

A new Arabian Night's Entertainment

By Horace Walpole

At the foot of the great mountain Hirgonqúu was anciently situated the kingdom of Larbidel. Geographers, who are not apt to make such just comparisons, said, it resembled a football just going to be kicked away; and so it happened; for the mountain kicked the kingdom into the ocean, and it has never been heard of since.

One day a young princess climbed up to the top of the mountain to gather goat's eggs, the whites of which are excellent for taking off freckles—Goat's eggs!—Yes—naturalists hold that all Beings are conceived in an egg. The goats of Hirgonqúu might be oviparous, and lay their eggs to be hatched by the fun. This is my supposition; no matter whether I believe it myself or not. I will write against and abuse any man that opposes my hypothesis. It would be fine indeed if learned men were obliged to believe what they assert.

The other side of the mountain was inhabited by a nation of whom the Larbidellians knew no more than the French nobility do of Great Britain, which they think is an island that some how or other may be approached by land. The princess had strayed into the confines of Cucurucu, when she suddenly found herself seized by the guards of the prince that reigned in that country. They told her in few words that she must be conveyed to the capital and married to the giant their lord and emperor. The giant, it seems, was fond of having a new wife every night, who was to tell him a story that would last till morning, and then have her head cut off—such odd ways have some folks of passing their wedding-nights! The princess modestly asked, why their master loved such long stories? The captain of the guard replied, his majesty did not sleep well—Well! said she, and if he does not!—not but I believe I can tell as long stories as any princess in Asia. Nay, I can repeat Leonidas by heart, and your emperor must be wakeful indeed if he can hold out against that.

By this time they were arrived at the palace. To the great surprise of the princess, the emperor, so far from being a giant, was but five feet one inch in height; but being two inches taller than any of his predecessors, the flattery of his courtiers had bellowed the name of *giant* on him; and he affected to look down upon any man above his own stature. The princess was immediately undressed and put to bed, his majesty being impatient to hear a new story.

Light of my eyes, said the emperor, what is your name? I call myself the princess Gronovia, replied she; but my real appellation is the frow Gronow. And what is the use of a name, said his majesty, but to be called by it? And why do you pretend to be a princess, if you are not? My turn is romantic, answered she, and I have ever had an ambition of being the heroine of a novel. Now there are but two conditions that entitle one to that rank; one must be a shepherdess or a princess. Well, content yourself, said the giant, you will die an empress without being either the one or the other! But what sublime reason had you for lengthening your name so unaccountably? It is a custom in my family, said she: all my ancestors were learned men, who wrote about the Romans. It sounded more classic, and gave a higher opinion of their literature, to put a Latin termination to their names. All this is Japonese to me, said the emperor; but your aucestors seem to have

been a parcel of mountebanks. Does one understand any thing the better for corrupting one's name? Oh, said the princess, but it shewed taste too. There was a time when in Italy the learned carried this still farther; and a man with a large forehead, who was born on the fifth of January, called himself Quintus Januarius Fronto. More and more absurd, said the emperor. You seem to have a great deal of impertinent knowledge about a great many impertinent people; but proceed in your story: whence came you? Mynheer, said she, I was born in Holland—The deuce you was, said the emperor, and where is that? It was no where, replied the princess, spritelily, till my countrymen gained it from the sea—Indeed, moppet! said his majesty; and pray who were your countrymen, before you had any country? Your majesty asks a vey shrewd question, said she, which I cannot resolve on a sudden; but I will step home to my library, and consult five or six thousand volumes of modern history, an hundred or two dictionaries, and an abridgment of geography in forty volume in folio, and be back in an instant. Not so fast, my life, said the emperor, you must not rise till you go to execution; it is now one in the morning, and you have not begun your story.

