

Theodor Fontane Describes a Conservative Election Campaign in Rural Brandenburg (1880s)

Abstract

The following excerpt is from Theodor Fontane's novel *Der Stechlin*, published in 1899. It is a fictional work, but the account provided here illuminates many aspects of rural elections in small-town Germany during the Bismarckian era. Fontane's main character, Dubslav von Stechlin, is a nobleman from Mark Brandenburg. He becomes the Conservative Party's Reichstag candidate in the constituency of Rheinsberg-Wutz, a traditional Conservative stronghold. In seeking the support of the common man, Stechlin has neither experience nor especial willingness, but he is well-known locally, and in an age when face-to-face politics had yet to give way to party machines, he stands a good chance of being elected. The competing candidates represent the Progressive Party [*Fortschrittspartei*] and the Social Democrats [*Sozialdemokraten*]. Stechlin refuses to campaign actively: his character is his platform. But both Stechlin and Fontane know that times are changing and that a more modern style of political campaigning is beginning to pay dividends. Stechlin loses the election and the Social Democrat wins.

Source

Election in Rheinsberg-Wutz

Chapter Seventeen

It was just as his aunt had written: Dubslav had allowed his name to be entered as a Conservative candidate and if there had still been any doubts on the matter for Woldemar, a few lines arriving from Lorenzen the next day sufficed to put them aside. It said in Lorenzen's letter:

"All sorts of grand and glorious things have transpired since your last visit. On the very same evening both Gundermann and Koseleger appeared and urged your father to run for office. Of course he refused at first. Said he was unfamiliar with the ways of the world and had no understanding for that sort of thing. But that didn't get him very far, Koseleger, who always has a few good stories up his sleeve—which is sure to stand him in good stead someday—immediately told him how years ago some fellow picked by Bismarck to be Minister of Finance who tried to extricate himself from the affair in the same manner with an 'I don't know anything about that sort of thing,' had run straight into the prompt Bismarckian reply, 'But that's exactly the reason I'm picking you, my dear fellow.' That was a tale which your father naturally couldn't resist.

"To make a long story short, he agreed. Traveling around to electioneer has naturally been ruled out; the same applies for speechmaking. The election is already next Saturday. As always, the die will be cast in Rheinsberg. I think he'll win. Only the Progressives might come into consideration or, at the very outside, the Social Democrats, if—which is easily possible—a few were to fall away from the Progressives. Under any circumstances, do write your Papa that you are glad about his decision. You can do so with a good conscience. If we get him through, I know for certain that no better man will be sitting in the Reichstag, and that we will all be able to congratulate ourselves on his election.

"And he too, of course. His life here is too lonely, you know, so much so that now and then even he complains about it, a thing that has never been his style. That's what I had to let you know about. 'Otherwise,' as they used to say during the war, 'all's quiet in the lines before Paris.' Krippenstapel is gadding about in great excitement. I think it's because of the pre-election meeting set for Thursday in

Stechlin itself, where I suspect he will give his usual speech on the bee state. My regards to your two kind friends, especially Czako. As always, your old friend, Lorenzen.”

After reading this, Woldemar was not quite certain how he should react. What Lorenzen had written, that no better man would be sitting in the Parliament, was quite right. Yet he nevertheless had reservations and concerns as well. The old fellow was by no means a politician. He could easily get himself deeply into nettles, perhaps even make a fool of himself in fact. And this thought was extremely painful to a son who ardently loved his father. Moreover, there was always the possibility he might be defeated in the campaign.

