Fritz von Dardel’s Portrait
of John Panzio Tockson

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and Research
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Alongside a career as a military officer and civil servant, Fritz von Dardel (1817–1901) had the opportunity around 1840 to train as an artist in Paris, under Léon Cogniet and Eugène Lami. On his return home, the urbane and multitalented Dardel soon became aide-de-camp to and a close confidant of Crown Prince Karl (later Karl XV). In the field of art in particular, Dardel was to play an important role, advising the king on purchases and expanding the collections of the Nationalmuseum. From his teacher Eugène Lami he had acquired a talent for portraying the glittering society life of his day in deftly executed watercolours. He is chiefly associated with slightly caricatured, or “charged”, portraits of contemporary celebrities, some of whom he encountered in his role as lord-in-waiting. Dardel also produced a number of interesting topographical and cultural-historical depictions of scenes and events that he had witnessed.

Fig. 1 Fritz von Dardel (1817–1901), John Panzio Tockson (Toxon) (c. 1838–1888), footman to Karl XV, married to Mathilda Charlotta Andersson. Pencil, partly watercolour, on paper, 20 x 15.5 cm. Purchase: Axel Hirsch Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMGRh 5116.
pipes, earning him the epithet “The Pipe Cleaner”. 1 Preserved records confirm this, but Tockson did a good deal more. 2 He served as the king’s personal attendant, and looked after his dogs and his horse. It is in the role of a groom that we see Tockson in the recently acquired portrait by Dardel (Fig. 1). He is shown wearing one of his characteristic costumes, with a red fez, bolero-like jacket and knee breeches. In his hands he holds the reins of a magnificent horse, sketched to the left in the drawing. Tockson used to accompany Karl XV on horseback on his “May Day promenades” on Djurgården, an occurrence also mentioned by August Strindberg in his social satire Det nya riket (The New Kingdom). 3 On one of these occasions, Tockson is said to have carelessly ended up in a ditch, after which he ceased to be part of the king’s escort on his traditional ride. He did not leave the court altogether, however, until after Charles XV’s death, when he received a small pension. Tockson married in 1870, had two children, and made a living doing a variety of casual work in Stockholm until his death. 4

John Panzio Tockson has previously been associated with Augusta Åkerlöf’s (1829–1878) likeness of him, painted in 1862, probably as a commission for Karl XV. 5 To that image, we can now add Dardel’s unusually penetrating rendering of Tockson which, unlike his more caricatured and stereotyped representations, offers a living portrait of the king’s first footman. 6 It throws into sharper relief our image of a court servant of African origin, the last in Sweden with the title of “Court Moor”.

Notes: