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THE DUKE'S DILEMMA.

A CHRONICLE OF NIESENSTEIN.
(Concluded.)

The Grand Duke was easily persuaded. Careless and easy-going, he yet was not wanting in determination, nor in a certain love of hazardous enterprises. He remembered that fortune is said to favor the bold, and his desperate position increased his courage. With joyful intrepidity, he accepted and adopted Balthazar's scheme.

"Bravo!" cried the manager; "you shall have no cause to repent. You behold in me a sample of your future courtiers; and since honors and dignities are to be distributed, it is with me, if you please, that we will begin. In this request I act up to the spirit of my part. A courtier should always be asking for something, should lose no opportunity, and should profit by his rival's absence to obtain the best place. I entreat your Highness to have the goodness to name me Prime Minister."

"Granted!" gaily replied the prince. "Your Excellency may immediately enter upon your functions."

"My Excellency will not fail to do so, and begins by requesting your signature to a few decrees I am about to draw up. But in the first place, your Highness must be so good as to answer two or three questions, that I may understand the position of affairs. A new-comer in a country, and a novice in a minister's office, has need of instructions. If it became necessary to enforce your commands, have you the means of so doing?"

"Undoubtedly."
"Your Highness has soldiers?"
"A regiment."
"How many men?"

"One hundred and twenty, besides the musicians."
"Are they obedient, devoted?"
"Passive obedience, unbounded devotion; soldiers and officers would die for me to the last man."

"It is their duty. Another question: Have you a prison in your dominions?"
"Certainly."

"I mean a good prison, strong and well guarded, with thick walls, solid bars, stern and incorruptible jailors."

"I have every reason to believe that the Castle of Zwingenberg combines all those requisites. The fact is, I have made very little use of it; but it was built by a man who understood such matters—by my father's great grandfather, Rudolph, the Inflexible."

"A fine surname for a sovereign! Your Inflexible ancestor, I am very sure, never lacked either cash or courtiers. Your Highness has perhaps done wrong to leave the state-prison untenanted. A prison requires to be inhabited like any other building; and the first act of the authority with which you have been pleased to invest me, will be a salutary measure of incarceration. I presume the Castle of Zwingenberg will accommodate a score of prisoners?"

"What! you are going to imprison twenty persons?"

"More or less. I do not yet know the exact number of the persons who composed your late court. They it is whom I propose lodging within the lofty walls constructed by the inflexible Rudolph. The measure is indispensable."

"But it is illegal!"

"I crave your Highness's pardon; you use a word I do not understand. It seems to me that in every good German government, that which is absolutely necessary is necessarily legal. That is my policy. Moreover, as prime minister, I am responsible. What would you have more? It is plain that, if we leave your courtiers their liberty, it will be impossible to perform our comedy; they will betray us. Therefore, the welfare of the State imperatively demands their imprisonment. Besides, you yourself have said that they are traitors, and therefore they deserve punishment. For your own safety's sake, for the success of your project—which will insure the happiness of your subjects—write the names, sign the order, and inflict upon the deserters the lenient chastisement of a week's captivity."

The Grand Duke wrote the names and signed several orders, which were forthwith intrusted to the most active and determined officers of the regiment, with instructions to make the arrests at once, and to take their prisoners to the Castle of Zwingenberg, at three quarters of a league from Karlstadt.

"All that now remains to be done is to send for your new court," said Balthazar. "Has your Highness carriages?"

"Certainly! a berlin, a barouche, and a cabriolet."

"And horses?"

"Six draught and two saddle."

"I take the barouche, the berlin and four horses; I go to Krusthal, put my actors up to their parts, and bring them here this evening.—We instal ourselves in the palace, and shall be at once at your Highness's orders."

"Very good; but before going, write an answer to Baron Pippinistr, who asks an audience."
"Two lines, very dry and official, putting him off till to-morrow. We must be under arms to receive him."

"Here is the note written, but how shall I sign it? The name of Balthazar is not very suitable to a German Excellency."

