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The truth was that Mrs. Errol had found a great many sad things in the course of her work among the poor of the little village that appeared so picturesque when it was seen from the moor-sides. Everything was not as picturesque, when seen near by, as it looked from a distance. She had found idleness and poverty and ignorance where there should have been comfort and industry. And she had discovered, after a while, that Erleboro was considered to be the worst village in that part of the country. Mr. Mordaunt had told her a great many of his difficulties and discouragements, and she had found out a great deal by herself. The agents who had managed the property had always been chosen to please the Earl, and had cared nothing for the degradation and wretchedness of the poor tenants. Many things, therefore, had been neglected which should have been attended to, and matters had gone from bad to worse.

As to Earl's Court, it was a disgrace, with its dilapidated houses and miserable, careless, sickly people. When first Mrs. Errol went to the place, it made her shudder. Such ugliness and slovenliness and want seemed worse in a country place than in a city. It seemed as if there it might be helped. And as she looked at the squalid, uncared-for children growing up in the midst of vice and brutal indifference, she thought of her own little boy spending his days in the great, splendid castle, guarded and served like a young prince, having no wish ungratified, and knowing nothing but luxury and ease and beauty. And a bold thought came in her wise little mother-heart. Gradually she had begun to see, as had

others, that it had been her boy's good fortune to please the Earl very much, and that he would scarcely be likely to be denied anything for which he expressed a desire.

"The Earl would give him anything," she said to Mr. Mordaunt. "He would indulge his every whim. Why should not that indulgence be used for the good of others? It is for me to see that this shall come to pass."

She knew she could trust the kind, childish heart; so she told the little fellow the story of Earl's Court, feeling sure that he would speak of it to his grandfather, and hoping that some good results would follow.

And strange as it appeared to every one, good results did follow.

The fact was that the strongest power to influence the Earl was his grandson's perfect confidence in him--the fact that Cedric always believed that his grandfather was going to do what was right and generous. He could not quite make up his mind to let him discover that he had no inclination to be generous at all, and that he wanted his own way on all occasions, whether it was right or wrong. It was such a novelty to be regarded with admiration as a benefactor of the entire human race, and the soul of nobility, that he did not enjoy the idea of looking into the affectionate brown eyes, and saying: "I am a violent, selfish old rascal; I never did a generous thing in my life, and I don't care about Earl's Court or the poor people"--or something which would

amount to the same thing. He actually had learned to be fond enough of that small boy with the mop of yellow love-locks, to feel that he himself would prefer to be guilty of an amiable action now and then. And so--though he laughed at himself--after some reflection, he sent for Newick, and had quite a long interview with him on the subject of the Court, and it was decided that the wretched hovels should be pulled down and new houses should be built.

"It is Lord Fauntleroy who insists on it," he said dryly; "he thinks it will improve the property. You can tell the tenants that it's his idea." And he looked down at his small lordship, who was lying on the hearth-rug playing with Dougal. The great dog was the lad's constant companion, and followed him about everywhere, stalking solemnly after him when he walked, and trotting majestically behind when he rode or drove.

Of course, both the country people and the town people heard of the proposed improvement. At first, many of them would not believe it; but when a small army of workmen arrived and commenced pulling down the crazy, squalid cottages, people began to understand that little Lord Fauntleroy had done them a good turn again, and that through his innocent interference the scandal of Earl's Court had at last been removed. If he had only known how they talked about him and praised him everywhere, and prophesied great things for him when he grew up, how astonished he would have been! But he never suspected it. He lived his simple, happy, child life,--frolicking about in the park; chasing the

rabbits to their burrows; lying under the trees on the grass, or on the rug in the library, reading wonderful books and talking to the Earl about them, and then telling the stories again to his mother; writing long letters to Dick and Mr. Hobbs, who responded in characteristic fashion; riding out at his grandfather's side, or with Wilkins as escort. As they rode through the market town, he used to see the people turn and look, and he noticed that as they lifted their hats their faces often brightened very much; but he thought it was all because his grandfather was with him.

