

# THE STORY OF MARCUS AURELIUS 2 BECOMING THE EMPEROR

BY ELBERT  
HUBBARD



*In the previous issue, Elbert Hubbard described how the philosophically-inclined Marcus became friends with Antoninus. Here Hubbard explores further the friendships between Antoninus and Marcus and introduces to us the future wife of Marcus, Faustina.*

## The deepening friendship

Between Antoninus and Marcus there grew up a very close friendship.

Antoninus could scale the ladder up the tall cedar, three rungs at a time, and come down hand over hand without putting his foot on a rest. He and Marcus built another crow's-nest thirty feet above the first. They drew up the lumber by ropes, and Antoninus being sinewy and strong climbed up first, and with thongs and nails they fixed the boards in place, and made a rope ladder such as sailors make, that they could pull up after them so no one could reach them.

## The royal visits

When the kind old Emperor came to the villa they showed him what they had done. He said he would not try to climb up now as he had a touch of rheumatism. But a light was fixed in

the upper lookout, drawn up by a cord, so they could signal to the Emperor down at the palace.

Then Antoninus taught Marcus to ride horseback and pick up a spear off the ground, with his horse at a gallop. This was great sport for the Consul and the Emperor, who looked on, but they did not try it then, but said they would later on when they were feeling just right.

## Introduction to Epictetus

And beside all this Aurelius Antoninus taught Marcus to read from Epictetus, and told him how this hunchback slave, Epictetus, who was owned by a man who had been a slave himself, was one of the sweetest, gentlest souls who had ever lived.

Together they read the Stoic-slave philosopher and made notes from him. And so impressed was Marcus that, boy though he was, he adopted the simple robe of the Stoics, slept on a plank, and made his life and language plain, truthful and direct.

This was all rather amusing to those near him – to all except Antoninus and

the boy's mother. The others said, "Leave him alone and he'll get over it".

## Faustina's follies

Faustina was still fond of admiration – the simple, studious ways of her husband were not to her liking. He was twenty years her senior, and she demanded gaiety as her right. Her delight was to tread the borderline of folly, and see how close she could come to the brink and not step off.

Julius Caesar's wife was put away on suspicion, but Faustina was worse than that! She would go down to the city to masquerades, leaving her little girl at home, and be gone for three days. When she returned Aurelius Antoninus spoke no word of anger or reproof. Her father said to her, "Beware! Your husband's patience has a limit. If he divorces you, I shall not blame him; and even if he should kill you, Roman law will not punish him!"

## Antonius's patience

But long years after, Marcus, in looking back on those days, wrote: "His patience knew no limit; he treated her as a perverse child, and he once said to

me: 'I pity and love her. I will not put her away – this were selfish. How can her follies injure me? We are what we are, and no one can harm us but ourselves.

### Learning from other people's mistakes

The mistakes of those near us afford us an opportunity for self-control – we will not imitate their errors, but rather strive to avoid them. In this way what might be a great humiliation has its benefits."

Let no one imagine, however, that the tolerance of Antoninus was the soft acquiescence of weakness. After his death Marcus wrote: "Whatsoever excellent thing he had planned to do, he carried out with a persistency that nothing could divert. If he punished men, it was by allowing them to be led by their own folly – his foresight, wisdom, and calm deliberation were beyond those of any man I ever knew".

The studious, direct and manly ways of Marcus were not cast aside when he put on the toga virilis, as Faustina had predicted. In spite of the difference in their ages, Antoninus and Marcus mutually sustained each other.

### Marcus and Little Faustina

Little Faustina was much more like her father than her mother, and very early showed her preference for her father's society. Marcus was her playmate and taught her to ride a pony astride, just as her father had taught him. The three would often ride over to the village of Lorium, twelve miles from Rome, where Antoninus had a summer villa. At Lanuvium, near at hand, the Emperor spent a part of his time, and he would occasionally join the party and listen to Marcus recite from Cicero and Cæsar.

### Marcus become the prefect

When Marcus was sixteen, Hadrian appointed him prefect of festivities in Rome, to take the place of the regular officer, a man of years, who was out of the city. So well did Marcus fill the place and make up his report, that when they again met, the old Emperor kissed his cheek, calling him, "My brave Verissimus," and said, "If I had a son, I would want him just like you".

### Marcus becomes the emperor

Not long after this the Emperor was taken violently ill. He called his counselors about his bedside and directed that Aurelius Antoninus should be his successor, and that, further, Antoninus should adopt Marcus Verus, so that Marcus should

succeed Aurelius Antoninus. Hadrian loved Marcus for his own sake, and he loved him, too, for the sake of the grandfather, his old soldier comrade, Annus Verus; and beside that he was intent on preserving the Spanish strain. In a short time Hadrian passed away, and Aurelius Antoninus was crowned Emperor of Rome, and Marcus Verus, aged seventeen, slim, slender and studious, took the name, Marcus Aurelius.



[The Story of Marcus Aurelius is from Elbert Hubbard's *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.]

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