Woldemar’s concerns were only too well-founded. It was by no means certain that old Dubslav, as popular as he was even with the opposition, would necessarily emerge as victor in the electoral contest. The Conservatives, of course, had grown accustomed to viewing Rheinsberg-Wutz as a citadel which could not be lost to their party. This belief was an error, however, and whatever previous reverence had existed toward old Kortschädel had its roots solely in the personal element. True enough, old Dubslav was his equal in esteem and popularity, but the whole business of perpetual personal favoritism had to come to an end sometime and the claim old Kortschädel had gained by serving so long, simply had to be over and done with, if for no other reason than at last there was someone new. No doubt about it, the opposition parties were springing into action and the situation was exactly as Lorenzen had written Woldemar, a Progressive, in fact, even a Social Democrat, could be elected.

What the mood of the district really was would have been best learned by anyone listening in passing at the office door of old Baruch Hirschfeld.

“Let me tell you, Isadore, you should be electing our good old Herr von Stechlin for sure.”

“No, father, I *won’t* be electing our good old Herr von Stechlin.”

“So why not? After all, he’s a nice gentleman, and he’s got his heart in the right place.”

“That he does. But his principles is wrong.”

“Isadore, don’t give me that principles business. I seen you fooling around with that little Marie from next door, and the way you undid her apron, and she was giving you a slap in the face. You made eyes at a gentile girl. And with the election coming now it’s public opinion you’re making eyes at. For that business with the girl, I’ve forgiven you. But that public opinion business, for that I ain’t forgiven you.”

“You will, Papa, dear. These is the new times, you know. And when I vote, it’s humanity I’m voting for.”

“Don’t give me that, Isadore. I know about that business. Humanity. All it wants to do is to have, but never to give. And now they want to share everything besides.”

“So let them share, Papa.”

“God in heaven above, what do you think you’ll get? Not a tenth of it.”

And so it went in the other localities as well. In Wutz, Fix spoke for the convent and the Conservatives in general, without recommending Dubslav specifically, because he knew how the Domina stood with regard to her brother. Then too, a leftist candidate from Cremmen looked as if he wanted to gain the upper hand in the Wutz area. More perilous for the entire county, however, was an itinerant speechifier from Berlin, who tramped about from village to village instructing the poorer folk that it was nonsense to expect anything from either the aristocracy or the church. They were always content to let heaven take care of things. But an eight-hour workday, an increase in wages and a Sunday outing to Finkenkrug—now

there you had the one true gospel.

And thus things fell apart everywhere. But at least in the Stechlin area itself they hoped to keep matters under control and to swing all votes to Dubslav. For this purpose it was decided that all should get together in the village inn; Thursday at seven was set as the time.

The Stechlin inn lay on the square formed by the intersection of the chestnut-lined road from Wutz with the actual village road, and was the most imposing of its four corner houses. In front stood a few age-old linden trees. Three, four feeding troughs were pushed close to the building's walls, but off towards the left where the corner shop and the inn's pub-room were located. Towards the right lay the large assembly room in which Dubslav was today to be acclaimed—if not for the world then at least for Rheinsberg-Wutz, and if not for Rheinsberg-Wutz, at least for Stechlin and its surroundings. The aforementioned main assembly room was a long hall with five windows that had seen many a schottische, something its appearance today by no means attempted to deny. Not only were all the polished sconces still in place, but the prodigious double bass, which would have been far too much trouble to be removed every time, also peeked over the railing of the music loft, its long neck set at an angle.

Beneath this loft, across the room, stood a longish table covered with a table cloth, intended for the committee. On benches to the right and left sat about twenty party deputies, whose duty it was to carry out the decisions of the committee. These party representatives were for the most part well-to-do Stechlin farmers, intermingled with official and half official personages from the neighborhood, foresters, rangers and foremen at the various glass and tar works. Also joining them were a peat inspector, an official from the surveyor's office, a tax official and finally an unsuccessful merchant, now an agent running the post office. Of course, rural postman Brose was in attendance, along with the entire constabulary, made up of foot patrolman Uncke and constable Pyterke of the mounted police. Pyterke only half belonged to the district, something that had long been a point of contention, but he particularly enjoyed appearing at assemblies like this nonetheless. Nothing was more pleasurable for him, in fact, than to observe his comrade and official colleague Uncke on occasions of this sort, and in the process to fully realize his own tremendous but actually quite justified superiority over the latter as a handsome fellow and former cuirassier-guard. Uncke was to him the absolute epitome of the comical and if his bronzed-reddish countenance in and of itself amused him to begin with, far, far more did his dyed shoe-brush side whiskers, and above all the way he tended to roll his eyes as he followed negotiations. Pyterke was right; Uncke really was a comical figure. His expression constantly said, "It all depends on me." At the same time he was a truly good-natured man who never wrote down more than was necessary in the line of duty and also only rarely broke things up.

