

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Baron sets all the people of the empire to work to build a bridge from their country to Great Britain—His contrivance to render the arch secure—Orders an inscription to be engraved on the bridge—Returns with all his company, chariot, etc., to England—Surveys the kingdoms and nations under him from the middle of the bridge.

“And now, most noble Baron,” said the illustrious Hilario Frosticos, “now is the time to make this people proceed in any business that we find convenient. Take them at this present ferment of the mind, let them not think, but at once set them to work.” In short, the whole nation went heartily to the business, to build an edifice such as was never seen in any other country. I took care to supply them with their favourite kava and fudge, and they worked like horses. The tower of Babylon, which, according to Hermogastricus, was seven miles high, or the Chinese wall, was a mere trifle, in comparison to this stupendous edifice, which was completed in a very short space of time.

It was of an immense height, far beyond anything that ever had been before erected, and of such gentle ascent, that a regiment of cavalry with a train of cannon could ascend with perfect ease and facility. It seemed like a rainbow in the heavens, the base of which appeared to rise in the centre of Africa, and the other extremity seemed to stoop into great Britain. A most noble bridge indeed, and a piece of masonry that has outdone Sir Christopher Wren. Wonderful must it have been to form so tremendous an arch, especially as the artists had certain difficulties to labour against which they could not have in the formation of any other arch in the world—I mean, the attraction of the moon and planets: Because the arch was of so great a height, and in some parts so elongated from the earth, as in a great measure to diminish in its gravitation to the centre of our globe; or rather, seemed more easily operated upon by the attraction of the planets: So that the stones of the arch, one would think, at certain times, were ready to fall *up* to the moon, and at other times to fall down to the earth. But as the former was more to be dreaded, I secured stability to the fabric by a very curious contrivance: I ordered the architects to get the heads of some hundred numbskulls and blockheads, and fix them to the interior surface of the arch, at certain intervals, all the whole length, by which means the arch was held together firm, and its inclination to the earth eternally established; because of all the things in the world, the skulls of these kind of animals have a strange facility of tending to the centre of the earth.

The building being completed, I caused an inscription to be engraved in the most magnificent style upon the summit of the arch, in letters so great and luminous, that all vessels sailing to the East or West Indies might read them distinct in the heavens, like the motto of Constantine.

KARDOL BAGARLAN KAI TON FARINGO SARGAI RA
MO PASHROL VATINEAC CAL COLNITOS RO NA FILNAT
AGASTRA SA DINGANNAL FANO.

That is to say, “As long as this arch and bond of union shall exist, so long shall the people be happy. Nor can all the power of the world affect them, unless the moon, advancing from her usual sphere, should so much attract the skulls as to cause a sudden elevation, on which the whole will fall into the most horrible confusion.”

An easy intercourse being thus established between Great Britain and the centre of Africa, numbers

travelled continually to and from both countries, and at my request mail coaches were ordered to run on the bridge between both empires. After some time, having settled the government to my satisfaction, I requested permission to resign, as a great cabal had been excited against me in England; I therefore received my letters of recall, and prepared to return to Old England.

In fine, I set out upon my journey, covered with applause and general admiration. I proceeded with the same retinue that I had before— Sphinx, Gog and Magog, &c., and advanced along the bridge, lined on each side with rows of trees, adorned with festoons of various flowers, and illuminated with coloured lights. We advanced at a great rate along the bridge, which was so very extensive that we could scarcely perceive the ascent, but proceeded insensibly until we arrived on the centre of the arch. The view from thence was glorious beyond conception; 'twas divine to look down on the kingdoms and seas and islands under us. Africa seemed in general of a tawny brownish colour, burned up by the sun: Spain seemed more inclining to a yellow, on account of some fields of corn scattered over the kingdom; France appeared more inclining to a bright straw-colour, intermixed with green; and England appeared covered with the most beautiful verdure. I admired the appearance of the Baltic Sea, which evidently seemed to have been introduced between those countries by the sudden splitting of the land, and that originally Sweden was united to the western coast of Denmark; in short, the whole interstice of the Gulf of Finland had no being, until these countries, by mutual consent, separated from one another. Such were my philosophical meditations as I advanced, when I observed a man in armour with a tremendous spear or lance, and mounted upon a steed, advancing against me. I soon discovered by a telescope that it could be no other than Don Quixote, and promised myself much amusement in the rencounter.

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