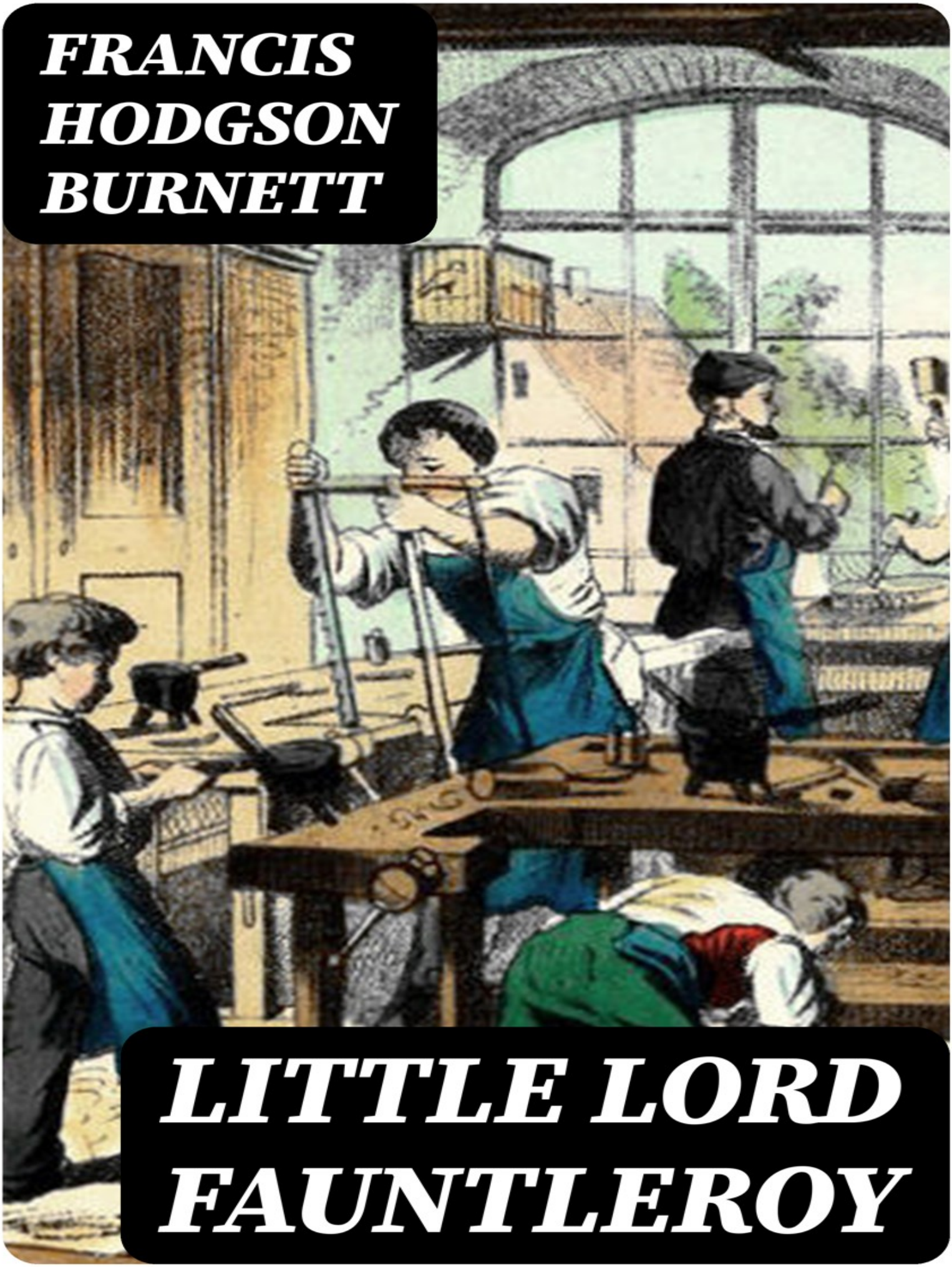
FRANCIS HODGSON BURNETT



LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY

Francis Hodgson Burnett

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Cedric himself knew nothing whatever about it. It had never been even mentioned to him. He knew that his papa had been an Englishman, because his mamma had told him so; but then his papa had died when he was so little a boy that he could not remember very much about him, except that he was big, and had blue eyes and a long mustache, and that it was a splendid thing to be carried around the room on his shoulder. Since his papa's death, Cedric had found out that it was best not to talk to his mamma about him. When his father was ill, Cedric had been sent away, and when he had returned, everything was over; and his mother, who had been very ill, too, was only just beginning to sit in her chair by the window. She was pale and thin, and all the dimples had gone from her pretty face, and her eyes looked large and mournful, and she was dressed in black.

"Dearest," said Cedric (his papa had called her that always, and so the little boy had learned to say it),
—"dearest, is my papa better?"

He felt her arms tremble, and so he turned his curly head and looked in her face. There was something in it that made him feel that he was going to cry.

"Dearest," he said, "is he well?"

Then suddenly his loving little heart told him that he'd better put both his arms around her neck and kiss her again and again, and keep his soft cheek close to hers; and he did

so, and she laid her face on his shoulder and cried bitterly, holding him as if she could never let him go again.

"Yes, he is well," she sobbed; "he is quite, quite well, but we—we have no one left but each other. No one at all."

Then, little as he was, he understood that his big, handsome young papa would not come back any more; that he was dead, as he had heard of other people being, although he could not comprehend exactly what strange thing had brought all this sadness about. It was because his mamma always cried when he spoke of his papa that he secretly made up his mind it was better not to speak of him very often to her, and he found out, too, that it was better not to let her sit still and look into the fire or out of the window without moving or talking. He and his mamma knew very few people, and lived what might have been thought very lonely lives, although Cedric did not know it was lonely until he grew older and heard why it was they had no visitors. Then he was told that his mamma was an orphan, and quite alone in the world when his papa had married her. She was very pretty, and