stooped to avoid the blow, and rushing to the tribunal seized the Speaker, who was fulminating against the Aristocrats, and taking the creature by one leg, flung him at the President. I laid about me most nobly, drove them all out of the house, and locking the doors put the key in my pocket.

I then went to the poor king, and making my obeisance to him—"Sire," said I, "your enemies have all fled. I alone am the National Assembly at present, and I shall register your edicts to recall the princes and the nobility; and in future, if your majesty pleases, I will be your Parliament and Council." He thanked me, and the amiable Marie Antoinette, smiling, gave me her hand to kiss.

At that moment I perceived a party of the National Assembly, who had rallied with the National Guards, and a vast procession of fishwomen, advancing against me. I deposited their Majesties in a place of safety, and with my drawn sword advanced against my foes. Three hundred fishwomen, with bushes dressed with ribbons in their hands, came hallooing and roaring against me like so many furies. I scorned to defile my sword with their blood, but seized the first that came up, and making her kneel down I knighted her with my sword, which so terrified the rest that they all set up a frightful yell and ran away as fast as they could for fear of being aristocrated by knighthood.

As to the National Guards and the rest of the Assembly, I soon put them to flight; and having made prisoners of some of them, compelled them to take down their national, and put the old royal cockade in its place.

I then pursued the enemy to the top of a hill, where a most noble edifice dazzled my sight; noble and sacred it was but now converted to the vilest purposes, their monument *de grands hommes*, a Christian church that these Saracens had perverted into abomination. I burst open the doors, and entered sword in hand. Here I observed all the National Assembly marching round a great altar erected to Voltaire; there was his statue in triumph, and the fishwomen with garlands decking it, and singing "Ca ira!" I could bear the sight no longer; but rushed upon these pagans, and sacrificed them by dozens on the spot. The members of the Assembly, and the fishwomen, continued to invoke their great Voltaire, and all their masters in this monument *de grands hommes*, imploring them to come down and succour them against the Aristocrats and the sword of Munchausen. Their cries were horrible, like the shrieks of witches and enchanters versed in magic and the black art, while the

thunder growled, and storms shook the battlements, and Rousseau, Voltaire, and Beelzebub appeared, three horrible spectres; one all meagre, mere skin and bone, and cadaverous, seemed death, that hideous skeleton; it was Voltaire, and in his hand were a lyre and a dagger. On the other side was Rousseau, with a chalice of sweet poison in his hand, and between them was their father Beelzebub!

I shuddered at the sight, and with all the enthusiasm of rage, horror, and piety, rushed in among them. I seized that cursed skeleton Voltaire, and soon compelled him to renounce all the errors he had advanced; and while he spoke the words, as if by magic charm, the whole assembly shrieked, and the pandemonium began to tumble in hideous ruin on their heads.

I returned in triumph to the palace, where the Queen rushed into my arms, weeping tenderly. "Ah, thou flower of nobility," cried she, "were all the nobles of France like thee, we should never have been brought to this!"

I bade the lovely creature dry her eyes, and with the King and Dauphin ascend my carriage, and drive post to Mont-Medi, as not an instant was to be lost. They took my advice and drove away. I conveyed them within a few miles of Mont-Medi, when the King, thanking me for my assistance, hoped I would not trouble myself any farther, as he was then, he presumed, out of danger; and the Queen also, with tears in her eyes, thanked me on her knees, and presented the Dauphin for my blessing. In short, I left the King eating a mutton chop. I advised him not to delay, or he would certainly be taken, and setting spurs to my horse, wished them a good evening, and returned to England. If the King remained too long at table, and was taken, it was not my fault.

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