

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XII

The frolic; its consequences—Windsor Castle—St. Paul's—College of Physicians—Undertakers, sextons, &c., almost ruined—Industry of the apothecaries.

THE FROLIC.

This famous sling makes the possessor equal to any task he is desirous of performing.

I made a balloon of such extensive dimensions, that an account of the silk it contained would exceed all credibility; every mercer's shop and weaver's stock in London, Westminster, and Spitalfields contributed to it: with this balloon and my sling I played many tricks, such as taking one house from its station, and placing another in its stead, without disturbing the inhabitants, who were generally asleep, or too much employed to observe the peregrinations of their habitations. When the sentinel at Windsor Castle heard St. Paul's clock strike thirteen, it was through my dexterity; I brought the buildings nearly together that night, by placing the castle in St. George's Fields, and carried it back again before daylight, without waking any of the inhabitants; notwithstanding these exploits, I should have kept my balloon, and its properties a secret, if Montgolfier had not made the art of flying so public.

On the 30th of September, when the College of Physicians chose their annual officers, and dined sumptuously together, I filled my balloon, brought it over the dome of their building, clapped the sling round the golden ball at the top, fastening the other end of it to the balloon, and immediately ascended with the whole college to an immense height, where I kept them upwards of three months. You will naturally inquire what they did for food such a length of time? To this I answer, Had I kept them suspended twice the time, they would have experienced no inconvenience on that account, so amply, or rather extravagantly, had they spread their table for that day's feasting.

Though this was meant as an innocent frolic, it was productive of much mischief to several respectable characters amongst the clergy, undertakers, sextons, and grave-diggers: they were, it must be acknowledged, sufferers; for it is a well-known fact, that during the three months the college was suspended in the air, and therefore incapable of attending their patients, no deaths happened, except a few who fell before the scythe of Father Time, and some melancholy objects who, perhaps to avoid some trifling inconvenience here, laid the hands of violence upon themselves, and plunged into misery infinitely greater than that which they hoped by such a rash step to avoid, without a moment's consideration.

If the apothecaries had not been very active during the above time, half the undertakers in all probability would have been bankrupts.

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