

# **THE CHILDREN'S MUNCHAUSEN**

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The Children's Munchausen by John Martin & Gordon Ross

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**JOHN MARTIN & GORDON ROSS**

**THE CHILDREN'S  
MUNCHAUSEN**





I FAIRLY LIFTED THE VESSEL SEVERAL YARDS OUT OF WATER

(page 124)

**THE CHILDREN'S  
MUNCHAUSEN  
RETOLD BY JOHN MARTIN**

ILLUSTRATED BY  
GORDON ROSS



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1921

## FOREWORD

### TO MY YOUNG READERS

WHEN I was younger I seldom read "Forewords" or even "Afterwords" to the books I hoped to enjoy, or, having read, had enjoyed. My habit was to think that authors deprived me of pages that might have been much more interestingly used. In fact, I considered prefatory pages and introductions a waste of paper and thieves of my valuable time. Perhaps you feel as I once did about prosy prefaces and serious forewords. If so, I fully understand and sympathize, but as I write these lines I cannot help having the hope that some of you will read them. If you do I am sure you will put something away into your memory store that will give you what I lost as a boy, a more complete and more worth while knowledge of this book and others that you may read. Yes, "the preface habit" is a good one and does more for us than we realize; besides, it is a rather pleasant way to take a peep into the real inside of the Author's head and heart.

I believe a short story of the book, *Munchausen*, its author, and those who contributed to the *Baron's Adventures*, will interest you; besides, I have a feeling of responsibility in the matter, thinking it only right that you should be admitted into a mystery that has always surrounded the stories gathered for you in this book.

For many years there was much uncertainty as to the au-

thorship of *The Travels of Baron Munchausen*, and as to its object there were many differences of opinion. It is not for me to awaken discussion long forgotten; therefore all I shall do is give you those opinions that are most reliable and from sources that are within my own reach.

In 1851 a London literary sheet called *Notes and Queries* said, "*The Travels of Baron Munchausen* was written to ridicule Mr. James Bruce, an Abyssinian explorer and traveler whose adventures at that time were thought to be fictitious." It is doubtful, however, if this reason for *Munchausen* is true, for in my own library I have a two-volume edition of *Munchausen* published by Kearsley in 1792-93, the first volume of which contains engravings marked as follows, "Published as the Act directs for G. Kearsley at No. 46, in Fleet Street, London, 1786." This date was four years before *Mr. Bruce's Travels* appeared. I am telling you this not as something of great importance to the why and wherefore of *Munchausen*, but rather as an interesting bit of knowledge you may use when you come to read the original editions of the book.

As to the authorship of the work there is now no doubt, for it is known that at least Chapters II, III, IV, V, and VI were written by RUDOLF ERICH RASPE,<sup>1</sup> and, as my old edition of 1792-93 says in the Editor's preface, "the rest are the production of another pen, written in the Baron's manner."

From this you will see that Raspe was the original fabri-

<sup>1</sup> In this edition of the Baron's adventures the original chapters by Raspe are represented by Chapters II, III, IV, V, and XIX.



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cator, who, with five chapters, inspired another and probably many others to build up two volumes of lies that have come to be considered the last word in fibbing, and *classics* of monstrous imagination. In the book I give you, the five famous chapters stand just as they appeared in the early editions save for such editing as seemed wise for me to make. It will be interesting for you to compare these chapters with those "written by another in the Baron's manner."

There have been many editions of *Munchausen*, and those in the German have all sorts of added adventures, but those I have included in this book of yours are made entirely from the only authentic source, the early English editions.

The Author, Rudolf Erich Raspe, was born in Hanover in 1737. He became a brilliant scholar and student of natural history and a great judge of antique jewelry. As the years passed, he grew to be a greater scamp than scholar, and his fondness for old jewelry led him to steal a collection from his employer; hence, in 1775 we see him a fugitive from justice, working his talents in England. In that country he lived by his brains, of which he had a plenty, and by his wits, which got him into frequent trouble. After years of honest writing and questionable uses of his wit, we find that he "salted," or scattered, valuable minerals on the estate of Sir John Sinclair. This kind and ever hopeful old baronet was successfully tolled along for a good but dangerous living for some time. The day came, however, when Raspe was caught in his "salting," but he was a bird that feared his own salt, and away he flew to Ireland,

where he died at Muckross in 1794. I should like to moralize a little right here with you upon the subject of ill-used talents and the evil thereof, but as you will do all that is necessary yourselves, why should I philosophize?

During his life Raspe was never known to be the originator of *Munchausen*. Until 1824 one August Bürger, a German and translator only of Raspe's tales, allowed it to be understood that he was the author, but in due time it fell to Bürger's lot to die, and his biographer let the cat out of the bag, much to the annoyance of friends who thought it best to leave well enough alone. I have no doubt that you will sometime have it said to you that *Munchausen* first appeared in German, but do not let that bother you; just say, "How about that edition of 1792-93 published in London by G. Kearsley?"

As to my part in making this book for you, I claim nothing save a very sincere desire to arrange a book that you will love and value and, above all, one that is *right* for you to use until you are old enough to read and understand the quaint old editions. (I wish you might then use one of mine, as I have many.)

I have left for you all the Baron's exact words and manners with the connection of the tales, only cutting out vulgarities common to a time when a spade was a spade too often to make proper reading. Cruelties I have omitted, for these are unnecessary to the interest of the stories. When long political discussions and the Baron's tiresome boasts arose, I ruthlessly reduced their length, for they add no color or punch to *ad-*

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*venture*. The second volume of my old edition I have written down to a few chapters, for I cannot understand it, to say nothing of getting enjoyment out of it.

In this book I have tried to give you a *Munchausen* that preserves the style and spirit of the original writing so that one day you will read the older renderings easily and familiarly and with real enjoyment and knowledge.

Finally, I sincerely hope that I have given you a book that will add to your joy and inspire you to a love of those classic tales that round out your literary taste and judgment.

Always your sincere friend,

JOHN MARTIN