The hall had three doors opening to the vestibule. At the middle door stood the two gendarmes who straightened to attention as the chairman of the committee rose from his seat at the stroke of seven and declared the meeting open.

The aforementioned chairman was, of course, Chief Forester Katzler, who today, instead of merely a black and white ribbon, had pinned on the actual Iron Cross he had won at St. Marie-aux-Chênes. Next to him sat Superintendent Koseleger and Pastor Lorenzen. On the narrow side of the table to the left was Krippenstapel, on the right, Mayor Kluckhuhn, the latter also wearing a medal, the Düppel Medal, even though he had only served in the reserve at Düppel. He enjoyed joking about it and said, while revealing his enviable teeth, "Yes sir, boys. That's how it goes. At Alsen I was, but at Düppel I wasn't. And so now I've got the Düppel medal."

Mayor Kluckhuhn was all in all a personality touched with a good sense of humor. He was a favorite of old Dubslav's and whenever the old veterans of '66 and '70 began getting on their high horse, he stepped in for the fellows of '64. "Let me tell you, boys, '64, that's where it all began."

[...]

In the same way that Gundermann was always wanting to “turn off the water” on the Social Democrats, so too Kluckhuhn compared everything having to do with the Social Democrats with that black monster in the Flensburg Bay. “I tell you, what they call the social revolution these days is lying right up next to us just like *Rolf Krake* did back then. Bebel’s just waiting and just like that he’ll sweep right in.”

Mayor Kluckhuhn was highly regarded in the entire Stechlin region and as he sat there now close to Koseleger, his medal resplendent on his chest, he was also well aware of it. But compared to Krippenstapel, whom as a classroom pedant and beekeeper he did not consider fully acceptable, on this particular occasion he really did not measure up. Today was Krippenstapel’s great day, so much so that even Kluckhuhn had to lower his tone.

Katzler, who was definitely no orator, rising with a note paper which contained various sentence beginnings, started by assuring all in attendance, among whom, perhaps, there were even a few dissenters, of his gratitude for their coming. They all knew why they were there. Old Kortschädel was dead, “passed on after a long and honorable life,” and the matter at hand today was to give old Herr von Kortschädel a successor in the Reichstag. The county had always gone Conservative and it was a matter of honor to go Conservative again, as Luther had said, “Even if the world were full of a thousand devils.” It was incumbent upon the county to show this decadent world that there were still “sanctuaries” and here was such a sanctuary. “We have, I believe,” he concluded, “no one at this table who is completely at home in parliamentary matters, for which reason I have endeavored to set down in written form that which brings us here tonight. It is but a feeble attempt. Each of us does what he can and the bramble bush can offer nothing but its own berries. But even they can refresh the thirsty wanderer. And therefore I ask our political colleague—to whom by the way, we owe so much for the study and research of this area—I ask Schoolmaster Krippenstapel to be so kind as to read what I have set down. *A pro memoria*. One can perhaps call it that.”

With a bow Katzler again took his seat while Krippenstapel arose. Like a lawyer, he paged through a number of papers and then said, “I defer to the request of the Chairman, and am pleased to be called upon to present the reading of a document that aids in bringing—of this point I am quite sure, we can, I believe, disregard those limitations expressed by the Chairman—the most powerful expression of the feelings of *every one of us*.”