"True, you must have another name, and a title; I create you Count Lipendorf."

"Thanks, your Highness. I will bear the title nobly, and restore it to you faithfully, with my seals of office, when the comedy is played out."

Count Lipendorf signed the letter, which Sigismund was ordered to take to Baron Pippinistr; then he started for Krusthal.

Next morning, the Grand Duke Leopold held a levee, which was attended by all the officers of his new court. And as soon as he was dressed he received the ladies, with infinite grace and affability.

Ladies and officers were attired in their most elegant theatrical costumes; the Grand Duke appeared greatly satisfied with their bearing and manners. The first compliment over, there came a general distribution of titles and offices.

The lover, Florival, was appointed aide-de-camp to the Grand Duke, colonel of hussars, and Count Reinsberg.

Rigolet, the low comedian, was named grand chamberlain, and Baron Fidibus.

Similar, who performed the valets, was master of the horse and Baron Kochemburg.

Anselmo, walking gentleman, was promoted to be gentleman in waiting and Chevalier Grillenfang.

The leader of the band, Lebel, was appointed superintendent of the music and amusements of the court, with the title of Chevalier Arpeggio.

The prima donna, Miss Delia, was created Countess of Rosenthal, an interesting orphan, whose dowry was to be the hereditary office of first lady of honor to the future Grand Duchess.

Miss Foligny, the singing chambermaid, was appointed widow of a general and Baroness Alenzau.

Miss Alice, walking lady, became Miss Fidibus, daughter of the chamberlain, and a rich heiress.

Finally, the denna, Madame Pastorale, was called to the responsible station of mistress of the robes and governess of the maids of honor, under the imposing title of Baroness Schicklick.

The new dignitaries received decorations in proportion to their rank. Count Balthazar von Lipendorf, prime minister, had two stars and three grand crosses. The aide-de-camp, Florival von Reinsberg, fastened five crosses upon the breast of his hussar jacket.

The parts duly distributed and learned, there was a rehearsal, which went off excellently well. The Grand Duke deigned to superintend the getting up of the piece, and to give the actors a few useful hints.

Prince Maximilian of Hanau and his august sister were expected that evening. Time was precious. Pending their arrival, and by way of practising his court, the Grand Duke gave audience to the ambassador from Saxe-Tolpelhausen.

Baron Pippinistr was ushered into the Hall of the Throne. He had asked permission to present his wife at the same time as his credentials, and that favor had been granted him.

At sight of the diplomatist, the new courtiers, as yet unaccustomed to rigid decorum, had difficulty in keeping their countenances. The Baron was a man of fifty, prodigiously tall, singularly thin, abundantly powdered, with legs like hop-poles, clad in knee-breeches and white silk stockings. A long slender pig-tail danced upon his flexible back. He had a face like a bird of prey—little round eyes, a receding chin, and an enormous hooked nose. It was scarcely possible to look at him without laughing, especially when one saw him for the first time. His apple-green coat glittered with a profusion of embroidery. His chest being too narrow to admit of a horizontal development of his decorations, he wore them in two columns, extending from his collar to his waist. When he approached the Grand Duke, with a self-satisfied snimper and a jaunty air, his sword by his side, his cocked-hat under his arm, nothing was wanting to complete the caricature.

The Baroness Pippinistr was a total contrast to her husband. She was a pretty little woman of five and twenty, as plump as a partridge, with a lively eye, a nice figure, and an engaging smile. There was mischief in her glance, seduction in her dimples and the rose's tint upon her cheeks. Her dress was the only ridiculous thing about her. To come to court, the little Baroness had put on all the finery she could muster; she sailed into the hall under a cloud of ribbons, sparkling with jewels and fluttering with plumes—the loftiest of which, however, scarcely reached to the shoulder of her lanky spouse.

