BARON MUNCHAUSEN SEEKS AND FINDS EMPLOYMENT

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

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MY TRIED and faithful cook, Bridget Rafferty, who had been with me for ten long days, having left my employ to become the wife of her third cousin, Mr. Patrolman Magginnis, of the Bronx squad, I came to town the other day and entered the intelligence office of Mrs. Bunkum, the famous domestic impresario, in search of a successor to the lady. Mrs. Bunkum keeps laundresses, cooks, kitchen ladies and butlers on tap, and so many of these respective individuals have marched from her office to my home and back during the last ten years that there is a worn footpath between the two establishments which is rapidly degenerating into a rut. As I took my place on the waiting line of the would-be employers, my attention was attracted to a fine looking old gentleman in the chair derectly ahead of me, who seemed curiously out of place in that atmosphere, and, in so far as his costume went, strangely but picturesquely out of date. More singular still, however, was that in whatever way he disposed of himself in his chair, I could distinctly see through him. He was not quite so transparent as a pane of French plate glass, but for translucency he was not to be excelled.

"Wonder who the deuce the old anachronism is?" I muttered to myself as I endeavored to recall where and when I had seen his undoubtedly familiar features before. The scar upon his nose certainly should have identified him at once, but the only name that occurred to me in an association of this idea with a personality was that of Capt. Kidd, and this chap surely was not he, for he wore no fierce mustachios, nor were there in the vicinity of his neck any of the chain marks which, since a certain interesting climax in his career, must have been distinguishing features in the physical makeup of the former pirate. Moreover, his language, under the irksome restrain of the long delay in getting through with the business in hand, was not that of the billowy main, but more sugegstive of a certain familiarity with the ways of polite society. Finally my speculations were set at rest by his divulgence to Mrs. Bunkum of his identity.

"Well," said that lady, glancing sharply at him. "What is it you want this morning, sir, cook, kitchenmaid, butler, or what?"

"I—I don't want any of them, madame," replied the old fellow with a lordly bow. "I have come to seek employment, not to give it. I have heard of the great opportinities on every hand in America"——

"Great heavens!" cried Mrs. Bunkum. "What can you do? Butt?"

"Beg pardon?" he returned, perplexed.

"Can you butt—that is, are you a butler, or do you wish a job as a coachman, oh a night watchman, or what?" she went on impatiently.

"I do not understand," said the old gentleman. "I want profitable employment, that is all."

"But what are you?—that's the point, I can see that you wouldn't be a good lady's maid, and I doubt if you would care to become a cook in a suburban family, with sixteen children, at fourteen dollars a month," said Mrs. Bunkum, sarcastically and frowning. "But whether you want a position as a gardener, a valet or a groom—how do I know?"

"Madame," said the old gentleman, drawing himself up proudly. "I am a baron."

"Then you don't want to come to an intelligence office for a job, Mr. Baron," said the lady, curtly. "The place for you to go to is a matrimonial bureau. There's one up the street, four doors from the corner, that is much patronized by heiresses seeking barons, dukes and earls for their menage, but we can't go into that business. There isn't enough money in it. You get a baron a place once and it's for life. He never comes back, so that a permanent trade in that line is next to impossible to build up; whereas, on the other hand, it's a lazy cook and an utterly hopeless mistress that doesn't pass through this office half a dozen times a year. Good morning. Next!"

Heroic Patience.

Now I was next, but I yielded up my place. My household could have gone without a cook for forty years before I would have abandoned this opportunity to have a chat with this strange nobleman whom I now recognized as no less a person that Hieronymus Carl Frederick, Baron Munchausen of Bodenwerder, come back to earth again in search of a share of that mavelous prosperity of which we see such evidences every time one promoter gets out his hatchet and goes after the scalp of his late partner, the other promoter.

"No cooks for me this day with Baron Munchausen in sight," I muttered, as I made my way out into the street in the train of his excellency.

"Excuse me, Baron," said I, tapping him gently upon his diaphanous shoulder. "Possibly I can be of service to you if you are really in search of employment."

"Ah!" he replied, turning and scrutinizing me closely. "And who, pray, may I ask, have I the honor of addressing?"

