LONG LIVE THE KING

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

—18—

"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 uncomprehending. 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 rifle 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

Then Haeckel Killed Him.

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 had known that they had done away with him. His mind, working now with almost unnatural activity, flew ahead 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 flung 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 flail-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 equaled 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 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. They had moved the body of the concierge, 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.

They met the detachment of cavalry at the door, and thus, in state, rode back to the palace where he was to rule, King Otto the Ninth. A very sad little king, for Nikky had answered his question honestly. A king who mopped his eyes with a very dirty handkerchief. A weary little king, too, with already a touch of indigestion!

Behind them, in the house on the Road of the Good Children, Haeckel, in an access of fury, ordered the body of the concierge flung from a window. It lay below, a twisted and shapeless thing, beside the pieces of old Adelbert's broken sword.

CHAPTER XX.

The Lincoln Penny.

And so, at last, King Otto the Ninth reached his palace, and was hurried up the stairs to the room where the council waited. Not at all a royal figure, but a tired little boy in gray trousers, a short black Eton coat, and a rolling collar which had once been white.

He gave one glance around the room. "My grandfather!" he said. And fell to crying into his dirty pocket-handkerchief.

The chancellor eyed grimly from under his shaggy brows the disreputable figure of his sovereign. Then he went toward him, and put his hand on his head.

"He was very eager for this rest, Otto," he said.

Then he knelt and very solemnly and with infinite tenderness, he kissed the small, not overclean, hand.

One by one the council did the same thing.

King Otto straightened his shoulders and put away the handkerchief. It had occurred to him that he was a man now and must act a man's part in the world.

"May I see him?" he asked. "I—didn't see him before."

"Your people are waiting, sire," the chancellor said gravely. "To a ruler, his people must come first."

And so, in the clear light from the room behind him, Otto the Ninth first stood before his people. They looked up, and hard eyes grew soft, tense muscles relaxed. They saw the erectness of the small figure, the steadiness of the blue eyes that had fought back their tears, the honesty and fire and courage of this small boy who was the king.

Let such of the revolutionists as remained scream before the parliament house. Let the flames burn and the drums beat. The solid citizens, the great mass of the people, looked up at the king and cheered mightily. Revolution had that night received its death blow at the hands of a child. The mob prepared to go home to bed.

While King Otto stood on the balcony, down below in the crowd an American woman looked up, and suddenly caught her husband by the arm.

"Robert," she said, "Robert, it is Bobby's little friend!"

"Nonsense!" he retorted. "It's rather dramatic, isn't it? Nothing like this at home! See, they've crowned him already."

But Bobby's mother looked with the clear eyes of most women, and all mothers.

"They have not crowned him," she said, smiling, with tears in her eyes. "The absurd little king! They have forgotten to take off his paper crown!"

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The dead king lay in state in the royal chapel. Tall candles burned at his head and feet, set in long black standards. His uniform lay at his feet, his cap, his sword. The flag of his country was draped across him. He looked very rested.

In a small private chapel nearby lay old Adelbert. They could not do him too much honor. He, too, looked rested, and he, too, was covered by the flag, and no one would have guessed that a part of him had died long before, and lay buried on a battlefield. It was, unfortunately, his old uniform that he wore. They had added his regimental flag to the national one, and on it they had set his shabby cap. He, too, might have been a king. There were candles at his head and feet, also; but alas, he had now no sword.

Thus it happened that old Adelbert the traitor lay in state in the palace, and that monks, in long brown robes, knelt and prayed by him. Perhaps he needed their prayers. But perhaps, in the great accounting, things are balanced up, the good against the bad. In that case, who knows?

The palace mourned and the palace rejoiced. Haeckel had told what he knew and the leaders of the terrorists were in prison. Some, in high places, would be hanged with a silken cord, as was their due. And others would be esthetically disposed of. The way was not yet clear ahead, but the crisis was passed and safely.

Early in the evening, soon after he had appeared on the balcony, the court had sworn fealty to Otto the Ninth. He had stood on the dais in the throne room, very much washed and brushed by that time, and the ceremony had taken place. Such a shout from relieved throats as went up, such a clatter as swords were drawn from scabbards and held upright in the air.

"Otto!" they cried. And again, "Otto."

The little king had turned quite pale with excitement.

Late in the evening Nikky Larisch went to the council room. The council had dispersed, and Mettlich sat alone. When Nikky was announced he frowned. Then, very faintly, he smiled. But he was stern enough when the young soldier entered. Nikky came to the point at once.

"I have come," he said, "to know what I am to do, sir."

"Do?" asked the chancellor, coldly.

"Whether the crown—whether the king is safe or not," said Nikky, looking dogged and not at all now like the picture of his mother. "I am guilty of—of all that happened."

The chancellor had meant to be very hard. But he had come through a great deal, and besides, he saw something Nikky did not mean him to see. He was used to reading men. He saw that the boy had come to the breaking point.

"Sit down," he said, "and tell me about it."

But Nikky would not sit. He stood, looking straight ahead, and told the story. He left nothing out, the scene on the roof, his broken promise.

"Although," he added, his only word of extenuation, "God knows I tried to keep it."

Then the message from Countess Loschek, and his long wait in her boudoir, to return to the thing he had found. As he went on, the chancellor's hand touched a button.

"Bring here at once Countess Loschek," he said, to the servant who came. "Take two of the guard, and bring her."

Then, remembering the work he had to do, he took another sip of milk. "These things you have done," he said to Nikky. "And weak and wicked enough they are. But, on the other hand, you found the king."

"Others found him also. Besides, that does not affect my guilt, sir," said Nikky steadily.

Suddenly the chancellor got up and, going to Nikky, put both hands on his shoulders.

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Quite to the end now, with the countess not in her rooms or anywhere in the palace. With the bonfires burned to cold ashes, and the streets deserted. With the police making careful search for certain men whose names Haeckel had given, and tearing frenzied placards from the walls. With Miss Braithwaite still lying in her drugged sleep, watched over by the sisters who had cared for the dead king, and with Karl, across the mountains, dreaming of a bride who would never be his.

Quite to the end. Only a word or two now, and we may leave the little king to fulfill his splendid destiny. Not a quiet life, we may be certain. Perhaps not a very peaceful or untroubled one. But a brave and steadfast and honorable one, be sure of that.

What should we gain by following Olga Loschek, eating her heart out in England, of the committee of ten, cowering in its cells? They had failed, as the wicked, sooner or later, must fail. Or Karl, growing fat in a prosperous land, alike greedy for conquest and too indolent for battle?

To finish the day, then, and close with midnight.

Nikky first, a subdued and rather battered Nikky. He was possessed by a desire, not indeed unknown to lovers, to revisit the place where he and Hedwig had met before. The roof—no less. Not even then that he hoped for himself any more than he had hoped before. But at least it could not be Karl.

He felt that he could relinquish her more easily since it was not Karl. As if, poor Nikky, it would ever make any difference who it was, so it were not he!

Strangely enough, Hedwig also had had a fancy to visit the roof. She could not sleep.

So she had dismissed her maid and gone through Hubert's rooms to the roof. Nikky found her there.

Hedwig did not turn her head. She knew his steps, had really known he must come, since she was calling him, actually calling, with all her determined young will. Oh, she was shameless!

But now that he had come, it was Nikky who implored, and Hedwig who held off.

"My only thought in all the world," he said. "Can you ever forgive me?" This was tactless. No lover should ever remind his lady that he has withstood her.

"For what?" said Hedwig coolly.

"For loving you so." This was much better, quite strategic, indeed. A trench gained!

"Do you really love me? I wonder."

But Nikky was tired of words, and rather afraid of them. They were not his weapons. He trusted more, as has been said somewhere else, in his two strong arms.

"Too much ever to let you go," he said. Which means nothing unless we take it for granted that she was in his arms. And she was, indeed.

The king having been examined and given some digestive tablets by the court physicians—a group which, strangely enough, did not include Doctor Weiderman—had been given a warm bath and put to bed.

There was much formality as to the process now, several gentlemen clinging to their hereditary right to hang around and be nuisances during the ceremony. But at last he was left alone with Oskar.

Alone, of course, as much as a king is ever alone, which, what with extra sentries and so on, is not exactly solitary confinement.

"Oskar!" said the king from his pillow.

"Majesty!"

Oskar was gathering the royal garments, which the physicians had ordered burned, in case of germs.

"Did you ever eat American ice cream?"

"No, majesty. Not that I recall."

"It is very delicious," observed the king, and settled down in his sheets. He yawned, then sat up suddenly—"Oskar!"

"Yes, majesty!"

"There is something in my trousers pocket. I almost forgot it. Please bring them here."

Sitting up in bed, and under Oskar's disapproving eye, because he, too, was infected with the germ idea, King Otto the Ninth felt around in his small pockets, until at last he had found what he wanted.

"Have I a small box anywhere, a very small box?" he inquired.

"The one in which your majesty's seal ring came is here. Also there is one in the study which contained crayons."

"I'll have the ring box," said his majesty.

And soon the Lincoln penny rested on a cushion of white velvet, on which were the royal arms.

King Otto looked carefully at the penny and then closed the lid.

"Whenever I am disagreeable, Oskar," he said, "or don't care to study, or—or do things that you think my grandfather would not have done, I wish you'd bring me this box. You'd better keep it near you."

He lay back and yawned again.

"Did you ever hear of Abraham Lincoln, Oskar?" he asked.

"I—I have heard the name, majesty," Oskar ventured cautiously.

"My grandfather thought he was a—great—man." His voice trailed off. "I—should—like—"

The excitements and sorrows of the day left him gently. He stretched his small limbs luxuriously, and half turned upon his face. Oskar, who hated disorder, drew the covering in stiff and geometrical exactness across his small figure, and tiptoed out of the room.

Some time after midnight the chancellor passed the guard and came into the room. There, standing by the bed, he prayed a soldier's prayer, and into it went all his hopes for his country, his grief for his dead comrade and sovereign, his loyalty to his new king.

King Otto, who was, for all the digestive tablets, not sleeping well,

Finally They Both Slept.

roused and saw him there, and sat upright at once.

"Is it morning?" he asked, blinking.

"No, majesty. Lie down and sleep again."

"Would you mind sitting down for a little while? That is, if you are not sleepy."

"I am not sleepy," said the chancellor, and drew up a great chair. "If I stay, will you try to sleep?"

"Do you mind if I talk a little? It may make me drowsy."

"Talk if you like, majesty," said the old man.

King Otto eyed him gravely.

"Would you mind if I got on your knee?" he asked, almost timidly. In all his life no one had so held him, and yet Bobby, that very evening, had climbed on his father's knee as though it was very generally done. "I would like to try how it feels."

"Come, then," said the chancellor.

The king climbed out of bed and up on his lap. His chancellor reached over and dragged a blanket from the bed.

"For fear of a cold!" he said, and draped it about the little figure. "Now, how is that?"

"It is very comfortable. May I put my head back?"

Long, long years since the chancellor had sat thus, with a child in his arms. His sturdy old arms encircled the boy closely.

"I want to tell about running away," said the king, wide-eyed in the dusk. "I am sorry. This time I am going to promise not to do it again."

"Make the promise to yourself, majesty. It is the best way."

"I will. I intend to be a very good king."

"God grant it, majesty."

"Like Abraham Lincoln?"

"Like Abraham Lincoln," said the chancellor gravely.

The king, for all his boasted wakefulness, yawned again, and squirmed closer to the old man's breast.

"And like my grandfather," he added.

"God grant that, also."

This time it was the chancellor who yawned, a yawn that was half a sigh. He was very weary, and very sad.

Suddenly, after a silence, the king spoke: "May a king do anything he wants?"

"Not at all," said the chancellor hastily.

"But, if it will not hurt the people? I want to do two things, or have two things. They are both quite easy." His tone was anxious.

"What are they?"

"You wouldn't like to promise first, would you?"

The chancellor smiled in the darkness.

"Good strategy, but I am an old soldier, majesty. What are they?"

"First, I would like to have a dog; one to keep with me."

"I—probably that can be arranged."

"Thank you. I do want a dog. And—" he hesitated.

"Yes, majesty?"

"I am very fond of Nikky," said the king. "And he is not very happy. He looks sad, sometimes. I—I would like him to marry Hedwig, so we can all be together the rest of our lives."

The chancellor hesitated. But, after all, why not? He had followed ambition all his life, and where had it brought him? An old man, whose only happiness lay in this child in his arms.

"Perhaps," he said gently, "that can be arranged also."

The night air blew softly through the open windows. The little king smiled, contentedly, and closed his eyes.

"I'm getting rather sleepy," he said. "But if I'm not too heavy, I'd like you to hold me a little longer."

"You are not too heavy, majesty."

Soon the chancellor, worn not with one day, but with many, was nodding. His eyes closed under his fierce eyebrows. Finally they both slept. The room was silent.

Something slipped out of the little king's hand and rolled to the floor.

It was the box containing the Lincoln penny.

[THE END.]

REFUGEES IN RICH ATTIRE

English Writer Describes Grotesque Figures He Saw During the Italian Retreat.

Amid all the chaos of the Italian retreat one kept on meeting utterly incongruous figures, for alongside of others road-worn, shabby and dirty, to be clean and well dressed is to be grotesque.

Amid this multitude of haggard, unwashed, unshaven, dead beat males, I noticed two Italian ladies treading delicately over the rough ballast of the railway track. They had naturally brought with them in that flight the most valuable of their possessions, which were of a kind conveniently carried on their persons. Against this gray background of mud and rubbish and a disbanded army their two figures glittered with a brilliance that would have been conspicuous in the Rue de la Paix.

Heavy sable furs and muffs almost bowed their shoulders; each finger had two or three rings that flashed in the light; round their necks were gold chains hung with pendants, and yet instead of the air of self-satisfied ostentation that might well have gone with a display so lavish, they were only two pathetically little, frightened, perplexed faces, and an uncertain gait that did not promise much further progress along that ankle-wrenching railway line.—G. Ward Price in the Century Magazine.

As to Remarkable Longevity.

We have all read of Thomas Parr, who lived to be one hundred and fifty-two. Likewise of the countess of Desmond, one hundred and forty-five; Margaret Patten, one hundred and thirty-seven; Thomas Damme, one hundred and sixty-four; John Rovin, one hundred and seventy-two; and Peter Torton, who reached the age of one hundred and eighty-five. But these cases of extraordinary longevity lack proof.

In the days when those persons lived no accurate chronological records were kept, and dates of occurrences were usually fixed by associating them in memory with other events believed to have happened about the same time. A man's identity was liable to be confused with that of a grandfather of the same name.

Nowadays nobody lives to any such ages. Why imagine that the extreme limits of longevity have shrunk within the last two or three centuries?

Great Tibetan Industry.

By far the largest herds of musk deer are to be found on the southern shores of the Koko-Nor, and the supply of musk there (at T'aochou) is larger than the quantity that comes through Sungpan. In fact, great quantities of musk do not come to Sungpan at all, but are sent east to Yuchow, in Honan, where a fair is held in the ninth and tenth moons, many of the Sungpan traders visiting this place. At Tachienlu musk is the most valuable export, practically every hong reeking with it, and nearly all the Tibetans who come from the far interior bring some with them. The price of medium musk there is thirteen times its weight in silver.

Best Methods.

An ounce of prevention is worth—well, you know what it is. The best way to put out a fire is not to let it start. The best way to cure a cold is not to have one.