

a costly vase. "Let us conceal ourselves," said she, and, unnoticed by Gotzkowsky, they glided behind the curtains.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RESCUE.

GOTZKOWSKY had closed with life and earthly affairs. He had signed the document declaring him a bankrupt, and he had delivered over all his property to his creditors. The die had been cast. He had been powerful and great through money, but his power and greatness had now gone from him, for he was poor. The same men who yesterday had bowed down to the ground before him, had to-day passed him by in pride and scorn; and those who had vowed him eternal gratitude, had turned him from their door like a beggar. Why should he continue to bear the burdens of a life which had no longer any allurements, and whose most precious jewel, his honor, he had lost?

De Neufville had done right, and only a coward would still cling to life after all that was worth living for had disappeared. They should not point scornfully at him as he went along the streets. He would not be condemned to hear whispered after him, "Look! there goes Gotzkowsky the bankrupt." No, this fearful word should never wound his ears or pierce his heart.

Once more only would he pass through those streets, which had so often seen him in his glory—once more, not poor, nor as the laughing-stock of children, but so that those who now derided him should bow down before him, and honor him as the mourning emblem of departed

honor: only his body should pass by these men who had broken his heart. He had determined to quit this miserable existence, to leave a world which had proved itself to him only a gulf of wickedness and malice, and his freed spirit would wing its way to regions of light and knowledge.

With such thoughts he entered the room which was to be the scene of his last hours. But he would not go down to the grave without bearing witness to the wickedness and malice of the world. His death should be a monument of its disgrace and ingratitude.

For this purpose he had sought this room, for in it was the costly *étagère* on which stood the silver pitcher presented to him by the Council of Leipsic as a token of their gratitude, and from it he would drink his fatal draught. He took it and emptied into it a small white powder, that looked so innocent and light, and yet was strong enough to drag him down with leaden weight into the grave. He then took the water-goblet and poured water on it. The draught was ready; all that was necessary was for him to put it to his lips to imbibe eternal rest, eternal oblivion.

Elise saw it all—understood it all. She folded her hands and prayed; her teeth chattered together, and all that she could feel and know was, that she must save him, or follow him to the grave. "When he raises the pitcher to his lips, I will rush out," she whispered to Bertram, softly, and opened the curtains a little in order to watch him.

Gotzkowsky had returned to the *étagère*. He took the silver-oaken wreath, the civic crown presented to him by the city of Berlin, and looked at it with a bitter, scornful smile. "I earned this," he said, half aloud—"I will take it with me to the grave. They shall find

my corpse crowned with this wreath, and when they turn away in shame, the broken bankrupt, John Gotzkowsky, will enjoy his last triumph over a degenerate world." And as if in a dream, in the feverish delirium of grief, he placed the wreath on his brow, then for a moment stood with his head bent in deep thought.

It was a strange picture to see his proud, tall figure, his pale, nervous face, crowned with the silver wreath, and opposite to him, looking through the curtains, his daughter, whose glowing eyes were eagerly watching her father.

And now Gotzkowsky seized the silver pitcher, raised it on high—it had already touched his lips—but suddenly he staggered back. A dearly-loved voice had called his name. Ah, it was the voice of his daughter, whom he had forgotten in the bitterness of his grief. He had believed his heart dead to all feeling, but love still lived in him, and love called him back to life. Like an electric shock it flew through his whole frame.

He put the pitcher down, and covering his face with his hands, cried, "Oh, unnatural father! I forgot my child!"

Behind him stood Elise, praying to God eagerly and fervently. She wished to appear quite composed, quite unsuspecting, that her father might not have even an inkling of her knowledge of his dark design. Her voice dare not tremble, her eye must remain clear and calm, and a smile play about her lips, which yet quivered with the anxious prayers she had just offered to God. "My father!" she said, in a low but quiet voice—"my father, I come to beg your blessing. And here is the myrtle wreath with which you were to adorn me."

Gotzkowsky still kept his face covered, but his whole frame trembled. "I thank Thee, O my God! I thank

Thee! the voice of my child has saved me." And turning round suddenly, he stretched out both arms toward her, exclaiming aloud: "Elise, my child, come to my heart, and comfort your father."

