

### XIII

OF course, as soon as the story of Lord Fauntleroy and the difficulties of the Earl of Dorincourt were discussed in the English newspapers, they were discussed in the American newspapers. The story was too interesting to be passed over lightly, and it was talked of a great deal. There were so many versions of it that it would have been an edifying thing to buy all the papers and compare them. Mr. Hobbs read so much about it that he became quite bewildered. One paper described his young friend Cedric as an infant in arms,--another as a young man at Oxford, winning all the honors, and distinguishing himself by writing Greek poems; one said he was engaged to a young lady of great beauty, who was the daughter of a duke; another said he had just been married; the only thing, in fact, which was NOT said was that he was a little boy between seven and eight, with handsome legs and curly hair. One said he was no relation to the Earl of Dorincourt at all, but was a small impostor who had sold newspapers and slept in the streets of New York before his mother imposed upon the family lawyer, who came to America to look for the Earl's heir. Then came the descriptions of the new Lord Fauntleroy and his mother. Sometimes she was a gypsy, sometimes an actress, sometimes a beautiful Spaniard; but it was always agreed that the Earl of Dorincourt was her deadly enemy, and would not acknowledge her son as his heir if he could help it, and as there seemed to be some slight flaw in the papers she had produced, it was expected that there would be a long

trial, which would be far more interesting than anything ever carried into court before. Mr. Hobbs used to read the papers until his head was in a whirl, and in the evening he and Dick would talk it all over. They found out what an important personage an Earl of Dorincourt was, and what a magnificent income he possessed, and how many estates he owned, and how stately and beautiful was the Castle in which he lived; and the more they learned, the more excited they became.

"Seems like somethin' orter be done," said Mr. Hobbs. "Things like them orter be held on to--earls or no earls."

But there really was nothing they could do but each write a letter to Cedric, containing assurances of their friendship and sympathy. They wrote those letters as soon as they could after receiving the news; and after having written them, they handed them over to each other to be read.

This is what Mr. Hobbs read in Dick's letter:

"DERE FREND: i got ure letter an Mr. Hobbs got his an we are sory u are down on ure luck an we say hold on as longs u kin an dont let no one git ahead of u. There is a lot of ole theves wil make al they kin of u ef u dont kepe ure i skined. But this is mosly to say that ive not forgot wot u did fur me an if there aint no better way cum over here an go in pardners with me. Biznes is fine an ile see no harm cums to u Enny

big feller that trise to cum it over u wil hafter setle it fust with  
Perfessor Dick Tipton. So no more at present

"DICK."

And this was what Dick read in Mr. Hobbs's letter:

"DEAR SIR: Yrs received and wd say things looks bad. I believe its a put  
up job and them thats done it ought to be looked after sharp. And what  
I write to say is two things. Im going to look this thing up. Keep quiet  
and Ill see a lawyer and do all I can And if the worst happens and them  
earls is too many for us theres a partnership in the grocery business  
ready for you when yure old enough and a home and a friend in

"Yrs truly,

"SILAS HOBBS."

"Well," said Mr. Hobbs, "he's pervided for between us, if he aint a  
earl."

"So he is," said Dick. "I'd ha' stood by him. Blest if I didn't like  
that little feller fust-rate."

The very next morning, one of Dick's customers was rather surprised. He was a young lawyer just beginning practice--as poor as a very young lawyer can possibly be, but a bright, energetic young fellow, with sharp wit and a good temper. He had a shabby office near Dick's stand, and every morning Dick blacked his boots for him, and quite often they were not exactly water-tight, but he always had a friendly word or a joke for Dick.

That particular morning, when he put his foot on the rest, he had an illustrated paper in his hand--an enterprising paper, with pictures in it of conspicuous people and things. He had just finished looking it over, and when the last boot was polished, he handed it over to the boy.

"Here's a paper for you, Dick," he said; "you can look it over when you drop in at Delmonico's for your breakfast. Picture of an English castle in it, and an English earl's daughter-in-law. Fine young woman, too,--lots of hair,--though she seems to be raising rather a row. You ought to become familiar with the nobility and gentry, Dick. Begin on the Right Honorable the Earl of Dorincourt and Lady Fauntleroy. Hello! I say, what's the matter?"

The pictures he spoke of were on the front page, and Dick was staring at one of them with his eyes and mouth open, and his sharp face almost pale with excitement.