"They are so fond of you," he once said, looking up at his lordship with a bright smile. "Do you see how glad they are when they see you? I hope they will some day be as fond of me. It must be nice to have EVERYbody like you." And he felt quite proud to be the grandson of so greatly admired and beloved an individual.

When the cottages were being built, the lad and his grandfather used to ride over to Earl's Court together to look at them, and Fauntleroy was full of interest. He would dismount from his pony and go and make acquaintance with the workmen, asking them questions about building and bricklaying, and telling them things about America. After two or three such conversations, he was able to enlighten the Earl on the subject of brick-making, as they rode home.

"I always like to know about things like those," he said, "because you never know what you are coming to."

When he left them, the workmen used to talk him over among themselves, and laugh at his odd, innocent speeches; but they liked him, and liked to see him stand among them, talking away, with his hands in his pockets, his hat pushed back on his curls, and his small face full of eagerness. "He's a rare un," they used to say. "An' a noice little outspoken chap, too. Not much o' th' bad stock in him." And they would go home and tell their wives about him, and the women would tell each other, and so it came about that almost every one talked of, or knew some story of, little Lord Fauntleroy; and gradually almost every one knew that the "wicked Earl" had found something he cared for at last--something which had touched and even warmed his hard, bitter old heart.

But no one knew quite how much it had been warmed, and how day by day the old man found himself caring more and more for the child, who was the only creature that had ever trusted him. He found himself looking forward to the time when Cedric would be a young man, strong and beautiful, with life all before him, but having still that kind heart and the power to make friends everywhere, and the Earl wondered what the lad would do, and how he would use his gifts. Often as he watched the little fellow lying upon the hearth, conning some big book, the light shining on the bright young head, his old eyes would gleam and his cheek would flush.

"The boy can do anything," he would say to himself, "anything!"

He never spoke to any one else of his feeling for Cedric; when he spoke of him to others it was always with the same grim smile. But Fauntleroy soon knew that his grandfather loved him and always liked him to be near--near to his chair if they were in the library, opposite to him at table, or by his side when he rode or drove or took his evening walk on the broad terrace.

"Do you remember," Cedric said once, looking up from his book as he lay on the rug, "do you remember what I said to you that first night about our being good companions? I don't think any people could be better companions than we are, do you?"

"We are pretty good companions, I should say," replied his lordship.

"Come here."

Fauntleroy scrambled up and went to him.

"Is there anything you want," the Earl asked; "anything you have not?"

The little fellow's brown eyes fixed themselves on his grandfather with a rather wistful look.

"Only one thing," he answered.

"What is that?" inquired the Earl.

Fauntleroy was silent a second. He had not thought matters over to himself so long for nothing.

"What is it?" my lord repeated.

Fauntleroy answered.

"It is Dearest," he said.

The old Earl winced a little.

"But you see her almost every day," he said. "Is not that enough?"

"I used to see her all the time," said Fauntleroy. "She used to kiss me when I went to sleep at night, and in the morning she was always there, and we could tell each other things without waiting."

The old eyes and the young ones looked into each other through a moment of silence. Then the Earl knitted his brows.

"Do you NEVER forget about your mother?" he said.

"No," answered Fauntleroy, "never; and she never forgets about me. I shouldn't forget about YOU, you know, if I didn't live with you. I should think about you all the more."

"Upon my word," said the Earl, after looking at him a moment longer, "I believe you would!"

The jealous pang that came when the boy spoke so of his mother seemed even stronger than it had been before; it was stronger because of this old man's increasing affection for the boy.

But it was not long before he had other pangs, so much harder to face that he almost forgot, for the time, he had ever hated his son's wife at all. And in a strange and startling way it happened. One evening, just before the Earl's Court cottages were completed, there was a grand dinner party at Dorincourt. There had not been such a party at the Castle for a long time. A few days before it took place, Sir Harry Lorrیداile and Lady Lorrیداile, who was the Earl's only sister, actually came for a visit--a thing which caused the greatest excitement in the village and set Mrs. Dibble's shop-bell tinkling madly again, because it was well known that Lady Lorrیداile had only been to Dorincourt once since her marriage, thirty-five years before. She was a handsome old lady with white curls and dimpled, peachy cheeks, and she was as good as gold, but she had never approved of her brother any more than did the rest of the world, and having a strong will of her own and not being at all afraid to speak her mind frankly, she had, after several lively quarrels with his lordship, seen very little of him since her young days.



