

"First of all, gentlemen," said the puffy Commissioner, "allow me to take breath;" and, seating himself, he began to wipe his forehead.

Agitated with the fear of some unhappy codicil to the unhappy testament already received, the members gazed anxiously at the open letter which he held in his hand; and the chairman, unable to control his impatience, made a grab at it: "Permit me, Mr. Pig." "No!" said Pig: "it is the postscript only which concerns the council: wait one moment, and I will have the honor of reading it myself." Therupon he drew out his spectacles; and, adjusting them with provoking coolness, slowly and methodically proceeded to read as follows:—"We open our letter to acquaint you with a piece of news which has just come to our knowledge, and which it will be important for your town to learn as soon as possible. His Serene Highness has resolved on visiting the remote provinces of his new dominions immediately; he means to preserve the strictest incognito; and we understand will travel under the name of Count Fitz-Hum, attended only by one gentleman of the bedchamber, viz. the Baron Von Hoax. The carriage he will use on this occasion is a plain English landau, the body painted dark blue, 'picked out' with tawny and white; and for his Highness in particular, you will easily distinguish him by his superb whiskers. Of course we need scarcely suggest to you, that, if the principal hotel of your town should not be in command order, or for any reason not fully and unconditionally available, it will be proper that you meet the illustrious traveller on his entrance with an offer of better accommodations in one of the best private mansions, amongst which your own, Herr Pig, is reputed to stand foremost. Your town is to have the honor of the new sovereign's first visit; and on this account you will be much envied, and the eyes of all Germany turned upon you. "Doubtless, most important intelligence!" said the chairman: "but who is your correspondent?"

"The old and eminent house of Wassermüller; and I thought it my duty to communicate the information without delay."

"To be sure, to be sure; and the council is under the greatest obligation to you for the service."

So said all the rest; for they all viewed in the light of a providential interference on behalf of the old traditional fees, perquisites and salaries, this opportunity so unexpectedly thrown in their way of winning the prince's favor. To make the matter still more important, it was absolutely necessary that their hospitalities should be on the most liberal scale. On that account it was highly gratifying to the council that Commissioner Pig loyally volunteered the loan of his house. Some drawback undoubtedly it was to this pleasure, that Commissioner Pig in his next sentence made known that he must be paid for his loyalty.

However there was no remedy; and his demands were acceded to. For not only was Pig-house the only mansion in the town at all suitable for the occasion; but it was also known to be so in the prince's capital, as clearly appeared from the letter which had just been read; at least when read by Pig himself.

All being thus arranged, and the council on the point of breaking up a sudden cry of "Treason!" was raised by a member; and the mace-bearer was detected skulking behind an arm-chair, perfidiously drinking in the secrets of the state. He was instantly dragged out, the enormity of his crime displayed to him (which under many governments, the chairman assured him, would have been punished with the lowstring or instant impalement), and after being amerced in a considerable fine, which paid the first instalment of the Pizgan demand, he was bound over to inviolable secrecy by an oath of great solemnity. His oath, at the suggestion of a member, was afterwards administered to the whole of the senate in rotation, which adjourned. "Now, my dear creatures," said the Commissioner to his wife and daughter, on returning home, "without a moment's delay send for the painter, the upholsterer, the cabinet-maker, also for the butcher, the fishmonger, the poulterer, the confectioner; in one half-hour let each and all be at work; and at work let them continue all day and all night!"

"At work! but what for? what for, Pig?"

"And, do you hear as quickly as possible," added Pig, driving them both out of the room.

"But what for?" they both repeated, re-entering at another door.

Without vouchsafing any answer, however, the Commissioner went on: "And let the tailor, the shoemaker, the milliner the—"

"The fiddle-stick end, Mr. Pig. I insist upon knowing what this is about."

"No matter what, my darling. *Sic volo, sic jubeo, stet pro ratione voluntas.*"

"Hark you! Mr. Commissioner. Matters are at length come to a crisis. You have the audacity to pretend to keep a secret from your lawful wife. Hear then my fixed determination. At this moment there is a haunch of venison roasting for dinner. The cook is so ignorant that, without my directions, this haunch will be scorched to a cinder. Now I swear that, unless you instantly reveal to me this secret, without any reservation whatever, I will resign the venison to its fate. I will, by all that is sacred."

The venison could not be exposed to a more fiery trial than was Mr. Commissioner Pig; the venison, when alive and hunted, could not have perspired more profusely, nor trembled in more anguish. But there was no alternative. His "morals" gave way before his "passion;" and after binding his wife and daughter by the general oath of secrecy, he communicated the state mystery. By the same of similar methods so many other wives assailed the virtue of their husbands, that in a few hours the limited scheme of secrecy adopted by the council was realized on the most extensive scale; for before nightfall, not merely a few members of the council, but every man, woman, and child in the place, had been solemnly bound over to inviolable secrecy.

