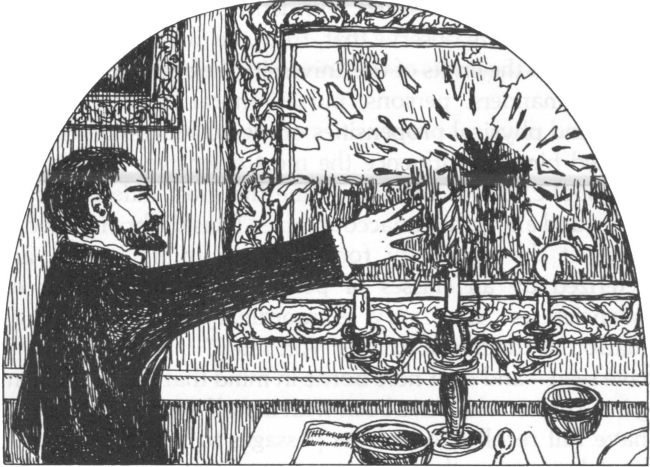


VON JUNG, THE MYSTIFIC [MYSTIFICATION]



I BELIEVE THERE are some young Americans even now in Gotham who were at the University of G——n during "the domination of the Baron Ritzner Von Jung." If so, these will not fail to remember him, and well; but they may be at a loss, nevertheless, to understand why I choose to dub the extraordinary personage in question with the odd title which forms the heading of this article. Thereby hangeth, however, a tale.

My friend, the Baron, was of a noble Hungarian family, every member of which (at least as far back into antiquity as any certain records extend) was more or less remarkable for talent of some description,—the majority for that species of *grotesquerie* in conception of which Tieck, a scion of the house, has given some vivid, although by no means the most vivid exemplifications. My acquaintance with him—with Ritzner—commenced at the magnificent Chateau Jung, into which a train of droll adventures, not to be made public, threw me *par hazard* during the summer months of the year 18—. Here it was I obtained a place in his regard, and here, with somewhat more difficulty, a partial insight into his mental conformation. In later days this insight grew more clear, as the intimacy which had at first permitted it became more close; and when, after three years' separation, we met at G——n, I knew all that it was necessary to know of the character of the Baron Ritzner Von Jung.

I remember the buzz of curiosity his advent excited within the college precincts on the night of the twenty-fifth of June. I remember still more distinctly, that while he was pronounced by all parties at first sight "the most remarkable man in the world," no person made any attempt at accounting for this opinion. That he was *unique* appeared so undeniable, it was deemed not pertinent to inquire wherein the unicity consisted. But, letting this matter pass for the present, I will merely observe that, from the first moment of his setting foot within the limits of the university, he began to exercise over the habits, manners, persons, purses, moral feelings, intellectual faculties, and physical propensities of the whole community which surrounded him, an influence the most extensive, the most absolutely despotic, yet at the same time the most indefinite, inappreciable, and altogether unaccountable. Thus the brief period of his residence at the university forms an era in its annals, and is characterized by all classes of people appertaining to it or its dependencies as "that very extraordinary epoch forming the domination of the Baron Ritzner Von Jung."

I have seen—and be it here borne in mind that the gentlemen still living in Gotham who have been with myself witness of these things will have full recollection of the passages to which I now merely allude—I have seen, then, the most outrageously preposterous of events brought about by the most intangible and apparently inadequate of means. I have seen—what, indeed, have I not seen? I have seen Villanova, the danseuse, lecturing in the chair of National Law, and I have seen D—, P—, T—, and Von C—, all enraptured with her profundity. I have seen the protector, the consul, and the whole faculty aghast at the convolutions of a weathercock. I have seen Sontag received with hisses, and a hurdy-gurdy with sighs. I have seen an ox-cart, with oxen, on the summit of the Rotunda. I have seen all the pigs of G—n in periwigs, and all her cows in canonicals. I have seen fifteen hundred vociferous cats in the steeple of St. P—. I have seen the college chapel bombarded—I have seen the college ramparts most distressingly placarded—I have seen the whole world by the ears—I have seen old Wertemuller in tears—and, more than all, I have seen such events come to be regarded as the most reasonable, commendable, and inevitable things in creation, through the silent, yet all-pervading and magical influence of the dominator Baron Ritzner Von Jung.

Upon the Baron's advent to G—n, he sought me out in my apartments. He was then of no particular age;—by which I mean that it was impossible to form a guess respecting his age by any data personally afforded. He might have been fifteen or fifty, and *was* twenty-one years and seven months. In stature he was about my

own height, say five feet eight inches. He was by no means a handsome man—perhaps rather the reverse. The contour of his face was somewhat angular and harsh. His forehead was lofty and very fair; his nose a snub; his eyes large, heavy, glassy and meaningless. About the mouth there was more to be observed. The lips were gently protruded, and rested the one upon the other after such fashion that it is impossible to conceive any, even the most complex, combination of human features, conveying so utterly, and so singly, the idea of unmitigated gravity, solemnity and repose. My readers have thus the physical Baron before them. What I shall add respecting those mental peculiarities to which I have as yet only partially adverted, will be told in my own words—for I find that, in speaking of my friend, I have been falling unwittingly into one of the many odd literary mannerisms of the dominator Baron Ritzner Von Jung.

It will be perceived, no doubt, from what I have already said, that the Baron was neither more nor less than one of those human anomalies now and then to be found, who make the science of *mystification* the study and the business of their lives. For this science a peculiar turn of mind gave him instinctively the cue, while his physical appearance afforded him unusual facilities for carrying his projects into effect. I firmly believe that no student at G——n, during that renowned epoch so quaintly termed the domination of the Baron Ritzner Von Jung, ever rightly entered into the mystery which overshadowed his character. I truly think that no person at the university, with the exception of myself, ever suspected him to be capable of a joke, verbal or practical:—the old bull-dog at the garden-gate would sooner have been accused,—the ghost of Heraclitus,—or the wig of the Emeritus Professor of Theology. This, too, when it was evident that the most egregious and unpardonable of all conceivable tricks, whimsicalities, and buffooneries were brought about, if not directly by him, at least plainly through his intermediate agency or connivance. The beauty, if I may so call it, of his art *mystifique* lay in that consummate ability (resulting from an almost intuitive knowledge of human nature, and the most wonderful self-possession,) by means of which he never failed to make it appear that the drolleries he was occupied in bringing to a point, arose partly in spite, and partly in consequence of the laudable efforts he was making for their prevention, and for the preservation of the good order and dignity of Alma Mater. The deep, the poignant, the overwhelming mortification which, upon each such failure of his praiseworthy endeavors, would suffuse every lineament of his countenance, left not the slightest room for doubt of his sincerity in the bosoms of even his most sceptical companions. The adroitness, too, was no less worthy of observation by which he contrived to

shift the sense of the grotesque from the creator to the created—from his own person to the absurdities to which he had given rise. How this difficult point was accomplished I have become fully aware by means of a long course of observation on the oddities of my friend, and by means of frequent dissertations on the subject from himself; but upon this matter I cannot dilate. In no instance, however, before that of which I speak, have I known the habitual mystific escape the natural consequence of his manœuvres—an attachment of the ludicrous to his own character and person. Continually enveloped in an atmosphere of whim, my friend appeared to live only for the severities of society; and not even his own household have for a moment associated other ideas than those of the rigid and august with the memory of the Baron Ritzner Von Jung.

To enter fully into the labyrinths of the Baron's finesse, or even to follow him in that droll career of practical mystification which gave him so wonderful an ascendancy over the mad spirits of G——n, would lead me to a far greater length than I have prescribed to myself in this article. I may dwell upon these topics hereafter, and then not *in petto* [briefly]. I am well aware that in tracing minutely and deliberately to their almost magical results the operations of an intellect like that of Ritzner, wherein an hereditary and cultivated taste for the bizarre was allied with an intuitive acumen in regard to the every-day impulses of the heart—(acumen which amounted to positive morbidity,) an untrodden field would be found to lie open before me, rich in novelty and vigour, of emotion and incident, and abounding in rare food for both speculation and analysis. But this, I have already said, could not be accomplished in little space. Moreover, the Baron is still living in Belgium, and it is not without the limits of the possible that his eye may rest upon what I am now writing. I shall be careful, therefore, not to disclose, *at least thus and here*, the mental machinery which he has a pleasure, however whimsical, in keeping concealed. An anecdote at random, however, may convey some idea of the *spirit* of his *pratique*. The *method* varied ad infinitum; and in this well-sustained variety lay chiefly the secret of that unsuspectedness with which his multifarious operations were conducted.