And now Krippenstapel put on his horn-rimmed glasses and read. It was a very brief piece and actually contained the same thing Katzler had just been saying. Krippenstapel’s way of emphasizing things, however, made sure that there was considerably more applause and that the final peroration, “and thus we unite in the declaration, ‘whoever lives in and around Stechlin, is *for* Stechlin,’” unleashed a tremendous uproar of approbation. Pyterke raised his helmet and pushed down on his sword, while Uncke looked around to see if there might perhaps be a single ill-disposed personage worthy of being noted down. Not to directly report him, but to take note of him, just in case. Brose, who—no doubt as a consequence of his profession—had been suffering because of the extended period of standing still, quickly started up with a sort of speed stride in the front hall, as if to control the nervousness in his legs, while Kluckhuhn rose up from his chair to greet Katzler, first with a military salute and then with the usual bow, whereby his Düppel medal dangled towards the Katzlerean Iron Cross. Only Koseleger and Lorenzen remained calm. Around the Superintendent’s mouth played a faintly ironical smile.

Then the Chairman declared the meeting adjourned.

[...]

Chapter Nineteen

[...]

Dubslav was in a splendid good humor. The glorious autumn weather, and in addition, the lively scene, had all raised his mood. Most uplifting of all, however, was that on the way and while passing down the main street, he had had occasion to greet various good friends. It was sounding ten from the church as he stopped before the Prince Regent's Inn, which had been set up as the polling place. Already standing before its front facade were several more or less dubious looking electoral delegates, all endeavoring to pass out their handbills to supposed party comrades.

Within the hall, the election was underway. Behind the urn presided old Herr von Zühlen, who, well into his seventies, knew how to combine the most grotesque feudalistic views with equally great charm, a talent which assured him of great popularity even with his political opponents. Next to him, on his left and right, sat Herr von Storbeck and Herr van dem Peerenboom. The latter was a Dutchman from the region of Delft, who but a few years earlier had bought a large estate in the Ruppin area and since that time had turned himself into a Prussian, and what was even more, into a "county man." They did not view him as being completely legitimate, however, for all sorts of reasons, even starting with his "van." None of this was shown, however, because he was not without the primary characteristic, which made a profound impression on most of the local county folk, of being a Dutch-Javanese coffee dealer, born so and so many years ago in Batavia. His neighbor von Storbeck's life history was more prosaic.

Among the others who also usually sat at the committee table was Katzler, whom Ermyntud, as Dubslav had quite correctly surmised, had sent from her childbed with the comment, that in the modern bourgeois state voting was every bit as valuable as taking up arms. "The child will be my angel in the meanwhile," she added, "and the feeling of fulfilled duty will keep up my strength." Gundermann too, who always had to be in the middle of things, was also sitting at the committee table. His behavior had something excited about it because, as Lorenzen had hinted, he really had secretly conspired against Dubslav. That he would be defeated was obvious and scarcely concerned him anymore. Filling him with dread, however, was the concern that his earlier duplicity might be revealed.

Dubslav dearly wished the whole affair were behind him. Thus after greeting several acquaintances outside and exchanging a few words with each, he proceeded from the vestibule into the polling room to place his ballot in the urn as quickly as possible. In the process his glance encountered that of old Zühlen. With a mixture of solemnity and whimsicality it seemed to say, "Yes sir, Stechlin, nothing much'll help either, one's just got to go along with the whole silly affair." Dubslav, it must be said, scarcely came to take note of this look because he caught sight of Katzler and advanced toward him immediately to congratulate him with a handshake on the birth of his seventh daughter. The old man passed Gundermann without taking notice. This was just by chance, of course; he knew nothing of the Siebenmühlener's duplicity. But the latter himself, having a bad conscience, became embarrassed and felt the oldster's bearing to be a rejection.

