

were few people to be seen; and the owner of the house which was on fire and his wife and two children were standing half dressed, gazing helplessly upon the flames, wringing their hands, and loudly bewailing their fate; while the servants were dragging enormous loads of all kinds of furniture out of the house. I took my place at one of the engines, and supplied it with water, which was brought in tubs from the nearest fountain. By degrees, the people came running up from all quarters, still, however, half stupified and almost reeling with sleep: they were arranged in order, and passed from hand to hand the buckets which they brought with them.

On a sudden, a heart-rending cry arose from the corner of the house which was on fire. I ran hastily to the spot, to give assistance in case any new misfortune should have befallen. Two children had been left behind in the flames! In their trepidation, the parents had forgotten them, and now the father stood pale as death, pointing with outstretched arms to a window in the third story; and the mother had fallen upon her knees, and with her hands upraised to heaven, prayed aloud for mercy! Two children, a boy and a girl, about twelve or thirteen years old, stood beside their parents, clasping their hands above their heads, weeping and crying out, "Oh, poor Anthony!—poor little Francis!—they will be lost in the fire, they will be burnt! O merciful God, take pity upon them!"

Meanwhile, a long ladder was brought and placed up to the window; but no one would venture to it, for the blazing rafters were already tumbling down with fearful crash; thick masses of smoke, and innumerable sparks of fire had burst out afresh, and were showering down on the crowd below. One of the two men who had put up the ladder, called out, "stand back, the gable is going to fall in!" The other said, "the poor children are lost! Even though any one would venture up, it would now be too late!" He leaped away, and the entire crowd fell back in alarm. In fact the gable of the house which was principally of wood, and had already taken fire, began to lean forward, and threatened every moment to fall.

The thought struck me notwithstanding: "In God's name let me venture! He will be merciful to me."

I scrambled up the ladder as fast as possible, and though it was somewhat too short, reached the window safely. What a sight was there. The room was illuminated by the fearful deep red glare of the fire—the children, two lovely little boys, in their white night dress, were kneeling in the centre of the room, and with their little hands uplifted to heaven, and cried out "Dear Father in Heaven, have mercy upon us, come to our aid, save us from

the flames!" The fire had already seized upon the woodwork of the floor and the doors. I forced in the window, and in a moment the flame, rendered more violent by the air, burst out with greater fury, and a torrent of smoke rushed from the window. I leaped hastily into the room, and placed the boys upon the window-sill—the crowd below raised a shout of joy when they saw the two children—I sprang up again, but I had to feel for a long time with my foot, before I could reach the ladder. Desiring one of the boys to cling round my neck, and clasping the other with my arm, I endeavoured, with my disengaged hand, to seize the ladder, and hold fast by it. It was a most perilous attempt—a loud shriek of terror burst from every tongue. "O God!" cried one in the crowd of spectators, "he never will be able to save them!" another shrieked, "O my God, all three will fall together!" and from every voice rose one simultaneous prayer: "God assist him, God have mercy on the children!" The children screamed aloud with terror and alarm, and even I myself felt almost faint with fear, when burdened as I was with the children, I caught hold of the ladder, and supporting myself with my single hand, tried to descend by it, while it tottered to and fro under my weight. But, with God's help, I succeeded, and amid the joyful shouts of the multitude, I came safely with the children to the ground.

I hastened to bring them to their parents. The mother had swooned away at the sight of the peril in which her children had been placed, and her husband had been trying to convey her into one of the neighbouring houses, but, unnerved by terror and anxiety, he was not able to support her, and she had sunk down upon the deep snow which covered the earth. Her husband knelt by her side, and the two elder children were trying to hold up her drooping head. As I drew near the parents, with the two little boys, carrying one of them in my arms, and leading the other by the hand, the boy whom I held by the hand burst away from me, ran up to his father, and cried out joyfully, "Dearest father!" His father sprang up, clasped the boy in his arms, and cried, "God be praised! My whole property may now perish in the fire, for my dearest treasures are saved!"

The joyous exclamation of the father, and the shrill voice of the child, as he strove to embrace him with his little arms, reached the mother's ear; she awoke from her swoon. I presented the other child to her. She snatched him wildly into her arms, as though he were not yet safe from the fire—she could only weep and sob convulsively for joy. Never shall I forget the look of gratitude she cast at me.

I hastened back to my fire-engine. After some hours the fire was mastered, and there was nothing