Elise uttered a cry of joy, rushed into his arms, and nestled close to his heart. She whispered in his ear words of fervent love, of warmest affection. They fell on Gotzkowsky's heart like soothing balm; they forced tears of mingled joy and repentance from his eyes.

A long while did they remain locked in each other's arms. Their lips were silent, but their hearts spoke, and they understood each other without words. Then Elise raised herself from her father's embrace, and, again offering him the myrtle-wreath, said with a smile, "And now, my father, bless your daughter."

"I will," said Gotzkowsky, drying his eyes. "Yes, from my whole soul will I bless you. But where is the bridegroom?"

Elise looked at him inquiringly. "Will you bid him, also, welcome?"

"That I will with all my heart!"

Elise approached the curtain, drew it back, and taking Bertram's hand, led him to her father, saying, with indescribable grace: "My father, bless your children."

"This is your bridegroom?" asked Gotzkowsky, and for the first time a sunbeam seemed to flash across his face.

Bertram with a cry of delight drew Elise to his heart. She clung to him, and said warmly: "I will rest on your breast, Bertram. I will be as true and as faithful as yourself. You shall reconcile me to mankind. You will make us both happy again. My father and I put our hope in you, and we both know it will not be in vain.

Is it not so, my father?" She extended her hand to Gotzkowsky.

He took it, but was too much affected to speak. He pressed it to his eyes and his breast, and then looked with a smile into the countenance of his daughter.

Elise continued: "Look, father, life is still worth something. It gives you a son, who is happy to share your unhappiness with you. It gives you a daughter, who looks upon every tear of yours as a jewel in your crown; who would be proud to go as a beggar with her father from place to place, and say to all the world, 'Gotzkowsky is a beggar because he was rich in love toward his fellow-men; he has become poor because he was a noble man, who had faith in mankind.'" And as she drew her father into her own and Bertram's embrace, she asked him, smiling through her tears, "My father, do you still wish to leave your children?"

"No, I will live—live for you!" cried Gotzkowsky, as, almost overcome with emotion and pleasure, he threw his arms around their necks, and kissed them both warmly and lovingly. "A new life is to begin for us," said he, cheerfully. "We will seek refuge in a quiet cottage, and take with us none of the show and luxury for which men work and sell their souls—none of the tawdriness of life. Will you not be content, Elise, to be poor, and purchase the honor of your father with the loss of this vain splendor?"

Elise leaned her head on his shoulder. "I was poor," she said, "when the world called me rich. Now I am rich when it will call me poor. Give up every thing that we possess, father, that no one may say Gotzkowsky owes him any thing, and has not kept his word." With ready haste she loosened the necklace from her throat, the bracelets from her arms, and the drops from her ears.

"Take these, too," said she, smiling. "Add them to the rest. We will keep nothing but honor, and the consciousness of our probity."

"Now I am your son, father," cried Bertram, with beaming eyes. "Now I have a right to serve you. You dare no longer refuse to accept all that is mine for your own. We will save the honor of our house, and pay all our creditors."

"That we will do," exclaimed Gotzkowsky; "I accept your offering, my son." And joining Elise and Bertram's hands together, he cast grateful looks to heaven, saying: "From this day forward we are poor, and yet far richer than many thousands of rich people; for we are of sound health, and have strong arms to work. We have good consciences, and that proud contentment which God gives to those only who trust in His help."

CHAPTER XVI.

RETRIBUTION.

THE appointed hour had arrived, and in the full splendor of his rich uniform, decorated with orders, and glittering with diamonds bestowed upon him by the favor of two empresses, Prince Feodor von Stratimojeff entered Gotzkowsky's house. With the proud step of victory he ascended the stairs that led to the apartments of his bride. The goal was at last reached. The beautiful, lovely, and wealthy maiden was finally to become his wife. He could present her at the court of St. Petersburg, and with her beauty, her virtue, and his happiness revenge himself on the fickle empress. These were his

