

Chapter 16: Description Of An Idol, Which They Destroy

Early in the morning, when marching from a little town called Changu, we had a river to pass, which we were obliged to ferry; and, had the Tartars had any intelligence, then had been the time to have attacked us, when the caravan being over, the rear-guard was behind; but they did not appear there. About three hours after, when we were entered upon a desert of about fifteen or sixteen miles over, we knew by a cloud of dust they raised, that the enemy was at hand, and presently they came on upon the spur.

Our Chinese guards in the front, who had talked so big the day before, began to stagger; and the soldiers frequently looked behind them, a certain sign in a soldier that he is just ready to run away. My old pilot was of my mind; and being near me, called out, "Seignior Inglese, these fellows must be encouraged, or they will ruin us all; for if the Tartars come on they will never stand it." - "If am of your mind," said I; "but what must be done?"

"Done?" says he, "let fifty of our men advance, and flank them on each wing, and encourage them. They will fight like brave fellows in brave company; but without this they will every man turn his back." Immediately I rode up to our leader and told him, who was exactly of our mind; accordingly, fifty of us marched to the right wing, and fifty to the left, and the rest made a line of rescue; and so we marched, leaving the last two hundred men to make a body of themselves, and to guard the camels; only that, if need were, they

should send a hundred men to assist the last fifty.

At last the Tartars came on, and an innumerable company they were; how many we could not tell, but ten thousand, we thought, at the least. A party of them came on first, and viewed our posture, traversing the ground in the front of our line; and, as we found them within gunshot, our leader ordered the two wings to advance swiftly, and give them a salvo on each wing with their shot, which was done. They then went off, I suppose to give an account of the reception they were like to meet with; indeed, that salute cloyed their stomachs, for they immediately halted, stood a while to consider of it, and wheeling off to the left, they gave over their design for that time, which was very agreeable to our circumstances.

Two days after we came to the city of Naun, or Naum; we thanked the governor for his care of us, and collected to the value of a hundred crowns, or thereabouts, which we gave to the soldiers sent to guard us; and here we rested one day. This is a garrison indeed, and there were nine hundred soldiers kept here; but the reason of it was, that formerly the Muscovite frontiers lay nearer to them than they now do, the Muscovites having abandoned that part of the country, which lies from this city west for about two hundred miles, as desolate and unfit for use; and more especially being so very remote, and so difficult to send troops thither for its defence; for we were yet above two thousand miles from Muscovy properly so called. After this we passed several great rivers, and two dreadful deserts; one of which

we were sixteen days passing over; and on the 13th of April we came to the frontiers of the Muscovite dominions. I think the first town or fortress, whichever it may be called, that belonged to the Czar, was called Arguna, being on the west side of the river Arguna.

I could not but feel great satisfaction that I was arrived in a country governed by Christians; for though the Muscovites do, in my opinion, but just deserve the name of Christians, yet such they pretend to be, and are very devout in their way. It would certainly occur to any reflecting man who travels the world as I have done, what a blessing it is to be brought into the world where the name of God and a Redeemer is known, adored, and worshipped; and not where the people, given up to strong delusions, worship the devil, and prostrate themselves to monsters, elements, horrid-shaped animals, and monstrous images. Not a town or city we passed through but had their pagodas, their idols, and their temples, and ignorant people worshipping even the works of their own hands. Now we came where, at least, a face of the Christian worship appeared; where the knee was bowed to Jesus: and whether ignorantly or not, yet the Christian religion was owned, and the name of the true God was called upon and adored; and it made my soul rejoice to see it. I saluted the brave Scots merchant with my first acknowledgement of this; and taking him by the hand, I said to him, "Blessed be God, we are once again amongst Christians." He smiled, and answered, "Do not rejoice too soon, countryman; these Muscovites are but an odd sort of Christians; and but for the name of it you may see very little

of the substance for some months further of our journey." - "Well," says I, "but still it is better than paganism, and worshipping of devils."

"Why, I will tell you," says he; "except the Russian soldiers in the garrisons, and a few of the inhabitants of the cities upon the road, all the rest of this country, for above a thousand miles farther, is inhabited by the worst and most ignorant of pagans." And so, indeed, we found it.

