

Long Live The King

BY MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Old Adelbert gazed at it. Then he commended his soul to God, and turned toward the palace. Before it were pecked dense throngs of silent people. Now and then a man put down a box, and rising on it, addressed the crowd, attempting to rouse them. Each time angry hands pulled him down, and hisses greeted him as he slunk away.

Had old Adelbert been alive to anything but his mission, he would have seen that this was no mob of revolutionists, but a throng of grieving people, awaiting the great bell of St. Stefan's with its dire news.

Then, above their heads, it rang out, slow, ominous, terrible. A sob ran through the crowd. In groups, and at last as a whole, the throng knelt. Men uncovered and women wept.

The bell rang on. At its first notes old Adelbert stopped, staggered, almost fell. Then he uncovered his head.

"Gone!" he said. "The old king! My old king!"

His face twitched. But the horror behind him drove him on through the kneeling crowd. Where it refused to

yield, he drove the iron point of his wooden leg into yielding flesh, and so made his way. Some one raised a cry and others took it up.

"The king!" they cried. "Show us the little king!"

But the balcony outside the deno king's apartments remained empty. The curtains at the long windows were drawn, save at one, opened for air. The breeze shook its curtains to and fro, but no small, childish figure emerged. The cries kept up, but there was a snarl in the note now.

"The king! Long live the king. Where is he?"

A man in a red costume, near old Adelbert, leaped on a box and lighted a flaming torch. "Aye!" he yelled "call for the little king. Where is he? What have they done with him?"

Old Adelbert pushed on. The voices of the revolutionist died behind him in a chorus of fury. From nowhere apparently, came lighted box banners proclaiming the chancellor's treason and demanding a republic. Some of them instructed the people to gather around the parliament where, it was stated, leading citizens were already forming a republic. Some, more violent, suggested an advance on the palace.

The crowd at first ignored them, but as time went on, it grew ugly. By all precedent, the new king should be now before them. What, then, if this rumor was true? Where was the little king? Revolution, now, in the making. A flame ready to blaze. Hastily, on the outskirts of the throng, a delegation formed to visit the palace, and learn the truth.

Drums were now beating steadily, filling the air with their throbbing, almost drowning out the solemn tolling of the bell. Around them were rallying angry groups. As the groups grew large, each drum led its followers toward the government house, where, on the steps, the revolutionary party harangued the crowd. Bonfires sprang up, built of no one knew what. In the public squares, red fire burned. The drums thrummed.

The city had not yet risen. It was large and slow to move. Slow, too, to believe in treason, or that it had no king. But it was a matter of moments now, not of hours.

The noise penetrated into the very wards of the hospital. Red fires bathed pale faces on their pillows in a feverish glow. Nurses gathered at the windows, their uniforms and faces alike

scribble in the glare, and whispered together.

One such group gathered near the bedside of the student Haeckel, still in his lethargy. His body had gained strength, so that he was clothed at times, to wander aimlessly about the ward. But he had remained dazed. Now and then the curtain of the past lifted, but for a moment only. He had forgotten his name. He spent long hours straggling to pierce the mist.

But mostly he lay, or sat, as now, beside his bed, a bandage still on his head, clad in shirt and trousers, bare feet thrust into worn hospital slippers. The red glare had not roused him, nor yet the beat of the drums. But a word or two that one of the nurses spoke caught his ear and held him. He looked up, and slowly rose to his feet. Unsteadily he made his way to a window, holding to the sill to steady himself.

Old Adelbert had been working his way impatiently. The temper of the mob was growing ugly. It was suspicious, frightened, potentially dangerous. The cry of "To the palace!" greeted his ears as he finally emerged breathless from the throng.

He stepped boldly to the old stone archway, and faced a line of soldiers there. "I would see the chancellor!" he gasped, and saluted.

The captain of the guard stepped out. "What is it you want?" he demanded.

"The chancellor," he lowered his voice. "I have news of the crown prince."

Magic words, indeed. Doors opened swiftly before them. But time was flying, too. In his confusion the old man had only one thought, to reach the chancellor. It would have been better to have told his news at once. The climbing stairs takes time when one is old and fatigued, and has but one leg.