I told him, adding that I believed he was acquainted with an ancestor of mine in Hades—an old fellow named Noah.

"Oh, indeed," said he cordially. "Why yes, I know him. Very well. Fact is he is an ancestor of mine, too, so that we meet upon a common basis of relationship. I should judge that you are my cousin, nine million, four hundred and sixty-three thousand, eight hundred and twenty-seven times remove."

And here he leaped into one of his old habits.

"Come to think of it," he said, "Noah and I were talking about you only last Thursday night. We were wondering how you were getting on, and were delighted to hear from Elijah, who had recently returned from town, that he had seen you at one of his meetings at the Madison Square Garden and that you seemed well."

Ordinarily I take offense at liars, but in this particular case I realized that it was only in the interest of pure geniality that the old gentleman had spoken without due regard for the precise truth. It was simply to place me at my ease that he had ventured the observation, and I naturally fell into his mood.

"Yes, I had quite a pleasant time with Elijah," I returned. "I showed him the town, and gave him a run out to Claremont in my automobile. He brought letters of introduction to me from Noah, and one of my earlier ancestors as well—a chap named Adam—and we hit it off remarkably well together."

As I finished this folderol the baron glanced at me keenly and then with a short laugh extended his hand.

"Now I know we're related," he observed. "I can tell by the strawberry mark of mendacity upon your soliloquy."

And from that moment we were fast friends.

"How did you get here?" I asked.

"Up through the subway in Park avenue," he answered. "That cavein there some time ago filled the main streets of Gehenna with Park avenue houses, one of which, liking the general style of its architecture, I rented and occupied last winter. Having occasion last week to go up on the roof to look after one of the chimney pots, which appeared to be clogged up, I was interested to observe that the hole through which the house had fallen was still open, so I crawled through, and here I am."

I gazed at him with open-mouthed admiration. Here, indeed, was no impairment through age of those powers which had originally won fame, if not fortune, for old Hieronymus of Bodenwerder.

His Point of View.

"Once here I became much interested in all that went on about me," he continued. "I read all the newspapers I could find and was amazed at the vast opportunities for the sudden acquisition of wealth upon every side of you Americans. It seemed as if all one needed to become a billionaire was an abundance of nerve, a sanguine temperament and an imagination unshackled by existing facts. With the keen eye given to my kind I perceived your magnates blowing the most beautiful iridescent bubbles, for which they supplied the wind and the public the soap, and which, when pierced left the magnates with the soap and the public with the wind. Why should I not do this as well as they? thought I. And so I have remained over. My chief object is to get a job of one kind or another where I may earn the wherewithal in your circulating medium to hire an office in a confidence inspiring neighboring like Wall street and there hang out my shingle:

HERONYMUS CARL FREDERICK,
BARON MUNCHAUSEN,
DEALER IN
IMAGINATION.

"It is only lack of this quality which I have to sell that prevents every man from becoming a billionaire, and I am ready to furnish it at a moment's notice. I have all kinds on draught. I am what you might call the Bank of England of Imagination, and I truly believe that if I can only once get started and the public perceives the quality of the imagination which I am willing to dispose of at so much a quart, you'll find people flocking to my headquarters in 'bus loads.'

"It's a splendid idea," said I. "I wouldn't mind buying thirty cents' worth of imagination from you now, cash down I need imagination in my business, and I can use some of it this very day."

"Very well, sir," replied the Baron. "Here's a thirty-cent idea that is worth a fortune, or rather will be before you get through with it. Do you know what a great man Tennyson was?"

"Yes," said I.

"And do you know how large a vocabulary he had?" he asked.

"No," he answered.

"Well, it has been stated to me that at the outside he did not use more than 3,675 separate words in all his work. Now in the latest dictionaries there are in the neighborhood of 300,000 words capable of an infinite number of variations. If you will advertise tomorrow that you will supply vocabularies of 5,000 words each to every applicant who encloses five dollars in money or postal order by which he or she can win a fame as great as Tennyson's without leaving home, your harvest will be rich."

I scratched my head in perplexity.

"I don't see how I can guarantee Tennyson's fame to those who would purchase my vocabularies," I ventured.