Completely identifying himself with his part

of prime minister, Balthazar, as soon as this oddly assorted pair appeared, decided upon his plan of campaign. His natural penetration told him the diplomatist's weak point. He felt that the Baron, who was old and ugly, must be jealous of his wife, who was young and pretty. He was not mistaken. Pippinistr was as jealous as a tiger-cat. Recently married, the meagre diplomatist had not dared to leave his wife at Saxe-Tolpelhausen, for fear of accident; he would not lose sight of her, and had brought her to Karlstadt in the arrogant belief that danger vanished in his presence.

After exchanging a few diplomatic phrases with the ambassador, Balthazar took Colonel Florival aside and gave him secret instructions. The dashing officer passed his hand through his richly-curling locks, adjusted his splendid pelisse and approached Baroness Pippinistr. The ambassador received him graciously; the handsome colonel had already attracted her attention, and soon she was delighted with his wit and gallant speeches. Florival did not lack imagination, and his memory was stored with well-turned phrases and sentimental tirades, borrowed from stage-plays. He spoke half from inspiration, half from memory, and was listened to with favor.

The conversation was carried on in French, for the best of reasons.

"It is the custom here," said the Grand Duke to the ambassador; "French is the only language spoken in this palace; it is a regulation I had some difficulty in enforcing, and I was at last obliged to decree that a heavy penalty should be paid for every German word spoken by a person attached to my court. That proved effectual, and will not easily catch any of these ladies and gentlemen tripping. My prime minister, Count Balthazar von Lipendorf, is the only one who is permitted occasionally to speak his native language."

Balthazar, who had long managed theatres in Alsace and Lorraine, spoke German like a Frankfurt brewer.

Meanwhile, Baron Pippinistr's uneasiness was extreme. Whilst his wife conversed in a low voice with the young and fascinating aide-de-camp, the pitiless prime minister held his arm tight, and explained at great length his views with respect to the famous commercial treaty. Caught in his own snare, the unlucky diplomatist was in agony; he fidgeted to get away, his countenance expressed grievous uneasiness, his legs were convulsively agitated. But in vain did he endeavor to abridge his tortments; the remorseless Balthazar relinquished not his prey.

Sigismund, promoted to be steward of the household, announced dinner. The ambassador and his lady had been invited to dine, as well as all the courtiers. The aide-de-camp was placed next to the baroness, the baron at the other end of the table. The torture was prolonged. Florival continued to whisper soft nonsense to the fair and well-pleased Pippinistr. The diplomatist could not eat.

There was another person present whom Florival's flirtation annoyed, and that person was Delia, Countess of Rosenthal. After dinner, Balthazar, whom nothing escaped, took her aside. "You know very well," said the minister, "that he is only acting a part in a comedy.—Should you feel hurt if he declared his love upon the stage to one of your comrades? Here it is the same thing; all this is but a play; when the curtain falls he will return to you."

A courtier announced that the Prince of Hanau and his sister were within a league of Karlstadt. The Grand Duke, attended by Count Reinsberg and some officers, went to meet them. It was dark when the illustrious guests reached the palace; they passed through the great saloon, where the whole court was assembled to receive them, and retired at once to their apartments.

"The game is fairly begun," said the Grand Duke to his prime minister; "and now, may heaven help us."
"Fear nothing," replied Balthazar. "The glimpse I caught of Prince Maximilian's physiognomy satisfied me that everything will pass off perfectly well, and without exciting the least suspicion. As to Baron Pippinistr, he is already blind with jealousy, and Florival will give him so much to do, that he will have no time to attend to his master's business. Things look well."

Next morning, the Prince and Princess of Hanau were welcomed, on awakening, by a serenade from the regimental band. The weather was beautiful; the Grand Duke proposed an excursion out of town, he was glad of an opportunity to show his guests the best features of his duchy—a delightful country, and many picturesque points of views, much prized and sketched by German landscape-painters. The proposal agreed to, the party set out in carriages and on horseback, for the old Castle of Rauberzell—magnificent ruins, dating from the middle ages, and famous far and wide. At a short distance from the castle, which lifted its gray turrets upon the summit of a wooded hill, the Princess Wilhel-

mina expressed a wish to walk the remainder of the way. Everybody followed her example. The Grand Duke offered her his arm; the Prince gave his to the Countess Delia von Rosenthal; and, at a signal from Balthazar, Baroness Pastorale von Schicklick took possession of Baron Pippinistr; whilst the smiling Baroness accepted Florival's escort. The young people walked at a brisk pace. The unfortunate Baron would gladly have availed of his long legs to keep up with his coquettish wife; but the denna, portly and ponderous, hung upon his arm, checked his ardor, and detained him in the rear. Respect for the mistress of the robes forbade rebellion or complaint.