However, at last it was done, and old Adelbert stamped to the door of the room where the council sat debating and the chancellor paced the floor.

Small ceremony now. Led by soldiers, who retired and left him to enter alone, old Adelbert stumbled into the room. He was out of breath and dizzy; his heart beat to suffocation. There was not air enough in all the world to breathe. He clutched at the velvet hangings of the door, and swayed, but he saw the chancellor.

"The crown prince," he said thickly. "Is at the home of the Americans." He stared about him. Strange that



"Make—Haste," He Said, and Slid Stiffly to the Ground.

the room should suddenly be filled with a mist. "But there be those—who wait—there—to capture him."

He caught desperately at the curtains, with their royal arms embroidered in blue and gold. Shameful, in such company, to stagger so!

"Make—haste," he said, and slid stiffly to the ground. He lay without moving.

The council roused then. Mettlich was the first to get to him. But it was too late.

Old Adelbert had followed the mist to the gates it concealed. More than that, shyness, traitor that he was, he had followed his king.

CHAPTER XIX.

In the Road of the Good Children, Haeckel crept to a window and looked out. Bonfires were springing up in the open square in front of the gov-

The wooden benches were piled together and fired, and by each such pyre stood a gesticulating, shouting red demon.

Guns were appearing now. Wagons loaded with them drove into the square, to be surrounded by a howling mob. The percentage of sober citizens was growing—sober citizens no longer. For the little king had not been shown to them. Obviously he could not be shown to them. Therefore rumor was right, and the boy was gone.

Against the palace, therefore, their rage was turned. The shouts for the little king turned to threats. The archbishop had come out on the balcony accompanied by Father Gregory. The archbishop had raised his hands, but had not obtained silence. Instead, to his horror and dismay, a few stones had been thrown.

He retired, breathing hard. But Father Gregory had remained, facing the crowd fearlessly, his arms not raised in benediction, but folded across his chest. Stones rattled about him, but he did not flinch, and at last he gained the ears of the crowd. His great voice, stern and fearless, held them.

"My friends," he said, "there is work to be done, and you lose time. We cannot show you the king, because he is not here. While you stand there shrieking, his enemies have their will of him. The little king has been stolen from the palace."

He might have swayed them, even then. He tried to move them to a search of the city. But a pallid man, sweating with excitement, climbed on the shoulders of two companions, and faced the crowd.

"Aye, he is stolen," he cried. "But who stole him? Not the city. We are loyal. Ask the palace where he is. Ask those who have allied themselves with Karnia. Ask Mettlich."

There was more, of course. The cries of "To the palace!" increased. Those behind pushed forward, shoving the ones ahead toward the archway, where a line of soldiers with fixed bayonets stood waiting.

The archduchess and Hilda with a handful of women, had fled to the roof, and from there saw the advance of the mob. Hedwig had haughtily refused to go.

At the hospital, Haeckel, the student, stood by his window, and little by little the veil lifted. His slow blood stirred first. The beating of drums, the shrieks of the crowd, the fires, all played their part. Another patient joined him, and together they looked out.

"Bad work!" said the other man. "Aye!" said Haeckel. Then, speaking very slowly, and with difficulty, "I do not understand."

"The king is dead."

"Aye," observed Haeckel, still incomprehending. And then, "Dead—the king?"

"Dead. Hear the bell."

"Then—" But he could not at once formulate the thought in his mind. Speech came hard. He was still in a cloud.

"They say," said the other man, "that the crown prince is missing, that he has been stolen. The people are frenzied."

He went on, dilating on the rumors. Still Haeckel labored. The king! The crown prince! There was something that he was to do. It was just beyond him, but he could not remember. Then, by accident, the other man touched the hidden spring of his memory.

"There are some who think that Mettlich—"

"Mettlich!" That was the word. With it the curtain split, as it were, the cloud was gone. Haeckel put a hand to his head.

A few minutes later, a strange figure dashed out of the hospital. The night watchman had joined the mob, and was at that moment selecting a ride from a cart. Around the cart were students, still in their carnival finery, wearing the colors of his own corps. Haeckel, desperate of eye, pallid and gaunt, clad still in his hospital shirt and trousers, Haeckel climbed on to the wagon, and mounted to the seat, a strange swaying figure, with a bandage on his head. In spite of that, there were some who knew him.

"Haeckel!" they cried. The word spread. The crowd of students pressed close.

"What would you do?" he cried to them. "You know me. You see me now. I have been done almost to death by those you would aid. Aye, arm yourselves, but not against your king. We have sworn to stand together. I call on you, men of my corps, to follow me. There are those who tonight will murder the little king and put King Mob on the throne. And they be those who have tortured me. Look at me! This they have done to me." He tore the bandage off, and showed his scarred head. "Quick!" he cried. "I know where they hide, these spawn of hell. Who will follow me? To the king!"

"To the king!"

They took up the cry, a few at first, then all of them. More than his words, the gaunt and wounded figure of Haeckel in the cart fought for him. He reeled before them. Two leaped up and steadied him, finally, indeed, took him on their shoulders, and led the way. They made a wedge of men, and pushed through the mob.

"To the little king!" was the cry they raised, and ran, a flying wedge of white, fantastic figures. Those who were unarmed seized weapons from the crowd as they passed. Urged by Haeckel, they ran through the streets. Haeckel knew. It was because he

to the house in the Road of the Good Children, and to what might be enacting there. His eyes burned. Now at last he would thwart them, unless—

Just before they turned into the street, a horseman had dashed out of it and hung himself out of the saddle. The door was bolted, but it opened to his ring, and Nikky faced the concierge, Nikky, with a drawn revolver in his hand, and a face deathly white.

He had had no time to fire, no time even to speak. The revolver flew out of his hand at one blow from the fall-like arms of the concierge. Behind him somewhere was coming, Nikky knew, a detachment of cavalry. But he had outdistanced them, riding frenziedly, had leaped hedges and ditches across the park. He must hold this man until they came.

Struggling in the grasp of the concierge, he yet listened for them. From the first he knew it was a losing battle. He had lost before. But he fought fiercely, with the strength of a dozen. His frenzy was equalled by that of the other man, and his weight was less by a half. He went down finally and lay still, a battered, twisted figure.

But Black Humbert, breathing hard, had heard sounds in the street, and put up the chain. He stood at bay, a huge, shaken figure at the foot of the stone staircase. He was for flight now. But surely—outside at the door some one gave the secret knock of the tribunal, and followed it by the password. He breathed again. Friends, of course, come for the ammunition. But, to be certain, he went to the window of his bureau, and looked out through the bars. Students!

"Coming!" he called. And kicked at Nikky's quiet figure as he passed it. Then he unbolted the door, dropped the chain, and opened the door.

Standing before him, backed by a great crowd of fantastic figures, was Haeckel.

They did not kill him at once. At the points of a dozen bayonets, intended, for vastly different work, they forced him up the staircase, flight after flight. At first he cried pitifully that he knew nothing of the royal child, then he tried to barter what he knew for his life. They jeered at him, pricked him shamefully from behind with daggers.

At the top of the last flight he turned and faced them. "Gentlemen, friends!" he implored. "I have done him no harm. It was never in my mind to do him an injury. I—"

"He is in the room where you kept me?" asked Haeckel, in a low voice.

"He is there, and safe."

Then Haeckel killed him. He struck him with a dagger, and his great body



Then Haeckel Killed Him.

fell on the stairs. He was still moving and groaning, as they swarmed over him.

Haeckel faced the crowd. "There are others," he said. "I know them all. When we have finished here, we will go on."

They were fearful of frightening the little king and only two went back, with the key that Haeckel had taken from the body of Black Humbert. They unlocked the door of the back room, to find his majesty sitting on a chair, with a rather moist handkerchief in his hand. He was not at all frightened, however, and was weeping for his grandfather.

"Has the carriage come?" he demanded. "I am waiting for a carriage."

They assured him that a carriage was on the way, and were very much at a loss.

"I would like to go quickly," he said. "I am afraid—my grandfather—Nikky!"

For there stood Nikky in the doorway, a staggering, white-lipped Nikky. He was not too weak to pick the child up, however, and carry him to the head of the stairs, by his order. So he stood there, the boy in his arms, and the students, only an hour before in revolt against him, cheered mightily.

(To be continued)
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