thoughts as he opened the door and entered Elise's room. There she stood in her white bridal attire, as delicate, as slender, and as graceful as a lily to the sight. There stood also her father, and the friend of her youth, Bertram. The witnesses to the ceremony were present, and nothing more was necessary but to lead her to the altar. Elise had requested of her father that she herself should see the prince, and give him his dismissal. She had also requested that Bertram should be present. She wished to show him that her heart had, at once and forever, been healed of its foolish and unholy love, and that she could face the prince without trembling or hesitation. This was an offering which she wished to bring to the honor of her future husband and her own pride; and she would have despised herself if a motion of her eyebrow or a sigh from her breast had betrayed the sadness which, against her will, she felt in her heart. She looked, therefore, with a cold and calm eye on the prince as he entered, and for the first time he seemed no longer the handsome man, the being endowed with numberless fascinations, of former days. She read only in his flaccid features the sad history of the past. The charm was broken which had held her eyes captive. Her vision was clear again, and she shuddered before this wild, demoniacal beauty which she had once adored as God's image in man. As she looked at him, she felt as if she could hate him, because she had loved him; because she had spent her first youth, her first love, her first happiness, on him; because he had defrauded her of the peace and innocence of her heart; and because she no longer had even the right of weeping for her lost love, but was forced to turn away from it with blushes of shame.

Feodor approached with an air of happy triumph and

satisfaction, and, bowing low to her father, said, with a most exquisite smile, "I have come to seek my bride—to request Elise's hand of her father."

With eyes beaming with pleasure he offered Elise his hand, but hers remained calm and cold, and her voice did not tremble or falter as she said: "I am a bride, but not yours, Prince Stratimojeff;" and extending her hand to Bertram, she continued: "This is my husband! To-day, for the third time, he has saved me—saved me from you!"

Prince Feodor felt annihilated, and staggered back as if struck by an electric shock. "Elise! is this the way you reward my love?" asked he sadly, after a pause. "Is this the troth you plighted me?"

She stepped up close to him, and said softly: "I kept my heart faithful to my Feodor, but he ceded it to Prince Stratimojeff. Elise is too proud to be the wife of a man who owes his title of prince to the fact of being the favorite of an empress."

She turned and was about to leave the room, but Feodor held her back. No reserve, no concealment were any longer possible to him. He only felt that he was infinitely wretched, and that he had lost the hope of his life. "Elise," he said, in that soft, sad tone, which had formerly charmed her heart, "I came to you to save me; you have thrust me back into an abyss. Like a drowning man I stretched out my hand to you, that in your arms I might live a new life. But Fate is just. It hunts me back pitilessly from this refuge, and I must and will sink. Well, then, though the waves of life close over me, my last utterance will be your name."

Elise found herself capable of the cruel courage of listening to his pathetic words with a smile: "You will yet have time to think over your death," said she, with

proud composure; and, turning to her father, she continued, "My business with this gentleman is finished. Now, father, begin yours." She gave her hand to Bertram, and, without honoring the prince with another look, she left the room with her betrothed.

"And now," said Gotzkowsky coldly, "now, sir, let us proceed to our affairs. Will you have the kindness to follow me to my counting-room? You have come to Berlin to rob me of my daughter and my property! You have been unsuccessful in the one; try now the other."

"That I will, that I shall!" cried the prince, gnashing his teeth, and anger flashing from his eyes. "Elise has been pitiless, I will be so too."

"And I would hurl your pity from me as an insult," said Gotzkowsky, "if you offered it."

"We are then enemies, for life and death—"

"Oh, no! We are two tradesmen who bargain and haggle with each other about the profits. There is nothing more between us." He opened the door and called in his secretary and his cashier. "This gentleman," said Gotzkowsky, with cutting coldness, "is the agent of Russia, sent here to negotiate with me, and in case I cannot pay, to adopt the most severe measures toward me. You, gentlemen, will transact this business with him. You have the necessary instructions." He then turned to the prince, who stood breathless and trembling from inward excitement, burning with anger and pain, and leaning against the wall to keep himself from falling. "Prince," said he, "you will be paid. Take these thirty thousand dollars; they are the fortune of my son-in-law. He has given it cheerfully to release us from you. Here, further, are my daughter's diamonds. Take them to your empress as a fit memorial of your German deeds,

and my pictures will cover the balance of my indebtedness to you."*

"It is too much, it is too much!" cried Prince Feodor; and as if hunted by the furies, he rushed out, his fists clinched, ready to crush any one who should try to stop him.

