

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER VI

The Baron is made a prisoner of war, and sold for a slave—Keeps the Sultan's bees, which are attacked by two bears—Loses one of his bees; a silver hatchet, which he throws at the bears, rebounds and flies up to the moon; brings it back by an ingenious invention; falls to the earth on his return, and helps himself out of a pit—Extricates himself from a carriage which meets his in a narrow road, in a manner never before attempted nor practised since—The wonderful effects of the frost upon his servant's French horn.

I was not always successful. I had the misfortune to be overpowered by numbers, to be made prisoner of war; and, what is worse, but always usual among the Turks, to be sold for a slave. [The Baron was afterwards in great favour with the Grand Seignior, as will appear hereafter.] In that state of humiliation my daily task was not very hard and laborious, but rather singular and irksome. It was to drive the Sultan's bees every morning to their pasture-grounds, to attend them all the day long, and against night to drive them back to their hives. One evening I missed a bee, and soon observed that two bears had fallen upon her to tear her to pieces for the honey she carried. I had nothing like an offensive weapon in my hands but the silver hatchet, which is the badge of the Sultan's gardeners and farmers. I threw it at the robbers, with an intention to frighten them away, and set the poor bee at liberty; but, by an unlucky turn of my arm, it flew upwards, and continued rising till it reached the moon. How should I recover it? how fetch it down again? I recollected that Turkey-beans grow very quick, and run up to an astonishing height. I planted one immediately; it grew, and actually fastened itself to one of the moon's horns. I had no more to do now but to climb up by it into the moon, where I safely arrived, and had a troublesome piece of business before I could find my silver hatchet, in a place where everything has the brightness of silver; at last, however, I found it in a heap of chaff and chopped straw. I was now for returning: but, alas! the heat of the sun had dried up my bean; it was totally useless for my descent: so I fell to work, and twisted me a rope of that chopped straw, as long and as well as I could make it. This I fastened to one of the moon's horns, and slid down to the end of it. Here I held myself fast with the left hand, and with the hatchet in my right, I cut the long, now useless end of the upper part, which, when tied to the lower end, brought me a good deal lower: this repeated splicing and tying of the rope did not improve its quality, or bring me down to the Sultan's farm. I was four or five miles from the earth at least when it broke; I fell to the ground with such amazing violence, that I found myself stunned, and in a hole nine fathoms deep at least, made by the weight of my body falling from so great a height: I recovered, but knew not how to get out again; however, I dug slopes or steps with my finger-nails [the Baron's nails were then of forty years' growth], and easily accomplished it.

Peace was soon after concluded with the Turks, and gaining my liberty, I left St. Petersburg at the time of that singular revolution, when the emperor in his cradle, his mother, the Duke of Brunswick, her father, Field-Marshal Munich, and many others were sent to Siberia. The winter was then so uncommonly severe all over Europe, that ever since the sun seems to be frost-bitten. At my return to this place, I felt on the road greater inconveniences than those I had experienced on my setting out.

I travelled post, and finding myself in a narrow lane, bid the postillion give a signal with his horn, that other travellers might not meet us in the narrow passage. He blew with all his might; but his endeavours were in vain, he could not make the horn sound, which was unaccountable, and rather unfortunate, for soon after we found ourselves in the presence of another coach coming the other

way: there was no proceeding; however, I got out of my carriage, and being pretty strong, placed it, wheels and all, upon my head: I then jumped over a hedge about nine feet high (which, considering the weight of the coach, was rather difficult) into a field, and came out again by another jump into the road beyond the other carriage: I then went back for the horses, and placing one upon my head, and the other under my left arm, by the same means brought them to my coach, put to, and proceeded to an inn at the end of our stage. I should have told you that the horse under my arm was very spirited, and not above four years old; in making my second spring over the hedge, he expressed great dislike to that violent kind of motion by kicking and snorting; however, I confined his hind legs by putting them into my coat-pocket. After we arrived at the inn my postillion and I refreshed ourselves: he hung his horn on a peg near the kitchen fire; I sat on the other side.

Suddenly we heard a *tereng! tereng! teng! teng!* We looked round, and now found the reason why the postillion had not been able to sound his horn; his tunes were frozen up in the horn, and came out now by thawing, plain enough, and much to the credit of the driver; so that the honest fellow entertained us for some time with a variety of tunes, without putting his mouth to the horn—"The King of Prussia's March," "Over the Hill and over the Dale," with many other favourite tunes; at length the thawing entertainment concluded, as I shall this short account of my Russian travels.

Some travellers are apt to advance more than is perhaps strictly true; if any of the company entertain a doubt of my veracity, I shall only say to such, I pity their want of faith, and must request they will take leave before I begin the second part of my adventures, which are as strictly founded in fact as those I have already related.

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