CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE

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Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke
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I am Prince Florestan of Wurtemberg, born in 1850, and consequently now of the mature age of twenty-four. I might call myself "Florestan II." but I think it better taste for a dethroned prince, especially when he happens to be a republican, to resume the name that is in reality his own.

Although the events which I am about to relate occurred this winter, so little is known in England of the affairs of the Ex-principality of Monaco, now forming the French commune of that name, that I feel that the details of my story, indeed all but the bare facts on which it is grounded, will be news to English readers. The English Post Office believes that Monaco forms part of Italy, and the general election extinguished the telegrams that arrived from France in February last.

All who follow continental politics are aware that the Prince Charles Honoré, known as Charles III. of Monaco, and also called on account of his infirmity "the blind prince," was the ruling potentate of Monaco during the last gambling season; that there lived with him his mother, the dowager princess; that he was a widower with one son, Prince Albert, Duc de Valentinois, heir apparent to the throne; that the latter had by his marriage with the Princess Marie of Hamilton, sister to the Duke of Hamilton, one son who in 1873 was six years old; that all the family lived on M. Blanc the lessee of the gambling tables. But Monaco is shut off from the rest of the world except in the winter months, and few have heard of the calamities which since the end of January have rained upon the ruling family. My cousin, Prince Albert, the "Sailor Prince," a good fellow of my own age, with no fault but his rash love of uselessly braving the perils of the ocean, had often been warned of the fate that would one day befall him. Once when a boy he had put to sea in his boat when a fearful storm was raging, had been upset just off the point at Monaco, and had been saved only by the gallantry of a sailor of the port who had risked his own life in keeping his sovereign's son afloat. In October 1873 my unfortunate cousin bought at Plymouth an English sailing yacht of 450 tons. He had a sailor's contempt for steam, which he told me was only fit for lubbers, when he came up and stayed with me at Cambridge in November to see the "fours." He explained to me then that he had got a bargain, that he had bought his yacht for one-third her value, and that he was picking up a capital crew of thirty men. He had no need to buy yachts for a third their value, for he was rich enough and to spare, having enjoyed the large fortune of his mother from the time he came of age. She was a Mérode, and vast forests in Belgium – part of Soignies for instance – belonged to him. His wife had her own fortune of four and a half million francs, bringing her in about seven thousand pounds a year, so he was able to spend all his money on himself. He did not spend it on his dress, for when he came to Cambridge and was introduced to Dr. Thompson, he neither had a dress suit to dine in at the lodge, nor a black morning coat to put on for hall, where his rough pea-jacket scandalised the "scouts." He sailed from Plymouth in November, and reached Monaco at the end of that month. In December he made several excursions, in none of which did his father go to sea with him, but on the 26th of January, as ill luck would have it, he tempted my poor uncle to go with him for a three days' cruise. It came on to blow hard that night, and nothing was ever heard of them again. Great was the excitement at Monaco on the 27th and 28th, but on the 29th the worst was known, as a telegram from Genoa informed the unfortunate old princess – who has all her faculties at the age of eighty-six – that her son and grandson were both numbered with the dead, for one of the boats of the rotten yacht had been fallen in with by a fishing vessel floating empty in mid sea.

The Conseil d'Etat was at once called together by the Governor General, and the little boy of the Princess Marie proclaimed by their order at the market-place. A proclamation was posted in the town the moment the sitting ended, declaring the joint regency of the dowager princess and of Baron Imberty. A telegram was sent to Princess Marie, who was staying with her child at Nice, informing her of her husband's death and of the accession of her son, and begging that she would the next day

confide the little Duc de Valentinois to the deputation of the councillors of state and of the officers of guards, who would reach Nice by train at noon. She was in the same despatch assured that on the death of the old dowager princess she should succeed her in the regency, but for family reasons on which I need not enlarge, she was requested not on this occasion to accompany her son.

All this I learnt by a telegram from the baron; I, as the son of the sister of the late prince, having now become most unexpectedly next heir to the throne of Monaco. I had no idea of the possibility of my ever being called upon to succeed a healthy boy of six, and gave the matter no thought but one of regret at the death of my gallant cousin Albert, who in the Prussian war had proved his courage in the French navy, while I, had I been older, should have had to have fought upon the other side, my father having been a prince of Wurtemberg.

