

"Your highness!" said the jester, recovering his composure. "I judge the future by the present and the past—will you please to have a cast of my new vocation?"

"Give me a cup of wine first?" said the prince, flinging himself beneath his canopied chair. "Talking to the knaves has made me dry. Here, Ivan, take off these spurs! and now, sir fool, tell me who will be king of Poland?"

"A man who will not number half your years, my lord. Does your highness tremble for your hoped for crown—will it please you to accept mine? Such baubles are in fashion—it will fit an older head than mine."

The prince laughed good humouredly, but he seemed a little disconcerted at the offer, while the jester dropping upon his knees, offered him his cap and bells with most ludicrous gravity. "Why, Zouski, you would not have me, in mine old age, play the fool?"

"You pleased yourself, my lord, before you consulted me. Had the Poles wished you for their governor, you would have been elected when they placed King Premislaus upon the throne. My claims to royalty are almost as good as yours—yet no man flings aloft his cap and cries: 'God save King Zouski.'"

"The fool's gone mad," said the prince, highly amused by his nonsense, beneath which he concealed a great deal of shrewd good sense.

"I would your highness were as mad as I am, you would find your senses by losing them." Then making a sudden vault into the air, he burst out into a strain of song, which cost him less labour than Rolofs', and was much more to the purpose:

I tell thee prince, hap what may hap,
I would not change my bells and cap,
To wear the crown you seek to win,
For all the jewels set therein.

That shining circle set with thorns,
Which folly covets,—wisdom scorns;
Dependent on the public will,
A king is but a servant still.

"My lord, seek not this foolish crown—change not your present independence for a breath of popular applause, which will grow cool before your head ceases to ache with the noise made at your election to the throne."

"Zouski," said the prince, gravely, yet sensibly touched by the earnest manner of his motley favourite; "you have outstepped your office. Who made you a politician?"

"That which makes most men talk of what they know nothing about," said the fool. "Ah, my dear honoured master, I wish you were fool enough to know your own weakness, and act like a wise man—withdraw your name from this election."

"Never!" said the prince, angrily. "I consider my claims incontrovertible. The nation will never be so ungrateful as to place another over me. They will respect my lofty station, my great wealth, long services, and honourable principles. The states will be unanimous in my favour. Where is my daughter?"

"She is coming, sire. I hear the people shout—and with her comes another candidate for royalty. Hurra! long live King Lechus!" said the jester, flinging up his cap.

"Take care, sir," said the offended old man, "or I will have you punished for such unseemly jests."

The jester seemed little discomposed by his threat, but skipping behind his master's chair, stood ready to thrust in a word, or by his mad capers to call up a laugh, should the company appear weary, or the conversation flag.

The old Weyvode met his son-in-law elect with a very cloudy brow, while he enfolded his lovely daughter in his arms, and kissed her with every demonstration of the most lively affection. "You are late, my Lily—what detained you so long?"

"A very untoward accident, my dear father," said the princess, and she proceeded to relate her adventure at the blacksmith's forge. The old man listened to the recital with great attention, then turning to Lord Lechus, he enquired if he had rewarded the brave peasant for his prompt assistance to his daughter.

"Yes, your highness, I trust I did," returned the Lord of Cracow. "I laid my whip across his brawny shoulders for the insolent manner in which he stared at the princess, and the presumptuous manner in which he dared bandy words with me."

"You did wrong, my lord," said the prince, frowning; "to strike an honest independent man, who had rendered my dear child an important service—what must the poor man have thought of our liberality?"

"Who cares what he thinks?" said the nobleman, scornfully. "Your highness is too tolerant to these plebeians—should it be my good fortune to obtain the crown, I'll rule those ignorant knaves with a tighter rein."

"I find, my Lord of Cracow, that your name is placed at the head of the list of noble candidates," said the Weyvode, with an air of strong displeasure; "it was not until this morning that I learnt that you were a candidate for the throne. I should have thought my age and well known services, should have given me the precedence."

"Nay good, my lord, be not angry," said the jester. "Do you not perceive that this gives you a double chance—should the crown drop from your own head, it may chance to drop upon your son's."

"Peace, fool!" said Lord Lechus, frowning at the impertinent jester, then turning to the prince, he said: