



FAUNTLEROY.

A STUDY IN PARENTS.

HE was the child of his parents' old age. Than this no child can be more precious.

He came to them in the midst of the furore created by Mrs. Hodgson Burnett's book, and so they christened him Fauntleroy.

He was reared with difficulty.

A week ago he had been promoted to a Fauntleroy suit. He had, by nature, the most darling long curls, and the whole appearance of the boy was exquisitely cherubic.

Not less dear were the parents. The father of Fauntleroy was spectacled, and had a great white beard: he wore queer collars—above which, at the back, his tie would always rise—and a frock coat, and he thought there was nothing half so comfortable as carpet slippers. The mother was a prim little body with ringlets, and she invariably affected a white cap. The key-note of the parents' character was mildness. They were an old-fashioned couple—and there was the pity of it. At times it would break in on Fauntleroy, with startling clearness, that these good people were quite out of touch with him. Fauntleroy was not always patient with them.

The parents, on the other hand, were ever painfully anxious not to offend their son. He was such a little wonder. Often, in the twilight, they would look at him and ask one another

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how they came to be his parents. The child was of superior clay to themselves.

But to-day there was sadness in their hearts, for it had been decided—not without much earnest discussion—that they must really talk seriously to Fauntleroy on a certain subject. He was to be chidden. It would pain them—Fauntleroy, too, would think it rude of them—but duty was duty.

Nothing is ever gained by hiding the truth, so it may as well be said at once: Fauntleroy was cherubic only in appearance.

To-day, for the fifth time that week, the nurse had complained to the old people of Fauntleroy's latest hobby. The boy occupied himself all day in pulling flies to pieces. The nurse would leave if Fauntleroy's parents did not punish Master Fauntleroy. The nurse-maid was refusing to sweep up after him.

So Fauntleroy was summoned to his parents' gentle presence.

He had kept them waiting half an hour when he strolled in, but that they overlooked: they must not be unreasonable.

The father was standing with his back to the fire, newspaper in hand. The mother was in the big arm-chair, knitting. Fauntleroy seated himself on a three-legged stool, and pouted. The mother, without more ado, shyly opened the ball: it had been arranged that she should do the speaking.

"Fauntle, darling, do you want to go to Heaven?" she asked.

"No."

Now, this wrong answer of Fauntleroy's quite disconcerted his poor mother. It upset her plans; she lost her cue. Two minutes passed in silence, for she did not know what next to say. Fauntleroy followed up his advantage. He got down from his stool. "Is that all?" he asked, obviously annoyed.

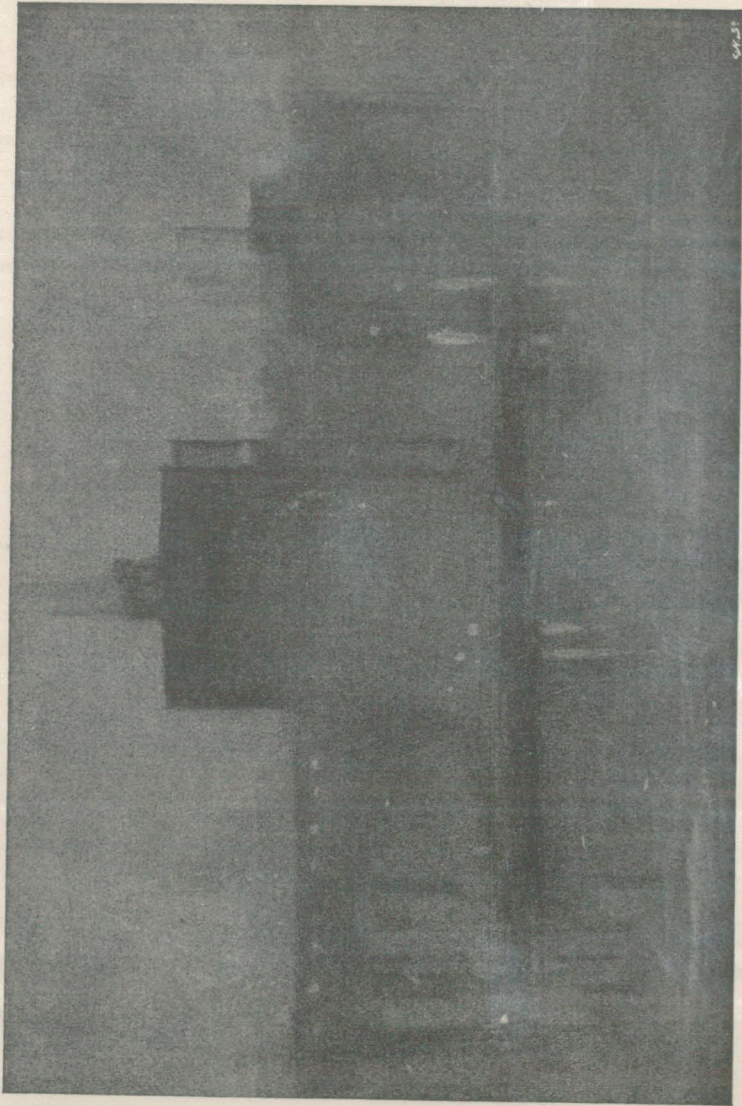
Water was in the mother's eyes. "My dear," said her husband encouragingly. At that she burst into tears.

Oh, it was most perfidious of her, after she had promised to be firm.

"No, Fauntle, that is not all," said the father, looking nervously at the hearth-rug. There was a quaver in his voice at first, but he gathered courage as he went along. "That is not all. It's about the flies."

