

# THE DUKE DE L'OMELETTE



And stepped at once into a cooler clime.—COWPER

**K**EATS FELL BY a criticism. Who was it died of "*The Andromache*?" Ignoble souls!—De l'Omelette perished of an ortolan. *L'histoire en est breve* [It's a brief story]. Assist me, Apicius!

A golden cage bore the little winged wanderer, enamored, melting, indolent, to the *Chaussée D'Antin*, from its home in far Peru. From its queenly possessor La Bellissima, to the Duke De l'Omelette, six peers of the empire conveyed the happy bird. It was "All for Love."

That night the Duke was to sup alone. In the privacy of his bureau he reclined languidly on that ottoman for which he sacrificed his loyalty in outbidding his king,—the notorious ottoman of Cadêt.

He buried his face in the pillow. The clock struck! Unable to restrain his feelings his Grace swallowed an olive. The door opens to the sound of soft music, and the most delicate of birds is before the most enamored of men! But what inexpressible dismay now overshadows the countenance of the Duke?—"Horreur!—chien!—Baptiste!—l'oiseau! ah, bon Dieu! cet oiseau modeste que tu as déshabillé de ses plumes, et que tu as servi sans papier [Horror! dog! Baptist! the

bird! Ah, good God, you have plucked that modest bunting and served it without ruffles]." It is superfluous to say more:—the Duke expired in a paroxysm of disgust.

"Ha! ha! ha!" said his Grace on the third day after his decease.

"He! he! he!" replied the Devil faintly, and drawing himself up with an air of *hauteur*.

"Why, surely you're not serious," retorted Duke De l'Omelette.—"You have no actual intention of—of—putting such—such—barbarous threats into execution."

"No *what?*" said his majesty—"come, sir, strip!"

"Strip, indeed!—very pretty i' faith!—no, sir, I shall *not* strip. Who are you, pray, that I, Duke De l'Omelette, Prince de Foie Gras, just come of age, author of the 'Mazurkiad,' and Member of the Academy, should divest myself at your bidding of the sweetest pantaloons ever made by Stultz, the daintiest *robe-de-chambre* [dressing gown] ever put together by Rombêrt—not to mention the taking my hair out of paper—and all to gratify your bloodthirsty propensities!"

"Who am I?—ah, true! I am Baal-Zebub, Prince of the Fly. I took thee, just now, from an inlaid coffin, curiously scented and labelled as per invoice. Belial sent thee,—my Inspector of Cemeteries. The pantaloons, which thou sayest were made by Stultz, are an excellent pair of linen drawers, and thy *robe-de-chambre* is a shroud of no scanty dimensions."

"Sir!" replied the Duke, "I am not to be insulted with impunity!—Sir! I shall take the earliest opportunity of avenging this insult!—Sir! you shall hear from me! In the meantime *au revoir!*"—and the Duke was bowing himself out of the Satanic presence, when he was interrupted and brought back by a gentleman in waiting. Upon this his Grace rubbed his eyes, yawned, shrugged his shoulders, reflected: and having become satisfied of his identity, took a bird's eye view of his whereabouts.

The apartment was superb. De l'Omelette pronounced it *bien comme il faut* [quite as it should be]. It was not very long, nor very broad,—but its height—ah, that was appalling!—There was no ceiling—certainly none—but a dense whirling mass of fiery-colored clouds. His Grace's brain reeled as he glanced upwards. From above, hung a chain of an unknown blood-red metal—its upper end lost, like the city of Boston, *parmi les nues* [among the clouds]. From its nether extremity hung a huge cresset. The Duke knew it to be a ruby; but there poured from it a light so intense, so still, so terrible, Persia never worshipped such—Gheber never imagined such—Mussulman never dreamed of such when, drugged with opium, he

has tottered to a bed of poppies, his back to the earth, and his face to the God Apollo. The Duke murmured a slight oath, decidedly approbatory.