We now launched into the greatest piece of solid earth that is to be found in any part of the world; we had, at least, twelve thousand miles to the sea eastward; two thousand to the bottom of the Baltic Sea westward; and above three thousand, if we left that sea, and went on west, to the British and French channels: we had full five thousand miles to the Indian or Persian Sea south; and about eight hundred to the Frozen Sea north.

We advanced from the river Arguna by easy and moderate journeys, and were very visibly obliged to the care the Czar has taken to have cities and towns built in as many places as it is possible to place them, where his soldiers keep garrison, something like the stationary soldiers placed by the Romans in the remotest countries of their empire; some of which I had read of were placed in Britain, for the security of commerce, and for the lodging of travellers. Thus it was here; for wherever we came, though at these towns and stations the garrisons and governors were Russians, and professed Christians, yet the inhabitants were mere pagans, sacrificing to idols, and

worshipping the sun, moon, and stars, or all the host of heaven; and not only so, but were, of all the heathens and pagans that ever I met with, the most barbarous, except only that they did not eat men's flesh.

Some instances of this we met with in the country between Arguna, where we enter the Muscovite dominions, and a city of Tartars and Russians together, called Nortzioussky, in which is a continued desert or forest, which cost us twenty days to travel over. In a village near the last of these places I had the curiosity to go and see their way of living, which is most brutish and unsufferable. They had, I suppose, a great sacrifice that day; for there stood out, upon an old stump of a tree, a diabolical kind of idol made of wood; it was dressed up, too, in the most filthy manner; its upper garment was of sheepskins, with the wool outward; a great Tartar bonnet on the head, with two horns growing through it; it was about eight feet high, yet had no feet or legs, nor any other proportion of parts.

This scarecrow was set up at the outer side of the village; and when I came near to it there were sixteen or seventeen creatures all lying flat upon the ground round this hideous block of wood; I saw no motion among them, any more than if they had been all logs, like the idol, and at first I really thought they had been so; but, when I came a little nearer, they started up upon their feet, and raised a howl, as if it had been so many deep-mouthed hounds, and walked away, as if they were displeased at our disturbing them. A little way off from the idol, and at the door of a hut, made of sheep

and cow skins dried, stood three men with long knives in their hands; and in the middle of the tent appeared three sheep killed, and one young bullock. These, it seems, were sacrifices to that senseless log of an idol; the three men were priests belonging to it, and the seventeen prostrated wretches were the people who brought the offering, and were offering their prayers to that stock.

I confess I was more moved at their stupidity and brutish worship of a hobgoblin than ever I was at anything in my life, and, overcome with rage, I rode up to the hideous idol, and with my sword made a stroke at the bonnet that was on its head, and cut it in two; and one of our men that was with me, taking hold of the sheepskin that covered it, pulled at it, when, behold, a most hideous outcry ran through the village, and two or three hundred people came about my ears, so that I was glad to scour for it, for some had bows and arrows; but I resolved from that moment to visit them again. Our caravan rested three nights at the town, which was about four miles off, in order to provide some horses which they wanted, several of the horses having been lamed and jaded with the long march over the last desert; so we had some leisure here to put my design in execution. I communicated it to the Scots merchant, of whose courage I had sufficient testimony; I told him what I had seen, and with what indignation I had since thought that human nature could be so degenerate; I told him if I could get but four or five men well armed to go with me, I was resolved to go and destroy that vile, abominable idol, and let them see that it had no power to help itself, and

consequently could not be an object of worship, or to be prayed to, much less help them that offered sacrifices to it.

He at first objected to my plan as useless, seeing that, owing to the gross ignorance of the people, they could not be brought to profit by the lesson I meant to teach them; and added that, from his knowledge of the country and its customs, he feared we should fall into great peril by giving offence to these brutal idol worshippers. This somewhat stayed my purpose, but I was still uneasy all that day to put my project in execution; and that evening, meeting the Scots merchant in our walk about the town, I again called upon him to aid me in it. When he found me resolute he said that, on further thoughts, he could not but applaud the design, and told me I should not go alone, but he would go with me; but he would go first and bring a stout fellow, one of his countrymen, to go also with us; "and one," said he, "as famous for his zeal as you can desire any one to be against such devilish things as these." So we agreed to go, only we three and my man- servant, and resolved to put it in execution the following night about midnight, with all possible secrecy.

