

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE RIVALS.

ELISE, immediately on reaching her room, hurried to the window and looked into the street, already darkened by the shades of evening. She was not mistaken—a carriage stood at the door; but to her surprise, she did not perceive the signal agreed on, she did not hear the post-horn blow the Russian air, “Lovely Minka, I must leave thee.” Nor was it the appointed hour; neither did her chambermaid, who waited in the lower story, come to seek her. She still stood at the window, and involuntarily she felt herself worried by this equipage. A sharp knocking at the door was heard. Before she had time to come to any determination, it was hastily opened, and Bertram entered with a lady, deeply veiled, on his arm.

“Bertram!” cried Elise, drawing back shyly. “What do you wish here?”

“What do I wish here?” answered Bertram, earnestly. “I come to ask a favor of my sister. I have promised this lady that she shall see and speak with you. Will my sister fulfil her brother’s promise?”

“What does the lady wish with me?” asked Elise, casting a timid look toward the mysterious veiled figure.

“She will herself tell you. She requested me, with tears, to bring her to Elise Gotzkowsky, for, she assured me, the happiness of her life depended on it.”

Elise felt an icy shudder run through her. She laid her hand on her heart, as if to protect it against the terrible danger which she felt threatened her, and with

trembling lip she repeated, “What does the lady wish with me?”

Bertram did not answer her, but letting go the arm of the unknown, he bowed low. “Countess,” said he, “this is Mademoiselle Elise Gotzkowsky. I have fulfilled my promise: allow me now to leave you, and may God impart convincing power to your words!”

He greeted the ladies respectfully, and left the room quickly. The two ladies were now alone together. A pause ensued. Both trembled, and neither ventured to break the silence.

“You desired to speak to me,” said Elise, finally, in a low, languid voice. “May I now beg of you—”

The lady threw back her veil, and allowed Elise to see a handsome countenance, moistened with tears. “It is I who have to beg,” said she, with a touching foreign accent, while seizing Elise’s hand, she pressed it warmly to her breast. “Forgive me; since I have seen you, I have forgotten what I had to say. At sight of you, all my words, and even my anger have left me. You are very beautiful. Be as noble as you are beautiful. My fate lies in your hands. You can restore me to happiness.”

“God alone can do that,” said Elise, solemnly.

“At this moment you are the divinity who has the disposal of my fate. You alone can restore me to happiness, for you have deprived me of it—yes, you, so young, so handsome, and apparently so innocent. You are the murderess of my happiness.” Her eyes sparkled, and a bright blush suffused her hitherto pale cheeks. “Yes,” cried she, with a triumphant laugh, “now I am myself again. My hesitation has vanished, and anger is again supreme. I am once more the lioness, and ready to defend the happiness of my life.”

Elise drew herself up, and she, too, felt a change in her heart. With the instinct of love, she felt that this handsome woman who stood opposite to her was her rival, her enemy with whom she had to struggle for her most precious property. Passion filled her whole being, and she vowed to herself not to yield a single step to this proud beauty. With an expression of unspeakable disdain, she fixed her eyes upon the countess. Their flashing looks crossed each other like the bright blades of two combatants in a duel.

"I do not understand you," said Elise, with angry coldness. "You must speak more plainly, if you wish to be understood."

"You do not wish to understand me," cried the countess. "You wish to avoid me, but I will not let you. I have suffered so much that I will not suffer any longer. We stand here opposite each other as two women engaged in a combat for life and death."

Elise suppressed the cry of pain which rose in her breast, and compelled herself to assume a proud and impassible composure. "I still do not understand you, nor do I desire to contend with an unknown person. But if you will not leave my room, you will allow me to do so."

She turned to go, but the countess seized her hand, and held her back. "No! you cannot go!" cried she, passionately. "You cannot go, for I know that you are going to him, to him whom I love, and I come to demand this man of you."

These half-threatening, half-commanding words, at last drove Elise from the assumed tranquillity she had maintained with so much difficulty. "I know not of whom you speak," cried she, in a loud voice.

But the countess was tired of dealing in these half-

concealed meanings, these mysterious allusions. "You know of whom I speak," cried she, vehemently. "You know that I have come to demand the restoration of my holiest possession, the heart of my beloved. Oh! give him back to me, give me back my betrothed, for he belongs to me, and cannot be another's. Let my tears persuade you. You are young, rich, handsome; you have every thing that makes life happy. I have nothing but him. Leave him to me."

Elise felt furious. Like a tigress, she could have strangled this woman, who came to destroy her happiness. A wild, angry laugh rang from her lips: "You say that you love him," exclaimed she. "Well, then, go to him and ask him for his heart. Why do you demand it of *me*? Win it from him, if you can."

"In order to be able to win it, you must first release him from the fetters with which you have bound him."

An angry flush overspread Elise's pale face. "You become insulting," she said.

The countess paid no attention to these words, but continued still more vehemently: "Make him free. Loose the bands which fetter him, and then, I am sure, he will return to me and be mine again."

Elise stared terrified at the face of the countess, excited and streaming with tears. She had heard but one little word, but this word had pierced her heart like a dagger.

"Return to you?" asked she, breathlessly. "Be yours *again*? He was then *once* yours?"

"I yielded to him what is most sacred in life, and yet you ask if he was mine!" said the countess, smiling sadly.

Elise uttered a loud, piercing shriek, and covered her face with her hands. Her emotion was so expressive and

painful that it touched the heart even of her rival. Almost lovingly she passed her arm around Elise's waist, and drew her down gently to her on the sofa. "Come," said she, "let us sit by each other like two sisters. Come, and listen to me. I will disclose a picture which will make your soul shudder!"

Elise yielded to her mechanically. She let herself involuntarily glide down on the sofa, and suffered the countess to take her hand. "Feodor once belonged to her," she murmured. "His heart was once given to another."

"Will you listen to me?" asked the countess; and, seeing Elise still lost in silent reverie, she continued: "I will relate to you the history of Feodor von Brenda, and his unhappy, forsaken bride." Elise shuddered, and cast a wandering, despairing look around.

"Will you listen to me?" repeated the countess.

"Speak—I am listening," whispered Elise, languidly. And then, the Countess Lodoiska von Sandomir, often interrupted by Elise's plaintive sighs, her outbursts of heartfelt sympathy, related to the young girl the sad and painful story of her love and her betrayal.

She was a young girl, scarcely sixteen, the daughter of a prince, impoverished by his own fault and prodigality, when she became the victim of her father's avarice. Without compassion for her tears, her timid youth, he had sold her for a million. With the cruel selfishness of a spendthrift miser, he had sold his young, fresh, beautiful daughter for dead, shining metal, to a man of sixty years, fit to be her grandfather, and who persecuted the innocent girl with the ardent passion of a stripling. She had been dragged to the altar, and the priest had been deaf to the "No!" she had uttered, when falling unconscious at his feet. Thus she had become the wife of the

rich Count Sandomir—a miserable woman who stood, amidst the splendor of life, without hope, without joy, as in a desert.

But one day this desert had changed, and spring bloomed in her soul, for love had come to warm her chilled heart with the sunbeam of happiness. She did not reproach herself, nor did she feel any scruples of conscience, that it was not her husband whom she loved. What respect could she have for marriage, when for her it had been only a matter of sale and purchase? She had been traded off like a slave, and with happy exultation she said to herself, "Love has come to make me free, and, as a free and happy woman, I will tear this contract by which I have been sold." And she had torn it. She had had no compassion on the gray hairs and devoted heart of her noble husband. She had been sacrificed, and now pitilessly did she sacrifice her husband to her lover. She saw but one duty before her—to reward the love of the man she adored with boundless devotion. No concealment, no disguise would she allow. Any attempt at equivocation she regarded as an act of treason to the great and holy feeling which possessed her whole soul.

Usually all the world is acquainted with the treachery and infidelity of a woman, while it is yet a secret to her husband. But the countess took care that her husband should be the first to learn of his injured honor, her broken faith. She had hoped that he would turn from her in anger, and break the marriage-bond which united her to him. But her husband did not liberate her. He challenged the betrayer of his honor, whose treachery was the blacker, because the count himself had introduced him into his house, as the son of the friend of his youth. They fought. It was a deadly combat, and

the old man of sixty, already bowed down by rage and grief, could not stand against the strength of his young and practised adversary. He was overcome. The dying husband had been brought to Countess Lodoiska, his head supported by his murderer, her lover. Even in this terrible moment she felt no anger against him, and as the eyes of her husband grew dull in death, she could only remember that she was now free to become his wife. She had thrown herself at the feet of the empress to implore her consent to this marriage, on which depended the hope and happiness, the honor and atonement of her life. The empress had not refused her consent, had herself appointed the wedding day which should unite her favorite with the young countess.

But a short time before the arrival of this day, so ardently longed for, looked forward to with so many prayers, such secret anxiety and gnawing self-reproaches, the war broke out, and Lodoiska did not dare to keep back her lover, as with glowing zeal he hastened to his colors. He had sworn to her never to forget her; to return faithful to her, and she had believed him.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE PUNISHMENT.

ELISE had followed the countess in her narration with intense attention and warm sympathy. Her face had become pale as marble, her countenance sad, and her eyes filled with tears. A fearful anticipation dawned in her heart, but she turned away from it. She would not listen to this secret voice which whispered to her

that this sad tale of the countess had reference to her own fate.

"Your lover did not deceive your trust?" asked she. "With such a bloody seal upon your love he dare not break his faith."

"He did break it," answered the countess, painfully. "I was nothing more to him than a guilty woman, and he went forth to seek an angel. He forgot his vows, his obligations, and cast me away, for I was a burden to him."

Both were silent in the bitterness of their sorrow. The countess fastened her large, bright eyes upon the young girl, who stared before her, pale, motionless, absorbed in her own grief.

This anxious silence was finally broken by the countess. "I have not yet told you the name of my lover. Shall I name him to you?"

Elise awoke as if from a heavy dream. "No," cried she, eagerly, "no, do not name him. What have I to do with him? I do not know him. What do I care to hear the name of a man who has committed so great a crime?"

"You must hear it," said the countess, solemnly. "You must learn the name of the man who chained me to him by a bloody, guilt-stained past, and then deserted me. It is Colonel Count Feodor von Brenda!"

Elise uttered a cry, and sank, half fainting, back on the cushions of the sofa. But this dejection did not last long. Her heart, which for a moment seemed to stop, resumed again its tumultuous beating; her blood coursed wildly through her veins, and her soul, unused to the despair of sorrow, resolved to make one last effort to free itself from the fetters with which her evil fate wished to encompass her. She drew herself up with

glowing cheeks and flashing eyes. "This is false," she cried; "a miserable invention, concocted to separate me from Feodor. Oh! I see through it all. I understand now my father's solemn asseverations, and why Bertram brought you to me. But you are all mistaken in me. Go, countess, and tell your friends, 'Elise offers up every thing and gives every thing to him whom she loves, in whom she believes, even if the whole world testifies against him.'" And with a triumphant smile, throwing back her head, she stood up and was about to leave the room.

The countess shrugged her shoulders as if in pity. "You do not believe me, then?" said she; "but you will believe this witness?" and she drew a letter from her bosom and handed it to Elise.

"It is his handwriting," cried the young girl, terrified, as she took the letter.

"Ah! you know his handwriting, then? He has written to you, too?" sighed the countess. "Well, then, read it. It is a letter he wrote me from Berlin at the commencement of his captivity. Read it!"

"Yes, I will read it," murmured Elise. "These written words pierce my eyes like daggers, but I will not mind the pain. I will read it."

She read the letter, which annihilated her whole happiness, slowly and with terrible composure. Drop by drop did she let the poison of these words of love, directed to another, fall into her soul. When she had finished reading it, she repeated to herself the last cruel words, the warm protestations, with which Feodor assured his bride of his unalterable love and fidelity, with which he swore to her that he looked upon his love to her not only as a happiness, but as a sacred obligation; that he owed her not only his heart but his honor.

Then long and carefully she considered the signature of his name, and folding up the paper, she handed it back, with a slight inclination to the countess.

"Oh, my God! I have loved him beyond bounds," muttered she, low; and then, unable to restrain her tears, she put her hands to her face and wept aloud.

"Poor, unhappy girl!" exclaimed the countess, laying her arm tenderly around her neck.

Elise drew back violently and regarded her almost in anger. "Do not commiserate me. I will not be pitied by you! I—"

She suddenly stopped, and an electric shock passed through her whole frame. She heard the concerted signal; and the tones of the post-horn, which slowly and heavily sounded the notes of the sad Russian melody, grated on her ear like a terrible message of misfortune.

The two women stood for a moment silent and motionless. They both listened to the dirge of their love and their happiness, and this simple, hearty song sounded to them horrible and awful in the boundless desolation of their hearts. At last the song ceased, and a voice, too well known and loved, cried, "Elise! Elise!"

The maiden started up, shuddering and terrified. "His voice frightens me."

But still she seemed not to be able to withstand the call; for she approached the window, and looked down hesitatingly.

The countess observed her jealously, and a fearful thought suddenly entered her mind. How, if this young girl loved him as much as she did? If she were ready to forgive him every thing, to blot out the whole past with the hand of love and commence a new existence with him? If she felt no compassion for Feodor's forsaken bride, and were willing to trample triumphant-

ly on her broken heart at the call of her lover, and follow him to the altar? Her whole soul writhed in pain. "Follow his call," cried she, with a derisive smile. "Leave your father, whom you have betrayed, for the sake of a traitor! You have vowed to love him. Go and keep your vow."

Outside Feodor's voice called Elise's name louder and more pressingly. A moment she listened, then rushed to the window, threw it open, and called out, "I come, I come!"

Lodoiska flew to her; drew back the young girl violently from the window, and throwing both arms firmly around her, said, almost breathlessly, "Traitor! You shall not cross this threshold! I will call your father. I will call the whole household together! I will—"

"You will call no one," interrupted Elise, and her proud, cold composure awed even the countess. "You will call no one, for I stay, and you—you go in my stead."

"What say you?" asked Lodoiska.

Elise raised her arm and pointed solemnly to the window. "I say," cried she, "that your bridegroom is waiting down there for you. Go, then."

With an exclamation of joy the countess pressed her in her arms. "You renounce him, then?"

"I have no part in him," said Elise coldly. "He belongs to you; he is bound to you by your disgrace and his crime. Go to him," cried she more violently, as she saw that the countess looked at her doubtfully. "Hasten, for he is waiting for you."

"But he will recognize me; he will drive me from him."

Elise pointed to her clothes, which were placed ready

for her departure. "There lie my hat and cloak," said she haughtily. "Take them; drop the veil. He knows this dress, and he will think it is me."

At this moment the door was torn open, and Bertram burst in. "Make haste," he cried, "or all is lost. Count Feodor is becoming impatient, and may himself venture to come for Elise. Gotzkowsky, too, has been awakened by the unaccustomed sound of the post-horn."

"Help the countess to prepare for the journey," cried Elise, standing still, motionless, and as if paralyzed.

Bertram looked at her, astonished and inquiringly; but in a few rapid words the countess explained to him Elise's intention and determination, to allow her to take the journey in her stead, and with her clothes.

Bertram cast on Elise a look which mirrored forth the admiration he felt for this young girl, who had so heroically gained the victory over herself. His reliance on her maiden pride, her sense of right and honor, had not been deceived.

The countess had now finished her toilet, and donned Elise's hat and cloak.

Bertram called on her to hasten, and she approached Elise to bid her farewell, and express her gratitude for the sacrifice she had made for her. But Elise waved her back proudly and coldly, and seemed to shudder at her touch.

"Go to your husband, countess," cried she, and her voice was hoarse and cold.

Lodoiska's eyes filled with tears. Once more she attempted to take Elise's hand, but the latter firmly crossed her arms and looked at her almost threateningly. "Go!" said she, in a loud, commanding voice.

Bertram took the arm of the countess and drew her

to the door. "Hasten!" said he; "there is no time to lose."

The door closed behind them. Elise was alone. She stood and listened to their departing steps; she heard the house door open; she heard the post-horn once more sound out merrily, and then cease. "I am alone!" she screamed, with a heart-rending cry. "They are gone; I am alone!" And stretching her arms despairingly to heaven, and almost beside herself, she cried out, "O God! will no one have compassion on me? will no one pity me?"

"Elise," said her father, opening the room door.

She sprang toward him with a loud exclamation, she rushed into his arms, embraced him, and, nestling in his bosom, she exclaimed faintly, "Have pity on me, my father; do not drive me from you! You are my only refuge in this world."

Gotzkowsky pressed her firmly to his breast and looked gratefully to heaven. "Oh! I well knew my daughter's heart would return to her father."

He kissed ardently her beautiful, glossy hair, and her head that was resting on his breast. "Do not weep, my child, do not weep," whispered he, tenderly.

"Let me weep," she answered, languidly; "you do not know how much sorrow and grief pass off with these tears."

The sound of the post-horn was now heard from the street below and then the rapid rolling of a carriage.

Elise clung still more closely to her father. "Save me," she cried. "Press me firmly to your heart. I am quite forsaken in this world."

The door was thrown open and Bertram rushed in, out of breath, exclaiming: "She is gone! he did not recognize her, and took her for you. The countess—"

He stopped suddenly and looked at Gotzkowsky, of whose presence he had just become aware.

Gotzkowsky inquired in astonishment, "Who is gone? What does all this mean?"

Elise raised herself from his arms and gazed at him with flashing eyes. "It means," she answered, "that the happiness of my life is broken, that all is deception and falsehood where I looked for love, and faith, and happiness!" With a touching cry of suffering, she fell fainting in her father's arms.

"Do not rouse her, father," said Bertram, bending over her; "grant her this short respite, for she has a great sorrow to overcome. When she comes to herself again, she will love none but you, her father."

Gotzkowsky pressed his lips on her brow, and blessed her in his thoughts. "She will find in me a father," said he, with deep emotion, "who, if necessary, can weep with her. My eyes are unused to tears, but a father may be allowed to weep with his daughter when she is suffering."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BANQUET OF GRATITUDE.

BERLIN had recovered from the terrors it had undergone. It was eight days since the enemy had left, and every thing was quiet and calm. But on this day the quiet was to be interrupted by a public merry-making. Berlin, which had suffered so much, was to rejoice again.

The festival which was to be celebrated, was intended for none else than John Gotzkowsky, the Merchant of

Berlin, the man whom all looked upon as their guardian angel and savior. He had cheerfully borne hardship and toil, danger and injustice, for the good of his fellow-men; he had always been found helping and ready to serve, unselfish and considerate. The whole town was under obligation to him; he had served all classes of society, and they all wished to evince their gratitude to him.

Gotzkowsky had been requested to remain at home on the morning of the festal day, but to hold himself in readiness to receive several deputations. They were to be succeeded by a grand dinner, given by the citizens of Berlin in his honor. They were to eat and drink, be merry, and enjoy themselves to his glorification; they were to drink his health in foaming glasses of champagne, and Gotzkowsky was to look upon it all as a grand festival with which the good citizens of Berlin were glorifying him, while they themselves were enjoying the luscious viands and fragrant wines.

In vain did Gotzkowsky refuse to accept the proffered festival. At first he tried to excuse himself on the plea of his daughter's illness, alleging that he could not leave her bedside. But information had been obtained from her physician, who reported her out of danger, and that Gotzkowsky might leave her for several hours without risk. Gotzkowsky being able to find no other excuse, was obliged to accept. Elise was indeed sick. The grief and despair of her betrayed and deceived heart had prostrated her; and her wild, fever-dreams, her desponding complaints, the reproachful conversations she carried on with her lover—unseen but nevertheless present in her delirium—had betrayed her secret to her father. Full of emotion, he thanked God for her happy escape, and felt no resentment against

this poor, misguided child, who had taken refuge from the loneliness of her heart, in his love, as in a haven of shelter. He only reproached his own want of discernment, as he said to himself: "Elise had cause to be angry with me and to doubt my affection. I bore solitude and the constant separation from my daughter because I thought I was working for her, but I forgot that at the same time she was solitary and alone, that she missed a father's tenderness as I did my child's love. I wished to make her rich, and I have only made her poor and wretched."

He kissed her burning, feverish forehead, he bedewed it with tears, and forgave her, from the bottom of his heart, her misplaced love, her errors and transgressions. She was with him; she had returned to his heart. In her despair she had fled to the bosom of her father, and sought support and assistance from him.

The dark clouds had all rolled over, and the heavens were again bright and clear. Berlin was freed from the enemy. Elise was convalescent, and the town of Berlin was preparing for her noblest citizen a banquet of gratitude.

The appointed hour had arrived for Gotzkowsky to receive the deputations, and he betook himself to the hall next the garden. A thundering hurrah received him. It proceeded from his workmen, who had come in procession through the garden, and were waving their hats and caps. They were followed by a multitude of women in black. This day they had laid aside the tears and griefs for their husbands and sons fallen in battle, in order to thank Gotzkowsky with a smile for the magnanimous kindness with which he had taken their part and secured their future.

Following these women came the poor orphans, with



mourning-cape on their arms. They rushed forward joyously toward Gotzkowsky, stretching out their little hands to him, and, at a word from the head operative, Balthazar, they stretched open their small mouths, and gave out such a shrill and crashing hurrah that the windows rattled, and many a stout workman stopped his ears and felt a ringing in his head.

"One more hurrah!" cried the enthusiastic Balthazar; and "hurrah!" screamed and squeaked the children.

"And now for a third—"

But Gotzkowsky seized hold of Balthazar's arm which he was about to move again, and with a look of comical terror, exclaimed: "But, man, don't you know that I have further use for my ears to-day? You deafen me with your screaming. That's enough."

Balthazar struggled himself free from the strong grasp of his master, and placed himself in a theatrical position opposite to him. He was able this day to indulge in his passion for eloquence, for the workmen had chosen him for their orator, and he had a right to speak. As he spoke, it could be seen by his sparkling eyes, and by his fiery enthusiasm, that his words had not been learned by rote, but proceeded from his heart.

"Sir, allow me to speak and express my joy, for it is a joy to have a noble master. Look at these children, dear master. Three days ago they had fathers who could work and care for them. But the cannon-balls deprived them of their fathers, and God sent them a father, and you are he. You adopted these children when they were forsaken by all else. You said: 'God forbid that the children of these brave men, who had fallen in defence of the liberty of Berlin, should be orphans! I will be their father.' Yes, sir, that is what

you said, and all the weeping mothers and all your workmen heard it and wrote it down in their hearts. Ask these widows for whom they pray to God. Ask the poor who were without bread and whom you fed. Ask the whole town who it is whom they bless and praise. They will all name the name of Gotzkowsky; with one voice they will all cry out: "Long live our friend and father! Long live Gotzkowsky!"

Unanimously did all join in this cry, shouting out, "Long live Gotzkowsky!"

Deeply moved, Gotzkowsky stretched out his hands to the workmen, and accepted, with cordial gratification, the flowers offered by the children. "Thank you, thank you," cried he, in a voice of deep emotion. "You have richly recompensed me, for I perceive that you love me, and nothing can be more beautiful than love."

"Diamonds!" cried out Ephraim, as he made his way through the crowd with Itzig and a deputation of the Jews, toward the hero of the day—"diamonds are more valuable than love, Gotzkowsky. Look at this brilliant, which sparkles and shines more brightly than ever did a look of love from any human eye."

He presented to Gotzkowsky a costly *solitaire* diamond, and continued: "Be so kind and grant us the favor of accepting this present. It is a diamond of the first water."

"It is a petrified tear of joy," interrupted Itzig, "shed by us on our delivery by you from taxation. You are our greatest benefactor, our best friend. You have proved yourself the savior of the Jews, for you freed us from the tax, and saved us what is more precious than honor, and rank, and happiness—our money; for, without money, the Jew is nobody. Accept, therefore, the ring, and wear it for our sakes."

"Accept it, we pray you," cried Ephraim, and the Jews took up the cry.

Gotzkowsky took the ring, and placed it on his finger, thanking the givers for the costly present, and assuring them he would wear it with pleasure in honor of them.

Itzig's brow was clouded with a slight frown, and stepping back to Ephraim and his friends, he muttered, "He accepts it. I was in hopes he would refuse it, for it cost much money, and we could have made very good use of it."

The solemn advance of the honorable gentlemen of the Berlin Town Council interrupted Itzig's private soliloquy, and drew his attention toward the chief burgomaster, Herr von Kircheisen, who, in all the splendor and dignity of his golden chain and of his office, accompanied by the senators and town officers, strode pompously through the crowd, and presented his hand to Gotzkowsky, who was respectfully advancing to meet him.

"The Council of Berlin has come to thank you. For it is an unparalleled example for a man to undertake and go through what you have done for us, without any interest, without any ulterior object."

"You make me out better than I am," replied Gotzkowsky, smiling at Herr von Kircheisen's pompous words. "I had an ulterior object. I wished to gain the love of my fellow-citizens. If I have succeeded, I am more than rewarded, and I pray you say no more on the subject."

