

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XXX

The Baron arrives in England—the Colossus of Rhodes comes to congratulate him—Great rejoicings on the Baron's return, and a tremendous concert—The Baron's discourse with Fragrantia, and her opinion of the Tour to the Hebrides.

Having arrived in England once more, the greatest rejoicings were made for my return; the whole city seemed one general blaze of illumination, and the Colossus of Rhodes, hearing of my astonishing feats, came on purpose to England to congratulate me on such unparalleled achievements. But above all other rejoicings on my return, the musical oratorio and song of triumph were magnificent in the extreme. Gog and Magog were ordered to take the maiden tower of Windsor, and make a tambourine or great drum of it. For this purpose they extended an elephant's hide, tanned and prepared for the design, across the summit of the tower, from parapet to parapet, so that in proportion this extended elephant's hide was to the whole of the castle what the parchment is to a drum, in such a manner that the whole became one great instrument of war.

To correspond with this, Colossus took Guildhall and Westminster Abbey, and turning the foundations towards the heavens, so that the roofs of the edifices were upon the ground, he strung them across with brass and steel wire from side to side, and thus, when strung, they had the appearance of most noble dulcimers. He then took the great dome of St. Paul's, raising it off the earth with as much facility as you would a decanter of claret. And when once risen up it had the appearance of a quart bottle. Colossus instantly, with his teeth, cracked off the superior part of the cupola, and then applying his lips to the instrument, began to sound it like a trumpet. 'Twas martial beyond description—*tantara!-tara!-ta!*

During the concert I walked in the park with Lady Fragrantia: she was dressed that morning in a *chemise à la reine*. "I like," said she, "the dew of the morning, 'tis delicate and ethereal, and, by thus bespangling me, I think it will more approximate me to the nature of the rose [for her looks were like Aurora]; and to confirm the vermilion I shall go to Spa." "And drink the Podhon spring?" added I, gazing at her from top to toe. "Yes," replied the lovely Fragrantia, "with all my heart; 'tis the drink of sweetness and delicacy. Never were there any creatures like the water-drinkers at spa; they seem like so many thirsty blossoms on a peach-tree, that suck up the shower in the scorching heat. There is a certain something in the waters that gives vigour to the whole frame, and expands every heart with rapture and benevolence. They drink! good gods! how they do drink! and then, how they sleep! Pray, my dear Baron, were you ever at the falls of Niagara?" "Yes, my lady," replied I, surprised at such a strange association of ideas; "I have been, many years ago, at the Falls of Niagara, and found no more difficulty in swimming up and down the cataracts than I should to move a minuet." At that moment she dropped her nosegay. "Ah," said she, as I presented it to her, "there is no great variety in these polyanthuses. I do assure you, my dear Baron, that there is taste in the selection of flowers as well as everything else, and were I a girl of sixteen I should wear some rosebuds in my bosom, but at five-and-twenty I think it would be more *apropos* to wear a full-blown rose, quite ripe, and ready to drop off the stalk for want of being pulled—heigh-ho!" "But pray, my lady," said I, "how do you like the concert?" "Alas!" said she, languishingly, while she laid her hand upon my shoulder, "what are these bodiless sounds and vibration to me? and yet what an exquisite sweetness in the songs of the northern part of our island:—*'Thou art gone awa' from me, Mary!*' How pathetic and divine the little airs of Scotland and the Hebrides! But never, never can I think of that same Doctor Johnson— that

CONSTABLE, as Fergus MacLeod calls him—but I have an idea of a great brown full-bottomed wig and a hogshead of porter! Oh, 'twas base! to be treated everywhere with politeness and hospitality, and in return invidiously to smellfungus them all over; to go to the country of Kate of Aberdeen, of Auld Robin Gray, 'midst rural innocence and sweetness, take up their plaids, and dance. Oh! Doctor, Doctor!”

“And what would you say, Fragrantia, if you were to write a tour to the Hebrides?” “Peace to the heroes,” replied she, in a delicate and theatrical tone; “peace to the heroes who sleep in the isle of Iona; the sons of the wave, and the chiefs of the dark-brown shield! The tear of the sympathising stranger is scattered by the wind over the hoary stones as she meditates sorrowfully on the times of old! Such could I say, sitting upon some druidical heap or tumulus. The fact is this, there is a right and wrong handle to everything, and there is more pleasure in thinking with pure nobility of heart than with the illiberal enmities and sarcasm of a blackguard.”

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