"You can't. That would be a swindle. After they get your vocabularies it's up to them, of course, to do the rest," said Munchausen. "It is only the way Tennyson arranged his words that brought him his success, and it will be only in the way these patrons of yours use the larger vocabularies which you furnish that will bring them theirs. In any event, if you sell as few as a thousand vocabularies at five dollars apiece that's five thousand dollars, which strikes me as a pretty good return on the thirty cents you pay for the idea."

Munchausen Dividends.

"Heavens," I cried, "it's 166,166 per cent—they send men to jail in this country when they get up as high as 520 per cent."

"Not the same thing at all," said the baron. "Those 520 per cent chaps never gave the public anything for their money. They went in for pure imagination undiluted. You, however, do give something in return. You give a man a vocabulary that's worth every cent he pays for it, whether he becomes a Tennyson or not. If he can't use it that's not your fault. If a chap comes to me and buys a set of carpenter's tools, I'm not a swindler because he doesn't know a saw from a tooth pick or a jack plane from a tack hammer and is therefore unable to use what I sell him."

"I still think I should be answerable to the law for imposing upon human credulity," said I.

"Well, it's easy enough to get around that," said the baron. "With each vocabulary send along a copy of Tennyson, in one volume, and call it 'How to Use 'Em; or, a Handbook to a Tennyson Vocabulary.' Then you have done everything you could do to give quid pro quo."

"Well, anyhow, baron," said I, "the idea is worth thirty cents and here is my check for the amount. You'll have to get something better, though, if you want to get on in New York. It's deeds, not words, that count."

"I know that," said the baron. "That's why I want to get started and float my United States Ambergris company, to develop the ambergris mines of South Dakota."

"Is there ambergris in South Dakota?" I asked.

"What's that got to do with it?" queried Munchausen. "I don't say that there is, but there's no reason why we shouldn't start a company to be ready for such mines if they are ever discovered."

I shook my head sadly.

"Never mind," said the baron. "You needn't be unhappy about me. I know what I am about, and I understand this age pretty thoroughly. When I lived in Bodenwerder I made the awful mistake of devoting my fancy to the mere entertainment of the public. Now I'm going in on a different basis. Imagination is my asset, and I'm going to work it for all it is worth—incorporate it, organize it, devote it to the enrichment of my own pockets, and take my place among the captains of industry.

"As my cousin nine billion' seven hundred and sixty-eight thousand, nine hundred and fifty-six times removed, but still dear to me, I shall be glad to have you come in and participate in the profits. But if you fear it and are unwilling to take risks that alone insure millions in the future, far be it from me to try to persuade you. Meanwhile, can you get me a job to tide me over?"

Whereupon I bethought me that my friend Harkaway, of the Folly Burlesque Opera company, of Santiago, was in need of a press agent, and I gave my new found cousin a letter of introduction to him, but it was never presented. I have since learned that the baron's reason for not applying for the position was that on his way to Harkaway's office he met Mr. Parker S. Watson, president of the Mulligatawny Trust company, of Virginia, by whom he has been employed to promote the interests of the Brooklyn and Jersey City Water Cress company, which controls the eel grass crop of Long Island sound and is putting its shares on the market, 60,000,000 of preferred at 97, and the common, amounting to 120,000,000, at 43. On the whole, I think the latter is the more profitable business, though that of the press agent is vastly more respectable.

I presume the baron chose the promotion of the Water Cress company rather than the press agency for a burlesque opera company because it gave opportunity for a greater play of the imagination.

Meanwhile the baron is very indignant with me because the 30-cent check I gave him for his vocabulary idea was returned to him unpaid. Somehow or other he cannot see why I should have paid him for his drafts on his imagination with one of mine on a wholly imaginary bank account, which indicates to my mind that he has no sense of humor. For this I am sorry, for without a sense of humor in this world of sin and woe it is difficult for any one to get anywhere, no matter how strenuous his effort or how able bodied a prevaricator he may be.

Good Stories Are Told of Men Who Command Great Ocean Liners.

NOWADAYS, when so many thousands of people annually cross the Atlantic on the great ocean grayhounds which so swiftly ply between England and America, some facts concerning the men in whom the great shipping companies and the travelers themselves so confidenly place implicit trust cannot fail to be of interest to every one.

