

CHAPTER X.

THE MAGISTRACY OF BERLIN.

GOTZKOWSKY had conquered his proud heart; he had left his house to apply to those whom he had benefited and saved in the days of their need and distress, and who had then avowed him everlasting gratitude. He resolved now, reluctantly and with deep humiliation, rather to remind them of those days than to ask of them any favors or assistance beyond the payment of their debts to him.

First he went to the ober-burgomaster, President Kircheisen; to the man whom he had saved from death, who had clung to him, and, when he had found his speech again, had vowed with tears that he would be forever grateful to him, and would bless the arrival of the hour in which he could prove it to him by deeds.

This hour had now arrived, but Herr von Kircheisen did not bless it; on the contrary, he cursed it. He was standing at the window of his ground floor when Gotzkowsky passed by. Their eyes met. Gotzkowsky's were clear and penetrating; Kircheisen's were cast down, as he stepped back from the window. He only had time to tell the servants that he was not at home for any one, whoever it might be, when the bell rang, and Gotzkowsky inquired for Herr von Kircheisen.

"Not at home, sir."

"Not at home! but I saw him just this moment standing at the window."

"It must have been a mistake, sir. The president has just gone to the Council-chamber."

"Very well. I will go to the town-hall," said Gotzkowsky, as he left the house.

Passing by the window he looked in again. This time, however, Kircheisen was not standing before the sashes, but at the side, ensconced behind the curtain, he was spying Gotzkowsky through the window. As he saw him passing by, pale of countenance, but erect and unbent, he felt involuntarily a feeling of remorse, and his conscience warned him of his unpaid debt toward the only man who came to his rescue. But he would not listen to his conscience, and with a dark frown he threw back his head with contempt.

"He is a bankrupt—I have nothing to do with him!" So saying, he retired to his study, and in obedience to a natural instinct, he opened his strong box, and refreshed himself with a look at the thousands which he had earned from Gotzkowsky as "detective and informer." And now his conscience no longer reproached him; the sight of the shining money lulled it into a gentle slumber.

In the meanwhile Gotzkowsky continued his toilsome and humiliating journey. He met men who formerly bent humbly to the earth before him, yet who scarcely greeted him now. Others, again, as they passed him, whispered, with a malicious smile, "Bankrupt!" As he came to the corner of a street, he met the valiant editor of the *Vossian Gazette*, who was coming round from the other side. As they met, he jostled Gotzkowsky rather roughly, yet Mr. Kretschmer did not think it worth while to excuse himself, but pulling his hat over his face he walked on with a dark and scornful look. As Gotzkowsky passed the houses, he could hear the windows rattle, and he knew that it was his former good friends, who were drawing back when they saw him coming, and

who, after he had passed, opened the windows again to look after him, to laugh at and mock him. It was an intellectual running of the gantlet, and Gotzkowsky's heart bled from the blows, and his feet were tired to death. What had he then done to burden himself with the cruelty and contumely of the world? Had he not been benevolent and kind, full of pity and humanity, obliging to every one? Had he not always shown himself ready to serve every one, and never requested nor desired services in return? Therein lay his fault and his crime.

He had been independent. He had never sought the favor of any man, but, trusting solely to himself, had always relied on his own strength. And now mankind wished to make him feel that he had mortified them by his self-sufficiency—for small natures never forgive one who dares to be independent of others, and finds his source of honor in himself. And this crime Gotzkowsky had been guilty of. What he was, he had made himself. He had owed nothing to protection, nothing to hypocrisy or flattery, eye-service, or cringing. Only by the strength and power of his own genius had he elevated himself above the world which he ruled.

And now that he was down, it was but natural that the world should fall upon him, tear him to pieces with its venomous fangs, to enjoy his torture, and joyfully to witness the lowering of pride and independence. Gotzkowsky arrived at the town-hall and slowly ascended the steps. How often had he gone this same road in answer to the pressing cry for help which the magistrate would utter in his distress! How often had he mounted those steps to give his advice, to lend his energy, his money, and his credit to these gentlemen of the Council!