Once Dubslav was again outside, the great question naturally became, "Well, what now?" It was only now going on eleven and the whole business would not be over before six, if it wasn't drawn out even longer. He expressed these sentiments to a number of the gentlemen seated on one of the benches in front of the inn who had somewhat prematurely helped themselves to the Prince Regent's liqueur cabinet, which under normal circumstances did not put in an appearance until after dinner.

[...]

Around four everyone had returned from the excursion and again stopped in front of the Prince Regent on a plaza occupied by old trees, which since time immemorial had borne the name "The Triangle" because of its shape. The election results were by no means yet certain. By now it could be seen rather

clearly, however, that many Progressive votes would pass to the candidate of the Social Democrats, to file maker Torgelow, who, although not personally present, had the simple folk behind him. Hundreds of his party comrades stood around in groups on the Triangle, conversing laughingly about the election speeches that had been presented by speakers of the opposing parties, partly in Rheinsberg and Wutz, and partly out in the flat countryside. One of those standing under the trees, an intimate of Torgelow, was the wood turner's journeyman Söderkopp, who simply in his capacity as wood turner's journeyman enjoyed considerable standing. Everyone thought, "that fellow can turn out to be a Bebel someday. Why not? Bebel is old and then we'll have this fellow." But Söderkopp also knew how to really enthrall the people. He went after Gundermann the hardest. "Yes sir, this Gundermann, I know the likes o' him. A board-cutter and stock-market swindler. Scrounges every penny that comes his way. Got seven mills, he does, but only two turns of phrase, and progress is alternately the 'precursor' or else it's the 'father' of socialism. Maybe we all come from the likes of him. That sort's capable of anything."

Uncke, as Söderkopp was going on in this way, edged closer and closer from tree to tree, taking his notes. At a further distance stood Pyterke, smiling to himself, visibly surprised that Uncke found so much worthy of copying down.

Pyterke's astonishment regarding Uncke's "note taking" was only too justified, but it would have been a good bit less so if Uncke's auditory zeal had been directed, instead of at the Social Democrat Söderkopp, toward a group standing off to the side. Here, in fact, several of those considered stalwarts of the state were chatting about the presumable outcome of the election and that the chances for old Stechlin's victory were getting worse from minute to minute. Especially the Rheinsbergers were said to have turned the outcome to his disadvantage.

"Devil take the whole of Rheinsberg," swore an elderly Herr von Kraatz, whose red face as he spoke became all the redder. "Miserable hole this. As truly as I'm standing here, we're not going to get him in, our good, old Stechlin. And what that means, we all know. Anybody who votes against *us*, votes against the king. It's all one and the same. That's what they call 'solidarity' these days."

[...]

Chapter Twenty

By six the outcome was as good as certain. A few reports were still outstanding but those were localities whose few votes could no longer change anything. It was clear that the Social Democrats had pulled off an almost stunning victory. Old Stechlin was far behind. Progressive candidate Katzenstein from Gransee even farther. By and large both defeated parties calmly accepted events; among the Free Thinkers little disappointment could be noticed, and as for the Conservatives, none at all. Dubslav dealt with it completely from the cheerful perspective, his party comrades even more so. Each of them thought, "Winning is a fine thing, but sitting down to dinner even better."

And, as a matter of fact, it was time to eat. Everyone longed to forget the whole boring process over a trout and a good bottle of Chablis. And once the trout was dispatched, and the saddle of venison began to beckon on the horizon, why, then the champagne was in sight as well. And the Prince Regent prided itself on the best of labels.

The table ran the length of the upstairs dining room. The majority of its occupants were manored lords or estate tenants, but also court councilors, fortunate enough to have "Captain of the Reserve" appended to their calling cards. To this *gros d'armee* were added forestry and tax officials, pension officials, preachers and high school teachers. At the head of the latter stood School Rector Thormeyer from Rheinsberg.

[...]

At six thirty—sconces and chandeliers were already burning—they ascended the steps, here and there a bit worn down, to the strains of the *Tannhäuser* march. Immediately before, some vacillation as to who would preside at table had still occurred. A few had been for Dubslav, expecting something stimulating from him, especially considering the situation. But the majority in the end rejected Dubslav's chairmanship as absolutely unthinkable since the noble Lord of Alten-Friesack, despite his advanced years, had also appeared at the election. The noble Lord of Alten-Friesack, it was said, was simply—and from a certain standpoint rightfully and fittingly so—the pride of the county, a unique personage in every way. Whether he could speak or not was, in a case like this where it was a matter of principle, utterly unimportant. In any case, the entire business of “being able to give a speech” was nothing but modern nonsense. The simple fact that the old man from Alten-Friesack would be sitting there was far, far more important than a speech, and his imposing cathedral chapter cross did not merely adorn him but rather the entire table.

[...]

And now the *Tannhäuser* march, performed by one of Thormeyer's teachers, was brought to a conclusion, and when after a certain time the moment for the first toast had arrived, Baron Beetz arose and announced, “Gentlemen. Our noble Lord of Alten-Friesack is filled with the duty and desire to propose a toast to His Majesty our King and Kaiser.” And while the oldster in confirmation of this announcement raised his glass, Baron Beetz, continuing in the role of his alter ego added, “His Majesty, the King and Kaiser, long life to him!” The Alten-Friesacker affirmed his accordance with a nod, and as the young teacher hastened again to the old grand piano obtained at a Rheinsberg Castle auction, the entire length of the table struck up “Heil dir im Siegerkranz,” the first verse of which was sung standing.

Formalities had hereby been concluded and a certain cheerfulness, of which by the way there had been no dearth from the beginning, could now more sustainedly assume its rightful place. To be sure there was still an important and at the same time difficult toast in sight, the one which had to deal with Dubslav and the unfortunate outcome of the election. Who should propose that? All preoccupied themselves with a certain amount of concern with this question and were actually relieved when all at once it was said that Gundermann would speak.

[...]

Gundermann now stepped behind his chair and began, while sticking his left hand in his pants pocket with affected nonchalance, “Gentlemen. When I was studying in Berlin so and so many years ago” (“well, well”), “when I was studying in Berlin some years ago, one day there was 'n execution . . .”

“Damnation, *he* sure knows how to start off well.”

“... one day there was 'n execution, because a fat plumber's *madamm*, after she fell in love with her apprentice, went and poisoned her husband, a respectable master plumber. And the lad himself was only seventeen. Yes sir, gentlemen, one thing I've got to say, even in those days some pretty wild things happened. And I, because I knew the prison director, I got admitted to the execution. And around me were standing nothing but assistant judges and civil service clerks, real young fellows, most of 'm with a pince-nez. They had pince-nez back then already, y'know. And then came the widow, if that's what you could call her. And she looked downright stout and almost portly because, everybody talked about it at the time, she had a goiter, so that the block had to be especially prepared. With a *decolleté*, so to speak.”

“With a *decolleté* . . . Pretty good, Gundermann.”

“And when she, the criminal, I mean, saw all those young clerks, her apprentice probably crossed her mind . . .”

“Let’s have no making fun of our clerks . . .”

“ . . . her apprentice probably crossed her mind, and she walked right over next to the edge of the scaffold and nodded to us—I’m saying ‘us’ because she was looking at me too—and said, ‘Yes sir, you young gents, *dat’s wot* comes of it . . .’ And you see, gentlemen, this very remark, even if emanating from a criminal, I’ve never ever forgotten since that day. And whenever I go through something like today, then such a remark absolutely *has* to occur to you, and so I say, just like that old girl did back then, ‘Yes sir, gentlemen, *dat’s wot* comes of it.’ And what does it come of? From the Social Democrats. And what do the Social Democrats come from?”

“From progress. Old story. We know that. Give us something new!”

“Nothing new in it. All I can do is agree. From progress. And where does *that* come from? That comes from our having this system for voting for everything and that huge building with four towers. And as far as I go, if they can’t get along without that huge building, because in the end money for the state does have to be approved—and without money, gentlemen, nothing’s going to work” (Agreement: “Without money the good times stop!”)—“well then, if it absolutely has to be, which I admit it does, what are we supposed to do, even with the concessions we’ve gladly made—with an election law, where it’s Herr von Stechlin who’s supposed to be elected and where it’s his coachman Martin, who’s driven him to the election, who actually gets elected, or at least might be able to get himself elected? And our Herr von Stechlin’s coachman Martin is still far more preferable to me than this Torgelow fellow. And all of this is what they call freedom. Nonsense’s what I call it. And a lot of others do too. But I imagine that this very election, in a county where the old Prussia is still alive, this election in particular, will do its part to open the eyes of those up above. I won’t say whose eyes.”

“Finish, finish!”

“I’m coming to the finish. They say back in ’70 the French called themselves ‘the gloriously vanquished.’ A proud remark, a remark worthy of emulation. And for us too, gentlemen. And just as we, without having to excuse ourselves for doing so, accept this champagne from France, so too, I believe, can we also adopt that just-quoted proud phrase of grieving from France. We have been vanquished, but we are the gloriously vanquished. We will have our *revanche*. We will take it. And until that day, in every way, To Herr von Stechlin of Castle Stechlin, long life to him!”

All rose and touched glasses with Dubslav. A few, it must be admitted, laughed and von Molchow, as he was ordering a new wine bucket said to Katzler, who was sitting beside him, “Heaven knows, this Gundermann always was and still is a jackass. What are we supposed to do with people like that? First off he describes that woman with a goiter for us, then he wants to get rid of the Reichstag. Monstrous stupidity. If we don’t have that huge building, we won’t have anything; it’s still our salvation, practically the only place where we can, to a certain extent, open our mouth (‘mouth,’ I say) and get something through. We’ve got to come to some sort of an agreement with the Center Party. Then we’re in the clear. And now comes this Gundermann and wants to take that from us too. It’s really true, y’know, that the parties and the upper class ruin themselves every time. Which is to say, you really can’t talk about ‘upper class’ in this case. This Gundermann fellow doesn’t belong to it. His mother was a midwife in Wrietzen. That’s why he’s always so pushy.”

Soon after Gundermann’s speech, which had been sort of an epilogue, Baron Beetz whispered to the old Alten-Friesacker that it was time to bring the meal to its conclusion. The old fellow, however, did not yet really want to do so, for once they got him sitting, he was sitting. But since immediately thereafter several chairs were pushed back, he had no other recourse but to join in. Thus with the tones of the “Hohenfriedberger March” resounding—considering the overall situation, the “Prague March,” in which it says, “Schwerin has fallen” might have been more appropriate—they returned to the ground floor rooms

where most of them wished to have at the coffee. At the same time a small party of the most courageous stepped out to the street, there, under the trees of the Triangle, to continue enjoying themselves with champagne and cognac.

[...]

In the city everything had by then become quiet, but out in the countryside they passed by large or small groups of cottagers, tar burners and glass factory folk, who had made a day of it for themselves and now were wending their way home, howling and singing as they went. Women too were among them, adding a certain flavor to it all.

Thus Dubslav trotted on towards Lake Nehmitz, which was considered the half-way point. Not far from it a charcoal kiln, Dietrichsofen, was to be found, and as Martin was making his way around the southerly protruding lake point, he saw someone lying on the road, his torso hidden by grass and reeds, but his feet directly across the roadway.

Martin pulled up. "Master, there be somebody lying there. I think it's old Tuxen."

"Tuxen, the old souse from Dietrichsofen?"

"Aye, Master. I'll take a look an' see what's wrong with'm."

