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THE
GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE
AND
HISTORICAL REVIEW.

By SYLVANUS URBAN, GENT.

M DCCC LVI.

JULY TO DECEMBER INCLUSIVE.

BEING VOLUME I. OF A NEW SERIES.
AND THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-FIRST SINCE THE COMMENCEMENT.



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NOVEMBER, 1856.

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BY SYLVANUS URBAN, GENT.

BARON MUNCHAUSEN.

MR. URBAN,—One of your correspondents asks in your last number, who was the author, and what was the origin, of the “Adventures of the Baron Munchausen?” The answer to this question forms a chapter in the curiosities of literature not altogether without interest. For the principal part of the information contained in the following observations, I am indebted to the last German edition of this celebrated work, (Gottingen and Berlin, 1849,) which

is furnished with a very able introductory dissertation (by Adolf Ellisen) upon “the life and writings of the author, the sources and originals of the Münchhausen, and the literature of fictitious travels in general.” To class the “Adventures of Baron Munchausen” with the fictitious travels of Lemuel Gulliver, or of Robinson Crusoe, would be to give them far too high a rank in literature. Still it is allowable to feel some curiosity as to the history and au-

The first edition of the work was published in London, by Smith, in 1785, without any author's name, under the following title: "Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia." A second edition came out in the following year, printed at Oxford, but with the same publisher's name upon the title-page, which bore the following inscription: "The singular Travels, Campaigns, Voyages, and Sporting Adventures of Baron Munnikhousen, commonly pronounced Munchausen; as he relates them over a bottle, when surrounded by his friends. A new edition, considerably enlarged, and ornamented with Views from the Baron's Drawings." A third edition, published in London in the same year, by Kearsley, bore the additional title prefixed, of "Gulliver revived," and is noticed in the GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE, vol. lvi. pt. 2, p. 590.

In 1787 and 1788 a fourth and a fifth edition of the work appeared in England, still without any name of author or compiler.

In 1787 the work first issued in a German form, with some additional stories, under the auspices of the poet Bürger, the author of the "Leonora," and became so popular, that a second edition was called for in the following year. In the preface to Bürger's second edition, he mentions the fifth English edition, and speaks in the following terms of the origin of the work:—"It is in truth somewhat singular to see the following tales, which were produced upon German soil, and have wandered in various forms and dresses through their own country, at last collected and made known through the press abroad. Perhaps Germany in this instance, as in others, has not done justice to her own deserts. Perhaps the English know better what humour is,—how valuable to the world, and how honourable to its possessor. However this may be, we find ourselves, in spite of all the speculations of our own vigilant writers, obliged to import a native production from a foreign country."

The above statement is sufficient to throw considerable doubt upon the story, current in several German and English publications, which attributes the origin of the book to Bürger, who, having met the Baron Jerome Münchhausen at Pyrmont, and heard him relate his waking dreams, is said to have given them to the world with his own improvements. Another myth preserved in the older edition of the

who are represented as striving to surpass each other in the grossness of their exaggerations, and gives Lichtenberg the credit of "the *mystification*, by which Munchausen was made to appear as the German translation of an English original."

In 1824, after Bürger's death, a writer in a German newspaper conjectured that Bürger had probably published the Munchausen simultaneously in English and German, with a view to obtain a larger profit by the work. This insinuation gave occasion to a letter by Karl von Reinhard, the friend of Bürger, and the editor of his works, in which the true author of Munchausen was first mentioned. "The collection had," he writes, "for its compiler, the late Professor Raspe, who published it after his flight from Cassel to England, where it met with great approbation, and was repeatedly reprinted." This statement, which was no doubt derived from the information of Bürger himself, is decisive as to the authorship. It was natural enough that Bürger, in his translation, should leave unmentioned a name which did not appear upon the English title-page, and which for certain reasons, which will speedily appear, would have been no recommendation to his countrymen.

Rudolf Erich Raspe, distinguishable to us henceforth as the first collector of Munchausen's Adventures, was not unknown to the world of his contemporaries as a German *littérateur* and *savant*, and, unfortunately also in another character. He was born in Hanover, in 1737, studied at Göttingen and Leipzig, and held for some time the position of a librarian in his native town. He was afterwards appointed a professor of the Caroline College, and Curator of the Cabinet of Antiquities and Coins, at Cassel. In the period between 1764 and 1775 he published several scientific treatises in Latin, German, and English, and a poem called "Hermin and Gunilde," described by Ellisen as "an allegorical would-be story of the times of chivalry," passably tolerable, according to the taste of its day. He also reviewed in different German publications "Ossian's Poems," and "Percy's Reliques," with some translations from each. His career at Cassel terminated in disgrace. He yielded to the temptation of appropriating some of the coins entrusted to his care, and being detected, was forced to have recourse to a hasty flight, which ended in his settling in

not seem to have interfered with his success, as "a foreigner of merit and reputation." He is so described in the "Catalogue of 500 Celebrated Authors of Great Britain," (London, 1788,) and continued his active literary labours without intermission. In 1782 or 1783 he had some appointment as overseer of mines in Cornwall, which he soon after abandoned; but in 1794 he accepted the office of manager of mines at Muckross, co. Donegal. He died in Ireland in the same year, before entering upon his duties. A short account of his life and works is to be found in the *Biographie Universelle*, where, however, no mention is made of his authorship of the "Adventures of Baron Munchausen."

Taking it now for granted that Professor Raspe put together and published Munchausen in this country, what connection, it may be asked, had this famous collection of lies with any member of the distinguished Hanoverian family to whose name they have given an uneuviable increase of celebrity? The original compiler made no scruple of pointing out the individual upon whom he purported to father his production. "Baron Munchausen," says the preface to the English work, "of Bodenwerder, near Haweln on the Weser, belongs to the noble family of that name which gave to the king's German dominions the late prime minister, and several other public characters equally illustrious." In Bürger's translation, this personality of description is a little modi-

passed his later days upon his property at Bodenwerder. The German editor of Munchausen is able to support the tradition of the Baron's story-telling, by the evidence of a clergyman who lived much in the Baron's society, and who informed Mr. Ellisen's father, a physician of Göttingen, who himself visited the Baron in his more advanced and quieter days, that the old officer used to relate his most surprising adventures "in a cavalier manner, with a military emphasis, but without any passion, and with the easy humour of a man of the world, as things which required no explanation or proof."

However much the compiler of the work may have been indebted to the Baron for the suggestions of his mode of narration, it is certain that a large proportion of the stories themselves are derived from far older originals, more familiar probably to the Professor than to the Baron. Some of the best known of the hunting adventures may be found in a dull, prosy form in Henry Bebel's *Facetiae*, printed in Strasburg in 1508; others of the tales are borrowed from Castiglione's *Cortegians*, and other known sources,—but they all acquire a new attraction from the charming *naïveté* and jaunty confidence of Munchausen's narrative. The Baron of Bodenwerder still remains unsurpassed in his *specialité*: he manages his weapon—the long-bow—with the facility and grace of a master.

F. N.

Lincoln's Inn.