Meantime some members of the council, who had an unhappy leaning to infidelity, began to suggest doubts on the authenticity of the Commissioner's news. Of old time he had been celebrated for the prodigious quantity of secret intelligence which his letter communications had not equally for his quality. Too often it stood in unhappy contradiction to the official news of the public journals. But still, on such occasions, the Commissioner would exclaim: What then? Who would believe what newspapers say? No man of sense believes a word the newspapers say. Agreeably to which hypothesis, upon various cases of obstinate discord between his letters and the gazettes of Europe some of which went the length of point-blank contradiction, unceremoniously giving the lie to each other, he persisted in siding with the former: peremptorily

refusing to be talked into a belief of certain events which the rest of Europe have long ago persuaded themselves to think matter of history. The battle of Leipzig, for instance, he treats to this hour as a mere idle chimeric of visionary politicians. Pure hypochondriacal fiction! says he. No such affair ever could have occurred, as you may convince yourself by looking at my private letters; they make no allusion to any transaction of that sort, as you will see at once; none whatever. Such being the character of the Commissioner's private correspondence, several councillors were disposed, on reflection, to treat his recent communication as very questionable and aspersarial, amongst whom was the chairman or chief burgomaster; and the next day he walked over to Pig-house for the purpose of expressing his doubts. The Commissioner was so much offended, that the other found it advisable to apologize with some energy. "I protest to you," said he, "that as a private individual I am fully satisfied, it is only in my public capacity that I took the liberty of doubting. The truth is, our town chest is miserably poor, and we would not wish to go to the expense of a new covering for the council-table upon a false alarm. Upon my honor, it was solely upon patriotic grounds that I sided with the sceptics." The Commissioner scarcely gave himself the trouble of accepting his apologies. And indeed at this moment the burgomaster had reason himself to feel ashamed of his absurd scruples; for in rushed a breathless messenger to announce that the blue landau and the "superb whiskers" had just passed through the north gate. Yes; Fitz-Hum and Von Hoax were positively here; not coming, but come; and the profane sceptic could no longer presume to doubt. For, whilst the messenger yet spoke, the wheels of Fitz-Hum's landau began to hum along the street. The chief burgomaster fled in affright; and with him fled the shades of infidelity.

This was a triumph, a providential *coup-de-theatre*, on the side of the true belief of the council; the Pizgan *Commissioner's Epistologium* was now forever established. Nevertheless, even in this great moment of his existence, Pig felt that he was not, happily, not perfectly happy something was still left to desire; something which reminded him that he was mortal. "O, why," said he, "why when such a *comœdique* of blessings is showered upon me, why would destiny will that it must come one day too soon? before the Brussels carpet was laid down in the breakfast parlour of the Pizgan. At such an instant, the carriage suddenly rolled up to the door; a dead stop followed, which put a dead stop to Pig's soliloquy; the steps were audibly let down; and the Commissioner was obliged to rush out precipitately in order to do the honors of reception to his illustrious guest.

"No ceremony, I beg," said the Count Fitz-Hum: "for one day at least let no idle forms remain of courts, or banish the happy thought that I am in the bosom of a friend!" So saying he stretched out his hand to the Commissioner; and, though he did not shake Pig's hand, yet (as great men do) he pressed it with the air of one who has feeling too fervent and profound for utterance; whilst Pig, on his part, sank upon one knee, and imprinted a grateful kiss upon that princely hand which had by its condescension for ever glorified his own.

Von Hoax was no less gracious than the Count Fitz-Hum; and was pleased repeatedly, both by words and gestures, to signify that he dispensed with all ceremony and idle consideration of rank.

The Commissioner was beginning to apologize for the unfinished state of the preparations, but the Count would not hear of it: "Adhesion to my person," said he; "unseasonable affection, I must say it, has (it seems) betrayed my rank to you; but for this night at least, I beseech you, let us forget it." And, upon the ladies excusing themselves from appearing, on the plea that their dresses were not yet arrived in which they could think of presenting themselves before their sovereign,—"Ah! what!" said the Count, gaily: "my dear Commissioner, I cannot think of accepting such excuses as these." Agitated as the ladies were at this summons, they found all their alarms put to flight in a moment by the affability and gracious manners of the high personage. Nothing came amiss to him; everything was right and delightful. Down went the little sofa-bed in a closet, which they had found it necessary to make up for one night, the state-bed being ready until the following day; and with the perfect high-breeding of a prince, he saw in the least mature of the arrangements for his reception, and the least successful of the attempt to entertain him, nothing but the good intention and loyal affection which had suggested them.

The first great question which arose was, At what hour would the Count Fitz-Hum be pleased to take supper? But this question the Count Fitz-Hum referred wholly to the two ladies; and for this one night he notified his pleasure that no other company should be invited. Precisely at eleven o'clock the party sat down to supper, which was served on the round table in the library. The Count Fitz-Hum, we have the pleasure of stating, was in the best health and spirits; and, on taking his seat, he smiled with the most paternal air,—at the same time bowing to the ladies who sat on his right and left hand, and saying,—"On peut-on être mieux, qu'au sein de sa famille!" At which words tears began to trickle down the cheeks of the Commissioner, overwhelmed with the sense of the honor and happiness which were thus descending *pleno jure* upon his family; and finding nothing left to wish for but that the whole city had been witness to his felicity. Even the cook came in for some distant rays and emanations of the princely countenance; for the supper, and signified to express his entire approbation of the Count Fitz-Hum condescended to express his entire approbation of the supper, and signified his pleasure to Von Hoax, that the cook should be remembered on the next vacancy which occurred in the palace establishment.

(To be Continued.)

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