The chief burgomaster shook his head majestically. "You have exercised toward us the virtue of philanthropy. Allow us to exercise toward you in return the virtue of gratitude." He took from the hands of the assistant burgomaster a dark-red *étui*, from which he

drew a wreath of oak-leaves, worked in silver, which he presented to Gotzkowsky. "John Gotzkowsky," said he, solemnly, "the Council and citizens of Berlin request you, through me, to accept this memorial of their love and gratitude. It is the civic crown of your magnanimity. Receive it from our hands, and accept also our vow that we will never forget what you have done for the town of Berlin."

Tears of delight, of heart-felt joy stood in Gotzkowsky's eyes as he took the oaken crown from his hands, and glowing words of gratitude poured from his lips.

Not far off, in a niche of a window of the hall, stood Messrs. Krause and Kretschmer, with sullen looks, witnessing the homage paid to Gotzkowsky, their souls filled with envy and rage. They, too, had come to thank him, but with unwilling hearts, because they could not be well absent from the festivities which the whole town offered him. But they were vexed to see this man, whom they hated from the bottom of their hearts, because of their obligations to him, so universally honored and beloved. It annoyed them to see the pleasant and affable smile with which the otherwise proud burgomaster conversed with him; to see with what cordial friendship the senators and councilmen surrounded him.

"I came hither," said Mr. Krause, softly, "to thank Gotzkowsky for saving us, but I must confess it worries me to see him so glorified."

Mr. Kretschmer shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Let them praise him," said he; "the *Vossian Gazette* will not notice it, and I will not write the smallest article on this occasion. As for the service he rendered us—well, certainly, it would have been unpleasant to have been flogged, but then we would have

been martyrs to our liberal opinions; the whole world would have admired and pitied us, and the king would not have refused us a pension."

"Certainly," whispered Mr. Krause, "he would have granted us a pension, and the whipping would have made us famous. It has never been forgotten of the English poet, Payne, that King Charles the First had his ears cut off, because he wrote against him. He is not celebrated for his writings, but for his chopped ears. We, too, might have become famous if this Gotzkowsky had not, in the most uncalled-for manner, interfered, and—but look!" cried he, interrupting himself, "the interview with the Council is finished, and it is now our turn to thank him."

The two editors hastened toward him in order, in well-arranged speech, and with assurances of eternal gratitude, to offer their thanks.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A ROYAL LETTER.

MR. KRAUSE had not yet finished the declamation of the poem which his inspiration had produced in honor of Gotzkowsky, when a loud noise was heard at the door of the hall, and Gotzkowsky's body-servant rushed in. A messenger of the Council was without, he announced; a letter had just arrived from the king, and, as he was to deliver it to the burgomaster in person, the messenger had brought him here. He handed Herr von Kircheisen a letter, and the latter broke the seal with majestic composure.

A pause of anxious expectation ensued. Each one inquired of himself with trembling heart what could be the meaning of this royal letter.

The countenance of the chief magistrate grew more and more cheerful, and suddenly he called aloud: "This is indeed a message of gladness for our poor town. The king, our gracious lord, releases us from our obligation to pay the promised war-tax of a million and a half. He wishes to retaliate for the Wurzburg and Bamberg bonds captured from the Aulic Council. For which reason his majesty's order is that we do not pay."

A single cry of joy sounded from the lips of all present. Gotzkowsky alone was silent, with downcast eyes, and his earnest, pensive expression contrasted strongly with the bright, joyous countenances which were illuminated by the order of the king to keep their money.

Among the happiest and most radiant, however, were the rich mint farmers Ephraim and Itzig, and the chief burgomaster.

"The royal decree relieves our town of a horrible burden," said Herr von Kircheisen, with a happy smile.

"The whole mercantile community must be grateful to the king," cried Ephraim. "Berlin saves a million and a half, and the Russian is sold."

Suddenly Gotzkowsky drew himself up erect, and his eagle eye ran over the whole assembly with a bold, beaming glance. "The Russian is not sold," cried he, "for Berlin will pay him the balance of a million and a half. Berlin has pledged her word, and she will redeem it."

The countenances of those around grew dark again, and here and there were heard words of anger and wild resentment.

"How!" cried Itzig, "do you require of the mer-