My great grandfather, continued the princess, was a Dutch merchant, who passed many years in Japan—On what account? said the emperor. He went thither to abjure his religion, said she, that he might get money enough to return and defend it against Philip 2d. You are a pleasant family, said the emperor; but though I love fables, I hate genealogies. I know in all families, by their own account, there never was any thing but good and great men from father to son; a sort of fiction that does not at all amuse me. In my dominions there is no nobility but flattery. Whoever flatters me best is created a great lord, and the titles I confer are synonymous to their merits. There is Kiss-my-breech-Can, my favourite; Adulation-Can, lord treasurer; Prerogative-Can, head of the law; and Blasphemy-Can, high-priest. Whoever speaks truth, corrupts his blood, and is itso facto degraded. In Europe you allow a man to be noble because one of his ancestors was a flatterer. But every thing degenerates, the farther it is removed from its source. I will not hear a word of any of your race before your father: what was he?

It was in the height of the contests about the bull unigenitus—I tell you, interrupted the emperor, I will not be plagued with any more of those people with Latin names: they were a parcel of coxcombs, and seem to have infected you with their folly. I am sorry, replied Gronovia, that your sublime highness is so little acquainted with the state of Europe, as to take a papal ordinance for a person. Unigenitus is Latin for the Jesuits—And who the devil are the Jesuits? said the giant. You explain one nonsensical term by another, and wonder I am never the wiser. Sir, said the princess, if you will permit me to give you a short account of the troubles that have agitated Europe for these last two hundred years, on the doctrines of grace, free-will, predestination, reprobation, jastification, etc. you will be more entertained, and will believe less, than if I told your majesty a long story of fairies and goblins. You are an eternal prater, said the emperor, and very self-sufficient; but talk your fill, and upon what subject you like, till tomorrow morning; but I swear by the soul of the holy Jirigi, who rode to heaven on the tail of a magpie, as soon as the clock strikes eight, you are a dead woman. Well, who was the Jesuit Unigenitus?

The novel doctrines that had sprung up in Germany, said Gronovia, made it necessary for the church to look about her. The disciples of Loyola—Of whom? said the emperor, yawning—Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, replied Gronovia, was—A writer of Roman history, I suppose, interrupted the emperor: what the devil were the Romans to you, that you trouble your head so much about them? The empire of Rome, and the church of Rome, are two distinct things,

said the princess; and yet, as one may say, the one depends upon the other, as the new testament does on the old. One destroyed the other, and yet pretends a right to its inheritance. The temporalities of the church—What's o'clock, said the emperor to the chief eunuch? it cannot sure be far from eight—this woman has gossiped at least seven hours. Do you hear, my tomorrow-night's wife shall be dumb—cut her tongue out before you bring her to our bed. Madam, said the eunuch, his sublime highness, whose erudition passes the sands of the sea, is too well acquainted with all human sciences to require information. It is therefore that his exalted wisdom prefers accounts of what never happened, to any relation either in history or divinity—You lie, said the emperor; when I exclude truth, I certainly do not mean to forbid divinity—How many divinities have you in Europe, woman? The council of Trent, replied Gronovia, has decided—the emperor began to snore—I mean, continued Gronovia, that notwithstanding all father Paul has asserted, cardinal Palavicini affirms that in the three first sessions of that council—the emperor was now fast asleep, which the princess and the chief eunuch perceiving, clapped several pillows upon his face, and held them there till he expired. As soon as they were convinced he was dead, the princess, putting on every mark of despair and concern, issued to the divan, where she was immediately proclaimed empress. The emperor, it was given out, had died of an hemorrhoidal cholic, but to shew her regard for his memory, her imperial majesty declared she would strictly adhere to the maxims by which he had governed. Accordingly she espoused a new husband every night, but dispensed with their telling her stories, and was graciously pleased also, upon their good behaviour, to remit the subsequent execution. She sent presents to all the learned men in Asia; and they in return did not fail to cry her up as a pattern of clemency, wisdom, and virtue: and though the panegyrics of the learned are generally as clumsy as they are fulsome, they ventured to assure her that their writings would be as durable as brass, and that the memory of her glorious reign would reach to the latest posterity.