Amidst the ruins of the venerable castle, the distinguished party found a table spread with an elegant collation. It was an agreeable surprise, and the Grand Duke had all the credit of an idea suggested to him by his prime minister.

The whole day was passed in rambling thro' the beautiful forest of Rauberzell. The Princess was charming; nothing could exceed the high breeding of the courtiers, or the fascination and elegance of the ladies; the Prince Maximilian warmly congratulated the Grand Duke on having a court composed of such agreeable and accomplished persons. Baroness Pippinistr declared, in a moment of enthusiasm, that the court of Saxe-Tolpelhausen was not to compare with that of Neisenstein. She could hardly have said anything more completely at variance with the object of her husband's mission. The Baron was near fainting.

Like not a few of her countrywomen, the Princess Wilhelmina had a strong predilection for Parisian fashions. She admired everything that came from France; she spoke French perfectly and greatly approved the Grand Duke's decree, forbidding any other language to be spoken at his court. Moreover, there was nothing extraordinary in such a regulation; French is the language of all the northern courts. But she was greatly tickled at the notion of a fine being inflicted for a single German word. She amused herself by trying to catch some of the Grand Duke's courtiers transgressing in this respect. Her labor was completely lost.

That evening, at the palace, when conversation began to languish, the Chevalier Arpeggio sat down to the piano, and the Countess Delia von Rosenthal sang an air out of the last new opera. The guests were enchanted with her performance. Prince Maximilian had been exceedingly attentive to the Countess during her excursion; the young actress's grace and beauty had captivated him, and the charm of her voice completed his subjugation. Passionately fond of music, every note she sang went to his very heart. When she had finished one song, he petitioned for another. The amiable prima donna sang a duet with the aide-de-camp, Florival von Reinsberg, and then, being further entreated, a trio, in which Similar—master of the horse, barytone, and Baron von Kochemburg—took a part.

Here our actors were at home, and their success was complete. Deviating from his usual reserve, Prince Maximilian did not disguise his delight; and the imprudent little Baroness Pippinistr declared that, with such a beautiful tenor voice, an aide-de-camp might aspire to anything. A cemetery on a wet day is a cheerful sight, compared to the Baron's countenance when he heard these words.

Upon the morrow a bustling party was the order of the day. In the evening there was a dance. It had been proposed to invite the principal families of the metropolis of Neisenstein, but the Prince and Princess begged that the circle might not be increased.

"We are four ladies," said the Princess, glancing at the prima donna, the singing chambermaid, and the walking lady, "it is enough for a quadrille."

There was no lack of gentlemen. There was the Grand Duke, the aide-de-camp, the grand chamberlain, the master of the horse, the gentleman in waiting, and Prince Maximilian's aide-de-camp, Count Darius von Sturmhaube, who appeared greatly smitten by the charms of the widowed Baroness Alenzau.

"I am sorry my court is not more numerous," said the Grand Duke, "but, within the last three days, I have been compelled to diminish it by one half."

"How so?" inquired Prince Maximilian.

"A dozen courtiers," replied the Grand Duke Leopold, "whom I had loaded with favors, dared conspire against me, in favor of a certain cousin of mine at Vienna. I discovered the plot, and the plotters are now in the dungeons of my good fortress of Zwingenberg."

"Well done," cried the Prince; "I like such energy and vigor. And to think that people taxed you with weakness of character! How we princes are deceived and calumniated!"