She had heard a great deal of him that was not pleasant through the years in which they had been separated. She had heard about his neglect of his wife, and of the poor lady's death; and of his indifference to his children; and of the two weak, vicious, unprepossessing elder boys who had been no credit to him or to any one else. Those two elder sons, Bevis and Maurice, she had never seen; but once there had come to Lorrیداile Park a tall, stalwart, beautiful young fellow about eighteen years old, who had told her that he was her nephew Cedric Errol, and that he had come to see her because he was passing near the place and wished to look at his Aunt Constantia of whom he had heard his mother speak. Lady Lorrیداile's kind heart had warmed through and through at the sight of the young man, and she had made him stay with her a week, and petted him, and made much of him and admired him immensely. He was

so sweet-tempered, light-hearted, spirited a lad, that when he went away, she had hoped to see him often again; but she never did, because the Earl had been in a bad humor when he went back to Dorincourt, and had forbidden him ever to go to Lorrیداile Park again. But Lady Lorrیداile had always remembered him tenderly, and though she feared he had made a rash marriage in America, she had been very angry when she heard how he had been cast off by his father and that no one really knew where or how he lived. At last there came a rumor of his death, and then Bevis had been thrown from his horse and killed, and Maurice had died in Rome of the fever; and soon after came the story of the American child who was to be found and brought home as Lord Fauntleroy.

"Probably to be ruined as the others were," she said to her husband, "unless his mother is good enough and has a will of her own to help her to take care of him."

But when she heard that Cedric's mother had been parted from him she was almost too indignant for words.

"It is disgraceful, Harry!" she said. "Fancy a child of that age being taken from his mother, and made the companion of a man like my brother! He will either be brutal to the boy or indulge him until he is a little monster. If I thought it would do any good to write----"

"It wouldn't, Constantia," said Sir Harry.

"I know it wouldn't," she answered. "I know his lordship the Earl of Dorincourt too well;--but it is outrageous."

Not only the poor people and farmers heard about little Lord Fauntleroy; others knew him. He was talked about so much and there were so many stories of him--of his beauty, his sweet temper, his popularity, and his growing influence over the Earl, his grandfather--that rumors of him reached the gentry at their country places and he was heard of in more than one county of England. People talked about him at the dinner tables, ladies pitied his young mother, and wondered if the boy were as handsome as he was said to be, and men who knew the Earl and his habits laughed heartily at the stories of the little fellow's belief in his

lordship's amiability. Sir Thomas Asshe of Asshawe Hall, being in Erleboro one day, met the Earl and his grandson riding together, and stopped to shake hands with my lord and congratulate him on his change of looks and on his recovery from the gout. "And, d' ye know," he said, when he spoke of the incident afterward, "the old man looked as proud as a turkey-cock; and upon my word I don't wonder, for a handsomer, finer lad than his grandson I never saw! As straight as a dart, and sat his pony like a young trooper!"

And so by degrees Lady Lorridaile, too, heard of the child; she heard about Higgins and the lame boy, and the cottages at Earl's Court, and a score of other things,--and she began to wish to see the little fellow. And just as she was wondering how it might be brought about, to her utter astonishment, she received a letter from her brother inviting her to come with her husband to Dorincourt.

"It seems incredible!" she exclaimed. "I have heard it said that the child has worked miracles, and I begin to believe it. They say my brother adores the boy and can scarcely endure to have him out of sight. And he is so proud of him! Actually, I believe he wants to show him to us." And she accepted the invitation at once.