CHAPTER XVII.

TARDY GRATITUDE.

JOHN GOTZKOWSKY, the rich merchant of Berlin, had determined to struggle no longer with Fate; no longer to undergo the daily martyrdom of an endangered honor, of a threatened name. Like the brave Sickenhagen, he said to himself, "Better a terrible end than an endless terror," and he preferred casting himself down the abyss at once, to be slowly hurled from cliff to cliff. He had given notice to the authorities of his failure, and of his intention of making over all his property to his creditors. He was now waiting to hand over the assets to the assignees, and leave the house which was no longer his. Not secretly, however, but openly, in the broad daylight, he would cross the threshold to pass through the streets of that town which was so much indebted to him, and which had formerly hailed him as her savior and preserver. It was inevitable—he must fall, but his

* Gotzkowsky paid his debt to Russia with thirty thousand dollars cash; a set of diamonds; and pictures which were taken by Russia at a valuation of eighty thousand dollars, and formed the first basis of the imperial gallery at St. Petersburg. Among these were some of the finest paintings of Titian, some of the best pieces of Rubens, and one of Rembrandt's most highly executed works—the portrait of his old mother.

fall should at the same time be his revenge. For the last time he would open the state apartments of his house; for the last time receive his guests. But these guests would be the legal authorities, who were to be his heirs while he was yet alive, and who were to consign his name to oblivion before death had inscribed it on any tombstone.

The announcement of his fall had spread rapidly through the town, and seemed at last to have broken through the hardened crust which collects around men's hearts. The promptings of conscience seemed for a moment to overcome the voice of egotism. The magistrates were ashamed of their ingratitude; and even the Jews of the mint, Ephraim and Itzig, had perceived that it would have been better to have avoided notoriety, and to have raised up the humbled Gotzkowsky, than to have trodden him in the dust entirely.

Instead of the officials whom he had expected, however, a committee of the Council, accompanied by Ephraim and Itzig, entered his house and asked to speak with him. He received them in his apartments of state, with his children at his side. His figure was erect, his head proudly raised, and he regarded them, not as an unfortunate, downcast man, but as a superior would regard his inferiors; and they lowered their eyes before his penetrating glances, ashamed and conscious of wrong.

"The Council have sent us," said one of the aldermen.

"I have no further business with the Council," said Gotzkowsky, contemptuously.

"Gotzkowsky, do not be angry with us any longer," said the aldermen, almost imploringly. "The magistracy, in acknowledgment of your great services to the city, are ready and willing to pay the sum you demand."

Gotzkowsky shook his head proudly. "I am no longer ready to accept it. The term has expired; you can no longer buy me off; you remain my debtors."

"But you will listen to us," cried Itzig. "We come in the name of the Jews."

"We are empowered to assist you," added Ephraim. "We have been instructed by the Jews to give you, on the security of your signature and the prepayment of the interest, as much money and credit as will prevent your house from failing."

Gotzkowsky's large bright eyes rested for a moment searchingly and speculatively on Ephraim's countenance; and the light, mocking smile which stood on the lips of the Jew confirmed his determination, and strengthened him in his resolution. "My house has failed," said he, quietly and proudly, and, reading the anxiety and terror depicted on their countenances, he continued almost exultingly: "yes! my house has failed. The document in which I announced it and declared myself a bankrupt, has already been sent to the magistracy and the merchant's guild."

"You dare not fail!" cried Itzig, in a rage.

"You dare not put this insult upon the Council and the town," exclaimed the aldermen, with dignity. "We cannot allow posterity to say of us, 'The town of Berlin left the noblest of her citizens to perish in want and misery.'"

"It will be well for me if posterity should say so, for then my name and my honor will be saved."

"But the magistracy will be delighted to be able to show its gratitude toward you."

"And the Jews will be delighted, too," cried Itzig. "The Jews are ready to help you."

Gotzkowsky cast an angry look at him. "That is to

say, you have calculated that it will not profit you if I do fail. You have large drafts on me, and if I fail, you only get a portion of your debt; whereas, if I stand, you get the whole. You would be magnanimous from self-interest, but I do not accept your magnanimity—you shall lose. Let that be your punishment, and my revenge. You have wounded my heart unto death, therefore I will strike you on the only spot in which you are sensitive to pain: I attack your greed of money. You come too late; I am bankrupt! My drafts are no longer current, but my honor will not die with my firm."

They were all silent, and gazed down to the earth frowningly. Only one looked toward Gotzkowsky with a clear, bright eye. This was Ephraim, who, mindful of his conversation with Gotzkowsky, said to himself, triumphantly, "He has taken one lesson from me—he has learned to despise mankind."

But Itzig was only the more furious. "You wish our ruin," said he, angrily. "You will be ungrateful. The Jews, who made you a present of a handsome ring, have not deserved that of you. What will the world say?"

"The world will learn the cause of my ruin, and condemn you," said Gotzkowsky. "Go, take all that I have; I will reserve nothing; I despise riches and estate. I wish to be poor; for in poverty is peace. I turn my back upon this house, and I take nothing with me but this laurel-wreath and you, my children."

Smilingly he gave his hands to Bertram and Elise. "Come, my children! let us wander out in the happiness of poverty. We shake the dust from our feet, and are light and free, for though we are poor, we are rich in love. Yes, we are poor; but poverty means freedom. We are no longer dependent upon prejudices, conven-

tionalities, and forms. We have nothing more to conceal or hide. We need not be ashamed of our poverty, for we dare to show it to all the world; and when we go through the streets as ragged beggars, these rich people will cast down their eyes in shame, for our poverty will accuse them, and our rags testify against them. Come, my children, let us begin our life of poverty. But when death comes to take me away, crown my cold brow with this laurel-wreath, given me by the city of Berlin, and write on my coffin: 'This is the world's reward!'"*

And firm and erect, leaning on his children, Gotzkowsky crossed the room. No one dared to detain him. Shame and remorse, anger and terror, kept them all spell-bound. "Let us go, let us go; I have a horror of this house, and this splendor sickens me."

"Yes! let us go," said Elise, throwing her arms around her father's neck. They went out into the street. How refreshing did the cool air seem to them, and how soft and sweet did the calm blue sky look down upon them! Gotzkowsky gazed up at it. He did not perceive the multitude of people which stood before his own door, or rather he did not wish to see them, because he took them for a portion of the idle, curious populace, which follows misfortune everywhere, and finds a spectacle for the amusement of its *ennui* in the suffering of others.

But for this once, Gotzkowsky was mistaken; it was indeed only poor people who were standing in the street, but their countenances bore the marks of sympathy, and their looks were sad. They had heard of his misfortunes, and had hastened hither, not from curiosity, but from interest in him. They were only factory-hands, to whom Gotzkowsky had been bene-

* With these words Gotzkowsky closes his autobiography.

factor, friend, and adviser; they were the poor whom he had supported and comforted, who now stood before his house, to bid him a last farewell. To be sure, they could render him no assistance—they had no money, no treasures—but they brought their love with their tears.

At the head of the workmen stood Balthazar, with his young wife, and although his eyes were dimmed with tears, he still recognized his master who had done him so much kindness; and although his breast was stifled with grief, yet he controlled himself, and cried out, "Long live Gotzkowsky, our father!"

"Hurrah for Gotzkowsky! Long may he live!" cried the crowd, not jubilantly, but in a sad tone, half smothered by tears.

Gotzkowsky's countenance beamed with joy, and with a grateful smile he stretched out his hand to Balthazar. "I thank you, my friend," he said; "you have often shouted in compliment to me, but never has it given me so much pleasure as to-day."

"Never has it been done more cordially and sincerely," said Balthazar, pressing Gotzkowsky's hand to his lips. "You have always been a father and a friend to us, and we have often been sorry that you were so rich and powerful that we could not show you how dear you were to us. Now that you are no longer rich, we can prove that we love you, for we can work for you. We have come to an agreement among ourselves. Each of us will give one working-day in the week, and the proceeds shall go to you, and as there are one hundred and seventy of us workmen, you shall at least not starve, Father Gotzkowsky."

Gotzkowsky looked at him with eyes glistening with pleasure. "I thank you, my friends," said he, deeply moved; "and if I do not accept your offer you must

not think that I do not appreciate its greatness or its beauty. Who can say that I am poor when you love me, my children?"

At that moment, a carriage stopped at the door. Bertram had brought it to convey them to their new and modest residence.

"Are you going, then, to leave us forever?" said Balthazar mournfully.

"No, my children, I remain among you, in the midst of you. I am only going to exchange this large house for a smaller one."

"Come," cried Balthazar, "come, my friends, we will escort our father, Gotzkowsky, to his new house. The town of Berlin shall see that only rich people are ungrateful, and that the poor never forget their benefactor and their friend. Come, let us take out the horses. We will draw Father Gotzkowsky through the streets."

The crowd answered with a thundering hurrah; and with busy haste they proceeded to the work. The horses were unharnessed, and twelve of the most powerful workmen crowded around the pole. In vain did Gotzkowsky beg them to refrain, not to make him an object of general curiosity. But the people paid no heed to his request—it was a necessity to their hearts to give him a public proof of their love. Almost by force they raised him into the carriage, and compelled Bertram and Elise, who had mixed with the crowd for the purpose of escaping attention, to take their seats beside him. And now the procession advanced. Women and workmen went on before, rejoicing and jumping about merrily at the side of the carriage; and when they met other workmen, these latter stopped and waved their hats, and greeted Gotzkowsky, calling him the great factory-lord, the father of his workmen, the benefactor of Berlin.

Especially when the procession came to the low houses and the poor cottages, the small dusty windows were thrown open, and sun-browned faces looked out, and toil-hardened hands greeted and waved.

The forsaken, the ruined Gotzkowsky celebrated this day a splendid triumph. The jubilant voice that thus did him homage was that of the people—and the voice of the people is the voice of God!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE AUCTION.

ALL was now over—the curtain had fallen: Gotzkowsky had run his brilliant career, and retired into oblivion. His fall was for some days the topic of conversation of the good Berliners; but it was soon superseded by some other novelty, and without either sympathy or ill-feeling they passed by the deserted house with the closed windows which had once been Gotzkowsky's residence. The king had purchased it, in order to carry on, at the expense of the royal government, the porcelain factory which Gotzkowsky had founded.

Months had passed by. How many changes had taken place in this short space of time! How many tears had been shed there, how many hopes destroyed!

Elise had become Bertram's wife; and she lived with him in the small, quiet residence which they had selected in the most remote quarter of the town. The three had entered the low, narrow rooms, which were to be their

home, with the firm determination not to let themselves be annoyed by such slight material privation as they might have to endure, but to pass them over with cheerful equanimity and proud indifference, consoling themselves with the conviction that no one could rob them of their great and pure love. And besides this, their honor and their reputation were untouched, for every one was acquainted with Gotzkowsky's fate, every one knew that he had not fallen through his own fault, but through the force of circumstances, and the baseness of mankind.

He might have cause of complaint against the world, it had none against him. With his creditors he had been honest. All that he possessed he had given up to them, and they were all satisfied. With proud step and unbent head could he pass through the streets, for no one dared to follow him with insulting words. Nor had he need to be ashamed of his poverty, for it was in itself a proof not only of his unmerited misfortune, but of his integrity. All this he said and repeated to himself daily, and yet it pained him to go through the streets, feeling solitary and downcast. His eyes even filled with tears, as one day passing by his house he saw the gates open, and equipages, as in former days, at his door, while genteel and rich people, with cold, apathetic countenances, were entering his house as they had done of yore. Formerly they came to Gotzkowsky's splendid dinners, now they had come to the auction. The *fauteuils* and velvet-covered sofas, the carpets and gold-embroidered curtains, the chandeliers of bronze and rock crystal, the paintings and statuary, the silver table-ware, and the costly porcelain service, all these were now exposed for sale.

There is something sad and mournful about an