

The Inglenook

The Last Man in the Line.

By Francis Knowles.

Uncle Jack's business errand upon an upper floor of the building kept him a long time. It was late, nearly dinner hour, guessed the Emperor waiting below at the door. He drew the five-dollar gold piece from his pocket again. Five dollars! In token of that many years. Earlier in the day he had wondered what to buy with his birthday gift. Finally he had decided. He smiled contentedly as it lay shining in the palm of his plump little hand. How surprised everybody would be at the dinner-table! They would open a mysterious package and would find—what? Well, something that cost just five dollars; something which this very morning he heard his father wish for. Uncle Jack, who gave him the money, was told confidentially of the proposed investment, and seemed surprised. The Emperor could not understand why. He was only five years old, you see, and he saw nothing unusual in giving instead of getting. The quicker his Uncle Jack came downstairs, and the sooner he took him to buy the gift for his father, the better pleased would the Emperor be. He was becoming impatient.

Over a doorway a few steps down the street hung a large black sign. White letters upon it spelled "Paymaster's Office." A long line of roughly dressed men straggled into the doorway. The last man in the line made very slow progress. Every five minutes or so a laborer forced his way out from under the swinging sign, stuffing something in his pocket. Then the man at the end of the line moved a step nearer.

"Poor fellows, they work for their money even after they have earned it!" said somebody in the Emperor's hearing.

"Yes, indeed. That chap at the end of the line is apt to dine by lamplight," was the reply.

"In company with his family," rejoined the other. "Chances are there'll be no dinner for them until he brings home the week's wages. I can tell you it's no fun to be the last man in the line."

The Emperor walked down to the end of the line. The man there, young and neatly clad, was clearly ill at ease. Toil had not yet set in his face those grim lines which labor eventually carves. There was stolid expectancy in the other men's eyes. In his impatience, hardly restrained. Presumably he knew the Emperor was looking at him, and their glances met. The Emperor's scrutiny was shyly curious, wholly sympathetic.

Withal, he was evidently thinking very hard. With his cap pushed back on his head he stood with his hands in his pockets, his legs apart, his feet firmly planted.

We said of the Emperor in those days that he was continually on the watch for honest faces, and that he could never meet an honest person's glance without nodding and smiling in return. A mere coincidence, if true, some people answered. But we believed it was superior insight. Meeting the glance of the last man in the line the Emperor nodded and smiled. Then they began a conversation.

"No; he wasn't in a hurry because dinner hour was near. Nobody was waiting hungry at home for his coming. But there was a wife—ill." "The last man in the line" said this with an embarrassed air. "She needed a doctor and—and a good many things, very promptly, too. This was Saturday. He could not wait until Monday and come back then for his wages. He must use some to-night—a little—enough to make sure of the doctor. No; he had not seen her since he went to his work early this morning. Yes; she wanted him to come just as much as he wanted to go to her."

The man at the end of the line suddenly stopped talking and stared at the swinging sign. It seemed very far away from him just then; but that was because his eyes were blurred. Then he looked down and saw the Emperor gravely proffering the gold piece. Of the conversation which followed, and its outcome, we are only told that the Emperor informed "the last man in the line" where he lived, and that the money changed hands. A moment later, when Uncle Jack joined him, he was waving good-bye toward a street that led to an East Side tenement.

Of course the Emperor had to tell, and he was not wholly happy in the telling. No! Indeed; nobody ever did. But something was wrong. Else why did his mother look reproachfully at Uncle Jack? And why did his father pretend to feel so badly when he was laughing at Uncle Jack at the same time? The matter weighed upon the Emperor's mind as he went to bed. After the evening prayer he looked up soberly at his mother's face, and found there, as ever, the assurance of sympathy. To her he repeated the circumstances which unconsciously taught him to-day his lesson of charity. And when he finished, he said good-night, content. For the mother, bending to kiss the sweet lips, whispered

as if to herself, "Christ send to all of us my Emperor's compassion for 'the last man in the line.'"

That is all of the Emperor's connection with this story, except that his five-dollar piece was returned to him on Monday night.

There is a further history. One of its scenes is in an East Side tenement, where, at the dawn of another child-life a brighter day came to a man and woman who are no longer last in the line.

The Pernicious Grumbling Habit.

Do not let your child acquire the habit of grumbling. Stop the first beginnings and it will never become a habit. If there is just cause of complaint, try to remedy it; if there is no possibility of improvement, teach that silent endurance is the best way to meet the inevitable. It is never wise to stay in a place and grumble. If the thing you dislike cannot be altered, change your environment. If, on reflection, you decide that, balancing one thing with another, you would rather bear the ills you know than fly to others that you know not of, bear them in silence.—Ladies' Home Journal.

The Bird's Breakfast.

Two little birdies,
One winter day,
Began to wonder,
And then to say,
"How about breakfast,
This wintry day?"

Two little maidens,
One wintry day,
Into the garden
Wended their way,
Where the snow lay deep
That wintry day.

One maid with a broom
Swept the snow away;
One scattered crumbs,
Then away to play;
And birdies had breakfast
That wintry day.

A Visit to the Queen.

Dorothy Drew, granddaughter of Mr. Gladstone, publishes in a London magazine this pretty picture of her visit to the Queen at Windsor Castle: "An Indian man whom the Queen likes very much, was at the door. The next moment we stood before the great Queen whom grandpapa served for 60 years. She was just another woman like grandmama, with a white cap on her head. I courtesied and kissed her, and told her my name, Dorsie, and of grandpapa, and all our pet names at Hawarden Castle. The Queen put on her glasses and asked me to go to the other side of the room that she could see me better. Then she took a little jewel case, and said, 'This is for you.'"

"I opened it and saw a darling little brooch with a diamond V., a diamond R., and a tourquoise I., and a little crown at the top made of red enamel. I courtesied and kissed her hand, and said, 'Thank you, very much.'"

"She looked very nice and kind, and I liked her very much. The Queen kissed me again, and mother and I went away."