had been living as companion to a rich old lady who was not kind to her, and one day Captain Cedric Errol, who was calling at the house, saw her run up the stairs with tears on her eyelashes; and she looked so sweet and innocent and sorrowful that the Captain could not forget her. And after many strange things had happened, they knew each other well and loved each other dearly, and were married, although their marriage brought them the ill-will of several persons. The one who was most angry of all, however, was the Captain's father, who lived in England, and was a very rich and important old nobleman, with a

very bad temper and a very violent dislike to America and Americans. He had two sons older than Captain Cedric; and it was the law that the elder of these sons should inherit the family title and estates, which were very rich and splendid; if the eldest son died, the next one would be heir; so, though he was a member of such a great family, there was little chance that Captain Cedric would be very rich himself.

But it so happened that Nature had given to the youngest son gifts which she had not bestowed upon his elder brothers. He had a beautiful face and a fine, strong, graceful figure; he had a bright smile and a sweet, gay voice; he was brave and generous, and had the kindest heart in the world, and seemed to have the power to make every one love him. And it was not so with his elder brothers; neither of them was handsome, or very kind, or clever. When they were boys at Eton, they were not popular; when they were at college, they cared nothing for study, and wasted both time and money, and made few real friends. The old Earl, their father, was constantly disappointed and humiliated by them; his heir was no honor to his noble name, and did not promise to end in being anything but a selfish, wasteful, insignificant man, with no manly or noble qualities. It was very bitter, the old Earl thought, that the son who was only third, and would have only a very small fortune, should be the one who had all the gifts, and all the charms, and all the strength and beauty. Sometimes he almost hated the handsome young man because he seemed to have the good things which should have gone with the stately title and the magnificent estates; and yet, in the depths of his proud, stubborn old heart, he

could not help caring very much for his youngest son. It was in one of his fits of petulance that he sent him off to travel in America; he thought he would send him away for a while, so that he should not be made angry by constantly contrasting him with his brothers, who were at that time giving him a great deal of trouble by their wild ways.

But, after about six months, he began to feel lonely, and longed in secret to see his son again, so he wrote to Captain Cedric and ordered him home. The letter he wrote crossed on its way a letter the Captain had just written to his father, telling of his love for the pretty American girl, and of his intended marriage; and when the Earl received that letter he was furiously angry. Bad as his temper was, he had never given way to it in his life as he gave way to it when he read the Captain's letter. His valet, who was in the room when it came, thought his lordship would have a fit of apoplexy, he was so wild with anger. For an hour he raged like a tiger, and then he sat down and wrote to his son, and ordered him never to come near his old home, nor to write to his father or brothers again. He told him he might live as he pleased, and die where he pleased, that he should be cut off from his family forever, and that he need never expect help from his father as long as he lived.

The Captain was very sad when he read the letter; he was very fond of England, and he dearly loved the beautiful home where he had been born; he had even loved his ill-tempered old father, and had sympathized with him in his disappointments; but he knew he need expect no kindness from him in the future. At first he scarcely knew what to do; he had not been brought up to work, and had no business

experience, but he had courage and plenty of determination. So he sold his commission in the English army, and after some trouble found a situation in New York, and married. The change from his old life in England was very great, but he was young and happy, and he hoped that hard work would do great things for him in the future. He had a small house on a quiet street, and his little boy was born there, and everything was so gay and cheerful, in a simple way, that he was never sorry for a moment that he had married the rich old lady’s pretty companion just because she was so sweet and he loved her and she loved him. She was very sweet, indeed, and her little boy was like both her and his father. Though he was born in so quiet and cheap a little home, it seemed as if there never had been a more fortunate baby. In the first place, he was always well, and so he never gave any one trouble; in the second place, he had so sweet a temper and ways so charming that he was a pleasure to every one; and in the third place, he was so beautiful to look at that he was quite a picture. Instead of being a bald-headed baby, he started in life with a quantity of soft, fine, gold-colored hair, which curled up at the ends, and went into loose rings by the time he was six months old; he had big brown eyes and long eyelashes and a darling little face; he had so strong a back and such splendid sturdy legs, that at nine months he learned suddenly to walk; his manners were so good, for a baby, that it was delightful to make his acquaintance. He seemed to feel that every one was his friend, and when any one spoke to him, when he was in his carriage in the street, he would give the stranger one sweet, serious look with the brown eyes, and then

follow it with a lovely, friendly smile; and the consequence was, that there was not a person in the neighborhood of the quiet street where he lived—even to the groceryman at the corner, who was considered the crossest creature alive—who was not pleased to see him and speak to him. And every month of his life he grew handsomer and more interesting.

When he was old enough to walk out with his nurse, dragging a small wagon and wearing a short white kilt skirt, and a big white hat set back on his curly yellow hair, he was so handsome and strong and rosy that he attracted every one's attention, and his nurse would come home and tell his mamma stories of the ladies who had stopped their carriages to look at and speak to him, and of how pleased they were when he talked to them in his cheerful little way, as if he had known them always. His greatest charm was this cheerful, fearless, quaint little way of making friends with people. I think it arose from his having a very confiding nature, and a kind little heart that sympathized with every one, and wished to make every one as comfortable as he liked to be himself. It made him very quick to understand the feelings of those about him. Perhaps this had grown on him, too, because he had lived so much with his father and mother, who were always loving and considerate and tender and well-bred. He had never heard an unkind or uncourteous word spoken at home; he had always been loved and caressed and treated tenderly, and so his childish soul was full of kindness and innocent warm feeling. He had always heard his mamma called by pretty, loving names, and so he used them himself when he spoke to her; he had

always seen that his papa watched over her and took great care of her, and so he learned, too, to be careful of her.

So when he knew his papa would come back no more, and saw how very sad his mamma was, there gradually came into his kind little heart the thought that he must do what he could to make her happy. He was not much more than a baby, but that thought was in his mind whenever he climbed upon her knee and kissed her and put his curly head on her neck, and when he brought his toys and picture-books to show her, and when he curled up quietly by her side as she used to lie on the sofa. He was not old enough to know of anything else to do, so he did what he could, and was more of a comfort to her than he could have understood.

“Oh, Mary!” he heard her say once to her old servant; “I am sure he is trying to help me in his innocent way—I know he is. He looks at me sometimes with a loving, wondering little look, as if he were sorry for me, and then he will come and pet me or show me something. He is such a little man, I really think he knows.”

As he grew older, he had a great many quaint little ways which amused and interested people greatly. He was so much of a companion for his mother that she scarcely cared for any other. They used to walk together and talk together and play together. When he was quite a little fellow, he learned to read; and after that he used to lie on the hearth-rug, in the evening, and read aloud—sometimes stories, and sometimes big books such as older people read, and sometimes even the newspaper; and often at such times

Mary, in the kitchen, would hear Mrs. Errol laughing with delight at the quaint things he said.

"And, indade," said Mary to the groceryman, "nobody cud help laughin' at the quare little ways of him—and his ould-fashioned sayin's! Didn't he come into my kitchen the noight the new Prisident was nominated and shtand afore the fire, lookin' loike a pictur', wid his hands in his shmall pockets, an' his innocent bit of a face as sayrious as a jedge? An' sez he to me: 'Mary,' sez he, 'I'm very much int'rusted in the 'lection,' sez he. 'I'm a 'publican, an' so is Dearest. Are you a 'publican, Mary?' 'Sorra a bit,' sez I; 'I'm the bist o' dimmycrats!' An' he looks up at me wid a look that ud go to yer heart, an' sez he: 'Mary,' sez he, 'the country will go to ruin.' An' nivver a day since thin has he let go by widout argyin' wid me to change me polytics."

Mary was very fond of him, and very proud of him, too. She had been with his mother ever since he was born; and, after his father's death, had been cook and housemaid and nurse and everything else. She was proud of his graceful, strong little body and his pretty manners, and especially proud of the bright curly hair which waved over his forehead and fell in charming love-locks on his shoulders. She was willing to work early and late to help his mamma make his small suits and keep them in order.

"'Ristycratic, is it?" she would say. "Faith, an' I'd loike to see the choild on Fifth Avey-NOO as looks loike him an' shteps out as handsome as himself. An' ivvery man, woman, and choild lookin' afther him in his bit of a black velvet skirt made out of the misthress's ould gownd; an' his little head

up, an’ his curly hair flyin’ an’ shinin’. It’s loike a young lord he looks.”

Cedric did not know that he looked like a young lord; he did not know what a lord was. His greatest friend was the groceryman at the corner—the cross groceryman, who was never cross to him. His name was Mr. Hobbs, and Cedric admired and respected him very much. He thought him a very rich and powerful person, he had so many things in his store,—prunes and figs and oranges and biscuits,—and he had a horse and wagon. Cedric was fond of the milkman and the baker and the apple-woman, but he liked Mr. Hobbs best of all, and was on terms of such intimacy with him that he went to see him every day, and often sat with him quite a long time, discussing the topics of the hour. It was quite surprising how many things they found to talk about—the Fourth of July, for instance. When they began to talk about the Fourth of July there really seemed no end to it. Mr. Hobbs had a very bad opinion of “the British,” and he told the whole story of the Revolution, relating very wonderful and patriotic stories about the villainy of the enemy and the bravery of the Revolutionary heroes, and he even generously repeated part of the Declaration of Independence.

Cedric was so excited that his eyes shone and his cheeks were red and his curls were all rubbed and tumbled into a yellow mop. He could hardly wait to eat his dinner after he went home, he was so anxious to tell his mamma. It was, perhaps, Mr. Hobbs who gave him his first interest in politics. Mr. Hobbs was fond of reading the newspapers, and so Cedric heard a great deal about what was going on in

Washington; and Mr. Hobbs would tell him whether the President was doing his duty or not. And once, when there was an election, he found it all quite grand, and probably but for Mr. Hobbs and Cedric the country might have been wrecked.

Mr. Hobbs took him to see a great torchlight procession, and many of the men who carried torches remembered afterward a stout man who stood near a lamp-post and held on his shoulder a handsome little shouting boy, who waved his cap in the air.

It was not long after this election, when Cedric was between seven and eight years old, that the very strange thing happened which made so wonderful a change in his life. It was quite curious, too, that the day it happened he had been talking to Mr. Hobbs about England and the Queen, and Mr. Hobbs had said some very severe things about the aristocracy, being specially indignant against earls and marquises. It had been a hot morning; and after playing soldiers with some friends of his, Cedric had gone into the store to rest, and had found Mr. Hobbs looking very fierce over a piece of the Illustrated London News, which contained a picture of some court ceremony.

“Ah,” he said, “that’s the way they go on now; but they’ll get enough of it some day, when those they’ve trod on rise and blow ‘em up sky-high,—earls and marquises and all! It’s coming, and they may look out for it!”

Cedric had perched himself as usual on the high stool and pushed his hat back, and put his hands in his pockets in delicate compliment to Mr. Hobbs.

“Did you ever know many marquises, Mr. Hobbs?” Cedric inquired,—“or earls?”

“No,” answered Mr. Hobbs, with indignation; “I guess not. I’d like to catch one of ‘em inside here; that’s all! I’ll have no grasping tyrants sittin’ ‘round on my cracker-barrels!”

And he was so proud of the sentiment that he looked around proudly and mopped his forehead.

“Perhaps they wouldn’t be earls if they knew any better,” said Cedric, feeling some vague sympathy for their unhappy condition.

“Wouldn’t they!” said Mr. Hobbs. “They just glory in it! It’s in ‘em. They’re a bad lot.”

They were in the midst of their conversation, when Mary appeared.

Cedric thought she had come to buy some sugar, perhaps, but she had not. She looked almost pale and as if she were excited about something.

“Come home, darlint,” she said; “the misthress is wantin’ yez.”

Cedric slipped down from his stool.

“Does she want me to go out with her, Mary?” he asked. “Good-morning, Mr. Hobbs. I’ll see you again.”

He was surprised to see Mary staring at him in a dumfounded fashion, and he wondered why she kept shaking her head.

“What’s the matter, Mary?” he said. “Is it the hot weather?”

“No,” said Mary; “but there’s strange things happenin’ to us.”

“Has the sun given Dearest a headache?” he inquired anxiously.

But it was not that. When he reached his own house there was a coupe standing before the door and some one was in the little parlor talking to his mamma. Mary hurried him upstairs and put on his best summer suit of cream-colored flannel, with the red scarf around his waist, and combed out his curly locks.

“Lords, is it?” he heard her say. “An’ the nobility an’ gintry. Och! bad cess to them! Lords, indade—worse luck.”

It was really very puzzling, but he felt sure his mamma would tell him what all the excitement meant, so he allowed Mary to bemoan herself without asking many questions. When he was dressed, he ran downstairs and went into the parlor. A tall, thin old gentleman with a sharp face was sitting in an arm-chair. His mother was standing near by with a pale face, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

“Oh! Ceddie!” she cried out, and ran to her little boy and caught him in her arms and kissed him in a frightened, troubled way. “Oh! Ceddie, darling!”

The tall old gentleman rose from his chair and looked at Cedric with his sharp eyes. He rubbed his thin chin with his bony hand as he looked.

He seemed not at all displeased.

“And so,” he said at last, slowly,—“and so this is little Lord Fauntleroy.”

II

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There was never a more amazed little boy than Cedric during the week that followed; there was never so strange or so unreal a week. In the first place, the story his mamma told him was a very curious one. He was obliged to hear it two or three times before he could understand it. He could not imagine what Mr. Hobbs would think of it. It began with earls: his grandpapa, whom he had never seen, was an earl; and his eldest uncle, if he had not been killed by a fall from his horse, would have been an earl, too, in time; and after his death, his other uncle would have been an earl, if he had not died suddenly, in Rome, of a fever. After that, his own papa, if he had lived, would have been an earl, but, since they all had died and only Cedric was left, it appeared that HE was to be an earl after his grandpapa's death—and for the present he was Lord Fauntleroy.

He turned quite pale when he was first told of it.

"Oh! Dearest!" he said, "I should rather not be an earl. None of the boys are earls. Can't I NOT be one?"

But it seemed to be unavoidable. And when, that evening, they sat together by the open window looking out into the shabby street, he and his mother had a long talk about it. Cedric sat on his footstool, clasping one knee in his favorite attitude and wearing a bewildered little face rather red from the exertion of thinking. His grandfather had sent for him to come to England, and his mamma thought he must go.

“Because,” she said, looking out of the window with sorrowful eyes, “I know your papa would wish it to be so, Ceddie. He loved his home very much; and there are many things to be thought of that a little boy can’t quite understand. I should be a selfish little mother if I did not send you. When you are a man, you will see why.”

Ceddie shook his head mournfully.

“I shall be very sorry to leave Mr. Hobbs,” he said. “I’m afraid he’ll miss me, and I shall miss him. And I shall miss them all.”

When Mr. Havisham—who was the family lawyer of the Earl of Dorincourt, and who had been sent by him to bring Lord Fauntleroy to England—came the next day, Cedric heard many things. But, somehow, it did not console him to hear that he was to be a very rich man when he grew up, and that he would have castles here and castles there, and great parks and deep mines and grand estates and tenantry. He was troubled about his friend, Mr. Hobbs, and he went to see him at the store soon after breakfast, in great anxiety of mind.

He found him reading the morning paper, and he approached him with a grave demeanor. He really felt it would be a great shock to Mr. Hobbs to hear what had befallen him, and on his way to the store he had been thinking how it would be best to break the news.

“Hello!” said Mr. Hobbs. “Mornin’!”

“Good-morning,” said Cedric.

He did not climb up on the high stool as usual, but sat down on a cracker-box and clasped his knee, and was so

silent for a few moments that Mr. Hobbs finally looked up inquiringly over the top of his newspaper.

“Hello!” he said again.

Cedric gathered all his strength of mind together.

“Mr. Hobbs,” he said, “do you remember what we were talking about yesterday morning?”

“Well,” replied Mr. Hobbs,—“seems to me it was England.”

“Yes,” said Cedric; “but just when Mary came for me, you know?”

Mr. Hobbs rubbed the back of his head.

“We WAS mentioning Queen Victoria and the aristocracy.”

“Yes,” said Cedric, rather hesitatingly, “and—and earls; don’t you know?”

“Why, yes,” returned Mr. Hobbs; “we DID touch ‘em up a little; that’s so!”

Cedric flushed up to the curly bang on his forehead. Nothing so embarrassing as this had ever happened to him in his life. He was a little afraid that it might be a trifle embarrassing to Mr. Hobbs, too.

“You said,” he proceeded, “that you wouldn’t have them sitting ‘round on your cracker-barrels.”

“So I did!” returned Mr. Hobbs, stoutly. “And I meant it. Let ‘em try it—that’s all!”

“Mr. Hobbs,” said Cedric, “one is sitting on this box now!”

Mr. Hobbs almost jumped out of his chair.

“What!” he exclaimed.

“Yes,” Cedric announced, with due modesty; “*I* am one—or I am going to be. I won’t deceive you.”

Mr. Hobbs looked agitated. He rose up suddenly and went to look at the thermometer.

“The mercury’s got into your head!” he exclaimed, turning back to examine his young friend’s countenance. “It IS a hot day! How do you feel? Got any pain? When did you begin to feel that way?”

He put his big hand on the little boy’s hair. This was more embarrassing than ever.

“Thank you,” said Ceddie; “I’m all right. There is nothing the matter with my head. I’m sorry to say it’s true, Mr. Hobbs. That was what Mary came to take me home for. Mr. Havisham was telling my mamma, and he is a lawyer.”

Mr. Hobbs sank into his chair and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

“ONE of us has got a sunstroke!” he exclaimed.

“No,” returned Cedric, “we haven’t. We shall have to make the best of it, Mr. Hobbs. Mr. Havisham came all the way from England to tell us about it. My grandpapa sent him.”

Mr. Hobbs stared wildly at the innocent, serious little face before him.

“Who is your grandfather?” he asked.

Cedric put his hand in his pocket and carefully drew out a piece of paper, on which something was written in his own round, irregular hand.

“I couldn’t easily remember it, so I wrote it down on this,” he said. And he read aloud slowly: “‘John Arthur Molyneux Errol, Earl of Dorincourt.’ That is his name, and he lives in a castle—in two or three castles, I think. And my papa, who died, was his youngest son; and I shouldn’t have been a lord

or an earl if my papa hadn’t died; and my papa wouldn’t have been an earl if his two brothers hadn’t died. But they all died, and there is no one but me,—no boy,—and so I have to be one; and my grandpapa has sent for me to come to England.”

Mr. Hobbs seemed to grow hotter and hotter. He mopped his forehead and his bald spot and breathed hard. He began to see that something very remarkable had happened; but when he looked at the little boy sitting on the cracker-box, with the innocent, anxious expression in his childish eyes, and saw that he was not changed at all, but was simply as he had been the day before, just a handsome, cheerful, brave little fellow in a blue suit and red neck-ribbon, all this information about the nobility bewildered him. He was all the more bewildered because Cedric gave it with such ingenuous simplicity, and plainly without realizing himself how stupendous it was.

“Wha—what did you say your name was?” Mr. Hobbs inquired.

“It’s Cedric Errol, Lord Fauntleroy,” answered Cedric. “That was what Mr. Havisham called me. He said when I went into the room: ‘And so this is little Lord Fauntleroy!’”

“Well,” said Mr. Hobbs, “I’ll be—jiggered!”

This was an exclamation he always used when he was very much astonished or excited. He could think of nothing else to say just at that puzzling moment.

Cedric felt it to be quite a proper and suitable ejaculation. His respect and affection for Mr. Hobbs were so great that he admired and approved of all his remarks. He had not seen enough of society as yet to make him realize

that sometimes Mr. Hobbs was not quite conventional. He knew, of course, that he was different from his mamma, but, then, his mamma was a lady, and he had an idea that ladies were always different from gentlemen.

He looked at Mr. Hobbs wistfully.

“England is a long way off, isn’t it?” he asked.

“It’s across the Atlantic Ocean,” Mr. Hobbs answered.

“That’s the worst of it,” said Cedric. “Perhaps I shall not see you again for a long time. I don’t like to think of that, Mr. Hobbs.”

“The best of friends must part,” said Mr. Hobbs.

“Well,” said Cedric, “we have been friends for a great many years, haven’t we?”

“Ever since you was born,” Mr. Hobbs answered. “You was about six weeks old when you was first walked out on this street.”

“Ah,” remarked Cedric, with a sigh, “I never thought I should have to be an earl then!”

“You think,” said Mr. Hobbs, “there’s no getting out of it?”

“I’m afraid not,” answered Cedric. “My mamma says that my papa would wish me to do it. But if I have to be an earl, there’s one thing I can do: I can try to be a good one. I’m not going to be a tyrant. And if there is ever to be another war with America, I shall try to stop it.”

His conversation with Mr. Hobbs was a long and serious one. Once having got over the first shock, Mr. Hobbs was not so rancorous as might have been expected; he endeavored to resign himself to the situation, and before the interview was at an end he had asked a great many questions. As Cedric could answer but few of them, he