

The story of Marcus Aurelius [4]

Marcus marries Faustina

ELBERT HUBBARD



In this extract, Elbert Hubbard chronicles how Marcus Aurelius and Faustina, the Younger developed affection for – and eventually marry – each other.

The matrimonial bazaar

As for society as a matrimonial bazaar, Marcus Aurelius could not see that it had its use. He was afraid of it – afraid of himself, perhaps. He loved the little Faustina. They had been comrades together, and played "keep house" under the olive-trees at Lorium; and had ridden their ponies over the hills.

Beppo, the pet lamb

Once Marcus and Faustina, on a ride across the country, bought a lamb out of the arms of a shepherd, and kept it until it grew great curling horns, and made visitors scale the wall or climb trees. Then three priests led it away to sacrifice, and Marcus and Faustina fell into each other's arms and rained tears down each other's backs, and refused to be comforted. What if their father was an Emperor, and Marcus would be some day! It would not bring back Beppo, with his innocent lamblike ways, and make him get down on his knees and wag his tail when they fed him out of a pail!

Beppo always got on his knees to eat, and showed his love and humility before he

grew his horns and reached the age of indiscretion; then he became awfully wicked, and it took three stout priests to lead him away and sacrifice him to the gods for his own good!

But gradually the grass grew on Beppo's make-believe grave in the garden, and Fronto's problems filled the vacuum in their hearts. Fronto gave his lessons to Marcus, and Marcus gave them to Faustina – thus do we keep things by giving them away.

Confronting more serious problems

But problems greater than pet sheep grown ribald and reckless were to confront Marcus and Faustina. They had both been betrothed to others, years before, and this they now resented. They talked of this much, and then suddenly ceased to talk of it, and each evaded mentioning it, and pretended they never thought of it. Then they explosively began again – began as suddenly to talk of it, and always when they met they mentioned it.

Marcus marries Faustina

Folks called them brother and sister – they were not brother and sister, only cousins. Finally the matter was brought to Antoninus, and he pretended that he had never thought about it; but in fact he had

thought of little else for a long time. And Antoninus said that if they loved each other very much, and he was sure they did, why, it was the will of the gods that they should marry, and he never interfered with the will of the gods; so he kissed them both and cried a few foolish tears, a thing an Emperor should never do. So they were married at the country seat at Lorium, out under the orange-trees as was often the custom, for orange-trees are green the year 'round, and bear fruit and flowers at the same time, and the flowers are very sweet, and the fruit is both beautiful and useful – and these things symbol constancy and fruitfulness and good luck, and that is why we yet have orange-blossoms at weddings and play the "Lohengrin March," which is orange-trees expressed in sweet sounds. Marcus was only twenty, and Faustina could not have been over sixteen – we do not know her exact age.

Confusing the two Faustinas

There are stories to the effect that the wife of Marcus Aurelius severely tried her husband's temper at times, but these tales seem to have arisen through a confusion of the two Faustinas.

The elder Faustina was the one who set the merry pace in frivolity, and once said that any woman with a husband twenty years her senior must be allowed a lover or two –

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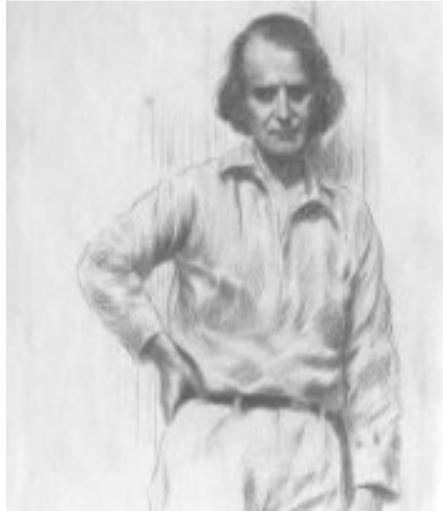
Marcus marries Faustina (Contd.)

goodness gracious! As far as we know, the younger Faustina was a most loyal and loving wife, the mother of a full dozen children. Coins issued by Marcus Aurelius stamped with the features of his wife, and the inscription Concordia, Faustina and Venus Felix, attest the felicity, or "felicity," of the marriage.

Their oldest boy, Commodus, was very much like his grandmother, Faustina, and a man who knows all about the Law of Heredity tells me that children are much more apt to resemble their grandparents than their father and mother.

I believe I once said that no house is big enough for two families, but this truth is like the Greek verb – it has many exceptions. In the same house with Emperor Antoninus Pius dwelt Lucilla, mother of Marcus, and Marcus and his wife. And they were all very happy – but life was rather more peaceful after the death of Faustina, the elder, which occurred a few years after her husband became Emperor.

She could not endure prosperity. But her husband mourned her death and made a public speech in eulogy of her, determined that only the best should be remembered of



one who had been the wife of an Emperor and the mother of his children.

Ouida's sympathy

As far as we know, Antoninus never spoke a word concerning his wife except in praise, not even when she left his house to be gone for months. It was Ouida, she of the aquafortis ink, who said, "A woman married to a man as good as Antoninus must have been very miserable, for while men who are thoroughly bad are not lovable, yet a man who is not occasionally bad is

unendurable".

And so Ouida's heart went out in sympathy and condolence to the two Faustinas, who wedded the only two men mentioned in Roman history who were infinitely wise and good.

In one of his essays, Richard Steele writes this, "No woman ever loved a man through life with a mighty love if the man did not occasionally abuse her". I give the remark for what it is worth. However, Montesquieu somewhere says that the chief objection to heaven is its monotony; so possibly there may be something in the Ouida-Steele philosophy – but of this I really can't say, knowing nothing about the subject, myself.

Elbert Hubbard was a renaissance man who was prominent around the early 20th century. The Story of Marcus Aurelius is from his Little Journeys to The Homes of The Great, Vol. 8. To make it easier to read we have broken down long paragraphs into short ones and added subtitles. The text is unaltered.

HOUSEKEEPING

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