We thought it better to delay it till the next night, because the caravan being to set forward in the morning, we suppose the governor could not pretend to give them any satisfaction upon us when we were out of his power. The Scots merchant, as steady in his resolution for the enterprise as bold in executing, brought me a Tartar's robe or gown of sheepskins, and a bonnet,

with a bow and arrows, and had provided the same for himself and his countryman, that the people, if they saw us, should not determine who we were. All the first night we spent in mixing up some combustible matter, with aqua vitae, gunpowder, and such other materials as we could get; and having a good quantity of tar in a little pot, about an hour after night we set out upon our expedition.

We came to the place about eleven o'clock at night, and found that the people had not the least suspicion of danger attending their idol. The night was cloudy: yet the moon gave us light enough to see that the idol stood just in the same posture and place that it did before. The people seemed to be all at their rest; only that in the great hut, where we saw the three priests, we saw a light, and going up close to the door, we heard people talking as if there were five or six of them; we concluded, therefore, that if we set wildfire to the idol, those men would come out immediately, and run up to the place to rescue it from destruction; and what to do with them we knew not. Once we thought of carrying it away, and setting fire to it at a distance; but when we came to handle it, we found it too bulky for our carriage, so we were at a loss again. The second Scotsman was for setting fire to the hut, and knocking the creatures that were there on the head when they came out; but I could not join with that; I was against killing them, if it were possible to avoid it.

Well, then," said the Scots merchant, "I will tell you what we will do: we will

try to make them prisoners, tie their hands, and make them stand and see their idol destroyed."

As it happened, we had twine or packthread enough about us, which we used to tie our firelocks together with; so we resolved to attack these people first, and with as little noise as we could. The first thing we did, we knocked at the door, when one of the priests coming to it, we immediately seized upon him, stopped his mouth, and tied his hands behind him, and led him to the idol, where we gagged him that he might not make a noise, tied his feet also together, and left him on the ground.

Two of us then waited at the door, expecting that another would come out to see what the matter was; but we waited so long till the third man came back to us; and then nobody coming out, we knocked again gently, and immediately out came two more, and we served them just in the same manner, but were obliged to go all with them, and lay them down by the idol some distance from one another; when, going back, we found two more were come out of the door, and a third stood behind them within the door. We seized the two, and immediately tied them, when the third, stepping back and crying out, my Scots merchant went in after them, and taking out a composition we had made that would only smoke and stink, he set fire to it, and threw it in among them. By that time the other Scotsman and my man, taking charge of the two men already bound, and tied together also by the arm, led them away to the idol, and left them there, to see if their idol would

relieve them, making haste back to us.

When the fuse we had thrown in had filled the hut with so much smoke that they were almost suffocated, we threw in a small leather bag of another kind, which flamed like a candle, and, following it in, we found there were but four people, who, as we supposed, had been about some of their diabolical sacrifices. They appeared, in short, frightened to death, at least so as to sit trembling and stupid, and not able to speak either, for the smoke.

We quickly took them from the hut, where the smoke soon drove us out, bound them as we had done the other, and all without any noise. Then we carried them all together to the idol; when we came there, we fell to work with him. First, we daubed him all over, and his robes also, with tar, and tallow mixed with brimstone; then we stopped his eyes and ears and mouth full of gunpowder, and wrapped up a great piece of wildfire in his bonnet; then sticking all the combustibles we had brought with us upon him, we looked about to see if we could find anything else to help to burn him; when my Scotsman remembered that by the hut, where the men were, there lay a heap of dry forage; away he and the other Scotsman ran and fetched their arms full of that. When we had done this, we took all our prisoners, and brought them, having untied their feet and ungagged their mouths, and made them stand up, and set them before their monstrous idol, and then set fire to the whole.