I was thoroughly English in my ways. My father, a man of wide and liberal views, disliking "professors" as much as Mr. Disraeli does, and especially distrusting Prussian pedagogues, had sent me to Eton and to Trinity. At Eton I had lived rather with the King's scholars than with my more natural allies, and had imbibed some views at which my poor father would have groaned. When I went up to Cambridge my friendships were in King's rather than in Third Trinity, and my opinions were those now popular among spectacled undergraduates, namely, universal negation. I even joined First Trinity Boat Club, instead of Third, because the gentlemen of the latter were too exclusive for my princely tastes.

During my four years at Cambridge I had rowed in First Trinity Second. I had heard at the Union Mr. Seeley defend the Commune, and oppose a motion declaring it innocent because it did not go on to express the "love and affection" with which that body was regarded by the University. I had supported a young fellow of Trinity when he showed that the surplus funds of the Union Society should be applied to the erection of statues of Mazzini in all the small villages of the West of England – a motion which I believe was carried, but neutralized by the fact that the Union Society possessed no surplus funds. I had also had the inestimable advantage of attending the lectures of Professor Fawcett on the English poor laws. I had, by the way, almost forgotten the most amusing of all the Union episodes of my time, which was the rising of Mr. Dilke of Trinity Hall, Sir Charles Dilke's brother – but a man of more real talent than his brother, although, if possible, a still more lugubrious speaker – to move that his brother's portrait, together with that of Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, the communist brother of a Marquis and a congenial spirit, should be suspended in the committee room to watch over the deliberations of that body, because, forsooth, they had happened to be president and vice-president of the Society at a moment when the new buildings were begun out of the subscriptions of such very different politicians as the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Devonshire, and Lord Powis. Mr. Dilke and his radicals were sometimes in a majority and sometimes in a minority at the Union, and the portraits of the republican lord and baronet went up on the wall or down under the table accordingly, Mr. Willimott, the valued custodian of the rooms, carrying out the orders of both sides with absolute impartiality.

Fired with the enthusiasm of my party and of my age, I had subscribed to the Woman's Suffrage Association, to Mr. Bradlaugh's election expenses, to the Anti-Game-Law Association, and to the Education League. My reading was less one-sided than my politics, and my republicanism was tempered by an unwavering worship of "Lothair." Mr. Disraeli was my admiration as a public man – a Bismarck without his physique and his opportunities – but then in politics one always personally prefers one's opponents to one's friends. As a republican, I had a cordial aversion for Sir Charles Dilke, a clever writer, but an awfully dull speaker, who imagines that his forte is public speaking, and who, having been brought up in a set of strong prejudices, positively makes a merit to himself of never having got over them. This he calls "never changing his opinions." For Mr. Gladstone I had the ordinary undergraduate detestation. There are no liberals at Cambridge. We were all rank republicans or champions of right divine.

The 31st of January was a strange day in my history. On entering my rooms in my flannels, hot from the boats, and hurrying for hall, I saw a telegram upon the table. I tore it open.

"The Governor-General, Monaco;

to

His Serene Highness Prince Florestan,

Trinity College,
Cambridge."

"His Serene Highness!" Surely a mistake! I read on.

> "This morning at noon his Serene Highness the reigning prince was committed by the princess his mother to the care of M. Henri de Payan, at Nice. The princess being nervous about railway accidents, the departure for Monaco took place by road. The carriage conveying his Serene Highness and M. de Payan was drawn by four horses. Turbie was reached without mishap, but half-way between Turbie and Roquebrune, at a sharp turn in the road, the horses took fright, and the coachman, in avoiding the precipice, threw the carriage upon the rocks on the mountain side of the road. His Serene Highness was thrown on his head and killed on the spot. Your Serene Highness is now reigning prince of Monaco, and will be proclaimed to-night after the meeting of the Council of State by the style of Florestan II. Lieutenant Gasignol, of the guard, will proceed at once to England and meet your Serene Highness at any spot which your Highness may please to indicate. M. de Payan escaped without a scratch."

Prince of Monaco! Prince of Monaco. And I had seen Lafont in *Rabagas*! I was not a "milk-and-water Rabagas," as Mr. Cole called Mr. Lowe, when all the papers reported him to have said "milk-and-water Rabelais," and the *Spectator* mildly wondered at the strangeness of the comparison. No, but I was somewhat of a milk-and-water Prince of Monaco after Lafont. What distinction! What carriage! If the princes of the earth were only like the princes of the stage, there would be no republicans. But then, fortunately, they are not. "Fortunately!" and I one of them. What am I saying?