"What's to pay, Dick?" said the young man. "What has paralyzed you?"

Dick really did look as if something tremendous had happened. He pointed to the picture, under which was written:

"Mother of Claimant (Lady Fauntleroy)."

It was the picture of a handsome woman, with large eyes and heavy braids of black hair wound around her head.

"Her!" said Dick. "My, I know her better 'n I know you!"

The young man began to laugh.

"Where did you meet her, Dick?" he said. "At Newport? Or when you ran over to Paris the last time?"

Dick actually forgot to grin. He began to gather his brushes and things together, as if he had something to do which would put an end to his business for the present.

"Never mind," he said. "I know her! An I've struck work for this mornin'."

And in less than five minutes from that time he was tearing through the streets on his way to Mr. Hobbs and the corner store.

Mr. Hobbs could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses when he looked across the counter and saw Dick rush in with the paper in his hand. The boy was out of breath with running; so much out of breath, in fact, that he could scarcely speak as he threw the paper down on the counter.

"Hello!" exclaimed Mr. Hobbs. "Hello! What you got there?"

"Look at it!" panted Dick. "Look at that woman in the picture! That's what you look at! SHE aint no 'ristocrat, SHE aint!" with withering scorn. "She's no lord's wife. You may eat me, if it aint Minna--MINNA! I'd know her anywheres, an' so 'd Ben. Jest ax him."

Mr. Hobbs dropped into his seat.

"I knowed it was a put-up job," he said. "I knowed it; and they done it on account o' him bein' a 'Merican!"

"Done it!" cried Dick, with disgust. "SHE done it, that's who done it. She was allers up to her tricks; an' I'll tell yer wot come to me, the minnit I saw her pictur. There was one o' them papers we saw had a letter in it that said somethin' 'bout her boy, an' it said he had a scar on his chin. Put them two together--her 'n' that there scar! Why, that there boy o' hers aint no more a lord than I am! It's BEN'S boy,--the little chap she hit when she let fly that plate at me."

Professor Dick Tipton had always been a sharp boy, and earning his living in the streets of a big city had made him still sharper. He had learned to keep his eyes open and his wits about him, and it must be confessed he enjoyed immensely the excitement and impatience of that moment. If little Lord Fauntleroy could only have looked into the store that morning, he would certainly have been interested, even if all the discussion and plans had been intended to decide the fate of some other boy than himself.

Mr. Hobbs was almost overwhelmed by his sense of responsibility, and Dick was all alive and full of energy. He began to write a letter to Ben, and he cut out the picture and inclosed it to him, and Mr. Hobbs wrote a letter to Cedric and one to the Earl. They were in the midst of this letter-writing when a new idea came to Dick.

"Say," he said, "the feller that give me the paper, he's a lawyer. Let's ax him what we'd better do. Lawyers knows it all."

Mr. Hobbs was immensely impressed by this suggestion and Dick's business capacity.

"That's so!" he replied. "This here calls for lawyers."

And leaving the store in the care of a substitute, he struggled into his coat and marched down-town with Dick, and the two presented themselves

with their romantic story in Mr. Harrison's office, much to that young man's astonishment.

If he had not been a very young lawyer, with a very enterprising mind and a great deal of spare time on his hands, he might not have been so readily interested in what they had to say, for it all certainly sounded very wild and queer; but he chanced to want something to do very much, and he chanced to know Dick, and Dick chanced to say his say in a very sharp, telling sort of way.

"And," said Mr. Hobbs, "say what your time's worth a' hour and look into this thing thorough, and I'LL pay the damage,--Silas Hobbs, corner of Blank street, Vegetables and Fancy Groceries."

"Well," said Mr. Harrison, "it will be a big thing if it turns out all right, and it will be almost as big a thing for me as for Lord Fauntleroy; and, at any rate, no harm can be done by investigating. It appears there has been some dubiousness about the child. The woman contradicted herself in some of her statements about his age, and aroused suspicion. The first persons to be written to are Dick's brother and the Earl of Dorincourt's family lawyer."

And actually, before the sun went down, two letters had been written and sent in two different directions--one speeding out of New York harbor on a mail steamer on its way to England, and the other on a train carrying letters and passengers bound for California. And the first was addressed



to T. Havisham, Esq., and the second to Benjamin Tipton.

And after the store was closed that evening, Mr. Hobbs and Dick sat in the back-room and talked together until midnight.