

The School for Emperors.

(Howard Angus Kennedy, in the 'Sunday at Home'.)

CHAPTER II.—Continued

(Concluded.)

With a good deal of trouble, by the aid of 'them nippers,' the Emperor broke off a big piece from the slab, and gave it into the little girl's hand; but the man, who was leaning against the shop door, called out roughly: 'You've given her a penn'orth,' and made out exactly two ounces in the brass scales. A good many little boys and girls came in on their way to school, and pretty soon the Emperor had learned the prices of all sorts of sweets, and how much change to give when he wanted to subtract twopence-halfpenny from a shilling. Then the man loaded up a hand-barrow and went off to sell sweets on the street, just warning his wife to see that 'Jack' didn't make any more mistakes.

When dinner-time came the Emperor could not eat a morsel. Still, when he got back to the shop he went on tasting the sweets, and by tea-time he felt so ill that he could hardly stand. When the man came home he found his wife behind the counter, and Jack groaning miserably on the straw underneath it. 'I thought so,' said the man; 'he's pretty safe not to eat any more sweets as long as he's here.' The Emperor thought so too. However, he felt better after a few hours' rest, and was just able to stagger out when the order came to shut up shop. The red-haired boy had come home by this time, and his father ordered him to go and help Jack with the shutters. This put him in a very bad temper, so the Emperor got a few more punches and kicks before the shutters were all up.

Then the children were called in to supper, and the red-haired boy, still in a bad humor, pulled his sister's hair. The little girl began to cry, and the Emperor, forgetting for the moment that she was only a common little girl, told the red-haired boy to stop. 'Oh,' said the young rascal, 'you've found your tongue, have you?' and pulled his sister's hair all the harder. Then the Emperor actually hit him—yes, hit him—right on the nose with his imperial little fist. It was the red-haired boy's turn to be surprised now, and he flew at the Emperor like a ferocious young tiger. The Emperor stood well up to him, but it was no good; the other boy was too strong, and in half a minute sent the Emperor flying out of doors with a pair of black eyes. He ran at the top of his speed down the street, not thinking where he was going, only bent on escaping from such a den of savages. He ran and he ran, till at last he nearly ran into—the little old woman.

'Very good!' said she. 'Very good, indeed! You have passed your first Standard, so now you shall be promoted. This is the way, my dear.'

She led the way into a narrow paved courtyard, turned into a doorway, up a stone stair, knocked at a door, and said: 'This is the second class, my dear.' Then the door opened and she vanished.

CHAPTER III.

By the light of a tallow-dip on a three-legged table he soon discovered a poor man lying huddled up in a heap of rags on the floor. The poor man turned, opened his eyes, and seeing the boy said feebly: 'Hullo, who are you?'

'The Emperor Maximus,' said the boy.

'Who did you say you was?' said the poor man.

And the Emperor said: 'They call me Jack.'

'Glad to see yer, whatever they call yer,' said the man. 'Have yer brought anythink with yer?'

'No,' said Jack, 'I came away in a hurry; and I didn't have anything to bring. What do you want?'

'I want a doctor, for one thing,' said the man, 'only I can't afford one; and I want something to eat.'

The little Emperor was surprised to find tears trickling down his cheeks, which he wiped away with his knuckles, for he could not find a handkerchief in his pocket, and said, 'I am very sorry. I will go and try and get something for you.'

'Bless yer little heart, youngster,' said the man. 'You're a good sort, you are.'

The Emperor went out into the street, but he had not the least idea where he could get what the poor man wanted. He had not stood there a minute when he saw the little old woman standing on the other side and ran to her, though it was very muddy.

'Very good,' said she, 'very good! I know what you want. Just come with me.'

She took him into a wide avenue, and put a broom into his hand. 'There, my dear, you sweep that crossing, and earn a little something for the sick man.'

The Emperor was glad enough now that he had learnt to use a broom, and he used it with such a will that in five minutes he had the best-swept crossing in the avenue. He had hardly finished, when one of his own lords-in-waiting came across, and his lordship was so pleased at not having to dirty his patent-leather shoes, that he gave the Emperor a shilling and did not wait for the change. The Emperor at once ran into a chemist's shop and asked for a shilling's-worth of anything they had for a sick man. The chemist opened his eyes very wide and said: 'What is the matter with him, my boy?'

'I don't know,' said the Emperor. 'He is very sick and very hungry, and he hasn't got anything at all.' The chemist put some beef jelly in his pocket and a hat on his head, and told the boy to show him the house. The Emperor led the way into the poor man's room. 'What is the matter with you?' said the kind chemist.

'Starvation,' said the man, 'no more and no less.'

'Oh!' said the chemist. 'Well, you eat this, just a morsel at a time, and I'll see what more can be done for you. Now, my boy,' he went on, writing on a bit of paper, 'you take this to Mrs. Davidson's. She's a wonderfully good woman, and I know she'd never allow a man to starve within a mile of her, if she knew it.' The Emperor did as he was told, and no sooner had he knocked than the door was opened by—the little ugly old woman. 'Very good!' said she. 'Very good indeed! You have passed the second Standard with honors. If you keep on as well as you have begun, you can go home at the end of the term.'

'Why, how many Standards are there?' said Maximus, with a rather woebegone look on his dirty little face.

'At any common school there are five-and-twenty,' said the little old woman, 'though most of the boys and girls only get a dozen or so, and some of them take many years even to pass the first. As for you, Maximus,' she went on, 'there are something like a thousand Standards at my school for emperors.'

The boy started, and nearly cried. 'Why, I shall never get through,' he said, mournfully. 'It's no use trying.'

'No,' said the old woman; 'if you pass your twenty-fifth Standard this term I shall let you go back to the palace and continue your studies there. At least, I shall let you live

there: I am quite sure that you won't stay there all the time, cooped up among courtiers and that sort of folk. But now I must be off to look after your patient.'

'Can't I go with you?' said the Emperor. 'Wouldn't you like me to stay there, in case he wants anything in the night? You see,' he went on, holding up his imperial little head as high as it would go, 'you see, he's one of my people.'

'Very good!' said the old woman. 'I would not have asked you to do it; but as it's your own idea you shall. You will be very tired by morning, but you'll have passed your third Standard, and then you can be off and look for Standard IV. You won't have any trouble in finding it.'

So that night the Emperor spent curled up in a corner of the sick man's room. Very hard he found the planks; but he answered cheerfully whenever the poor man called, and when the time came for him to leave in the morning he marched through the streets whistling—yes, actually whistling—till he got into the country. For three long months he tramped from cottage to cottage and town to town. He never had any trouble in finding his Standards, and some of them were very difficult; but they seemed to get easier and easier, and he had almost forgotten even to want to get back to the palace—when, all of a sudden, one day, when he thought his road was leading right into the heart of an immense and gloomy forest, he passed out at the other side and found himself in the palace grounds. There was his mother, sitting on a marble seat, looking through a pile of dry papers that the Prime Minister had brought her to sign.

'Run away!' said the horrified Prime Minister when he spied a ragged little boy marching boldly into the royal presence. But the Empress-mother looked up, and knew her boy at once, and ran and stooped down and kissed him and hugged him.

If the Prime Minister and all the courtiers had only known where he had been, and what sort of adventures he had had! Nobody knew that, except the Emperor himself, and the Empress-mother, and a little old woman who used to come bringing standard rose-bushes for his Majesty's garden. The Emperor used to plant them with his own hands; and before he was anything like ninety-nine years old people used to say, 'There was never such a rose-garden as that in all the world: and there was never such an Emperor as his Majesty!'

Lift thy head, throw off thy sadness,

Never let the joy-buds chill;

If thou nurse each germ of gladness,

Gladness all thy life may fill.

—From the Danish.

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