Poor little fellow! How sad for his young mother too. A reigning prince for nineteen hours, and that outside of his own dominions and at the age of six. A strange world! and a strange world, for me too. A half-Protestant, half-free-thinking, republican, German, Cambridge undergraduate, suddenly called to rule despotically over a Catholic and Italian people. My succession, at least, would be undisputed. No one had ever vowed that I "should never ascend the throne – without a protest." One of the Grimaldis had a claim which was no doubt a just one, my respected great uncle having been probably a usurper; but Marshal MacMahon and the Duc de Broglie would, I well knew, support me, preferring even a German prince at Monaco to an Italian. My succession, I repeat, was undisputed; but if anybody had taken the trouble to dispute it, I can answer for it that they would have been cheated out of their amusement, for I should willingly have resigned to their charge so burdensome a toy. I was that which the republican mayor of Birmingham, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, in his jocular speech proposing the Prince of Wales' health at the mayor's banquet, said that one of his friends had been trying by argument to make the Prince – with, "as yet," only "partial success" – a republican King. I would have gone only to Monaco to proclaim the republic had I not known that the strange despotism

– presided over not as a despotism should be by one clever despot, but by two stupid despots, the Dukes of Magenta and Broglie – which is called the French republic, would not permit the creation of a small model for herself in the middle of her commune of Roquebrune.

I was not sorry to leave Cambridge. My rooms in the new court overlooked Caius, where they had typhoid fever; and between the fear of infection and the noise of the freshmen's wines in Trinity Hall, I was beginning to have enough of Cambridge. My bedmaker and tutor were the only people to whom I bid goodbye. The men were all in hall and out at wines, and I left notes for my friends instead of looking them up in their rooms. I caught my tutor as he was going into hall. I told him of the news, and I could see the idea of an invitation for next winter to the castle at Monaco pass through his mind as he assured me that my rule would be a blessing to my country, and that nothing could better fit me for a sceptre than the training of an English gentleman. He added, with a return of the grim humour of a don, that he supposed that as a sovereign prince I need scarcely "take an *exeat*." My poor old bed-maker, who had read the telegram in my absence from my room, called me "your imperial majesty" three times while she packed my shirts, but in half-an-hour I was off to London; and on the evening of the 3rd of February I met M. de Payan and Lieutenant Gasignol by appointment at the Grand Hotel at Paris.

From M. de Payan I obtained my first accurate ideas as to the State of Monaco. I found that I was not more independent under the supremacy of France than is the Emperor William independent under the domination of Prince von Bismarck. I had not only the Code Napoléon, and a Council of State dressed in exact copies of their Versailles namesakes, but French custom-house officers levying French custom-house duties in my dominions. At the beginning of our conversation I had said to M. de Payan, "Between ourselves, and fearing though I do that like Charles I. of England I may be committing high treason against myself, I feel bound to tell you that my only ideas of my principality are derived from M. Sardou's *Rabagas*."

Why is it that inhabitants of small and isolated communities never can see a joke? M. de Payan, slightly drawing himself up and speaking with as much stiffness as he could assume towards his prince, gravely answered me, "Your Serene Highness is not aware, I presume, that *Rabagas* was a satire directed against France in her decline, and not against your Highness's principality."

M. Sardou wasting his hours on satirising Monaco. I will never joke again, I said to myself, unless I should suffer the modern fate of kings and be deposed.

"M. de Payan," I replied, "I am aware of what you say, and I was joking."

"We have no Gambettas at Monaco, your Highness; that is all I meant."

"Perhaps, Sir, the country would be happier if you had. Rabagas was not Gambetta, but Emile Olivier – not the man who never despaired of France, but the man who sacrificed his opinions to his advancement. I admire M. Gambetta, who is at this moment the first man in France, in my estimation, and the second political man in Europe. His figure will stand out in history, daubed as even it is with the mud that French politicians are ceaselessly flinging at each other."

"M. Gambetta is, as your Serene Highness says, a man of extraordinary powers; but his father was a tradesman at Cahors, and is retired and lives at Nice, near your Serene Highness's dominions."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.