

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER IX

Adventures in Turkey, and upon the river Nile—Sees a balloon over Constantinople; shoots at, and brings it down; finds a French experimental philosopher suspended from it—Goes on an embassy to Grand Cairo, and returns upon the Nile, where he is thrown into an unexpected situation, and detained six weeks.

When I was in the service of the Turks I frequently amused myself in a pleasure-barge on the Marmora, which commands a view of the whole city of Constantinople, including the Grand Seignior's Seraglio. One morning, as I was admiring the beauty and serenity of the sky, I observed a globular substance in the air, which appeared to be about the size of a twelve-inch globe, with somewhat suspended from it. I immediately took up my largest and longest barrel fowling-piece, which I never travel or make even an excursion without, if I can help it; I charged with a ball, and fired at the globe, but to no purpose, the object being at too great a distance. I then put in a double quantity of powder, and five or six balls: this second attempt succeeded; all the balls took effect, and tore one side open, and brought it down. Judge my surprise when a most elegant gilt car, with a man in it, and part of a sheep which seemed to have been roasted, fell within two yards of me. When my astonishment had in some degree subsided, I ordered my people to row close to this strange aerial traveller.

I took him on board my barge (he was a native of France): he was much indisposed from his sudden fall into the sea, and incapable of speaking; after some time, however, he recovered, and gave the following account of himself, viz.: "About seven or eight days since, I cannot tell which, for I have lost my reckoning, having been most of the time where the sun never sets, I ascended from the Land's End in Cornwall, in the island of Great Britain, in the car from which I have been just taken, suspended from a very large balloon, and took a sheep with me to try atmospheric experiments upon: unfortunately, the wind changed within ten minutes after my ascent, and instead of driving towards Exeter, where I intended to land, I was driven towards the sea, over which I suppose I have continued ever since, but much too high to make observations.

"The calls of hunger were so pressing, that the intended experiments upon heat and respiration gave way to them. I was obliged, on the third day, to kill the sheep for food; and being at that time infinitely above the moon, and for upwards of sixteen hours after so very near the sun that it scorched my eyebrows, I placed the carcase, taking care to skin it first, in that part of the car where the sun had sufficient power, or, in other words, where the balloon did not shade it from the sun, by which method it was well roasted in about two hours. This has been my food ever since." Here he paused, and seemed lost in viewing the objects about him. When I told him the buildings before us were the Grand Seignior's Seraglio at Constantinople, he seemed exceedingly affected, as he had supposed himself in a very different situation. "The cause," added he, "of my long flight, was owing to the failure of a string which was fixed to a valve in the balloon, intended to let out the inflammable air; and if it had not been fired at, and rent in the manner before mentioned, I might, like Mahomet, have been suspended between heaven and earth till doomsday."

The Grand Seignior, to whom I was introduced by the Imperial, Russian, and French ambassadors, employed me to negotiate a matter of great importance at Grand Cairo, and which was of such a nature that it must ever remain a secret.

I went there in great state by land; where, having completed the business, I dismissed almost all my

attendants, and returned like a private gentleman; the weather was delightful, and that famous river the Nile was beautiful beyond all description; in short, I was tempted to hire a barge to descend by water to Alexandria. On the third day of my voyage the river began to rise most amazingly (you have all heard, I presume, of the annual overflowing of the Nile), and on the next day it spread the whole country for many leagues on each side! On the fifth, at sunrise, my barge became entangled with what I at first took for shrubs, but as the light became stronger I found myself surrounded by almonds, which were perfectly ripe, and in the highest perfection. Upon plumbing with a line my people found we were at least sixty feet from the ground, and unable to advance or retreat. At about eight or nine o'clock, as near as I could judge by the altitude of the sun, the wind rose suddenly, and canted our barge on one side: here she filled, and I saw no more of her for some time. Fortunately we all saved ourselves (six men and two boys) by clinging to the tree, the boughs of which were equal to our weight, though not to that of the barge: in this situation we continued six weeks and three days, living upon the almonds; I need not inform you we had plenty of water. On the forty- second day of our distress the water fell as rapidly as it had risen, and on the forty-sixth we were able to venture down upon *terra firma*. Our barge was the first pleasing object we saw, about two hundred yards from the spot where she sunk. After drying everything that was useful by the heat of the sun, and loading ourselves with necessaries from the stores on board, we set out to recover our lost ground, and found, by the nearest calculation, we had been carried over garden-walls, and a variety of enclosures, above one hundred and fifty miles. In four days, after a very tiresome journey on foot, with thin shoes, we reached the river, which was now confined to its banks, related our adventures to a boy, who kindly accommodated all our wants, and sent us forward in a barge of his own. In six days more we arrived at Alexandria, where we took shipping for Constantinople. I was received kindly by the Grand Seignior, and had the honour of seeing the Seraglio, to which his highness introduced me himself.

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