

Tales by Musæus, Tieck, Richter, Volume 1.djvu/13



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order in his finances. Nor did he give himself the trouble to investigate the real condition of the business; but after flying to the common Fool's-litany, and thundering out some scores of curses, he transmitted to his shoulder-shrugging steward the laconic order: Find means.

Bill-brokers, usurers and money-changers now came into play. For high interest, fresh sums were poured into the empty coffers; the silver flooring of the dining-room was then more potent in the eyes of creditors, than in these times of ours the promissory obligation of the Congress of America, with the whole thirteen United States to back it. This palliative succeeded for a season; but, underhand, the rumour spread about the town, that the silver flooring had been privily removed, and a stone one substituted in its stead. The matter was immediately, by application of the lenders, legally inquired into, and discovered to be actually so. Now, it could not be denied, that a marble-floor, worked into nice Mosaic, looked much better in a parlour, than a sheet of dirty, tarnished dollars: the creditors, however, paid so little reverence to the proprietor's refinement of taste, that on the spot they, one and all, demanded payment of their several moneys; and as this was not complied with, they proceeded to procure an act of bankruptcy; and Melchior's house, with its appurtenances, offices, gardens, parks and furniture, were sold by public auction, and their

late owner, who in this extremity had screened himself from jail by some chicanery of law, judicially ejected.

It was now too late to moralise on his absurdities, since philosophical reflections could not alter what was done, and the most wholesome resolutions would not bring him back his money. According to the principles of this our cultivated century, the hero at this juncture ought to have retired with dignity from the stage, or in some way terminated his existence; to have entered on his travels into foreign parts, or opened his carotid artery; since in his native town he could live no longer as a man of honour. Franz neither did the one nor the other. The *qu'en-dira-t-on*, which French morality employs as bit and curb for thoughtlessness and folly, had never once occurred to the unbridled squanderer in the days of his profusion, and his sensibility was still too dull to feel so keenly the disgrace of his capricious wastefulness. He was like a

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