

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 His fall was for some days the topic of conversation of the good Berliners; but it was soon superseded by some other novelty, and without either sympathy or ill-feeling they passed by the deserted house with the closed windows which had once been Gotzkowsky's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

auction. It speaks always of the ruin and breaking up of a man's life and the happiness of his family, of the wreck of a shattered existence, and the sad remains of what was once, perhaps, a brilliant destiny. On the day of an auction there ceases to be a home, the sacred secrets of family life vanish; home is no longer the abode of peace, and the long-cherished *penates* hide their heads in grief.

Then the gates are opened, and the curious multitude rushes in, and with callous eye spies into each corner and every room; tries the sofas on which, perhaps, yesterday some poor-widow sat weeping for her lost husband; throws itself down on the bed which once had been the sacred temple of their love; and coldly and unfeelingly examines the furniture of parlor and boudoir, which yet retains the appearance of comfort and of genial repose, though soon to be scattered to the winds, to proclaim aloud its sad and secret story in the gaudy show-room of some second-hand dealer. All the beauty and splendor of Gotzkowsky's former days were now to be displayed at auction. For this reason there stood so many carriages before his door; for this reason did so many noble and wealthy persons come to his house, and, mixed with brokers and speculators, crowd into those halls, which they had formerly trod with friendly smiles and in costly dresses.

No one took any heed of the figure of a man crouching, leaning against the staircase, with his hat pressed down over his brow, and the collar of his cloak drawn up high over his face. No one perceived how he shuddered when the auctioneer handled the beautiful articles and called on the public to bid. It was to him a terrible grief to assist at these obsequies of his past life, and yet he could not tear himself away. He felt fascinated, as

it were, by some supernatural power, and forced to remain in the house and attend this horrible ceremony. In the tediousness of his lonesome, inactive, idle misery, it was a species of diversion to him, something to arouse him from his dull ruminations, to be present at this disintegration and demolition of his own house.

As Jeremiah once sat among the ruins of Jerusalem, so sat Gotzkowsky with concealed face at the threshold of his house, listening with savage joy to the strokes of the auctioneer's hammer—albeit each blow struck him to the heart, and made its wounds smart still more keenly. At times, when a well-known voice fell on his ear, he would raise his head a little, and look at the bidders, and examine their cold, unsympathizing faces. How many were there among them whom he had once called his friends, and to whom he had done good! And now, like vultures, they flocked to the carcass of his past; they bought his treasures, while their eyes glistened with malicious joy. They were delighted to be able to boast that they possessed a souvenir of the rich Gotzkowsky.

When Gotzkowsky saw this, he felt ashamed that he had once smiled lovingly on these men, had confided in them, and believed in their assurances of friendship. He rose to leave, feeling himself refreshed and strengthened, for his depression and grief had left him. Never had he walked the streets more proudly than on the day when he returned from the auction to his dark, lowly dwelling. Never had he looked upon mankind with greater pity or more bitter scorn. And yet it pained him to reënter this dismal, quiet house, and to force himself back into the *ennui* and indolence of his inactive life. It was such a sensitive, burning pain, so, in the

fulness of his strength and manhood to be condemned to do nothing more than drag on a weary existence—to sleep, to eat, and to dream of the past! And yet he would repeat to himself, he was strong and active to work and create; and nevertheless, he was condemned to idleness, to live by the favor and toil of others, even if these others were his children.

But they worked for him with so much pleasure and so much love! Bertram had accepted the situation of book-keeper in a large factory, and his salary was sufficient to support the three. To be sure, they had to manage carefully, and provide scantily enough. But Elise was active and notable; though as the spoilt child of wealth, she had, indeed, been able to learn nothing of those minor offices of life which are called by women "housekeeping." Still the instinct of her sex had enabled her soon to acquire this knowledge, and in a short time she became mistress of it. It was, indeed, a pleasant sight to see Elise, with the same quiet cheerfulness, acting at one moment the part of cook in the kitchen, at another setting her little chamber to rights with busy hands, and making amends in cleanliness and neatness for what was wanting in elegance and beauty. True, she was altered, but never since she had been Bertram's wife had her brow been darkened or her eye dimmed. Her face was always bright and clear: for her husband, when he returned home, she had always a smile of welcome, a cordial greeting—never a word of complaint or of mourning over the privations she was obliged to undergo, or the wealth she had lost. Elise felt rich—for she loved her husband; not with that ardent, consuming passion which she had once felt, and which had been the cause of so much disappointment and so many tears; but with that gentle, affectionate flame which never dies

out, but is constantly supplied and nourished by esteem and appreciation.

Bertram was no longer her brother; he was her beloved, her friend, her counsellor, and comforter, above all. With him she was always certain to be understood and appreciated, to find comfort and help. As on a rock, she could now rely on the noble heart of one who was at the same time so firm, and yet so soft in loving, that he had never doubted her, never turned away from her. Her whole heart was given up to him in gratitude and affection, and with her whole life did she wish to reward him for his noble love, for the self-sacrificing gratitude with which he had given up his entire fortune to her father, and saved the name and honor of his house from disgrace and shame. She desired neither splendor nor jewels. Surrounded by the halo of her love, and of her quiet, peaceful happiness, this poor, little dwelling seemed to her as a temple of peace and of holy rest; and, locked in Bertram's embrace, her wishes never reached beyond its narrow sphere.

But Gotzkowsky was not as yet able to attain this resignation. This repose was to him an annihilating torment, and the inactive vegetation a living death. With each day the torture increased, the soreness of his heart became more corroding and painful. At times he felt as if he must scream out aloud in the agony of his despair. He would strike his chest with his clinched fists, and cry to God in the overflow of his sufferings. He who his whole life long had been active, was now condemned to idleness; he who through his whole life had worked for others, was now obliged to lay his hands in his lap, and allow others to labor for him. How had he deserved this? What crime had he committed, that after he had toiled and worked honestly, he should go

down, whilst others who had enriched themselves by fraud and lying, by cunning and malice, should drive through the streets in splendid carriages, surrounded by elegance and wealth, while he was obliged to creep along, bowed down with sorrow? He had gone down, while Ephraim had risen higher and higher. He had become poor because he was honest; but Ephraim had grown rich on usury. His firm had failed, while Ephraim continued to coin money. What did the Jew care that his name was branded by the people, that they spoke with cutting sarcasm of the pewter-money to which he had so skilfully imparted the appearance of silver coin, and that he was derided by all? Gotzkowsky's name, too, had been scoffed at, and he had been a benefactor of the people, while Ephraim had been their blood-sucking leech.

At last, Gotzkowsky came to a firm determination that he would have revenge—yes, revenge on this ungrateful generation which had betrayed and forsaken him—revenge on the men who had shown themselves so small and pitiful. He wanted to remind those who were flourishing in pride and splendor, of their meanness and ingratitude. He would accuse no one, but his whole life was an indictment, not against individual men, but whole communities and cities, against the king himself. They had all been ungrateful toward him. They were all his debtors, and in presence of the whole world he would cast their ingratitude, their meanness, their malice, and knavery in their face, and humble them by recalling the past. He wrote for that purpose *The History of his Life*, not in anger and scorn; he did not dip his pen in gall, he made no ill-natured reflections, no contemptuous remarks. He did nothing more than quietly and simply, clearly and truthfully, describe his

life and his deeds, and whenever it was necessary, confirm his assertions by quotations from the official documents relating thereto.*

The very simplicity and truthfulness of this "*Biography of a Patriotic Merchant*" procured for it an enormous success, and made the long-forgotten, much-calumniated Gotzkowsky for a while the topic of conversation, not only in Berlin, but throughout all Germany. Every one wanted to read the book. All wished to have the malicious pleasure of seeing how much people of rank, communities, cities, and princes, were indebted to this man, and how pitilessly they had let him sink.

The natural consequence was that the book, though written simply and with reserve, gave great offence. Gotzkowsky had accused no one, but the facts accused. His present poverty and need condemned the proud, high-born people, and showed to the world their cold-hearted-

* His biography begins in these words: "I know that I subject myself to a variety of judgments. How ridiculous will I appear in the eyes of many, because I did not use my fortune for my own benefit! They will say, 'A man who pretends to know the world, a merchant, furthermore, whose principal merit is to make himself rich, and found a great house, gives so little heed to self-interest, and entertains dreams of humanity and benevolence, hardly pardonable in a philosopher. Others, again, will deem my acts too good-natured, improvident, or vain, as usually happens, when such are considered from a point of view different from the actual one. But as long as I am convinced that I have acted as a true Christian and an honest patriot, I can despise all these criticisms. I would not act otherwise, if I had my whole life to live over again. But I would be more prudent, as I am better acquainted with the character of those in whom I confided most. The peace of mind and cheerfulness which innocence and the consciousness of good deeds impart, are too perceptible to me, to allow me to hesitate for a moment between the demands of selfishness and those of humanity.'"

ness and miserable conduct. He had not exposed *individuals* to the judgment of the world; no—his book accused the whole magistracy of Berlin of deeds of ingratitude; and it even included the king, for whom he had bought a hundred thousand *ducats*' worth of pictures, and who had only paid him back a hundred and fifty thousand *dollars*.

If his book had contained the smallest untruth, if there had been the least false statement in it, they would have stigmatized him as a calumniator and scandalizer of majesty. But Gotzkowsky had only told the truth. They could not, therefore, punish him as a false witness or slanderer. Consequently they had to content themselves with suppressing "The Life of a Patriotic Merchant."

The booksellers in Berlin were therefore ordered to give up all the copies, and even Gotzkowsky received an order to return those in his possession. He did so; he gave up the book to the authorities, who persecuted him because they had cause to blush before him; but his memory he could not surrender. His memory remained faithful to him, and was his support and consolation, whenever he felt ready to despair; this made him proud in his misfortune, and free in the bonds of poverty. And now they were really poor; and penury, with all its horrors, its humiliations and sufferings, crept in upon them.

Gotzkowsky's book had awakened all those who envied and hated him, and they vowed his ruin. It showed how much the merchants of Berlin were indebted to him, and how little of this indebtedness they had cancelled. It was therefore an accusation against the wealthy merchants of Berlin, against which they could not defend themselves, but for which they could wreak revenge. Not on him, for he had nothing they could take from

him—no wealth, no name, no credit, and, in their mercantile eyes, no honor. But they revenged themselves on his family—on his son-in-law. The rich factory-lord, whose book-keeper Bertram had been, deprived him of his situation; and in consequence of a preconcerted arrangement, he could find no situation elsewhere. How could he now support his family? He was willing to work his fingers to the bone for his wife, for his father, for his child, who looked up so lovingly to him with its large, clear, innocent eyes, and dreamt not of the anxiety of its father, nor of the sighs which told of the anguish of its young mother. But nowhere could he procure employment—nowhere was there a situation for the son-in-law of Gotzkowsky, who had accused the merchants, the magistrates, yea, even the king! And now they were indeed poor, for they had no work; but, condemned to inactivity, to comfortless brooding, they shudderingly asked themselves what was to become of them—how this life of privation was to end.

But while Bertram and Elise remained sad and dispirited, Gotzkowsky suddenly brightened up. For a long time he had walked up and down in silent thought. Now, of a sudden, his countenance assumed the cheerful expression of former days, and energetic self-reliance was expressed in his features. Elise looked on with astonishment. He drew out from his chest the last remains of by-gone days, the silver oak-wreath set with diamonds, presented him by the town of Berlin, and the golden goblet given by the town of Leipsic. He looked at them for a long time attentively, and then went out, leaving Elise alone, to weep and pray to God to send them help, and to console Bertram when he came home from his fruitless search after a situation.

It was some hours before Gotzkowsky returned, but

his countenance still retained its cheerfulness, and his features exhibited the energy and activity of past days. He stretched out his hands to both of his children, and drew them affectionately toward him and embraced them. "Are we then really poor, possessing one another? I say that we are still rich, for our hearts are yet warm, and our honor is not yet lost. But we have not yet learned to bear the indigence of our outer life. We have covered our poverty with the gloss of respectability; we have been ashamed to appear in the streets in coarse clothes; we have not yet learned to distinguish the necessary from the superfluous; we have endeavored to be poor, and yet happy, in a city. That has been our mistake. The happiness of poverty does not reside within the cold walls of a town. It is not sown among the paving-stones of a street. It is only in Nature, who is rich enough to nourish and give to all those who trustingly cast themselves on her bosom—only in Nature, and the privacy of country life, that we can find rest and peace. Come, my children, let us leave this town; let us have the courage to become children of Nature and free citizens of poverty. Let us cast the show and glitter of a city life behind us, and wander forth, not over the sea nor into the desert, but to a cottage in a wood. I have stripped off the last vestige of the past, and the silver wreath and the golden goblet have been of some use, for they have furnished us the means to found a new existence. Bertram, have you the courage to commence life anew and become a peasant?"

Bertram smiled. "I have both the courage and the strength, for I am hearty and able to work."

"And you, Elise, are you not too proud to bring up your child as a peasant?"

Elise kissed her child, and handed him to her father.

"Let us bring him up to be a good and healthy man—a man like you and his father, and he will overcome the world and poverty, and be happy."

"Oh! I well knew that I could count upon you; and now I know how we all can be helped. We are rich enough to buy, in some corner of the world, a little piece of land that we can cultivate, and on which we can build a cottage. The product of my valuables is sufficient for that purpose; and what we can realize from these articles of furniture will be sufficient to defray our travelling expenses. Get ready, then, children; to-morrow we leave for Silesia. In the mountains there we will look out some quiet, secluded valley, where the newly-made peasants can build them a cottage. There we will forget the past, and cast all its sufferings behind us; or if we do speak of them, it will be as of the tales of our childhood. Come, my children, let us return to Nature, God, and contentment. Do you remember, Elise, how I once related to you that as a lad I once lay hungry and wretched on the high-road? The hand which was then stretched out to me did not proceed out of the cloud, but from heaven. It was not the consolation of an alms that it gave me, but the comforting assurance of love which raised me up and strengthened me, directing my looks to God, and teaching me to love Him in all His works. God dwells and speaks in Nature. Let us seek Him there, and serve Him in the sweat of our brow and in the coarse peasant's frock.

And they went, and did as Gotzkowsky said. They moved to Silesia, and bought themselves there, among the mountains, a piece of land and a cottage, in which they led a quiet, retired, happy life. The world forgot them. Gotzkowsky's name passed into oblivion. But history preserved it, and still holds him up as an ex-

ample, not only of the most noble patriotism, but also of the ingratitude of men. His book, too, is left us, and bears witness for him. But as we read it, we become sad, and are ready to cry out, as he does, "*This is the world's reward!*"

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THE END.

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