When she reached Dorincourt Castle with Sir Harry, it was late in the afternoon, and she went to her room at once before seeing her brother. Having dressed for dinner, she entered the drawing-room. The Earl was there standing near the fire and looking very tall and imposing; and at

his side stood a little boy in black velvet, and a large Vandyke collar of rich lace--a little fellow whose round bright face was so handsome, and who turned upon her such beautiful, candid brown eyes, that she almost uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise at the sight.

As she shook hands with the Earl, she called him by the name she had not used since her girlhood.

"What, Molyneux!" she said, "is this the child?"

"Yes, Constantia," answered the Earl, "this is the boy. Fauntleroy, this is your grand-aunt, Lady Lorridaile."

"How do you do, Grand-Aunt?" said Fauntleroy.

Lady Lorridaile put her hand on his shoulders, and after looking down into his upraised face a few seconds, kissed him warmly.

"I am your Aunt Constantia," she said, "and I loved your poor papa, and you are very like him."

"It makes me glad when I am told I am like him," answered Fauntleroy, "because it seems as if every one liked him,--just like Dearest, eszackly,--Aunt Constantia" (adding the two words after a second's pause).

Lady Lorrیداile was delighted. She bent and kissed him again, and from that moment they were warm friends.

"Well, Molyneux," she said aside to the Earl afterward, "it could not possibly be better than this!"

"I think not," answered his lordship dryly. "He is a fine little fellow. We are great friends. He believes me to be the most charming and sweet-tempered of philanthropists. I will confess to you, Constantia,--as you would find it out if I did not,--that I am in some slight danger of becoming rather an old fool about him."

"What does his mother think of you?" asked Lady Lorrیداile, with her usual straightforwardness.

"I have not asked her," answered the Earl, slightly scowling.

"Well," said Lady Lorrیداile, "I will be frank with you at the outset, Molyneux, and tell you I don't approve of your course, and that it is my intention to call on Mrs. Errol as soon as possible; so if you wish to quarrel with me, you had better mention it at once. What I hear of the young creature makes me quite sure that her child owes her everything. We were told even at Lorrیداile Park that your poorer tenants adore her already."

"They adore HIM," said the Earl, nodding toward Fauntleroy. "As to Mrs.

Errol, you'll find her a pretty little woman. I'm rather in debt to her for giving some of her beauty to the boy, and you can go to see her if you like. All I ask is that she will remain at Court Lodge and that you will not ask me to go and see her," and he scowled a little again.

"But he doesn't hate her as much as he used to, that is plain enough to me," her ladyship said to Sir Harry afterward. "And he is a changed man in a measure, and, incredible as it may seem, Harry, it is my opinion that he is being made into a human being, through nothing more nor less than his affection for that innocent, affectionate little fellow. Why, the child actually loves him--leans on his chair and against his knee. His own children would as soon have thought of nestling up to a tiger."

The very next day she went to call upon Mrs. Errol. When she returned, she said to her brother:

"Molyneux, she is the loveliest little woman I ever saw! She has a voice like a silver bell, and you may thank her for making the boy what he is. She has given him more than her beauty, and you make a great mistake in not persuading her to come and take charge of you. I shall invite her to Lorrیداile."

"She'll not leave the boy," replied the Earl.

"I must have the boy too," said Lady Lorrیداile, laughing.

But she knew Fauntleroy would not be given up to her, and each day she saw more clearly how closely those two had grown to each other, and how all the proud, grim old man's ambition and hope and love centered themselves in the child, and how the warm, innocent nature returned his affection with most perfect trust and good faith.

She knew, too, that the prime reason for the great dinner party was the Earl's secret desire to show the world his grandson and heir, and to let people see that the boy who had been so much spoken of and described was even a finer little specimen of boyhood than rumor had made him.

"Bevis and Maurice were such a bitter humiliation to him," she said to her husband. "Every one knew it. He actually hated them. His pride has full sway here." Perhaps there was not one person who accepted the invitation without feeling some curiosity about little Lord Fauntleroy, and wondering if he would be on view.

And when the time came he was on view.

"The lad has good manners," said the Earl. "He will be in no one's way. Children are usually idiots or bores,--mine were both,--but he can actually answer when he's spoken to, and be silent when he is not. He is never offensive."

But he was not allowed to be silent very long. Every one had something to say to him. The fact was they wished to make him talk. The ladies

petted him and asked him questions, and the men asked him questions too, and joked with him, as the men on the steamer had done when he crossed the Atlantic. Fauntleroy did not quite understand why they laughed so sometimes when he answered them, but he was so used to seeing people amused when he was quite serious, that he did not mind. He thought the whole evening delightful. The magnificent rooms were so brilliant with lights, there were so many flowers, the gentlemen seemed so gay, and the ladies wore such beautiful, wonderful dresses, and such sparkling ornaments in their hair and on their necks. There was one young lady who, he heard them say, had just come down from London, where she had spent the "season"; and she was so charming that he could not keep his eyes from her. She was a rather tall young lady with a proud little head, and very soft dark hair, and large eyes the color of purple pansies, and the color on her cheeks and lips was like that of a rose. She was dressed in a beautiful white dress, and had pearls around her throat. There was one strange thing about this young lady. So many gentlemen stood near her, and seemed anxious to please her, that Fauntleroy thought she must be something like a princess. He was so much interested in her that without knowing it he drew nearer and nearer to her, and at last she turned and spoke to him.

"Come here, Lord Fauntleroy," she said, smiling; "and tell me why you look at me so."

"I was thinking how beautiful you are," his young lordship replied.



Then all the gentlemen laughed outright, and the young lady laughed a little too, and the rose color in her cheeks brightened.

"Ah, Fauntleroy," said one of the gentlemen who had laughed most heartily, "make the most of your time! When you are older you will not have the courage to say that."

"But nobody could help saying it," said Fauntleroy sweetly. "Could you help it? Don't YOU think she is pretty, too?"

"We are not allowed to say what we think," said the gentleman, while the rest laughed more than ever.

But the beautiful young lady--her name was Miss Vivian Herbert--put out her hand and drew Cedric to her side, looking prettier than before, if possible.

"Lord Fauntleroy shall say what he thinks," she said; "and I am much obliged to him. I am sure he thinks what he says." And she kissed him on his cheek.

"I think you are prettier than any one I ever saw," said Fauntleroy, looking at her with innocent, admiring eyes, "except Dearest. Of course, I couldn't think any one QUITE as pretty as Dearest. I think she is the prettiest person in the world."

"I am sure she is," said Miss Vivian Herbert. And she laughed and kissed his cheek again.

She kept him by her side a great part of the evening, and the group of which they were the center was very gay. He did not know how it happened, but before long he was telling them all about America, and the Republican Rally, and Mr. Hobbs and Dick, and in the end he proudly produced from his pocket Dick's parting gift,--the red silk handkerchief.

"I put it in my pocket to-night because it was a party," he said. "I thought Dick would like me to wear it at a party."

And queer as the big, flaming, spotted thing was, there was a serious, affectionate look in his eyes, which prevented his audience from laughing very much.

"You see, I like it," he said, "because Dick is my friend."

But though he was talked to so much, as the Earl had said, he was in no one's way. He could be quiet and listen when others talked, and so no one found him tiresome. A slight smile crossed more than one face when several times he went and stood near his grandfather's chair, or sat on a stool close to him, watching him and absorbing every word he uttered with the most charmed interest. Once he stood so near the chair's arm that his cheek touched the Earl's shoulder, and his lordship, detecting

the general smile, smiled a little himself. He knew what the lookers-on were thinking, and he felt some secret amusement in their seeing what good friends he was with this youngster, who might have been expected to share the popular opinion of him.

Mr. Havisham had been expected to arrive in the afternoon, but, strange to say, he was late. Such a thing had really never been known to happen before during all the years in which he had been a visitor at Dorincourt Castle. He was so late that the guests were on the point of rising to go in to dinner when he arrived. When he approached his host, the Earl regarded him with amazement. He looked as if he had been hurried or agitated; his dry, keen old face was actually pale.

