

TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

CHAPTER XV

A further account of the journey from Harwich to Helvoetsluys- Description of a number of marine objects never mentioned by any traveller before-Rocks seen in this passage equal to the Alps in magnitude; lobsters, crabs, &c., of an extraordinary magnitude-A woman's life saved-The cause of her falling into the sea-Dr. Hawes' directions followed with success.

I omitted several very material parts in my father's journey across the English Channel to Holland, which, that they may not be totally lost I will now faithfully give you in his own words, as I heard him relate them to his friends several times.

"On my arrival," says my father, "at Helvoetsluys, I was observed to breathe with some difficulty; upon the inhabitants inquiring into the cause, I informed them that the animal upon whose back I rode from Harwich across to their shore did not swim! Such is their peculiar form and disposition, that they cannot float or move upon the surface of the water; he ran with incredible swiftness upon the sands from the shore, driving fish in millions before him, many of which were quite different from any I had yet seen, carrying their heads at the extremity of their tails. I crossed," continued he, "one prodigious range of rocks, equal in height to the Alps (the tops or highest parts of these marine mountains are said to be upwards of one hundred fathoms below the surface of the sea), on the sides of which there was a great variety of tall, noble trees, loaded with marine fruit, such as lobsters, crabs, oysters, scollops, mussels, cockles, &c. &c.; some of which were a cart-load singly! and none less than a porter's! All those which are brought on shore and sold in our markets are of an inferior dwarf kind, or, properly, waterfalls, *i.e.*, fruit shook off the branches of the tree it grows upon by the motion of the water, as those in our gardens are by that of the wind! The lobster-trees appeared the richest, but the crab and oysters were the tallest. The periwinkle is a kind of shrub; it grows at the foot of the oyster-tree, and twines round it as the ivy does the oak. I observed the effect of several accidents by shipwreck, &c., particularly a ship that had been wrecked by striking against a mountain or rock, the top of which lay within three fathoms of the surface. As she sank she fell upon her side, and forced a very large lobster-tree out of its place. It was in the spring, when the lobsters were very young, and many of them being separated by the violence of the shock, they fell upon a crab-tree which was growing below them; they have, like the farina of plants, united, and produced a fish resembling both. I endeavoured to bring one with me, but it was too cumbersome, and my salt-water Pegasus seemed much displeased at every attempt to stop his career whilst I continued upon his back; besides, I was then, though galloping over a mountain of rocks that lay about midway the passage, at least five hundred fathom below the surface of the sea, and began to find the want of air inconvenient, therefore I had no inclination to prolong the time. Add to this, my situation was in other respects very unpleasant; I met many large fish, who were, if I could judge by their open mouths, not only able, but really wished to devour us; now, as my Rosinante was blind, I had these hungry gentlemen's attempts to guard against, in addition to my other difficulties.

"As we drew near the Dutch shore, and the body of water over our heads did not exceed twenty fathoms, I thought I saw a human figure in a female dress then lying on the sand before me with some signs of life; when I came close I perceived her hand move: I took it into mine, and brought her on shore as a corpse. An apothecary, who had just been instructed by Dr. Hawes [the Baron's father must have lived very lately if Dr. Hawes was his preceptor], of London, treated her properly, and she recovered. She was the rib of a man who commanded a vessel belonging to Helvoetsluys. He was just

going out of port on a voyage, when she, hearing he had got a mistress with him, followed him in an open boat. As soon as she had got on the quarter-deck she flew at her husband, and attempted to strike him with such impetuosity, that he thought it most prudent to slip on one side, and let her make the impression of her fingers upon the waves rather than his face: he was not much out in his ideas of the consequence; for meeting no opposition, she went directly overboard, and it was my unfortunate lot to lay the foundation for bringing this happy pair together again.

"I can easily conceive what execrations the husband loaded me with when, on his return, he found this gentle creature waiting his arrival, and learned the means by which she came into the world again. However, great as the injury is which I have done this poor devil, I hope he will die in charity with me, as my motive was good, though the consequences to him are, it must be confessed, horrible."

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