During the epoch of the domination it really appeared that the demon of the *dolce far niente* lay like an incubus upon the university. Nothing was done, at least, beyond eating and drinking, and making merry. The apartments of the students were converted into so many pot-houses, and there was no pot-house of them all more famous or more frequented than that of your humble servant, and the Baron Ritzner Von Jung—for it must be understood that we were chums. Our carousals here were many, and boisterous, and long, and never unfruitful of events.

Upon one occasion we had protracted our sitting until nearly day-break, and an unusual quantity of wine had been drunk. The company consisted of seven or eight individuals besides the Baron and myself. Most of these were young men of wealth, of high connection, of great family pride, and all alive with an exaggerated sense of honor. They abounded in the most ultra German opinions respecting the *duello*. To these Quixotic notions some recent Parisian publications, backed by three or four desperate and fatal rencontres at G—n, had given new vigor and impulse; and thus the conversation, during the greater part of the night, had run wild upon the all-engrossing topic of the times. The Baron, who had been unusually silent and abstracted in the earlier portion of the evening, at length seemed to be aroused from his apathy, took a leading part in the discourse, and dwelt upon the benefits, and more especially upon the beauties, of the received code of etiquette in passages of arms, with an ardor, an eloquence, an impressiveness, and if I may so speak, an affectionateness of manner, which elicited the warmest enthusiasm from his hearers in general, and absolutely staggered even myself, who well knew him to be at heart a ridiculer of those very points for which he contended, and especially to hold the entire *fanfaronnade* of duelling etiquette in the sovereign contempt which it deserves.

Looking around me during a pause in the Baron's discourse, (of which my readers may gather some faint idea when I say that it bore resemblance to the fervid, chanting, monotonous, yet musical, sermonic manner of Coleridge,) I perceived symptoms of even more than the general interest in the countenance of one of the party. This gentleman, whom I shall call Hermann, was an original in every respect—except, perhaps, in the single particular that he was one of the greatest asses in all Christendom. He contrived to bear, however, among a particular set at the university, a reputation for deep metaphysical thinking, and, I believe, for some logical talent. His personal appearance was so peculiar that I feel confident my outline of him will be recognized at once by all who have been in company with the model. He was one of the tallest men I have ever seen, being full six feet and a half. His proportions were singularly *malapropos*. His legs were brief, bowed, and very slender; while above them arose a trunk worthy of the Farnesian Hercules. His shoulders, nevertheless, were round, his neck long although thick, and a general stoop forward gave him a slouching air. His head was of colossal dimensions, and overshadowed by a dense mass of straight raven hair, two huge locks of which, stiffly plastered with pomatum, extended with a lachrymose air down the temples, and partially over the cheek bones—a fashion which of late days has wormed itself (the wonder is that it has not arrived here before) into

the good graces of Gotham. But the face itself was the chief oddity. The upper region was finely proportioned, and gave indication of the loftiest species of intellect. The forehead was massive and broad, the organs of ideality over the temples, as well as those of causality, comparisons, and eventuality, which betray themselves above the *os frontis*, being so astonishingly developed as to attract the instant notice of every person who saw him. The eyes were full, brilliant, beaming with what might be mistaken for intelligence, and well relieved by the short, straight, picturesque-looking eyebrow, which is perhaps one of the surest indications of general ability. The aquiline nose, too, would have done honour to a Hebrew medallion; certainly nothing more magnificent was ever beheld, nothing more delicate nor more exquisitely modelled. All these things were well enough, as I have said; it was the inferior portions of the visage which abounded in deformity, and which gave the lie instanter to the tittle-tattle of the superior. The upper lip (a huge lip in length) had the appearance of being swollen as by the sting of a bee, and was rendered still more atrocious by a little spot of very black mustachio immediately beneath the nose. The under lip, apparently disgusted with the gross obesity of its fellow, seemed bent upon resembling it as little as might be, and getting as far removed from it as possible. It was accordingly very curt and thin, hanging back as if utterly ashamed of being seen; while the chin, retreating still an inch or two farther, might have been taken for—any thing in the universe but a chin.

In this abrupt transition, or rather descent, in regard to character, from the upper to the lower regions of the face, an analogy was preserved between the face itself and the body at large, whose peculiar construction I have spoken of before. The result of the entire conformation was, that opinions directly conflicting were daily entertained in respect to the personal appearance of Hermann. Erect, he was absolutely hideous, and seemed to be, what in fact he really was, a fool. At table, with his hand covering the lower part of his visage, (an attitude of deep meditation which he much affected,) truly I never witnessed a more impressive *tableau* than his general appearance presented.