"I was detained," he said, in a low voice to the Earl, "by--an extraordinary event."

It was as unlike the methodic old lawyer to be agitated by anything as it was to be late, but it was evident that he had been disturbed. At dinner he ate scarcely anything, and two or three times, when he was spoken to, he started as if his thoughts were far away. At dessert, when Fauntleroy came in, he looked at him more than once, nervously and uneasily. Fauntleroy noted the look and wondered at it. He and Mr. Havisham were on friendly terms, and they usually exchanged smiles. The lawyer seemed to have forgotten to smile that evening.

The fact was, he forgot everything but the strange and painful news he

knew he must tell the Earl before the night was over--the strange news which he knew would be so terrible a shock, and which would change the face of everything. As he looked about at the splendid rooms and the brilliant company,--at the people gathered together, he knew, more that they might see the bright-haired little fellow near the Earl's chair than for any other reason,--as he looked at the proud old man and at little Lord Fauntleroy smiling at his side, he really felt quite shaken, notwithstanding that he was a hardened old lawyer. What a blow it was that he must deal them!

He did not exactly know how the long, superb dinner ended. He sat through it as if he were in a dream, and several times he saw the Earl glance at him in surprise.

But it was over at last, and the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room. They found Fauntleroy sitting on the sofa with Miss Vivian Herbert,--the great beauty of the last London season; they had been looking at some pictures, and he was thanking his companion as the door opened.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you for being so kind to me!" he was saying; "I never was at a party before, and I've enjoyed myself so much!"

He had enjoyed himself so much that when the gentlemen gathered about Miss Herbert again and began to talk to her, as he listened and tried

to understand their laughing speeches, his eyelids began to droop. They drooped until they covered his eyes two or three times, and then the sound of Miss Herbert's low, pretty laugh would bring him back, and he would open them again for about two seconds. He was quite sure he was not going to sleep, but there was a large, yellow satin cushion behind him and his head sank against it, and after a while his eyelids drooped for the last time. They did not even quite open when, as it seemed a long time after, some one kissed him lightly on the cheek. It was Miss Vivian Herbert, who was going away, and she spoke to him softly.

"Good-night, little Lord Fauntleroy," she said. "Sleep well."

And in the morning he did not know that he had tried to open his eyes and had murmured sleepily, "Good-night--I'm so--glad--I saw you--you are so--pretty----"

He only had a very faint recollection of hearing the gentlemen laugh again and of wondering why they did it.

No sooner had the last guest left the room, than Mr. Havisham turned from his place by the fire, and stepped nearer the sofa, where he stood looking down at the sleeping occupant. Little Lord Fauntleroy was taking his ease luxuriously. One leg crossed the other and swung over the edge of the sofa; one arm was flung easily above his head; the warm flush of healthful, happy, childish sleep was on his quiet face; his waving tangle of bright hair strayed over the yellow satin cushion. He made a

picture well worth looking at.

As Mr. Havisham looked at it, he put his hand up and rubbed his shaven chin, with a harassed countenance.

"Well, Havisham," said the Earl's harsh voice behind him. "What is it? It is evident something has happened. What was the extraordinary event, if I may ask?"

Mr. Havisham turned from the sofa, still rubbing his chin.

"It was bad news," he answered, "distressing news, my lord--the worst of news. I am sorry to be the bearer of it."

The Earl had been uneasy for some time during the evening, as he glanced at Mr. Havisham, and when he was uneasy he was always ill-tempered.

"Why do you look so at the boy!" he exclaimed irritably. "You have been looking at him all the evening as if--See here now, why should you look at the boy, Havisham, and hang over him like some bird of ill-omen! What has your news to do with Lord Fauntleroy?"

"My lord," said Mr. Havisham, "I will waste no words. My news has everything to do with Lord Fauntleroy. And if we are to believe it--it is not Lord Fauntleroy who lies sleeping before us, but only the son of Captain Errol. And the present Lord Fauntleroy is the son of your son

Bevis, and is at this moment in a lodging-house in London."