The Grand Duke cast a grateful glance at Balthazar. That able minister by this time felt himself as much at his ease in his new office as if he had held it all his life; he even began to

suspect that the government of a grand-duchy is a much easier matter than the management of a company of actors. Incessantly engrossed by his master's interests he manoeuvred to bring about the marriage which was to give the Grand Duke happiness, wealth and safety, but, notwithstanding his skill, notwithstanding the tortments with which he had filled the jealous soul of Pippinistr, the ambassador devoted the scanty moments of repose his wife left him to furthering the object of his mission. The alliance with the Saxe-Tolpelhausen was pleasing to Prince Maximilian; it offered him various advantages: the extinction of an old law-suit between the two states, the cession of a large extent of territory, and, finally, the commercial treaty which the perfidious Baron had brought to the court of Neisenstein, with a view of concluding it in favor of the principality of Ilanau. Invested with unlimited powers, the diplomatist was ready to insert in the contract almost any conditions Prince Maximilian chose to dictate to him.

It is necessary here to remark that the Elector of Saxe-Tolpelhausen was desperately in love with the Princess Wilhelmina.

It was evident that the Baron would carry the day, if the prime minister did not hit upon some scheme to destroy his credit or force him to retreat. Balthazar, fertile in expedients, was teaching Florival his part in the palace garden, when Prince Maximilian met him and requested a moment's private conversation.

"I am at your highness's orders," respectfully replied the minister.

"I will go straight to the point, Count Lipendorf," the Prince began. "I married my late wife, a Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt, from political motives. She has left me three sons. I now intend to marry again; but this time I need not sacrifice myself to state considerations, and I am determined to consult my heart alone."

"If your highness does me the honor to consult me, I have merely to say that you are perfectly justified in acting as you propose. After once sacrificing himself to his people's happiness, a prince has surely a right to think a little of his own."

"Exactly my opinion! Count, I will tell you a secret. I am in love with Miss von Rosenthal!"

"Miss Delia?"

"Yes, sir; Miss Delia, Countess of Rosenthal, and, what is more, I will tell you that I know everything."

"What may it be that your highness knows?"

"I know who she is."

"Ha!"

"It was a great secret!"

"And how came your highness to discover it?"

"The Grand Duke revealed it to me."

"I might have guessed as much!"

"He alone could do so, and I rejoice that I addressed myself directly to him. At first, when I questioned him concerning the young Countess's family, he ill concealed his embarrassment; her position struck me as strange; young, beautiful, and alone in the world, without relatives or guardians—all that seemed to me singular, if not suspicious. I trembled, as the possibility of an intrigue flashed upon me; but the Grand Duke, to dissipate my unfounded suspicion, told me all."

"And what is your highness' decision?"

"After such a revelation!"

"It is in no way changes my intentions. I shall marry the lady."

"Marry her? But no; your highness jests."

"Count Lipendorf, I never jest. What is there, then, so strange in my determination.—The Grand Duke's father was romantic, and of a roving disposition; in the course of his life he contracted several alliances—Miss von Rosenthal is the issue of one of these unions. I care not for the illegitimacy of her birth; she is of noble blood, of a princely race—that is all I require."

"Yes," replied Balthazar, who had concealed his surprise and kept his countenance, as became an experienced statesman and consummate comedian. "Yes, I now understand; and I think as you do. Your Highness has the talent of bringing everybody over to your way of thinking."

"The greatest piece of good fortune," continued the Prince, "is that the mother remained unknown; she is dead, and there is no trace of family on that side."

"As your Highness says, it is very fortunate. And doubtless the Grand Duke is informed of your august intentions with respect to the proposed marriage?"

"No; I have as yet said nothing either to him or to the Countess. I reckon upon you, my dear Count, to make my offer, to whose acceptance I trust there will not be the slightest obstacle. I give you the rest of the day to arrange everything. I will write Miss von Rosenthal; I hope to receive from her own lips the assurance of my happiness, and I will beg her to bring me her answer herself, this evening, in the