The corners of the room were rounded into niches.—Three of these were filled with statues of gigantic proportions. Their beauty was Grecian, their deformity Egyptian, their *tout ensemble* French. His grace could not understand them and said 'Bah!' In the fourth niche the statue was veiled; it was *not* colossal. Then there was a taper ankle, a sandalled foot. De l'Omelette laid his hand upon his heart, closed his eyes, raised them, and caught his Satanic Majesty—in a blush.

But the paintings!—Kupris! Astarte! Astoreth—a thousand and the same! And Rafaele has beheld them! Yes, Rafaele has been here; for did he not paint the——? and was he not consequently damned? The paintings!—the paintings! O luxury! O love!—who, gazing on those forbidden beauties, shall have eyes for the dainty devices of the golden frames that lie imbedded, and asleep in those swelling walls of eider-down?

But the lofty, narrow windows of stained glass, and porphyry!—how many!—how magnificent!—And the curtains! ah! that aerial silk!—the vapour-like floating of that gorgeous drapery!

The Duke's heart is fainting within him. No—oh, no. He is not, as you suppose, dizzy with magnificence, nor drunk with the ecstatic breath of those innumerable censers. *C'est vrai que de toutes ces choses il a fait un memorandum—mais* [True, he took note of all these things, *but . . .*]! The Duke De l'Omelette is horror-stricken—for, through the lurid vista which a single uncurtained window is affording, lo! gleams the most ghastly of all fires.

*Le pauvre Duc* [Poor Duke]! Could he have imagined that the glorious, the voluptuous, the never-dying symphonies of that melodious hall, as they passed filtered and transmuted through the alchemy of that enchanted glass, were the wailings and the howlings of the hopeless and the damned! And there, too!—there!—on that ottoman!—who could *he* be?—he, the *petit-maître*—no, the Diety—who sat as if carved in marble, *et qui sourit*, with his pale countenance, *si amèrement* [and who smiled so bitterly]?

*Mais il faut agir* [But one must do something]. A Frenchman never faints outright. Besides, his Grace hated a scene—De l'Omelette is himself again. There were some foils on a table—some points also. The Duke had studied under B——— *il avait tué ses six hommes* [he had killed six men in duels.] Now, then, *il peut s'échapper* [he can escape]. *Horreur!* his Majesty does not fence!

*Mais il joue* [But he plays cards]! What a thought! His Grace had an excellent memory. Have you dipped in the "*Diable*" of the Abbé

Gualtier? Therein it is said "*que le Diable n'ose pas refuser un jeu d'écarté* [The Devil dares not refuse a game]."

But the chances! True—desperate; but scarcely more desperate than the Duke himself. Besides, was he not in the secret?—had he not skimmed over Père La Chaise?—was he not a member of the Academy? "*Si je perds* [If I lose]," said he, "*je serai deux fois perdu*—I shall be doubly damned—*voilà tout* [that's all]!" (Here the Duke shrugged his shoulders.) "*Eh bien! Si je gagne, je reviendrai à mes ortolans—que les cartes soient préparées* [Oh, well! But if I do win, I can go back to my buntings—let the cards be prepared]!"

His Grace was all care, all attention—his Majesty all confidence. A spectator would have thought of Francis and Charles. De l'Omelette thought of his game. His Majesty did not think; he shuffled. His Grace *coupa* [cut the deck].

The cards are dealt. The trump is turned slowly *mais avec un air de fierté* [but proudly]. The corner appears—it is—it is—the king! No—it was the queen. His majesty cursed her masculine habiliments. De l'Omelette laid his hand upon his heart.

They play. The Duke counts. The hand is out. His Majesty counts heavily, smiles, and has taken wine. The Duke slips a card.

"*C'est à vous à faire* [It's your turn]," said his Majesty, cutting. His Grace bowed, dealt, and arose from the table *en présentant le Roi* [showing the King].

His Majesty looked chagrined.

Had the drunkard not been Alexander, he would have been Diogenes; and the Duke assured his antagonist in taking leave, "*que s'il n'était pas De l'Omelette il n'aurait point d'objection d'être le Diable* [that if he weren't already De l'Omelette, he'd have no objections to being King of Hell]."

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