We stayed by it a quarter of an hour or thereabouts, till the powder in the eyes and mouth and ears of the idol blew up, and, as we could perceive, had split altogether; and in a word, till we saw it burned so that it would soon be quite consumed. We then began to think of going away; but the Scotsman said, "No, we must not go, for these poor deluded wretches will all throw themselves into the fire, and burn themselves with the idol." So we resolved to stay till the forage has burned down too, and then came away and left them. After the feat was performed, we appeared in the morning among our fellow-travellers, exceedingly busy in getting ready for our journey; nor could any man suppose that we had been anywhere but in our beds.

But the affair did not end so; the next day came a great number of the country people to the town gates, and in a most outrageous manner demanded satisfaction of the Russian governor for the insulting their priests and burning their great Cham Chi-Thaungu. The people of Nertsinkay were at first in a great consternation, for they said the Tartars were already no less than thirty thousand strong. The Russian governor sent out messengers to appease them, assuring them that he knew nothing of it, and that there had not a soul in his garrison been abroad, so that it could not be from anybody there: but if they could let him know who did it, they should be exemplarily punished. They returned haughtily, that all the country revered the great Cham Chi-Thaungu, who dwelt in the sun, and no mortal would have dared to offer violence to his image but some Christian miscreant; and they therefore resolved to denounce war against him and all

the Russians, who, they said, were miscreants and Christians.

The governor, unwilling to make a breach, or to have any cause of war alleged to be given by him, the Czar having strictly charged him to treat the conquered country with gentleness, gave them all the good words he could. At last he told them there was a caravan gone towards Russia that morning, and perhaps it was some of them who had done them this injury; and that if they would be satisfied with that, he would send after them to inquire into it. This seemed to appease them a little; and accordingly the governor sent after us, and gave us a particular account how the thing was; intimating withal, that if any in our caravan had done it they should make their escape; but that whether we had done it or no, we should make all the haste forward that was possible: and that, in the meantime, he would keep them in play as long as he could.

This was very friendly in the governor; however, when it came to the caravan, there was nobody knew anything of the matter; and as for us that were guilty, we were least of all suspected. However, the captain of the caravan for the time took the hint that the governor gave us, and we travelled two days and two nights without any considerable stop, and then we lay at a village called Plothus: nor did we make any long stop here, but hastened on towards Jarawena, another Muscovite colony, and where we expected we should be safe. But upon the second day's march from Plothus, by the clouds of dust behind us at a great distance, it was plain we were

pursued. We had entered a vast desert, and had passed by a great lake called Schanks Oser, when we perceived a large body of horse appear on the other side of the lake, to the north, we travelling west. We observed they went away west, as we did, but had supposed we would have taken that side of the lake, whereas we very happily took the south side; and in two days more they disappeared again: for they, believing we were still before them, pushed on till they came to the Udda, a very great river when it passes farther north, but when we came to it we found it narrow and fordable.

The third day they had either found their mistake, or had intelligence of us, and came pouring in upon us towards dusk. We had, to our great satisfaction, just pitched upon a convenient place for our camp; for as we had just entered upon a desert above five hundred miles over, where we had no towns to lodge at, and, indeed, expected none but the city Jarawena, which we had yet two days' march to; the desert, however, had some few woods in it on this side, and little rivers, which ran all into the great river Udda; it was in a narrow strait, between little but very thick woods, that we pitched our camp that night, expecting to be attacked before morning. As it was usual for the Mogul Tartars to go about in troops in that desert, so the caravans always fortify themselves every night against them, as against armies of robbers; and it was, therefore, no new thing to be pursued. But we had this night a most advantageous camp: for as we lay between two woods, with a little rivulet running just before our front, we could not be surrounded, or attacked any way but in our front or rear. We took care also

to make our front as strong as we could, by placing our packs, with the camels and horses, all in a line, on the inside of the river, and felling some trees in our rear.

In this posture we encamped for the night; but the enemy was upon us before we had finished. They did not come on like thieves, as we expected, but sent three messengers to us, to demand the men to be delivered to them that had abused their priests and burned their idol, that they might burn them with fire; and upon this, they said, they would go away, and do us no further harm, otherwise they would destroy us all. Our men looked very blank at this message, and began to stare at one another to see who looked with the most guilt in their faces; but nobody was the word - nobody did it. The leader of the caravan sent word he was well assured that it was not done by any of our camp; that we were peaceful merchants, travelling on our business; that we had done no harm to them or to any one else; and that, therefore, they must look further for the enemies who had injured them, for we were not the people; so they desired them not to disturb us, for if they did we should defend ourselves.