As a duellist he had acquired great renown, even at G——n. I forget the precise number of victims who had fallen at his hands; but they were many. He was a man of courage undoubtedly. But it was upon his minute acquaintance with the etiquette of the *duello*, and the *nicety* of his sense of honor, that he most especially prided himself. These things were a hobby which he rode to the death. To Ritzner, ever upon the lookout for the grotesque, his peculiarities,

bodily and mental, had for a long time past afforded food for mystification. Of this, however, I was not aware; although, in the present instance, I saw clearly that something of a whimsical nature was upon the *tapis* with my chum, and that Hermann was its especial object.

As the former proceeded in his discourse, or rather monologue, I perceived the excitement of Hermann momentarily increasing. At length he spoke; offering some objection to a point insisted upon by R., and giving his reasons in detail. To these the Baron replied at length (still maintaining his exaggerated tone of sentiment) and concluding, in what I thought very bad taste, with a sarcasm and a sneer. The hobby of Hermann now took the reins in his teeth. This I could discern by the studied hair-splitting farrago of his rejoinder. His last words I distinctly remember. "Your opinions, allow me to say, Baron Von Jung, although in the main correct, are, in many nice points, discreditable to yourself and to the university of which you are a member. In a few respects they are even unworthy of serious refutation. I would say more than this, sir, were it not for the fear of giving you offence (here the speaker smiled blandly,) I would say, sir, that your opinions are not the opinions to be expected from a gentleman."

As Hermann completed this equivocal sentence, all eyes were turned upon the Baron. He became very pale, then excessively red, then, dropping his pocket-handkerchief, stooped to recover it, when I caught a glimpse of his countenance, while it could be seen by no one else at the table. It was radiant with the quizzical expression which was its natural character, but which I had never seen it assume except when we were alone together, and when he unbent himself freely. In an instant afterwards he stood erect, confronting Hermann; and so total an alteration of countenance in so short a period I certainly never witnessed before. For a moment I even fancied that I had misconceived him, and that he was in sober earnest. He appeared to be stifling with passion, and his face was cadaverously white. For a short time he remained silent, apparently striving to master his emotion. Having at length seemingly succeeded, he reached a decanter which stood near him, saying, as he held it firmly clenched—"The language you have thought proper to employ, Mynheer Hermann, in addressing yourself to me, is objectionable in so many particulars, that I have neither temper nor time for specification. That my opinions, however, are not the opinions to be expected from a gentleman, is an observation so directly offensive as to allow me but one line of conduct. Some courtesy, nevertheless, is due to the presence of this company, and to yourself, at

the present moment, as my guest. You will pardon me, therefore, if, upon this consideration, I deviate slightly from the general usage among gentlemen in similar cases of personal affront. You will forgive me for the moderate tax I shall make upon your imagination, and endeavor to consider, for an instant, the reflection of your person in yonder mirror as the living Mynheer Hermann himself. This being done, there will be no difficulty whatever. I shall discharge this decanter of wine at your image in yonder mirror, and thus fulfil all the spirit, if not the exact letter, of resentment for your insult, while the necessity of physical violence to your real person will be obviated."

With these words he hurled the decanter full of wine furiously against the mirror which hung directly opposite Hermann; striking the reflection of his person with great precision, and of course shattering the glass to fragments. The whole company at once started to their feet, and, with the exception of myself and Ritzner, took their hats for their departure. As Hermann went out, the Baron whispered me that I should follow him and make an offer of my services. To this I agreed; not knowing precisely what to make of so ridiculous a piece of business.

The duellist accepted my aid with his usual stiff and *ultra-recherche* [highly affected] air, and taking my arm, led me to his apartment. I could hardly forbear laughing in his face while he proceeded to discuss, with the profoundest gravity, what he termed "the refinedly peculiar character" of the insult he had received. After a long harangue in his ordinary style, he took down from his bookshelves a pretty thick octavo, written in barbarous Latin by one Hedelin, a Frenchman, and having the quaint title, "*Duelli Lex scripta, et non, aliterque* [The Law of War, written, unwritten, and otherwise]." From this he read me one of the drollest chapters in the world concerning "*Injuriae per applicationem, per constructionem, et per se* [Torts according to circumstances, torts according to what you choose to make of them, and torts as such]," about half of which, he averred, was strictly applicable to his own "refinedly peculiar" case, although not one syllable of the whole matter could I understand for the life of me. Having finished the chapter, he closed the book, and demanded what I thought necessary to be done. I replied that I had entire confidence in his superior delicacy of feeling, and would abide by what he proposed. With this answer he seemed flattered, and sat down to write a note to the Baron. It ran thus:

SIR,—My friend, Mr. P——, will hand you this note. I find it incumbent upon me to request, at your earliest convenience, an explanation of this evening's occurrences at your chambers. In the

event of your declining this request, Mr. P. will be happy to arrange, with any friend whom you may appoint, the steps preliminary to a meeting.

With sentiments of perfect respect,
Your most humble servant,

JOHAN HERMANN.

To the Baron Ritzner Von Jung,
August 18th, 18—.

Not knowing what better to do, I called upon Ritzner with this epistle. He bowed as I presented it; and, with a grave countenance, motioned me to a seat. He then said that he was aware of the contents of the note, and that, of course, it would be unnecessary for him to peruse it. With this, to my great astonishment, he repeated the letter nearly verbatim, handing me, at the same time, an already written reply. This, which ran as follows, I carried to Hermann.

Sir,

Through our common friend, Mr. P., I have received your note of this evening. Upon due reflection I frankly admit the propriety of the explanation you suggest. This being admitted, I still find great difficulty, (owing to the *refinedly peculiar* nature of our disagreement, and of the personal affront offered on my part,) in so wording what I have to say by way of apology, as to meet all the minute exigencies, and, as it were, all the variable shadows of the case. I have great reliance, however, on that extreme delicacy of discrimination, in matters appertaining to the rules of etiquette, for which you have been so long and so preeminently distinguished. With perfect certainty, therefore, of being comprehended, I beg leave, in lieu of offering any sentiments of my own, to refer you to the opinions of the Sieur Hedelin, as set forth in the ninth paragraph of the chapter on "*Injuriae per applicationem, per constructionem, et per se,*" in his "*Duelli Lex scripta, et non, aliterque.*" The nicety of your discernment in all the matters here treated of will be sufficient, I am assured, to convince you *that the mere circumstance alone of my referring you to this admirable passage, ought to satisfy your request, as a man of honor, for explanation.*

With sentiments of profound respect,
Your most obedient servant,

Von Jung.

The Herr Johan Hermann.
August 18th, 18—.

Hermann commenced the perusal of this epistle with a scowl, which, however, was converted into a smile of the most ludicrous

self-complacency as he came to the rigmarole about *Injuriae per applicationem, per constructionem, et per se*. Having finished reading, he begged me, with the blandest of all possible airs, to be seated, while he made reference to the treatise in question. Turning to the passage specified, he read it with great care to himself, then closed the book, and desired me, in my character of confidential acquaintance, to express to the Baron Von Jung his exalted sense of his chivalrous behaviour, and, in that of second, to assure him that the explanation offered was of the fullest, and most honorable, and the most unequivocally satisfactory nature.

Somewhat amazed at all this, I made my retreat to the Baron. He seemed to receive Hermann's amicable letter as a matter of course, and after a few words of general conversation, went to an inner room and brought out the everlasting treatise "*Duelli Lex scripta, et non, aliterque*." He handed me the volume and asked me to look over some portion of it. I did so, but to little purpose, not being able to gather the least particle of definite meaning. He then took the book himself, and read me a chapter aloud. To my extreme surprise, what he read proved to be a most horribly grotesque account of a duel between two baboons. He now explained the mystery; showing that the volume, as it appeared *primâ facie*, was written upon the plan of nonsense verses of Du Bartas; that is to say, the language was ingeniously framed so as to present to the ear all the outward signs of intelligibility, and even of profound analysis, while in fact not a shadow of meaning existed, except in insulated sentences. The key to the whole was found in leaving out every second and third word alternately, when there appeared a series of ludicrous quizzes upon the *duello*.

The Baron afterwards informed me that he had purposely thrown the treatise in Hermann's way two or three weeks before the adventure, and that he was satisfied, from the general tenor of his conversation, that he had studied it with the deepest attention, and firmly believed it to be a work of unusual profundity. Upon this hint he proceeded. Hermann would have died a thousand deaths rather than acknowledge his inability to understand anything and everything in the universe that had ever been written about the *duello*.

[June, 1837]