

# TRAVELS OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

## CHAPTER XXIII

*The Baron proceeds on his voyage-Convoy's a squadron to Gibraltar -Declines the acceptance of the island of Candia-His chariot damaged by Pompey's Pillar and Cleopatra's Needle-The Baron out- does Alexander-Breaks his chariot, and splits a great rock at the Cape of Good Hope.*

Taking the reins in my hand, while the music gave a general salute, I cracked my whip, away they went, and in three hours I found myself just between the Isle of Wight and the main land of England. Here I remained four days, until I had received part of my accompaniment, which I was ordered to take under my convoy. 'Twas a squadron of men- of-war that had been a long time prepared for the Baltic, but which were now destined for the Mediterranean. By the assistance of large hooks and eyes, exactly such as are worn in our hats, but of a greater size, some hundredweight each, the men-of-war hooked themselves on to the wheels of the vehicle: and, in fact, nothing could be more simple or convenient, because they could be hooked or unhooked in an instant with the utmost facility. In short, having given a general discharge of their artillery, and three cheers, I cracked my whip, away we went, helter skelter, and in six jiffies I found myself and all my retinue safe and in good spirits just at the rock of Gibraltar. Here I unhooked my squadron, and having taken an affectionate leave of the officers, I suffered them to proceed in their ordinary manner to the place of their destination. The whole garrison were highly delighted with the novelty of my vehicle; and at the pressing solicitations of the governor and officers I went ashore, and took a view of that barren old rock, about which more powder has been fired away than would purchase twice as much fertile ground in any part of the world! Mounting my chariot, I took the reins, and again made forward, in mad career, down the Mediterranean to the isle of Candia. Here I received despatches from the Sublime Porte, entreating me to assist in the war against Russia, with a reward of the whole island of Candia for my alliance. At first I hesitated, thinking that the island of Candia would be a most valuable acquisition to the sovereign who at that time employed me, and that the most delicious wines, sugar, &c., in abundance would flourish on the island; yet, when I considered the trade of the East India Company, which would most probably suffer by the intercourse with Persia through the Mediterranean, I at once rejected the proposal, and had afterwards the thanks of the Honourable the House of Commons for my propriety and political discernment.

Having been properly refreshed at Candia, I again proceeded, and in a short time arrived in the land of Egypt. The land of this country, at least that part of it near the sea, is very low, so that I came upon it ere I was aware, and the Pillar of Pompey got entangled in the various wheels of the machine, and damaged the whole considerably. Still I drove on through thick and thin, till, passing over that great obelisk, the Needle of Cleopatra, the work got entangled again, and jolted at a miserable rate over the mud and swampy ground of all that country; yet my poor bulls trotted on with astonishing labour across the Isthmus of Suez into the Red Sea, and left a track, an obscure channel, which has since been taken by De Tott for the remains of a canal cut by some of the Ptolemies from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean; but, as you perceive, was in reality no more than the track of my chariot, the car of Queen Mab.

As the artists at present in that country are nothing wonderful, though the ancient Egyptians, 'tis said, were most astonishing fellows, I could not procure any new coach-springs, or have a possibility of setting my machine to rights in the kingdom of Egypt; and as I could not presume to attempt another journey overland, and the great mountains of marble beyond the source of the Nile, I thought it most

eligible to make the best way I could, by sea, to the Cape of Good Hope, where I supposed I should get some Dutch smiths and carpenters, or perhaps some English artists; and my vehicle being properly repaired, it was my intention thence to proceed, overland, through the heart of Africa. The surface of the water, I well knew, afforded less resistance to the wheels of the machine—it passed along the waves like the chariot of Neptune; and in short, having gotten upon the Red Sea, we scudded away to admiration through the pass of Babelmandeb to the great Western coast of Africa, where Alexander had not the courage to venture.

And really, my friends, if Alexander had ventured toward the Cape of Good Hope he most probably would have never returned. It is difficult to determine whether there were then any inhabitants in the more southern parts of Africa or not; yet, at any rate, this conqueror of the world would have made but a nonsensical adventure; his miserable ships, not contrived for a long voyage, would have become leaky, and foundered, before he could have doubled the Cape, and left his Majesty fairly beyond the limits of the then known world. Yet it would have been an august exit for an Alexander, after having subdued Persia and India, to be wandering the Lord knows where, to Jup or Ammon, perhaps, or on a voyage to the moon, as an Indian chief once said to Captain Cook.

But, for my part, I was far more successful than Alexander; I drove on with the most amazing rapidity, and thinking to halt on shore at the Cape, I unfortunately drove too close, and shattered the right side wheels of my vehicle against the rock, now called the Table Mountain. The machine went against it with such impetuosity as completely shivered the rock in a horizontal direction; so that the summit of the mountain, in the form of a semi-sphere, was knocked into the sea, and the steep mountain becoming thereby flattened at the top, has since received the name of the Table Mountain, from its similarity to that piece of furniture.

Just as this part of the mountain was knocked off, the ghost of the Cape, that tremendous sprite which cuts such a figure in the *Lusiad*, was discovered sitting squat in an excavation formed for him in the centre of the mountain. He seemed just like a young bee in his little cell before he comes forth, or like a bean in a bean-pod; and when the upper part of the mountain was split across and knocked off, the superior half of his person was discovered. He appeared of a bottle- blue colour, and started, dazzled with the unexpected glare of the light: hearing the dreadful rattle of the wheels, and the loud chirping of the crickets, he was thunder-struck, and instantly giving a shriek, sunk down ten thousand fathoms into the earth, while the mountain, vomiting out some smoke, silently closed up, and left not a trace behind!

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