The skippers of the ocean steamships of the present day are widely different from the gruff old sea dogs of fifty, or even twenty, years ago. Then the captain was generally dictatorial, unobliging, rude, and cared nothing for the comfort and well-being of his passengers. But the exigencies of modern civilization have completely changed all this. In these days of keen competition, shipping combines and big dividends, the companies realize that, as a profit-earning factor, the captain must be regarded primarily important. So they have placed in command of their boats polished gentlemen of good family and education, whose skill as navigators is equal to their social qualities.

Many have served in the British navy, and most of the captains and many of the officers of the American line have taken part as commissioned officers of the government during actual hostilities.

One of the most interesting personalities of the great fleet of ocean-going skippers is Capt. Horatio McKay, who until last year was commodore of the Cunard line. He was legitimately proud of the record that he had crossed the Atlantic over 900 times in vessels belonging to the company, without ever having to report a serious mishap. While commodore of the Umbria he added considerably to his reputation for seamanship by bringing that vessel into port of New York without assistance after one of the most serious accidents which can happen to a big American steamer. Her shaft broke while in midocean, and her machinery was useless. Seven hundred and fifty miles from port she was taken in tow by the steamer Bohemia for a few hours; but the towing hawsers broke, and Capt. McKay refused several other offers to tow him in. By sheer dogged perseverance he succeeded in bringing the disabled Umbria in on her own resources—no small achievement, as can be readily imagined, in stormy, wintry weather. The steamer was out seventeen days, during eight of which the captain never left the bridge! It was on this trip that he met Miss Elizabeth Swan, of Oyster Bay, L. I., who is now Mrs. Horatio McKay.

Like Capt. McKay, Capt. Henry Walker, R. N. R., who has just retired from active service, met his fate on the promenade deck, for it was on the Campania that he first saw and soon afterwards married Miss A. C. Harrison, of Hartford, Conn. Capt. McKay celebrated his fiftieth anniversary of strenuous seamanship last year, as well as his one-hundredth round trip as a commander of the Cunard line. He went to seat at the age of thirteen in a British man-of-war, and two years later was transferred to Nelson's famous ship, the Victory. He took part in the Indian mutiny and the Chinese war, and during his thirty-four years' service with the line commanded all of the big Cunarders. During his fifty years on the waves he has been wrecked but once, when he beached his ship, the Evangeline, on the coast of Egypt, and saved all his passengers.

Another interesting skipper is Capt. Alexander McKay, of the Lucania. He has been to sea for forty-eight years, and thirty of these has been spent in the service of the Cunard line. The trade of the sea is hereditary with the McKays. His father sailed for fifty-three years, and his brother was commodore in the United States navy.

Capt. Edward R. McKinistry, of the Teutonic, has many medals, every one of them earned for signal bravery. When the Teutonic was armed and put into commission by the British admiralty for the last jubilee parade Capt. McKinstry was chief officer. When the steamer was down at Spithead, a training ship, with all sail set, was passed, and as she went by the commander of the training ship fell overboard. McKinstry, who was on the bridge of the Teutonic, saw him fall, and in full uniform took the dive of about forty feet, swam to where the officer was and saved him. King Edward, then Prince of Wales, was on board, and when McKinstry was again on duty he went to him, and shaking hands with him heartily, said, "I congratulate you, sir. That was the act of a very brave man." One of the young German princes, who was also on board, remarked, "A deed like that deserves promotion," and McKinstry was soon afterwards made a captain. Of all his medals, he is produest of the one given him by the British Royal Humane society.

Capt. Mills, of the Philadelphia, is extremely popular, and the fact that he can tell a good story is not the least important of his qualifications. Recalling his experience when serving under a surly old-time skipper, he tells that on one occasion, when the captain came on deck to take the noon observation, the sun became hidden behind a cloud, preventing the operation. One of the passengers stepped up to him and said, "I see that you could not make your observation." "No," said the captain, "but I see you made yours." Capt. Mills also tells of old Capt. ———, who had a reputation for extreme rudeness. One Sunday afternoon he was promenading the deck in all the glory of his Sunday clothes, when a lady accosted him. "Captain, what steamer is that over yonder?" With a grunt he answered, "Oh, go ask the cook." She stared at him fixedly for a moment, taking him in head to foot, and remarked in measured tones, "I beg your pardon; I thought you were the cook." But the lady happened to be the wife of a United States ambassador, and the affront cost Capt. ——— his job as commodore of the line.

