

Ben took his boy and went back to his cattle ranch in California, and he returned under very comfortable circumstances. Just before his going, Mr. Havisham had an interview with him in which the lawyer told him that the Earl of Dorincourt wished to do something for the boy who might have turned out to be Lord Fauntleroy, and so he had decided that it would be a good plan to invest in a cattle ranch of his own, and put Ben in charge of it on terms which would make it pay him very well, and which would lay a foundation for his son's future. And so when Ben went away, he went as the prospective master of a ranch which would be almost as good as his own, and might easily become his own in time, as indeed it did in the course of a few years; and Tom, the boy, grew up on it into a fine young man and was devotedly fond of his father; and they were so successful and happy that Ben used to say that Tom made up to him for all the troubles he had ever had.

But Dick and Mr. Hobbs--who had actually come over with the others to see that things were properly looked after--did not return for some time. It had been decided at the outset that the Earl would provide for Dick, and would see that he received a solid education; and Mr. Hobbs had decided that as he himself had left a reliable substitute in charge of his store, he could afford to wait to see the festivities which were to celebrate Lord Fauntleroy's eighth birthday. All the tenantry were invited, and there were to be feasting and dancing and games in the park, and bonfires and fire-works in the evening.

"Just like the Fourth of July!" said Lord Fauntleroy. "It seems a pity my birthday wasn't on the Fourth, doesn't it? For then we could keep them both together."

It must be confessed that at first the Earl and Mr. Hobbs were not as intimate as it might have been hoped they would become, in the interests of the British aristocracy. The fact was that the Earl had known very few grocery-men, and Mr. Hobbs had not had many very close acquaintances who were earls; and so in their rare interviews conversation did not flourish. It must also be owned that Mr. Hobbs had been rather overwhelmed by the splendors Fauntleroy felt it his duty to show him.

The entrance gate and the stone lions and the avenue impressed Mr. Hobbs somewhat at the beginning, and when he saw the Castle, and the flower-gardens, and the hot-houses, and the terraces, and the peacocks, and the dungeon, and the armor, and the great staircase, and the stables, and the liveried servants, he really was quite bewildered. But it was the picture gallery which seemed to be the finishing stroke.

"Somethin' in the manner of a museum?" he said to Fauntleroy, when he was led into the great, beautiful room.

"N--no--!" said Fauntleroy, rather doubtfully. "I don't THINK it's a museum. My grandfather says these are my ancestors."

"Your aunt's sisters!" ejaculated Mr. Hobbs. "ALL of 'em? Your great-uncle, he MUST have had a family! Did he raise 'em all?"

And he sank into a seat and looked around him with quite an agitated countenance, until with the greatest difficulty Lord Fauntleroy managed to explain that the walls were not lined entirely with the portraits of the progeny of his great-uncle.

He found it necessary, in fact, to call in the assistance of Mrs. Mellon, who knew all about the pictures, and could tell who painted them and when, and who added romantic stories of the lords and ladies who were the originals. When Mr. Hobbs once understood, and had heard some of these stories, he was very much fascinated and liked the picture gallery almost better than anything else; and he would often walk over from the village, where he staid at the Dorincourt Arms, and would spend half an hour or so wandering about the gallery, staring at the painted ladies and gentlemen, who also stared at him, and shaking his head nearly all the time.

"And they was all earls!" he would say, "er pretty nigh it! An' HE'S goin' to be one of 'em, an' own it all!"

Privately he was not nearly so much disgusted with earls and their mode of life as he had expected to be, and it is to be doubted whether his strictly republican principles were not shaken a little by a closer

acquaintance with castles and ancestors and all the rest of it. At any rate, one day he uttered a very remarkable and unexpected sentiment:

"I wouldn't have minded bein' one of 'em myself!" he said--which was really a great concession.

What a grand day it was when little Lord Fauntleroy's birthday arrived, and how his young lordship enjoyed it! How beautiful the park looked, filled with the thronging people dressed in their gayest and best, and with the flags flying from the tents and the top of the Castle! Nobody had staid away who could possibly come, because everybody was really glad that little Lord Fauntleroy was to be little Lord Fauntleroy still, and some day was to be the master of everything. Every one wanted to have a look at him, and at his pretty, kind mother, who had made so many friends. And positively every one liked the Earl rather better, and felt more amiably toward him because the little boy loved and trusted him so, and because, also, he had now made friends with and behaved respectfully to his heir's mother. It was said that he was even beginning to be fond of her, too, and that between his young lordship and his young lordship's mother, the Earl might be changed in time into quite a well-behaved old nobleman, and everybody might be happier and better off.

What scores and scores of people there were under the trees, and in the tents, and on the lawns! Farmers and farmers' wives in their Sunday suits and bonnets and shawls; girls and their sweethearts; children

frolicking and chasing about; and old dames in red cloaks gossiping together. At the Castle, there were ladies and gentlemen who had come to see the fun, and to congratulate the Earl, and to meet Mrs. Errol.

Lady Lorredaile and Sir Harry were there, and Sir Thomas Asshe and his daughters, and Mr. Havisham, of course, and then beautiful Miss Vivian Herbert, with the loveliest white gown and lace parasol, and a circle of gentlemen to take care of her--though she evidently liked Fauntleroy better than all of them put together. And when he saw her and ran to her and put his arm around her neck, she put her arms around him, too, and kissed him as warmly as if he had been her own favorite little brother, and she said:

"Dear little Lord Fauntleroy! dear little boy! I am so glad! I am so glad!"