"Pooff!" said Fauntleroy, placing his hands in his pockets.

"Dear—haven't we said—enough?" pleaded the mother,



*Lion Brewery, Lambeth,
From an Aquatint by Joseph Pennell.*

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who, while admiring her husband's pluck, could see plainly that Fauntleroy did not like it.

"No, it is not enough," said the father stoutly.

"It's all right; I don't mind him, Ma," said Fauntleroy, putting out his tongue in the rudest manner.

"No, it is not enough," repeated the father, ignoring the interruption, and stopping for a moment to marvel at his own severity. The Majesty of Man in him was aroused at last. He was becoming conscious of his own strength, and he rather liked the feeling. There was no quaver in his voice now. "You are a very naughty boy, sir," he said, looking Fauntleroy square in the face.

"Pooff!" retorted Fauntleroy again. But Fauntleroy was none the less surprised. It was the first time his father had been impertinent to him.

"Your conduct has caused your mother and me great pain. We would have you know that you must be kind to flies. How would *you* like to be pulled to pieces, sir?"

The mother wept worse than ever at this picture of her darling child in little bits. She placed her hand on her husband's arm; he was really going too far.

Fauntleroy merely laughed.

"You are an exceedingly naughty boy," continued the father relentlessly, "*and you are to have no jam with your tea to-day.*"

The father had spoken.

The son's mouth twitched involuntarily at the sentence, which was more severe than he had expected. Then, his hands still in his pockets, he strolled out at the door, slamming it with all his might. And a few seconds later they heard the nursery door slam noisily.

"A dreadful temper!" commented the father, looking, in his old way, at the hearth-rug; "A dreadful temper!"

"I am sure I don't know where he should get it from," whimpered the mother.

"Not from my side, most certainly, my dear."

"And most certainly not from mine."

"Your father, my dear——"

"Thank you. That is brave, to insult the dead."

It was most sad. Before the coming of Fauntleroy they had never had words.

Then the mother resumed her knitting and pretended to knit, and the father resumed his paper and pretended to read.

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But, after a time, it became intolerable.

Their consciences smote them too hard.

“Oh, Abel, how could you dragoon him so?”

The father fidgeted with his paper. He knew full well how thoroughly he merited the reproach. He had allowed himself to be carried away, and had acted the part of the bravo and the bully towards his own flesh and blood. Had his been a really strong character, he would have gone up long before now to apologise to Fauntleroy. But as it was—“My dear,” he said lamely, “you know what the Book says—‘Spare the rod and spoil the child.’”

The little lady drew herself up, and looked quite big. “Listen, Abel,” she said, “I am in earnest. The first day you dare to lay hands on my darling child, I leave you.”

Then, in a few minutes, “Abel, I have made up my mind. He is to have his jam. I shall ring for Nurse to run up and tell him so.”

To this the father answered nothing.

So the bell was rung, and Nurse appeared.

“Nurse, will you please go up to Master Fauntleroy, and tell him that he may have his jam as usual.”

“If you wish it, Mum,” said Nurse with undisguised disapproval.

“We wish it,” said the father.

Nurse was absent for about five minutes.

She looked grave when she appeared again in the parlour. “I can’t get no answer from Master Fauntle, and the door’s locked inside, and it’s quite quiet there,” she said.

“Good God!” cried both the parents jumping to their feet. The same thought struck the two of them together. Fauntleroy had—

“I’ll go up,” cried the father. “We’ll both go up,” cried the mother.

“Fauntle! Fauntle!” they screamed outside his door. “Fauntle, we are sorry. Fauntle, forgive us. You are to have your jam. Jam! Answer us!”

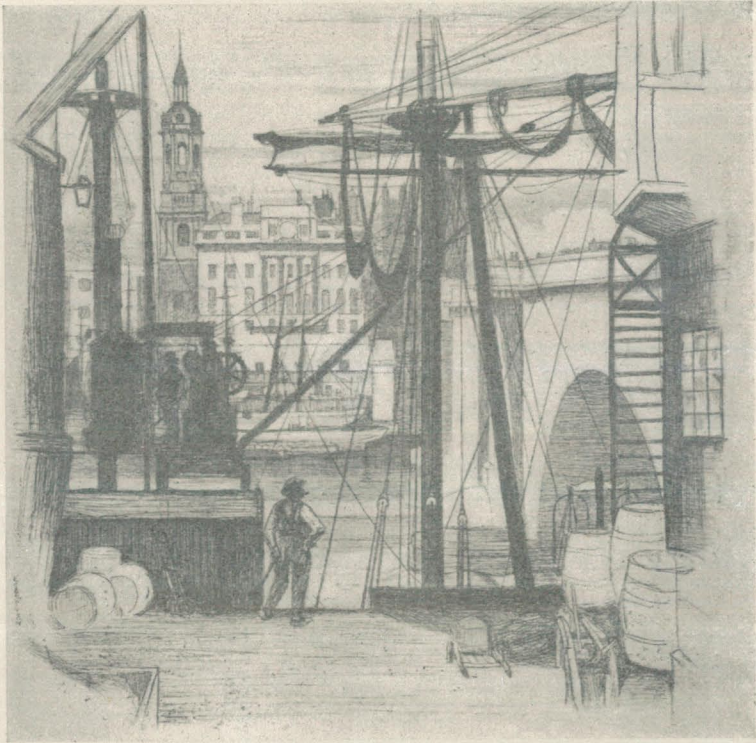
But there was no answer.

They rattled the door frantically.

But inside there was silence.

They tried to break open the door.

But the door would not give way.



St. Magnus, London Bridge.
From an Etching by Edgar Wilson.