The Earl clutched the arms of his chair with both his hands until the veins stood out upon them; the veins stood out on his forehead too; his fierce old face was almost livid.

"What do you mean!" he cried out. "You are mad! Whose lie is this?"

"If it is a lie," answered Mr. Havisham, "it is painfully like the truth. A woman came to my chambers this morning. She said your son Bevis married her six years ago in London. She showed me her marriage certificate. They quarrelled a year after the marriage, and he paid her to keep away from him. She has a son five years old. She is an American of the lower classes,--an ignorant person,--and until lately she did not fully understand what her son could claim. She consulted a lawyer and found out that the boy was really Lord Fauntleroy and the heir to the earldom of Dorincourt; and she, of course, insists on his claims being acknowledged."

There was a movement of the curly head on the yellow satin cushion. A soft, long, sleepy sigh came from the parted lips, and the little boy stirred in his sleep, but not at all restlessly or uneasily. Not at all as if his slumber were disturbed by the fact that he was being proved a small impostor and that he was not Lord Fauntleroy at all and never would be the Earl of Dorincourt. He only turned his rosy face more on its side, as if to enable the old man who stared at it so solemnly to

see it better.

The handsome, grim old face was ghastly. A bitter smile fixed itself upon it.

"I should refuse to believe a word of it," he said, "if it were not such a low, scoundrelly piece of business that it becomes quite possible in connection with the name of my son Bevis. It is quite like Bevis. He was always a disgrace to us. Always a weak, untruthful, vicious young brute with low tastes--my son and heir, Bevis, Lord Fauntleroy. The woman is an ignorant, vulgar person, you say?"

"I am obliged to admit that she can scarcely spell her own name," answered the lawyer. "She is absolutely uneducated and openly mercenary. She cares for nothing but the money. She is very handsome in a coarse way, but----"

The fastidious old lawyer ceased speaking and gave a sort of shudder.

The veins on the old Earl's forehead stood out like purple cords.

Something else stood out upon it too--cold drops of moisture. He took out his handkerchief and swept them away. His smile grew even more bitter.

"And I," he said, "I objected to--to the other woman, the mother of



this child" (pointing to the sleeping form on the sofa); "I refused to recognize her. And yet she could spell her own name. I suppose this is retribution."

Suddenly he sprang up from his chair and began to walk up and down the room. Fierce and terrible words poured forth from his lips. His rage and hatred and cruel disappointment shook him as a storm shakes a tree. His violence was something dreadful to see, and yet Mr. Havisham noticed that at the very worst of his wrath he never seemed to forget the little sleeping figure on the yellow satin cushion, and that he never once spoke loud enough to awaken it.

"I might have known it," he said. "They were a disgrace to me from their first hour! I hated them both; and they hated me! Bevis was the worse of the two. I will not believe this yet, though! I will contend against it to the last. But it is like Bevis--it is like him!"

And then he raged again and asked questions about the woman, about her proofs, and pacing the room, turned first white and then purple in his repressed fury.

When at last he had learned all there was to be told, and knew the worst, Mr. Havisham looked at him with a feeling of anxiety. He looked broken and haggard and changed. His rages had always been bad for him, but this one had been worse than the rest because there had been something more than rage in it.

He came slowly back to the sofa, at last, and stood near it.

"If any one had told me I could be fond of a child," he said, his harsh voice low and unsteady, "I should not have believed them. I always detested children--my own more than the rest. I am fond of this one; he is fond of me" (with a bitter smile). "I am not popular; I never was. But he is fond of me. He never was afraid of me--he always trusted me. He would have filled my place better than I have filled it. I know that. He would have been an honor to the name."

He bent down and stood a minute or so looking at the happy, sleeping face. His shaggy eyebrows were knitted fiercely, and yet somehow he did not seem fierce at all. He put up his hand, pushed the bright hair back from the forehead, and then turned away and rang the bell.

When the largest footman appeared, he pointed to the sofa.

"Take"--he said, and then his voice changed a little--"take Lord Fauntleroy to his room."