They were far from being satisfied with this for an answer: and a great crowd of them came running down in the morning, by break of day, to our camp; but seeing us so well posted, they durst come no farther than the brook in our front, where they stood in such number as to terrify us very much; indeed, some spoke of ten thousand. Here they stood and looked at us a

while, and then, setting up a great howl, let fly a crowd of arrows among us; but we were well enough sheltered under our baggage, and I do not remember that one of us was hurt.

Some time after this we saw them move a little to our right, and expected them on the rear: when a cunning fellow, a Cossack of Jarawena, calling to the leader of the caravan, said to him, "I will send all these people away to Sibeilka." This was a city four or five days' journey at least to the right, and rather behind us. So he takes his bow and arrows, and getting on horseback, he rides away from our rear directly, as it were back to Nertsinskay; after this he takes a great circuit about, and comes directly on the army of the Tartars as if he had been sent express to tell them a long story that the people who had burned the Cham Chi-Thaungu were gone to Sibeilka, with a caravan of miscreants, as he called them - that is to say, Christians; and that they had resolved to burn the god Scal-Isar, belonging to the Tonguses. As this fellow was himself a Tartar, and perfectly spoke their language, he counterfeited so well that they all believed him, and away they drove in a violent hurry to Sibeilka. In less than three hours they were entirely out of our sight, and we never heard any more of them, nor whether they went to Sibeilka or no. So we passed away safely on to Jarawena, where there was a Russian garrison, and there we rested five days.

From this city we had a frightful desert, which held us twenty- three days' march. We furnished ourselves with some tents here, for the better

accommodating ourselves in the night; and the leader of the caravan procured sixteen wagons of the country, for carrying our water or provisions, and these carriages were our defence every night round our little camp; so that had the Tartars appeared, unless they had been very numerous indeed, they would not have been able to hurt us. We may well be supposed to have wanted rest again after this long journey; for in this desert we neither saw house nor tree, and scarce a bush; though we saw abundance of the sable-hunters, who are all Tartars of Mogul Tartary; of which this country is a part; and they frequently attack small caravans, but we saw no numbers of them together.

After we had passed this desert we came into a country pretty well inhabited - that is to say, we found towns and castles, settled by the Czar with garrisons of stationary soldiers, to protect the caravans and defend the country against the Tartars, who would otherwise make it very dangerous travelling; and his czarish majesty has given such strict orders for the well guarding the caravans, that, if there are any Tartars heard of in the country, detachments of the garrison are always sent to see the travellers safe from station to station. Thus the governor of Adinskoy, whom I had an opportunity to make a visit to, by means of the Scots merchant, who was acquainted with him, offered us a guard of fifty men, if we thought there was any danger, to the next station.

I thought, long before this, that as we came nearer to Europe we should find

the country better inhabited, and the people more civilised; but I found myself mistaken in both: for we had yet the nation of the Tonguses to pass through, where we saw the same tokens of paganism and barbarity as before; only, as they were conquered by the Muscovites, they were not so dangerous, but for rudeness of manners and idolatry no people in the world ever went beyond them. They are all clothed in skins of beasts, and their houses are built of the same; you know not a man from a woman, neither by the ruggedness of their countenances nor their clothes; and in the winter, when the ground is covered with snow, they live underground in vaults, which have cavities going from one to another. If the Tartars had their Cham Chi-Thaungu for a whole village or country, these had idols in every hut and every cave. This country, I reckon, was, from the desert I spoke of last, at least four hundred miles, half of it being another desert, which took us up twelve days' severe travelling, without house or tree; and we were obliged again to carry our own provisions, as well water as bread. After we were out of this desert and had travelled two days, we came to Janezay, a Muscovite city or station, on the great river Janezay, which, they told us there, parted Europe from Asia.