He gave Dubslav the reins and climbed down and shoved and shook the old fellow lying on the road. "Aye then, Tuxen, what be ya doin' here? If there weren't no moon, man, you'd be a ded'n."

"Oiye, oiye," said the old timer. But one could see that his head was not clear.

And now Dubslav climbed down as well to help Martin lay the totally helpless old timer on the back seat. In the process the drunkard regained his senses to a certain extent and said, "Noi, noi, Martin, not thar. A'druther yer put mey op on the front sate."

And in fact they pulled him up and there he sat then, not saying a word. He was ashamed of himself in front of the master.

Finally, however, the latter spoke up and said, "Well say now, Tuxen, can't you leave off wi' the brandy then? Laying down in a place like that. 'Tis nightfrost already. 'Nother hour, an you'd be a ded'n. Were they all like that?"

"Mosht o'em."

"And so you all voted for Katzenstein."

"Noi, Master, not fer Katzenstein."

And now he became silent again as he reeled back and forth uncertainly on the coachman's box.

"Well let's hear it then. You know perfectly well, I'll not take anybody's noggin off. It's all the same anyway. Well then, not fer Katzenstein. Well, fer who then?"

"Fer that Torgelow feller."

Dubslav laughed. "For Torgelow, the one the Berliners sent you. Has he ever done anything for you yet?"

"Noi, not yet."

“Well, why then?”

“Oiye, they be tellin’ us, e *wants* ta do somethin’ fer us, an e’s really fer us poor folk. An’ we’ll all get a piece o’ p’tater land. An’ they be sayin’ too, e’s smarter than th’others.”

“Might well be. But he’s a long way from bein’ as smart as you’re all dumb. Have any of you ever gone hungry?”

“Noi, not zactly.”

“Well, that can still come too, y’know.”

“Ach, Master, that prob’ly won’t be aither.”

“Well, who knows, Tuxen. But here’s Dietrichsofen. Now climb down there and be careful you don’t fall when the horses start up. And here’s something for you. But no more for today. You’ve had enough for today. An’ now see that you get t’bed and dream about that p’tater land.”

Chapter Twenty-One

The next morning, Woldemar learned from last minute newspaper reports that the Social Democratic candidate, the filemaker Torgelow, had been the victor in the Rheinsberg-Wutz electoral district. Soon thereafter arrived a letter from Lorenzen, who initially confirmed the reports and at the conclusion added that Dubslav was actually heartily pleased about the outcome. Woldemar was as well. He believed that at Dressel’s or Borchardt’s his father quite probably had the stuff in him to hold forth with a good deal of common sense on every sort of political topic and what was more, with the roguish wit worthy of an Eulenspiegel. But to speak objectively and knowledgeably in the Reichstag on such matters was something he neither could nor wished to do. Woldemar was so convinced of this that he was able to come to terms with the idea of a defeat relatively quickly, even though as the old man’s son he nevertheless also felt a certain involvement. At the same time, however, he was thankful that just at this moment he had been entrusted with a command to East Prussia which would keep him away from Berlin for a few weeks. By the time he would return, inquiries about the whole election business would no longer need be of concern, least of all in his regiment, in which, apart from a few intimate friends, everyone had actually kept a stony silence about the whole unpleasant incident.

Source of English translation: “Election in Rheinsberg-Wutz,” from Theodor Fontane, *The Stechlin* (orig. 1899), translated and introduced by William L. Zwiebel. Rochester, NY: Camden House (www.camden-house.com), 1995, pp. 135–40, 153–54, 157–63, 167–69.

Source of original German text reprinted in Theodor Fontane, *Werke, Schriften und Briefe*, edited by Walter Keitel and Helmuth Nürnberger. Twenty-one volumes in four sections. Section I, *Sämtliche Romane, Erzählungen, Gedichte, Nachgelassenes*, vol. 5. © 1980 Carl Hanser Verlag: Munich, pp. 162–69, 184–85, 188–95, 201–03.

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