And afterward she walked about the grounds with him, and let him show her everything. And when he took her to where Mr. Hobbs and Dick were, and said to her, "This is my old, old friend Mr. Hobbs, Miss Herbert, and this is my other old friend Dick. I told them how pretty you were, and I told them they should see you if you came to my birthday,"--she shook hands with them both, and stood and talked to them in her prettiest way, asking them about America and their voyage and their life since they had been in England; while Fauntleroy stood by, looking up at her with adoring eyes, and his cheeks quite flushed with delight because he saw that Mr. Hobbs and Dick liked her so much.

"Well," said Dick solemnly, afterward, "she's the daisiest gal I ever saw! She's--well, she's just a daisy, that's what she is, 'n' no mistake!"

Everybody looked after her as she passed, and every one looked after little Lord Fauntleroy. And the sun shone and the flags fluttered and the games were played and the dances danced, and as the gayeties went on and the joyous afternoon passed, his little lordship was simply radiantly happy.

The whole world seemed beautiful to him.

There was some one else who was happy, too,--an old man, who, though he had been rich and noble all his life, had not often been very honestly happy. Perhaps, indeed, I shall tell you that I think it was because he was rather better than he had been that he was rather happier. He had not, indeed, suddenly become as good as Fauntleroy thought him; but, at least, he had begun to love something, and he had several times found a sort of pleasure in doing the kind things which the innocent, kind little heart of a child had suggested,--and that was a beginning. And every day he had been more pleased with his son's wife. It was true, as the people said, that he was beginning to like her too. He liked to hear her sweet voice and to see her sweet face; and as he sat in his arm-chair, he used to watch her and listen as she talked to her boy; and he heard loving, gentle words which were new to him, and he began to see why the little fellow who had lived in a New York side street and known

grocery-men and made friends with boot-blacks, was still so well-bred and manly a little fellow that he made no one ashamed of him, even when fortune changed him into the heir to an English earldom, living in an English castle.

It was really a very simple thing, after all,--it was only that he had lived near a kind and gentle heart, and had been taught to think kind thoughts always and to care for others. It is a very little thing, perhaps, but it is the best thing of all. He knew nothing of earls and castles; he was quite ignorant of all grand and splendid things; but he was always lovable because he was simple and loving. To be so is like being born a king.

As the old Earl of Dorincourt looked at him that day, moving about the park among the people, talking to those he knew and making his ready little bow when any one greeted him, entertaining his friends Dick and Mr. Hobbs, or standing near his mother or Miss Herbert listening to their conversation, the old nobleman was very well satisfied with him. And he had never been better satisfied than he was when they went down to the biggest tent, where the more important tenants of the Dorincourt estate were sitting down to the grand collation of the day.

They were drinking toasts; and, after they had drunk the health of the Earl, with much more enthusiasm than his name had ever been greeted with

before, they proposed the health of "Little Lord Fauntleroy." And if

there had ever been any doubt at all as to whether his lordship was popular or not, it would have been set that instant. Such a clamor of voices, and such a rattle of glasses and applause! They had begun to like him so much, those warm-hearted people, that they forgot to feel any restraint before the ladies and gentlemen from the castle, who had come to see them. They made quite a decent uproar, and one or two motherly women looked tenderly at the little fellow where he stood, with his mother on one side and the Earl on the other, and grew quite moist about the eyes, and said to one another:

"God bless him, the pretty little dear!"

Little Lord Fauntleroy was delighted. He stood and smiled, and made bows, and flushed rosy red with pleasure up to the roots of his bright hair.

"Is it because they like me, Dearest?" he said to his mother. "Is it, Dearest? I'm so glad!"

And then the Earl put his hand on the child's shoulder and said to him:

"Fauntleroy, say to them that you thank them for their kindness."

Fauntleroy gave a glance up at him and then at his mother.

"Must I?" he asked just a trifle shyly, and she smiled, and so did Miss



Herbert, and they both nodded. And so he made a little step forward, and everybody looked at him--such a beautiful, innocent little fellow he was, too, with his brave, trustful face!--and he spoke as loudly as he could, his childish voice ringing out quite clear and strong.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you!" he said, "and--I hope you'll enjoy my birthday--because I've enjoyed it so much--and--I'm very glad I'm going to be an earl; I didn't think at first I should like it, but now I do--and I love this place so, and I think it is beautiful--and--and--and when I am an earl, I am going to try to be as good as my grandfather."

And amid the shouts and clamor of applause, he stepped back with a little sigh of relief, and put his hand into the Earl's and stood close to him, smiling and leaning against his side.

And that would be the very end of my story; but I must add one curious piece of information, which is that Mr. Hobbs became so fascinated with high life and was so reluctant to leave his young friend that he actually sold his corner store in New York, and settled in the English village of Erlesboro, where he opened a shop which was patronized by the Castle and consequently was a great success. And though he and the Earl never became very intimate, if you will believe me, that man Hobbs became in time more aristocratic than his lordship himself, and he read the Court news every morning, and followed all the doings of the House of Lords! And about ten years after, when Dick, who had finished his

education and was going to visit his brother in California, asked the good grocer if he did not wish to return to America, he shook his head seriously.

"Not to live there," he said. "Not to live there; I want to be near HIM, an' sort o' look after him. It's a good enough country for them that's young an' stirrin'--but there's faults in it. There's not an auntsister among 'em--nor an ear!"