All the country between the river Oby and the river Janezay is as entirely pagan, and the people as barbarous, as the remotest of the Tartars. I also found, which I observed to the Muscovite governors whom I had an opportunity to converse with, that the poor pagans are not much wiser, or nearer Christianity, for being under the Muscovite government, which they

acknowledged was true enough - but that, as they said, was none of their business; that if the Czar expected to convert his Siberian, Tonguse, or Tartar subjects, it should be done by sending clergymen among them, not soldiers; and they added, with more sincerity than I expected, that it was not so much the concern of their monarch to make the people Christians as to make them subjects.

From this river to the Oby we crossed a wild uncultivated country, barren of people and good management, otherwise it is in itself a pleasant, fruitful, and agreeable country. What inhabitants we found in it are all pagans, except such as are sent among them from Russia; for this is the country - I mean on both sides the river Oby - whither the Muscovite criminals that are not put to death are banished, and from whence it is next to impossible they should ever get away. I have nothing material to say of my particular affairs till I came to Tobolski, the capital city of Siberia, where I continued some time on the following account.

We had now been almost seven months on our journey, and winter began to come on apace; whereupon my partner and I called a council about our particular affairs, in which we found it proper, as we were bound for England, to consider how to dispose of ourselves. They told us of sledges and reindeer to carry us over the snow in the winter time, by which means, indeed, the Russians travel more in winter than they can in summer, as in these sledges they are able to run night and day: the snow, being frozen, is

one universal covering to nature, by which the hills, vales, rivers, and lakes are all smooth and hard as a stone, and they run upon the surface, without any regard to what is underneath.

But I had no occasion to urge a winter journey of this kind. I was bound to England, not to Moscow, and my route lay two ways: either I must go on as the caravan went, till I came to Jarislaw, and then go off west for Narva and the Gulf of Finland, and so on to Dantzic, where I might possibly sell my China cargo to good advantage; or I must leave the caravan at a little town on the Dwina, from whence I had but six days by water to Archangel, and from thence might be sure of shipping either to England, Holland, or Hamburg.

Now, to go any one of these journeys in the winter would have been preposterous; for as to Dantzic, the Baltic would have been frozen up and I could not get passage; and to go by land in those countries was far less safe than among the Mogul Tartars; likewise, as to Archangel in October, all the ships would be gone from thence, and even the merchants who dwell there in summer retire south to Moscow in the winter, when the ships are gone; so that I could have nothing but extremity of cold to encounter, with a scarcity of provisions, and must lie in an empty town all the winter. Therefore, upon the whole, I thought it much my better way to let the caravan go, and make provision to winter where I was, at Tobolski, in Siberia, in the latitude of about sixty degrees, where I was sure of three

things to wear out a cold winter with, viz. plenty of provisions, such as the country afforded, a warm house, with fuel enough, and excellent company.

I was now in quite a different climate from my beloved island, where I never felt cold, except when I had my ague; on the contrary, I had much to do to bear any clothes on my back, and never made any fire but without doors, which was necessary for dressing my food, &c. Now I had three good vests, with large robes or gowns over them, to hang down to the feet, and button close to the wrists; and all these lined with furs, to make them sufficiently warm. As to a warm house, I must confess I greatly dislike our way in England of making fires in every room of the house in open chimneys, which, when the fire is out, always keeps the air in the room cold as the climate. So I took an apartment in a good house in the town, and ordered a chimney to be built like a furnace, in the centre of six several rooms, like a stove; the funnel to carry the smoke went up one way, the door to come at the fire went in another, and all the rooms were kept equally warm, but no fire seen, just as they heat baths in England. By this means we had always the same climate in all the rooms, and an equal heat was preserved, and yet we saw no fire, nor were ever incommoded with smoke.

The most wonderful thing of all was, that it should be possible to meet with good company here, in a country so barbarous as this - one of the most northerly parts of Europe. But this being the country where the state criminals of Muscovy, as I observed before, are all banished, the city was full

of Russian noblemen, gentlemen, soldiers, and courtiers. Here was the famous Prince Galitzin, the old German Robostiski, and several other persons of note, and some ladies. By means of my Scotch merchant, whom, nevertheless, I parted with here, I made an acquaintance with several of these gentlemen; and from these, in the long winter nights in which I stayed here, I received several very agreeable visits.