Capt. H. St. George Lindsey, of the Celtic, likes to see full dress at his table, and he is himself always immaculately groomed. Capt. Lindsey was asked one day why his company persisted in giving its steamers such singularly ill-fitting names as Cymric, Cedric, Georgic, and those proposed for the two recently put on the stocks, Corinthic and Athenic. Why always this "ic" at the end of the names? "Well," responded Capt. Lindsey, "we believe, you know, in keeping up the famous 'ic' galaxy, following Majestic, Oceanic, Germanic, and the rest, and it is possible that the next boat the company builds will be named the Seasic."

Capt. John C. Cameron, the commodore of the fleet, is known to most transatlantic voyagers, and with all who know him he is a general favorite. He has a quick, terse, incisive way of speaking, but when he speaks the person spoken to knows that he has said something. "Captain," said a lady passenger, soon after the pilot had gone overboard off Sandy Hook, "do you think I will be able to make the 2:15 p. m. train from Liverpool to London next Wednesday?" Taking out his watch, looking at it, and beaming most benignly, Capt. Cameron answered: "Madam, I think you will make it, with about seven minutes to spare."

CAPT. PASSAU,
Of the American Liner St. Louis.

Once the weather was so thick that the Oceanic could not make Queenstown and pick up the regular pilot. A strange pilot, a Welsh pilot, was taken on board off Point Lynas, about forty miles outside of Liverpool. When anchored in the Mersey, the pilot shouted, at the top of his voice, to the chief officer, who was at the post on the forecastle head: "How much chain have you got out for'ard?" Capt. Cameron heard this, and remarked quietly: "I don't allow shouting on this steamer. Quartermasters are stationed all along the line to carry messages." "Oh!" said the Welshman, "I'll be hanged if I knowed I was aboard a blooming man-of-war."

When Cept. Passow, of the St. Louis, was chief officer of the City of Paris, he showed signal courage and bravery when that boat broke down about 200 miles west of the Fastnet. Her accident was a singular one, and the fact that she did not sink within a few minutes, was marvelous, for her engines, going at full speed, literally threshed their way through the bottom before they were stopped. When it was discovered that nothing could be done to have the ship propelled by her own engines, the captain called the officers into consultation. Passow offered to take a crew of volunteers in one of the lifeboats to look for assistance, or make the nearest port possible on the southwest coast of Ireland. Do you realize what that meant?

Those on the big steamer, disabled as she was, had at least the consoling companionship of these three or four hundred other human beings, but this handful of men under Passow offered to risk their lives for the ones they left behind. Imagine, if possible, picture it if you can, the awful solitude of being on the big ocean in a big row boat, and with every chance against them. Cheered by the passengers, the lifeboat was lowered and steered away from the vessel at 11 o'clock in the forenoon. They sailed and rowed all day and long after dark, but failed to obtain a sight of anything until about 1 o'clock in the morning of the next day. Then the lights of a big steamer were seen, and noting the signals made by the men in the boat, she bore down on them. It was the White Star liner Adriatic, and Passow went on board and told his mission to her commander. He begged him to tow the City of Paris to Queenstown or near enough to land to get another boat, but the captain of the Adriatic said he could not do so, as he had the royal mail on board, and was not at liberty to tow, but only to save life. He did, however, promise to make for the helpless steamer and to stand by her until daylight, and see what could be done. Did Passow and his half-dozen heroes go back to their steamer on the Adriatic? No, not a bit of it. In spite of having been many hours at their oars, and in spite of the hard time they had experienced, they were again put overboard, and started off at once for the Irish coast, which they reached safely, and communicated with the proper authorities, who sent immediate relief.

White House Ghosts.

I love to think of the gaunt form of Lincoln walking through these rooms.—Theodore Roosevelt.

Shade of Lincoln—What is this I hear. The recognition of seceding states? Why, this can't be the White house I've got into. This must be the British foreign office and that young man in eyeglasses must be Lord John Russell.—New York Evening Post.