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THE ROYAL ELECTION.

A TALE OF THE OLDEN TIMES—BORROWED FROM THE EARLY HISTORY OF POLAND.

BY SUSANNA MOODIE.

CHAPTER III.

WE will leave Lechus to pursue the road to the city, and introduce our readers into the great hall in the palace of Prince Boleslaus, the Weyvode. The father of the fair Rixa, and one of the candidates for royalty, Boleslaus, was an old and distinguished nobleman, who had been the friend and private counsellor of the late king, and was only second to him in rank and wealth. Boleslaus was a good man, but by far too gentle and unobtrusive to be the favourite of a bold and turbulent people. He had little chance of success in the coming election; yet it was his weak point to wish to be elected king. He loved the pomp and show of royalty; in short, he was a kind, benevolent man, who possessed an immense share of vanity. Beloved by his vassals, and respected by his friends, he imagined that all the world viewed him in the same light. He made a great mistake—many wiser men have done the same; and the old Weyvode lived in a barbarous age, and could hardly be expected to know better. He could neither read nor write; and all the knowledge he had acquired during a long life, was derived through the bards and story-tellers, who frequented his court. His jester was his oracle, and was a privileged person, who said and did a thousand fantastic things in his presence; beguiling the tedium of a wet day, or a dull hour, with his drollery.

Zouski was the most independent creature in the world—a freeman in a household and a land of slaves—and he exercised his prerogative to the utmost: he would have been termed a radical in these days. No matter. Our fool only possessed too quick a perception of the ridiculous, which made him often speak the truth, when his superiors would rather have been flattered by a lie. He knew his power, and kept it; and, like a wise man, whilst his reputed folly amused others, it kept his head safe between his shoulders, and enabled him to rule the house. He saw the absurdity of an old superannu-

ated courtier wishing to entangle himself with the cares of royalty, and he left no opportunity escape of turning it into ridicule.

The prince was absent in the city, canvassing for the election. All his domestics and slaves were in attendance to swell his train, and increase their master's consequence in the eyes of the crowd. Zouski alone had refused to accompany him, "for fear," he said, "that they might take a fancy to him, and elect him king." The old white-haired bard, Rolof, and himself, alone occupied, at this broad hour of noon, the vast hall, which looked like a museum of dried boars' heads, bears' paws, deers' horns, wolves' tails, and eagles' claws, which formed a sort of crest to suits of rusty mail, dingy banners, and massy shields, which completely hid the stone walls, pannelled with oak, from the view of the spectator.

The bard was seated on the lower step of the dais, his head leaning upon the small harp, used at that remote period. Zouski, arrayed in the cap and bells, the symbol of his office, and dressed in a gay, motley suit, was tossing a gilded ball from hand to hand, and cutting a thousand fantastic capers. Sometimes he stopped in the midst of a gallopade, which would have astonished a modern dandy, and cast a sly glance at his companion. The old bard's thoughts were far away, composing an extemporaneous song in honour of the day, and in praise of the country, for which he felt all the poet's love, the patriot's zeal. He had Utopian visions, that old bard. He abhorred every thing like despotism. Had he lived in the time of Robert Burns, the latter's song of "Wha weeps for honest poverty" would have found an echo in the old man's breast. He loved his master; but, like Zouski, he did not wish to see him king, because he thought that it would not contribute to his happiness or the general good. But his fit of abstraction was over, and, tuning his harp, he sang, in a fine tenor voice, little broken by years, the fruit of his lucubrations: