

Little Lord Fauntleroy

Mały Lord



Frances Hodgson Burnett

**WYDANIE
DWUJĘZYCZNE**

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I

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 crossdest 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 Prident 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 mistress 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' gentry. 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

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 endeavored to answer them himself, and, being fairly launched on the subject of earls and marquises and lordly estates, explained many things in a way which would probably have astonished Mr. Havisham, could that gentleman have heard it.

But then there were many things which astonished Mr. Havisham. He had spent all his life in England, and was not accustomed to American people and American habits. He had been connected professionally with the family of the Earl of Dorincourt for nearly forty years, and he knew all about its grand estates and its great wealth and importance; and, in a cold, business-like way, he felt an interest in this little boy, who, in the future, was to be the master and owner of them all,—the future Earl of Dorincourt. He had known all about the old Earl's disappointment

in his elder sons and all about his fierce rage at Captain Cedric's American marriage, and he knew how he still hated the gentle little widow and would not speak of her except with bitter and cruel words. He insisted that she was only a common American girl, who had entrapped his son into marrying her because she knew he was an earl's son. The old lawyer himself had more than half believed this was all true. He had seen a great many selfish, mercenary people in his life, and he had not a good opinion of Americans. When he had been driven into the cheap street, and his coupe had stopped before the cheap, small house, he had felt actually shocked. It seemed really quite dreadful to think that the future owner of Dorincourt Castle and Wyndham Towers and Chorlworth, and all the other stately splendors, should have been born and brought up in an insignificant house in a street with a sort of green-grocery at the corner. He wondered what kind of a child he would be, and what kind of a mother he had. He rather shrank from seeing them both. He had a sort of pride in the noble family whose legal affairs he had conducted so long, and it would have annoyed him very much to have found himself obliged to manage a woman who would seem to him a vulgar, money-loving person, with no respect for her dead husband's country and the dignity of his name. It was a very old name and a very splendid one, and Mr. Havisham had a great respect for it himself, though he was only a cold, keen, business-like old lawyer.

When Mary handed him into the small parlor, he looked around it critically. It was plainly furnished, but it had a home-like look; there were no cheap, common ornaments, and no cheap, gaudy pictures; the few adornments on the walls were in good taste and about the room were many pretty things which a woman's hand might have made.

"Not at all bad so far," he had said to himself; "but perhaps the Captain's taste predominated." But when Mrs. Errol came into the room, he began to think she herself might have had something to do with it. If he had not been quite a self-contained and stiff old gentleman, he would probably have started when he saw her. She looked, in the simple black dress, fitting closely to her slender figure, more like a young girl than the mother of a boy of seven. She had a pretty, sorrowful, young face, and a very tender, innocent look in her large brown eyes,--the sorrowful look that had never quite left her face since her husband had died. Cedric was used to seeing it there; the only times he had ever seen it fade out had been when he was playing with her or talking to her, and had said some old-fashioned thing, or used some long word he had picked up out of the newspapers or in his conversations with Mr. Hobbs. He was fond of using long words, and he was always pleased when they made her laugh, though he could not understand why they were laughable; they were quite serious matters with him. The lawyer's experience taught him to read people's characters very shrewdly, and as soon as he saw Cedric's mother he knew that the old Earl had made a great mistake in thinking her a vulgar, mercenary woman. Mr. Havisham had never been married, he had never even been in love, but he divined that this pretty young creature with the sweet voice and sad eyes had married Captain Errol only because she loved him with all her affectionate heart, and that she had never once thought it an advantage that he was an earl's son. And he saw he should have no trouble with her, and he began to feel that perhaps little Lord Fauntleroy might not be such a trial to his noble family, after all. The Captain had been a handsome fellow, and the young mother was very pretty, and perhaps the boy might be well enough to look at.

When he first told Mrs. Errol what he had come for, she turned very pale.

"Oh!" she said; "will he have to be taken away from me? We love each other so much! He is such a happiness to me! He is all I have. I have tried to be a good mother to him." And her sweet young voice trembled, and the tears rushed into her eyes. "You do not know what he has been to me!" she said.

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"I am obliged to tell you," he said, "that the Earl of Dorincourt is not--is not very friendly toward you. He is an old man, and his prejudices are very strong. He has always especially disliked America and Americans, and was very much enraged by his son's marriage. I am sorry to be the bearer of so unpleasant a communication, but he is very fixed in his determination not to see you. His plan is that Lord Fauntleroy shall be educated under his own supervision; that he shall live with him. The Earl is attached to Dorincourt Castle, and spends a great deal of time there. He is a victim to inflammatory gout, and is not fond of London. Lord Fauntleroy will, therefore, be likely to live chiefly at Dorincourt. The Earl offers you as a home Court Lodge, which is situated pleasantly, and is not very far from the castle. He also offers you a suitable income. Lord Fauntleroy will be permitted to visit you; the only stipulation is, that you shall not visit him or enter the park gates. You see you will not be really separated from your son, and I assure you, madam, the terms are not so harsh as--as they might have been. The advantage of such surroundings and education as Lord Fauntleroy will have, I am sure you must see, will be very great."

He felt a little uneasy lest she should begin to cry or make a scene, as he knew some women would have done. It embarrassed and annoyed him to see women cry.

But she did not. She went to the window and stood with her face turned away for a few moments, and he saw she was trying to steady herself.

"Captain Errol was very fond of Dorincourt," she said at last. "He loved England, and everything English. It was always a grief to him that he was parted from his home. He was proud of his home, and of his name. He would wish--I know he would wish that his son should know the beautiful old places, and be brought up in such a way as would be suitable to his future position."

Then she came back to the table and stood looking up at Mr. Havisham very gently.

"My husband would wish it," she said. "It will be best for my little boy. I know--I am sure the Earl would not be so unkind as to try to teach him not to love me; and I know--even if he tried--that my little boy is too much like his father to be harmed. He has a warm, faithful nature, and a true heart. He would love me even if he did not see me; and so long as we may see each other, I ought not to suffer very much."

"She thinks very little of herself," the lawyer thought. "She does not make any terms for herself."

"Madam," he said aloud, "I respect your consideration for your son. He will thank you for it when he is a man. I assure you Lord Fauntleroy will be most carefully guarded, and every effort will be used to insure his happiness. The Earl of Dorincourt will be as anxious for his comfort and well-being as you yourself could be."

"I hope," said the tender little mother, in a rather broken voice, "that his grandfather will love Ceddie. The little boy has a very affectionate nature; and he has always been loved."

Mr. Havisham cleared his throat again. He could not quite imagine the gouty, fiery-tempered old Earl loving any one very much; but he knew it would be to his interest to be kind, in his irritable way, to the child who was to be his heir. He knew, too, that if Ceddie were at all a credit to his name, his grandfather would be proud of him.

"Lord Fauntleroy will be comfortable, I am sure," he replied. "It was with a view to his happiness that the Earl desired that you should be near enough to him to see him frequently."

He did not think it would be discreet to repeat the exact words the Earl had used, which were in fact neither polite nor amiable.

Mr. Havisham preferred to express his noble patron's offer in smoother and more courteous language.

He had another slight shock when Mrs. Errol asked Mary to find her little boy and bring him to her, and Mary told her where he was.

"Sure I'll foind him aisy enough, ma'am," she said; "for it's wid Mr. Hobbs he is this minnit, settin' on his high shtool by the counther an' talkin' pollytics, most loikely, or enj'yin' hissself among the soap an' candles an' pertaties, as sinsible an' shwate as ye plase."

"Mr. Hobbs has known him all his life," Mrs. Errol said to the lawyer. "He is very kind to Ceddie, and there is a great friendship between them."

Remembering the glimpse he had caught of the store as he passed it, and having a recollection of the barrels of potatoes and apples and the various odds and ends, Mr. Havisham felt his doubts arise again. In England, gentlemen's sons did not make friends of grocerymen, and it seemed to him a rather singular proceeding. It would be very awkward if the child had bad manners and a disposition to like low company. One of the bitterest humiliations of the old Earl's life had been that his two elder sons had been fond of low company. Could it be, he thought, that this boy shared their bad qualities instead of his father's good qualities?

He was thinking uneasily about this as he talked to Mrs. Errol until the child came into the room. When the door opened, he actually hesitated a moment before looking at Cedric. It would, perhaps, have seemed very queer to a great many people who knew him, if they could have known the curious sensations that passed through Mr. Havisham when he looked down at the boy, who ran into his mother's arms. He experienced a revulsion of feeling which was quite exciting. He recognized in an instant that here was one of the finest and handsomest little fellows he had ever seen.

His beauty was something unusual. He had a strong, lithe, graceful little body and a manly little face; he held his childish head up, and carried himself with a brave air; he was so like his father that it was really startling; he had his father's golden hair and his mother's brown eyes, but there was nothing sorrowful or timid in them. They were innocently fearless eyes; he looked as if he had never feared or doubted anything in his life.

"He is the best-bred-looking and handsomest little fellow I ever saw," was what Mr. Havisham thought. What he said aloud was simply, "And so this is little Lord Fauntleroy."

And, after this, the more he saw of little Lord Fauntleroy, the more of a surprise he found him. He knew very little about children, though he had seen plenty of them in England--fine, handsome, rosy girls and boys, who were strictly taken care of by their tutors and governesses, and who were sometimes shy, and sometimes a trifle boisterous, but never very interesting to a ceremonious, rigid old lawyer. Perhaps his personal interest in little Lord Fauntleroy's fortunes made him notice Ceddie more than he had noticed other children; but, however that was, he certainly found himself noticing him a great deal.

Cedric did not know he was being observed, and he only behaved himself in his ordinary manner. He shook hands with Mr. Havisham in his friendly way when they were introduced to each other, and he answered all his questions with the unhesitating readiness with which he answered Mr. Hobbs. He was neither shy nor bold, and when Mr. Havisham was talking to his mother, the lawyer noticed that he listened to the conversation with as much interest as if he had been quite grown up.

"He seems to be a very mature little fellow," Mr. Havisham said to the mother.

"I think he is, in some things," she answered. "He has always been very quick to learn, and he has lived a great deal with grownup people. He has a funny little habit of using long words and expressions he has read in books, or has heard others use, but he is very fond of childish play. I think he is rather clever, but he is a very boyish little boy, sometimes."

The next time Mr. Havisham met him, he saw that this last was quite true. As his coupe turned the corner, he caught sight of a group of small boys, who were evidently much excited. Two of them were about to run a race, and one of them was his young lordship, and he was shouting and making as much noise as the noisiest of his companions. He stood side by side with another boy, one little red leg advanced a step.

"One, to make ready!" yelled the starter. "Two, to be steady. Three--and away!"

Mr. Havisham found himself leaning out of the window of his coupe with a curious feeling of interest. He really never remembered having seen anything quite like the way in which his lordship's lordly little red legs flew up behind his knickerbockers and tore over the ground as he shot out in the race at the signal word. He shut his small hands and set his face against the wind; his bright hair streamed out behind.

"Hooray, Ced Errol!" all the boys shouted, dancing and shrieking with excitement. "Hooray, Billy Williams! Hooray, Ceddie! Hooray, Billy! Hooray! 'Ray! 'Ray!"

"I really believe he is going to win," said Mr. Havisham. The way in which the red legs flew and flashed up and down, the shrieks of the boys, the wild efforts of Billy Williams, whose brown legs were not to be despised, as they followed closely in the rear of the red legs, made him feel some excitement. "I really--I really can't help hoping he will win!" he said, with an apologetic sort of cough. At that moment, the wildest yell of all went up from the dancing, hopping boys. With one last frantic leap the future Earl of Dorincourt had reached the lamp-post at the end of the block and touched it, just two seconds before Billy Williams flung himself at it, panting.

"Three cheers for Ceddie Errol!" yelled the little boys. "Hooray for Ceddie Errol!"

Mr. Havisham drew his head in at the window of his coupe and leaned back with a dry smile.

"Bravo, Lord Fauntleroy!" he said.

As his carriage stopped before the door of Mrs. Errol's house, the victor and the vanquished were coming toward it, attended by the clamoring crew. Cedric walked by Billy Williams and was speaking to him. His elated little face was very red, his curls clung to his hot, moist forehead, his hands were in his pockets.

"You see," he was saying, evidently with the intention of making defeat easy for his unsuccessful rival, "I guess I won because my legs are a little longer than yours. I guess that was it. You see, I'm three days older than you, and that gives me a 'vantage. I'm three days older."

And this view of the case seemed to cheer Billy Williams so much that he began to smile on the world again, and felt able to swagger a little, almost as if he had won the race instead of losing it. Somehow, Ceddie Errol had a way of making people feel comfortable. Even in the first flush of his triumphs, he remembered that the person who was beaten might not feel so gay as he did, and might like to think that he MIGHT have been the winner under different circumstances.

That morning Mr. Havisham had quite a long conversation with the winner of the race--a conversation which made him smile his dry smile, and rub his chin with his bony hand several times.

Mrs. Errol had been called out of the parlor, and the lawyer and Cedric were left together. At first Mr. Havisham wondered what he should say to his small companion. He had an idea that perhaps it would be best to say several things which might prepare Cedric for meeting his grandfather, and, perhaps, for the great change that was to come to him. He could see that Cedric had not the least idea of the sort of thing he was to see when he reached England, or of the sort of home that waited for him there. He did not even know yet that his mother was not to live in the same house with him. They had thought it best to let him get over the first shock before telling him.

Mr. Havisham sat in an arm-chair on one side of the open window; on the other side was another still larger chair, and Cedric sat in that and looked at Mr. Havisham. He sat well back in the depths of his big seat, his curly head against the cushioned back, his legs crossed, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets, in a quite Mr. Hobbs-like way. He had been watching Mr. Havisham very steadily when his mamma had been in the room, and after she was gone he still looked at him in respectful thoughtfulness. There was a short silence after Mrs. Errol went out, and Cedric seemed to be studying Mr. Havisham, and Mr. Havisham was certainly studying Cedric. He could not make up his mind as to what an elderly gentleman should say to a little boy who won races, and wore short knickerbockers and red stockings on legs which were not long enough to hang over a big chair when he sat well back in it.

But Cedric relieved him by suddenly beginning the conversation himself.

"Do you know," he said, "I don't know what an earl is?"

"Don't you?" said Mr. Havisham.

"No," replied Ceddie. "And I think when a boy is going to be one, he ought to know. Don't you?"

"Well--yes," answered Mr. Havisham.

"Would you mind," said Ceddie respectfully--"would you mind 'splainin it to me?" (Sometimes when he used his long words he did not pronounce them quite correctly.) "What made him an earl?"

"A king or queen, in the first place," said Mr. Havisham. "Generally, he is made an earl because he has done some service to his sovereign, or some great deed."

"Oh!" said Cedric; "that's like the President."

"Is it?" said Mr. Havisham. "Is that why your presidents are elected?"

"Yes," answered Ceddie cheerfully. "When a man is very good and knows a great deal, he is elected president. They have torch-light processions and bands, and everybody makes speeches. I used to think I might perhaps be a president, but I never thought of being an earl. I didn't know

about earls," he said, rather hastily, lest Mr. Havisham might feel it impolite in him not to have wished to be one,--"if I'd known about them, I dare say I should have thought I should like to be one."

"It is rather different from being a president," said Mr. Havisham.

"Is it?" asked Cedric. "How? Are there no torch-light processions?"

Mr. Havisham crossed his own legs and put the tips of his fingers carefully together. He thought perhaps the time had come to explain matters rather more clearly.

"An earl is--is a very important person," he began.

"So is a president!" put in Ceddie. "The torch-light processions are five miles long, and they shoot up rockets, and the band plays! Mr. Hobbs took me to see them."

"An earl," Mr. Havisham went on, feeling rather uncertain of his ground, "is frequently of very ancient lineage----"

"What's that?" asked Ceddie.

"Of very old family--extremely old."

"Ah!" said Cedric, thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets. "I suppose that is the way with the apple-woman near the park. I dare say she is of ancient lin-lenage. She is so old it would surprise you how she can stand up. She's a hundred, I should think, and yet she is out there when it rains, even. I'm sorry for her, and so are the other boys. Billy Williams once had nearly a dollar, and I asked him to buy five cents' worth of apples from her every day until he had spent it all. That made twenty days, and he grew tired of apples after a week; but then--it was quite fortunate--a gentleman gave me fifty cents and I bought apples from her instead. You feel sorry for any one that's so poor and has such ancient lin-lenage. She says hers has gone into her bones and the rain makes it worse."

Mr. Havisham felt rather at a loss as he looked at his companion's innocent, serious little face.

"I am afraid you did not quite understand me," he explained. "When I said 'ancient lineage' I did not mean old age; I meant that the name of such a family has been known in the world a long time; perhaps for hundreds of years persons bearing that name have been known and spoken of in the history of their country."

"Like George Washington," said Ceddie. "I've heard of him ever since I was born, and he was known about, long before that. Mr. Hobbs says he will never be forgotten. That's because of the Declaration of Independence, you know, and the Fourth of July. You see, he was a very brave man."

"The first Earl of Dorincourt," said Mr. Havisham solemnly, "was created an earl four hundred years ago."

"Well, well!" said Ceddie. "That was a long time ago! Did you tell Dearest that? It would int'rust her very much. We'll tell her when she comes in. She always likes to hear cur'us things. What else does an earl do besides being created?"

"A great many of them have helped to govern England. Some of them have been brave men and have fought in great battles in the old days."

"I should like to do that myself," said Cedric. "My papa was a soldier, and he was a very brave man--as brave as George Washington. Perhaps that was because he would have been an earl if he hadn't died. I am glad earls are brave. That's a great 'vantage--to be a brave man. Once I used to be rather afraid of things--in the dark, you know; but when I thought about the soldiers in the Revolution and George Washington--it cured me."

"There is another advantage in being an earl, sometimes," said Mr. Havisham slowly, and he fixed his shrewd eyes on the little boy with a rather curious expression. "Some earls have a great deal of money."

He was curious because he wondered if his young friend knew what the power of money was.

"That's a good thing to have," said Ceddie innocently. "I wish I had a great deal of money."

"Do you?" said Mr. Havisham. "And why?"

"Well," explained Cedric, "there are so many things a person can do with money. You see, there's the apple-woman. If I were very rich I should buy her a little tent to put her stall in, and a little stove, and then I should give her a dollar every morning it rained, so that she could afford to stay at home. And then--oh! I'd give her a shawl. And, you see, her bones wouldn't feel so badly. Her bones are not like our bones; they hurt her when she moves. It's very painful when your bones hurt you. If I were rich enough to do all those things for her, I guess her bones would be all right."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Havisham. "And what else would you do if you were rich?"

"Oh! I'd do a great many things. Of course I should buy Dearest all sorts of beautiful things, needle-books and fans and gold thimbles and rings, and an encyclopedia, and a carriage, so that she needn't have to wait for the street-cars. If she liked pink silk dresses, I should buy her some, but she likes black best. But I'd, take her to the big stores, and tell her to look 'round and choose for herself. And then Dick----"

"Who is Dick?" asked Mr. Havisham.

"Dick is a boot-black," said his young; lordship, quite warming up in his interest in plans so exciting. "He is one of the nicest boot-blacks you ever knew. He stands at the corner of a street down-town. I've known him for years. Once when I was very little, I was walking out with Dearest, and she bought me a beautiful ball that bounced, and I was carrying it and it bounced into the middle of the street where the carriages and horses were, and I was so disappointed, I began to cry--I was very little. I had kilts on. And Dick was blacking a man's shoes, and he said 'Hello!' and he ran in between the horses and caught the ball for me and wiped it off with his coat and gave it to me and said, 'It's all right, young un.' So Dearest admired him very much, and so did I, and ever since then, when we go down-town, we talk to him. He says 'Hello!' and I say 'Hello!' and then we talk a little, and he tells me how trade is. It's been bad lately."

"And what would you like to do for him?" inquired the lawyer, rubbing his chin and smiling a queer smile.

"Well," said Lord Fauntleroy, settling himself in his chair with a business air, "I'd buy Jake out."

"And who is Jake?" Mr. Havisham asked.

"He's Dick's partner, and he is the worst partner a fellow could have! Dick says so. He isn't a credit to the business, and he isn't square. He cheats, and that makes Dick mad. It would make you mad, you know, if you were blacking boots as hard as you could, and being square all the time, and your partner wasn't square at all. People like Dick, but they don't like Jake, and so sometimes they don't come twice. So if I were rich, I'd buy Jake out and get Dick a 'boss' sign--he says a 'boss' sign goes a long way; and I'd get him some new clothes and new brushes, and start him out fair. He says all he wants is to start out fair."

There could have been nothing more confiding and innocent than the way in which his small lordship told his little story, quoting his friend Dick's bits of slang in the most candid good faith. He seemed to feel not a shade of a doubt that his elderly companion would be just as interested as he was himself. And in truth Mr. Havisham was beginning to be greatly interested; but perhaps not quite so much in Dick and the apple-woman as in this kind little lordling, whose curly head was so busy, under its yellow thatch, with good-natured plans for his friends, and who seemed somehow to have forgotten himself altogether.

"Is there anything----" he began. "What would you get for yourself, if you were rich?"

"Lots of things!" answered Lord Fauntleroy briskly; "but first I'd give Mary some money for Bridget--that's her sister, with twelve children, and a husband out of work. She comes here and cries, and Dearest gives her things in a basket, and then she cries again, and says: 'Blessin's be on yez, for a beautiful lady.' And I think Mr. Hobbs would like a gold watch and chain to remember me by, and a meerschaum pipe. And then I'd like to get up a company."

"A company!" exclaimed Mr. Havisham.

"Like a Republican rally," explained Cedric, becoming quite excited. "I'd have torches and uniforms and things for all the boys and myself, too. And we'd march, you know, and drill. That's what I should like for myself, if I were rich."

The door opened and Mrs. Errol came in.

"I am sorry to have been obliged to leave you so long," she said to Mr. Havisham; "but a poor woman, who is in great trouble, came to see me."

"This young gentleman," said Mr. Havisham, "has been telling me about some of his friends, and what he would do for them if he were rich."

"Bridget is one of his friends," said Mrs. Errol; "and it is Bridget to whom I have been talking in the kitchen. She is in great trouble now because her husband has rheumatic fever."

Cedric slipped down out of his big chair.

"I think I'll go and see her," he said, "and ask her how he is. He's a nice man when he is well. I'm obliged to him because he once made me a sword out of wood. He's a very talented man."

He ran out of the room, and Mr. Havisham rose from his chair. He seemed to have something in his mind which he wished to speak of.

He hesitated a moment, and then said, looking down at Mrs. Errol:

"Before I left Dorincourt Castle, I had an interview with the Earl, in which he gave me some instructions. He is desirous that his grandson should look forward with some pleasure to his future life in England, and also to his acquaintance with himself. He said that I must let his lordship know that the change in his life would bring him money and the pleasures children enjoy; if he expressed any wishes, I was to gratify them, and to tell him that his grand-father had given him what he wished. I am aware that the Earl did not expect anything quite like this; but if it would give Lord Fauntleroy pleasure to assist this poor woman, I should feel that the Earl would be displeased if he were not gratified."

For the second time, he did not repeat the Earl's exact words. His lordship had, indeed, said:

"Make the lad understand that I can give him anything he wants. Let him know what it is to be the grandson of the Earl of Dorincourt. Buy him everything he takes a fancy to; let him have money in his pockets, and tell him his grandfather put it there."

His motives were far from being good, and if he had been dealing with a nature less affectionate and warm-hearted than little Lord Fauntleroy's, great harm might have been done. And Cedric's mother was too gentle to suspect any harm. She thought that perhaps this meant that a lonely, unhappy old man, whose children were dead, wished to be kind to her little boy, and win his love and confidence. And it pleased her very much to think that Ceddie would be able to help Bridget. It made her happier to know that the very first result of the strange fortune which had befallen her little boy was that he could do kind things for those who needed kindness. Quite a warm color bloomed on her pretty young face.

"Oh!" she said, "that was very kind of the Earl; Cedric will be so glad! He has always been fond of Bridget and Michael. They are quite deserving. I have often wished I had been able to help them more. Michael is a hard-working man when he is well, but he has been ill a long time and needs expensive medicines and warm clothing and nourishing food. He and Bridget will not be wasteful of what is given them."

Mr. Havisham put his thin hand in his breast pocket and drew forth a large pocket-book. There was a queer look in his keen face. The truth was, he was wondering what the Earl of Dorincourt would say when he was told what was the first wish of his grandson that had been granted. He wondered what the cross, worldly, selfish old nobleman would think of it.

"I do not know that you have realized," he said, "that the Earl of Dorincourt is an exceedingly rich man. He can afford to gratify any caprice. I think it would please him to know that Lord Fauntleroy had been indulged in any fancy. If you will call him back and allow me, I shall give him five pounds for these people."

"That would be twenty-five dollars!" exclaimed Mrs. Errol. "It will seem like wealth to them. I can scarcely believe that it is true."

"It is quite true," said Mr. Havisham, with his dry smile. "A great change has taken place in your son's life, a great deal of power will lie in his hands."

"Oh!" cried his mother. "And he is such a little boy--a very little boy. How can I teach him to use it well? It makes me half afraid. My pretty little Ceddie!"

The lawyer slightly cleared his throat. It touched his worldly, hard old heart to see the tender, timid look in her brown eyes.

"I think, madam," he said, "that if I may judge from my interview with Lord Fauntleroy this morning, the next Earl of Dorincourt will think for others as well as for his noble self. He is only a child yet, but I think he may be trusted."

Then his mother went for Cedric and brought him back into the parlor. Mr. Havisham heard him talking before he entered the room.

*Dalsza część książki dostępna w wersji
pełnej.*

