

# TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

## THE SECOND VOLUME

### PREFACE TO THE SECOND VOLUME

Baron Munchausen has certainly been productive of much benefit to the literary world; the numbers of egregious travellers have been such, that they demanded a very Gulliver to surpass them. If Baron de Tott dauntlessly discharged an enormous piece of artillery, the Baron Munchausen has done more; he has taken it and swam with it across the sea. When travellers are solicitous to be the heroes of their own story, surely they must admit to superiority, and blush at seeing themselves out-done by the renowned Munchausen: I doubt whether any one hitherto, Pantagruel, Gargantua, Captain Lemuel, or De Tott, has been able to out-do our Baron in this species of excellence: and as at present our curiosity seems much directed to the interior of Africa, it must be edifying to have the real relation of Munchausen's adventures there before any further intelligence arrives; for he seems to adapt himself and his exploits to the spirit of the times, and recounts what he thinks should be most interesting to his auditors.

I do not say that the Baron, in the following stories, means a satire on any political matters whatever. No; but if the reader understands them so, I cannot help it.

If the Baron meets with a parcel of negro ships carrying whites into slavery to work upon their plantations in a cold climate, should we therefore imagine that he intends a reflection on the present traffic in human flesh? And that, if the negroes should do so, it would be simple justice, as retaliation is the law of God! If we were to think this a reflection on any present commercial or political matter, we should be tempted to imagine, perhaps, some political ideas conveyed in every page, in every sentence of the whole. Whether such things are or are not the intentions of the Baron the reader must judge.

We have had not only wonderful travellers in this vile world, but splenetic travellers, and of these not a few, and also conspicuous enough. It is a pity, therefore, that the Baron has not endeavoured to surpass them also in this species of story-telling. Who is it can read the travels of Smellfungus, as Sterne calls him, without admiration? To think that a person from the North of Scotland should travel through some of the finest countries in Europe, and find fault with everything he meets—nothing to please him! And therefore, methinks, the Tour to the Hebrides is more excusable, and also perhaps Mr. Twiss's Tour in Ireland. Dr. Johnson, bred in the luxuriance of London, with more reason should become cross and splenetic in the bleak and dreary regions of the Hebrides.

The Baron, in the following work, seems to be sometimes philosophical; his account of the language of the interior of Africa, and its analogy with that of the inhabitants of the moon, show him to be profoundly versed in the etymological antiquities of nations, and throw new light upon the abstruse history of the ancient Scythians, and the Collectanea.

His endeavour to abolish the custom of eating live flesh in the interior of Africa, as described in Bruce's Travels, is truly humane. But far be it from me to suppose, that by Gog and Magog and the Lord Mayor's show he means a satire upon any person or body of persons whatever: or, by a tedious litigated trial of blind judges and dumb matrons following a wild goose chase all round the world, he should glance at any trial whatever.

Nevertheless, I must allow that it was extremely presumptuous in Munchausen to tell half the sovereigns of the world that they were wrong, and advise them what they ought to do; and that instead of ordering millions of their subjects to massacre one another, it would be more to their interest to employ their forces in concert for the general good; as if he knew better than the Empress of Russia, the Grand Vizier, Prince Potemkin, or any other butcher in the world. But that he should be a royal Aristocrat, and take the part of the injured Queen of France in the present political drama, I am not at all surprised; but I suppose his mind was fired by reading the pamphlet written by Mr. Burke.

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