This day the doors were not thrown open to him;

the beadle did not bow down to the earth before him, but proudly and with erect head stepped up to him and bade him wait in the antechamber until he had announced him to the assembled Council. He had to wait long, but finally the doors opened and he was admitted. There sat the aldermen and councillors, and the burgomaster, just as they had when, in their need and distress, they had appealed to Gotzkowsky for advice and assistance—just as they had when, in solemn session, they determined to present him with a silver laurel-wreath as an honorable testimonial.

Only the chief burgomaster was absent. Herr von Kircheisen was at home, enjoying the sight of the money he had won from Gotzkowsky. This day they did not receive him as a counsellor or friend, but more like a delinquent. No one rose to greet him—no one offered him a seat! They knew that he came to ask for something. Why, then, should they be polite to him, as he was only a petitioner like all other poor people? In the mean time Gotzkowsky did not seem to be aware of the alteration. Smiling, and with a firm, proud step he walked to a chair and sat down.

After a pause the burgomaster asked him churlishly what his business was. He drew out a parcel of papers, and laying them on the table, said, "I have brought my accounts."

A panic seized the worshipful gentlemen of the Council, and they sat petrified in their seats.

"Your worships have forgotten my claims," said Gotzkowsky quickly. "However, that I can easily understand, as the accounts are somewhat old. It is now four years since I have had the honor of having the Council of Berlin as my debtor; since I thrice performed the perilous journey to Königsberg and Warsaw in order to

negotiate the war contribution in the name of the town. At that time, too, I was obliged, in the service of the Council, to take with me many valuable presents. I may enumerate among them the diamond-set staff for General von Fermore, and the snuff-box, with the portrait of the empress, surrounded by brilliants, which I delivered to the General Field-Marshal Count Butterlin, in the name of the magistracy and town of Berlin. But, gentlemen, you will find the accounts of all these things here."

The gentlemen of the Council did not answer him; they seized upon the papers hastily, and turned them over, and looked into them with stern and sullen eyes. Not a word was said, and nothing was heard but the rustling of the papers, and the low muttering of one of the senators adding the numbers, and verifying the calculation. Gotzkowsky rose, and walked to the window. Raising his looks to heaven, his countenance expressed all the pain and bitterness to which his soul almost succumbed. Ah! he could have torn the papers out of the hand of this miserable, calculating, reckoning senator, and with pride and contempt have thrown them in his face. But he thought of his daughter, and the honor of his name. He had to wait it out, and bend his head in submission.

At last the burgomaster laid the papers aside, and turned scowlingly toward Gotzkowsky. The latter stepped up to the table with a smile, making a vow to himself that he would remain quiet and patient.

"Have you read them, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We have read them," answered the burgomaster roughly, "but the Council cannot admit that it owes you any thing."

"No?" cried Gotzkowsky; and then, allowing him-

self to be overcome by a feeling of bitterness—"I believe you. Those in authority seldom take cognizance of what they owe, only what is owing to them."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said the first councillor with solemn dignity, "we know very well that we owe you thanks for the great services you have rendered the town."

Gotzkowsky broke out into a loud, ironical laugh. "Do you remember that? I am glad that you have not forgotten it."

"It is true," continued the councillor, in a tone of conciliation, "at the request of the magistracy you took charge of the affairs of the town. You travelled to St. Petersburg to see the empress; twice did you go to Warsaw to see General Fermore, and twice to Saxony to visit the king. You see the Council knows how much it is indebted to you."

"And we are cheerfully willing to be grateful to you," interrupted the burgomaster, "and to serve you when and in what manner we can, but these debts we cannot acknowledge."

Gotzkowsky looked at him in dismay, and a deep glow suffused his cheek. "You refuse to pay them?" he asked, faintly.

"It pains us deeply that we cannot recognize these claims. You must abate somewhat from them if we are to pay them," answered the burgomaster rudely.

"Do you dare to propose this to me?" cried Gotzkowsky, his eyes flashing, his countenance burning with anger and indignation. "Is this the way you insult the man to whom four years ago on this very spot you swore eternal gratitude? In those days I sacrificed to you my repose, the sleep of my nights; for, when the town was threatened with danger and alarm, there was no Council,

no authority in existence, for you were base cowards, and abjectly begged for my good offices. With tears did you entreat me to save you. I left my house, my family, my business, to serve you. At the risk of my life, in the depth of winter, I undertook these journeys. You did not consider that Russian bayonets threatened me, that I risked health and life. You thought only of yourselves. I have not put down in the account the sleepless nights, the trouble and anxiety, the privation and hardships which I suffered. I do not ask any money or recompense for my services. I only ask that I may be paid back what I actually expended; and you have the assurance to refuse it?"

"No, we do not," said the burgomaster, quite unmoved by Gotzkowsky's noble excitement. "We do not refuse payment; we only desire a reduction of the amounts."

"You wish to cheapen and bargain with me," said Gotzkowsky with a hoarse laugh. "You take me for a chapman, who measures out his life and services by the yard; and you wish to pay me for mine by the same measure. Go, most sapient gentlemen; I carry on a wholesale trade, and do not cut off yards. That I leave to shopkeepers, to souls like yours."

The burgomaster rose up proud and threateningly from his seat. "Do you dare to insult the Council?"

"No, the Council of Berlin insult themselves by their own deeds. They dare to chaffer with me!"

"And they have a right to do so," cried the burgomaster, quite beside himself with rage. "Who asked you to play the great lord in our name, and distribute royal presents—diamonds and gold snuff-boxes? You could have done it much more cheaply. The Russian is not so high-priced. But it was your pleasure to be

magnificent at our expense, and to strut about as a bountiful gentleman."

"Silence!" cried Gotzkowsky, in such a commanding tone that the burgomaster was struck dumb, and sank back in his chair. Gotzkowsky said no more. He took the accounts from the table, and, casting a look of anger and contempt on the worthy gentlemen, tore the papers in pieces, and threw the scraps at their feet. "I am paid!" he said, proudly, and turned to leave the room.

One of the town councillors hastened after him, and held him back. "You are too hasty: we may yet agree."

"No!" said Gotzkowsky, striving to free himself. "I do not chaffer and bargain for my right."

The other held him tight. "But the Council are not averse to paying you, if you—"

"If I will only traffic with you, is it not so?" interrupted Gotzkowsky. "Let me go; we have done with each other."

"You will regret having repulsed the Council," said the burgomaster, threateningly.

"I never regret an action when my honor is satisfied," said Gotzkowsky, with proud contempt; and then, without honoring the worthy gentlemen with another look, he left the hall, and returned into the street.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JEWS OF THE MINT.

HERR ITZIG was a very pious and devout Jew. He kept the Sabbath strictly after the custom of his ancestors. He was charitable to the poor; and no Jew beggar ever left his door without a gift.

He sat in his room, performing his morning devotions, and so deeply was he immersed therein, that he did not hear a repeated knocking at the door until a low, gentle voice whispered, "Good-morning, Herr Itzig!"

Itzig first finished his prayer; for all the world he would not have broken off before the end of it: "Be gracious and merciful to us, Jehovah, and incline us to be compassionate and helpful to all who approach us with supplication, even as we desire that thou shouldst be to us." And now the pious Jew closed his prayer-book, and turned slowly around.

That pale, bent man, who greeted him with a sorrowful smile—could it possibly be—could it be John Gotzkowsky, the celebrated banker, the honored and bright hero of the Exchange, the money-king before whom all Europe bowed down?

An expression of malicious joy stole over Itzig's face; but he suppressed it immediately, for the last words of his prayer still floated around his lips, and somewhat purified them. "Ah!" said he, in a friendly tone, as he stepped toward Gotzkowsky, stretching out both his hands to him, "the great and powerful John Gotzkowsky does me the honor to visit me. What joy for my humble house!"

Gotzkowsky did not allow himself to be misled by

this seeming politeness. He observed him with sharp and penetrating eyes, and then proudly said: "Listen, Itzig; let us be candid with each other. You know the reports which are current about me in the city and on the Bourse."

"I know them, but do not believe them," cried Itzig, with an altered, earnest mien. "Yes, I know these reports, and I know too what they are worth. They are a speculation of Ephraim, that your notes may be depreciated, that he may buy them in at a low rate. I know that Gotzkowsky is a rich man; and a rich man has judgment, and whoever has judgment is prudent—does not venture much, nor stand security for other people."

"I have perhaps less of this judgment than you think," said Gotzkowsky. "It may be that I have stood security."

"Then you will certainly know how to pay?" said Itzig, with a forced laugh.

"But how if I cannot pay?" said Gotzkowsky, sadly.

Itzig stepped back, and gazed at him horrified.

"If I cannot pay," continued Gotzkowsky, impressively; "if I am unable to pay half a million for Leipsic, another half million for the Russian claims, after having lost the same amount yesterday by the new treasury ordinance—what would you say to that, Itzig?"

Itzig listened to him with increasing terror, and gradually his features assumed an expression of hatred and savage rage. When Gotzkowsky had finished, he raised his clasped hands to heaven, as if imploring the wrath of God on the head of the sinner. "My God! sir, are you, then, going to fail?"

Gotzkowsky seized his hand, and looked into his quivering face with an expression of intense anxiety. "Listen to me, Itzig. I may yet be saved; every thing de-

pends upon my obtaining a delay, that my credit may not be shaken. You are rich—”

“No, I am poor,” interrupted Itzig, vehemently. “I am perfectly poor; I have nothing but what I earn.”

“But you can earn a great deal,” said Gotzkowsky, with a faint smile. “I wish to effect a loan from you. Take my word of honor as security.”

“Your word of honor!” cried Itzig, thrusting back his hand. “What can I do with your word of honor? I cannot advance any money on it.”

“Consider! the honor of my name is concerned—and this, till now, I have kept unsullied before God and man!” cried Gotzkowsky, imploringly.

“And if my own honor was concerned,” exclaimed Itzig, “I would rather part with it than my money. Money makes me a man. I am a Jew. I have nothing but money—it is my life, my honor! I cannot part with any of it.”

But Gotzkowsky did not allow himself to be repulsed. It seemed to him that his future, his honor, his whole life hung upon this moment. He felt like a gambler who has staked his last hope upon one throw of the dice. If this fails, all hope is gone; no future, no life is left, nothing but the grave awaits him. With impetuous violence he seized the hand of the rich Itzig. “Oh!” said he, “remember the time when you swore eternal gratitude to me.”

“I never would have sworn it,” cried Itzig—“no, by the Eternal, I never would have done it, if I had thought you would ever have needed it!”

“The honor of my name is at stake!” cried Gotzkowsky, in a tone of heart-rending agony. “Do you not understand that this is to me my life? Remember your vow! Let your heart for once feel sympathy—act

as a man toward his fellow-man. Advance me money upon my word of honor. No, not on that alone—on my house, on all that belongs to me. Lend me the sum I need. Oh! I will repay it in a princely manner. Help me over only these shoals, and my gratitude to you will be without bounds. You have a heart—take pity on me!”

Itzig looked with a malicious smile into his pale, agitated face. “So the rich, the great Christian banker, in the hour of his trouble, thinks that the poor derided Jew has a heart; I admit that I have a heart—but what has that to do with money? When business begins, there the heart stops. No, I have no heart to lend you money!”

Gotzkowsky did not answer immediately. He stood for an instant motionless, as if paralyzed in his inmost being. His soul was crushed, and he scarcely felt his grief. He only felt and knew that he was a lost man, and that the proud edifice of his fortune was crumbling under him, and would bury him in its ruins. He folded his hands and raised his disconsolate looks on high; he murmured: You see my suffering, O God! I have done my utmost! I have humbled myself to begging—to pitiful complaining. My God! my God! will no helping hand stretch itself once more to me out of the cloud?”

“You should have prayed before to God,” said Itzig, with cruel mockery. “You should have begged Him for prudence and foresight.”

Gotzkowsky did not heed him. He fought and struggled with his immense suffering, and, being a noble and a brave man, he at length conquered it. For a moment he had been cowed and downcast, but now he recovered all the power of his energetic nature. He raised

again his bowed head, and his look was once more determined and defiant. "Well, then, I have tried every thing; now I accept my fate. Listen, then, Herr Itzig, I am going to suspend payment; my house must fail!"

Itzig shuddered with a sudden terror. "My God!" cried he, "only yesterday I bought a draft of yours. You will not pay it?"

"I will not do it, because I cannot; and I would not do it, if I could. I have humbled myself before you in the dust, and you have stretched out no hand to raise me. Farewell, and may that now happen which you would not prevent when you could! You punish yourself. Farewell!"

Itzig held him convulsively back, and cried, in a voice drowned by rage, "You will pay my draft?"

"I will not," said Gotzkowsky. "You have judged; take now your reward." He threw Itzig's hands from him, and hastened from the spot.

Behind him sounded the wailing and raging of Itzig, who implored Heaven and hell to punish the criminal who had cheated him of his money.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LEIPSIK MERCHANT.

EXHAUSTED and weary, Gotzkowsky returned to his house, and retired to his room, to give himself up to the sad and terrible thoughts which tortured him. He could not conceal from himself that the sword above his head was only suspended by two thin threads. If De Neufville did not return from Amsterdam, and if the

courier did not bring a relief from Leipsic, then was he lost without redemption, and the deadly sword must fall. For the first time did he think of death; for the first time did the thought of it flash like lightning through his brain, and make him almost cheerful and happy.

He could die; it was not necessary that he should bear the pain and humiliation of life. He could take refuge in the quiet, silent grave under the turf, which would soon be decked with flowers over his agonized breast. He had worked much; his feet were sore, and his heart weary, from his walk through life. Why should he not lay himself down in the grave to rest, to dream, or to sink in the arms of eternal, dreamless sleep?

But this enticing thought he cast forcibly from him. He had not yet lost all hope. His anticipations rose as the door opened, and the servant handed him a large sealed letter, which the courier from Leipsic had just brought. With hasty hand he seized the letter, and motioned to Peter to retire. But as soon as he was alone, and was about to break the seal, he drew back and hesitated. This letter might, indeed, contain his salvation; but it might also contain his death-sentence. He weighed it in his hand thoughtfully, and muttered to himself: "It is as light as a feather, and yet its contents may be heavy enough to hurl me down the abyss. But this is foolish," he exclaimed aloud, drawing himself up proudly. "At least I will know my fate, and see clearly into the future."

With a firm hand he broke the seal. But as he read, horror and dismay were depicted in his countenance, and his whole frame shook. Violently he flung the paper on the ground. "This, then, this is my reward—reproaches, accusations, instead of thanks; scorn and malice, instead of compassion. Reproaches, because I

assisted them; accusations, that I had offered to help them; only because without me it would have been impossible for the King of Prussia to raise so much money. Without my mediation, they say, they would not have paid, but at the utmost would have had to endure a somewhat longer imprisonment, which would have been more tolerable than the loss of such immense sums."

He paced impatiently up and down, and as he came to the letter he spurned it with his foot, like a poisonous adder, too loathsome to touch. "I have deserved this punishment," cried he, laughing aloud from inward pain.

"Who bade me love mankind? who bade me help them, instead of like a highwayman falling upon and plundering them, when they were defenceless? Fool that I was to give to life any other interpretation, any other end!" He threw himself in a chair, and was soon buried in thought. Once more he reviewed his whole past, and as he made up the accounts of his life, he had to confess that the total of his hours of happiness was but small, while that of his years of misery and toil was heavy enough to bear him down. But there was still one hope, and as long as he could expect De Neufville's arrival all was not lost, and he must still wait in patience, still struggle with the worm that gnawed at his heart. With such painful thoughts as these was he busied when the door opened, and Elise entered with a glowing countenance.

She was so happy, that in her selfishness she did not perceived his troubled and careworn looks. "Oh" said she, kissing his hand, "I am so happy at last to find you alone at home. Several times have I sought you here."

"With letters for me?" asked he, hurriedly, for he had not observed Elise's excited countenance. Both were so occupied with their own thoughts and feelings,

that they took note of nothing else. "Have not letters arrived?" asked he once more.

"No letters have arrived," said she, smiling joyously, "but happiness has come."

"De Neufville is here, then!" cried Gotzkowsky, anxiously, hurrying toward the door.

"What has De Neufville to do with it?" asked Elise, with surprise holding him back.

Gotzkowsky stared for a moment, terrified at her bright face, and then a sad smile stole across his own. "Poor fool that I am!" he muttered; "I complain of the egotism of men, while I am selfish enough to think only of myself." He drew Elise toward him, and looking at her with infinite tenderness, said, "Well, my child, speak: what happiness has arrived?"

"Look at me," said she, playfully; "can you read nothing in my looks?"

Sadly he looked down deep into her large bright eyes. "Oh, your eyes shine as bright as two stars of hope, the last that are left me!"

Elise threw both her arms around his neck, and kissed him, then drew him with gentle force toward the ottoman, and, as she forced him down on the cushions, she took her own seat, smiling, on the stool at his feet. "How often, my father, have you sat here and cared for me! Ah! I know well how much sorrow I have caused you in these last four sad years, I could not command my heart to forget. You knew this, and yet you have been considerate and gentle as a mother, and kind as the best of fathers. You were never angry with me on account of my grief; you knew of it, and yet you allowed me to weep." She took his hand in hers, and for a moment covered her hot, burning face with it, then looked cheerfully up in his face. "See," she said, "I do not shed

any more tears, or, if I do, they are tears of joy. My father, I come to ask your blessing. Feodor is again here; he has come to ask me of you for his wife. Oh, forgive him, and grant your blessing to a love which till now has been the anguish of my life, but which hereafter will be its chief happiness!"

Blushing and with maiden modesty she nestled in her father's breast. Gotzkowsky felt himself paralyzed with terror. He pressed his child's head warmly to his breast, saying to himself, "And this, too, my God! you try me sorely. This is the greatest sacrifice you have demanded of me yet; but my pride is gone. This offering, too, will I make."

"Well, my father, you do not answer?" asked Elise, still leaning on his breast. "All is right, is it not? and you will give us your fatherly blessing, and forgive Feodor the errors of former years, and receive him as a son?"

Gotzkowsky, with his eyes still raised to heaven, moved his lips in silent prayer. At last, after a long, painful pause, he said solemnly: "Well, let it be so; I give my consent."

Elise uttered a cry of joy, and, amidst tears of unalloyed delight, kissed him, as smiling, and often interrupted by her own deep emotion, she narrated her meeting with Feodor, Lodoiska's death, and the letter she had written to her. "Oh, how delightful this hour would be," continued she, after finishing her narrative, "if I could only remain with you! Love bids me go, and yet it keeps me here! I have promised Feodor to go with him, but I did it in my haste, seeing only him and listening only to his prayers. Now I see you, my father, and it seems to me as if I could not leave you to-day."

"To-day!" cried Gotzkowsky, and a ray of joy shone

from his face. He arose, and, with folded arms, paced the room. His soul was full of gratitude to God, to whom he had prayed in his despair. Was this not a sign that God was with him, even if men forsook him?—that God had pity on him, even if all others were pitiless. This day his child wished to leave him, to enter on a brilliant destiny. He had, therefore, no longer any need to be anxious about her fate; and, as she was going to leave at once, he would be spared the torture of having her as a witness to his disgrace and degradation. He took her to his breast, and kissed her with heartfelt fervor. "Farewell, my child, my only happiness; you wish to leave me. I will be alone, but I will have time to think of and pray for you." He then cast her from him almost roughly, for he felt as if his grief would unman him. "Go," he cried, "your bridegroom is waiting for you; go, then, and order your bridal ornaments."

Elise smiled. "Yes, I will adorn myself; but you, father, will place the wreath of myrtle on my head, will you not? That is the sacred and last office of love with which a mother sends a daughter from her arms. I have no mother. You are both father and mother to me. Will you not crown me with the myrtle-wreath?"

"Yes," said he, with a sigh, "I will place the myrtle on your brow, and God grant it may not turn to a crown of thorns! Go now, my child, adorn thyself, and leave me alone to pray for you."

He greeted her smilingly, and accompanied her to the door. But when she had left the room he felt indescribably lonesome, and, pressing his hands against his breast to suppress the cry which choked him, he muttered in a low tone, "I have lost her—she is mine no

longer. Every thing forsakes me. The unfortunate is ever alone!"

Once more a knocking, repeated at his door, awakened him from his reverie. Peter his servant entered, and announced Herr Ephraim.

A ray of joyful astonishment flashed across him, and, as he stepped hastily toward the rich Jew of the mint, he said to himself: "Is it possible that this man comes to have pity on me in my distress? Will he be more magnanimous than Itzig? Will he assist me?"

CHAPTER XIII.

EPHRAIM THE TEMPTER.

"You seek me?" asked Gotzkowsky, as Ephraim entered and saluted him in silence.

Gotzkowsky's sharp glance had detected in his insolent bearing and contracted features that it was not pity or sympathy which had brought the Jew to him, but only a desire to gloat over the sufferings of his victim. "He shall not enjoy his triumph. He shall find me collected and determined, and shall not suspect my grief." Thus thinking, he forced his features into a cheerful expression, and handing a chair to the still silent Ephraim, said laughingly: "Indeed, I must be in a dangerous plight, if the birds of prey are already settling around me. Do you already scent my death, Herr Ephraim? By Heaven! that would be a dainty morsel for you!"

"You are angry with me," said Ephraim, shaking his head slowly; "but you shall know how much injustice

you do me. I bring you an important and fearful piece of news."

"It must be fearful, indeed," interrupted Gotzkowsky, "as you do yourself the pleasure of bringing it to me in person."

Ephraim shrugged his shoulders and abruptly replied, "De Neufville has failed!"

A cry of horror escaped Gotzkowsky's lips; he staggered, and was obliged to support himself by a chair to keep himself from falling. This was the last, decisive blow, and it had wounded him mortally. "De Neufville has failed!" he muttered low to himself.

"Yes, he is bankrupt!" said Ephraim with scarcely suppressed malice. "The proud Christian merchant, whose greatest pleasure it was to look down with contempt upon the Jew Ephraim, he is bankrupt. The Jew stands firm, but the Christian merchant is broken." And as he spoke, he broke into a scornful laugh, which brought back to Gotzkowsky his composure and self-possession.

"You triumph!" he said, "and on your brow is marked your rejoicing over our fall. Yes! you have conquered, for De Neufville's failure is your deed. It was you who persecuted him so long, and by cunning suspicions and calumny undermined his credit until it was destroyed, and the whole edifice of his honorable industry fell together."

"It is my work," cried Ephraim exultingly, "for he stood in my way, and I have pushed him out of it—what more? Life is but a combat; whoever is the strongest—that is, has the most money—is conqueror."

"De Neufville has fallen—that is a hard blow," muttered Gotzkowsky; and as his wandering eye met Ephraim's, he added with an expression of complete pros-