

HOW "LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY" WAS WRITTEN.

A CHAT WITH MRS. HODGSON BURNETT.



THE AUTHOR'S STUDY.

IT was among the pictures at the New Gallery one May morning that I first met Mrs. Hodgson Burnett. The authoress, I remember, showed keen appreciation of all the best things in the exhibition, but the pictures before which she lingered longest were those of children and child-life. This only confirmed my impression that the lady whose most successful book has a little boy for its hero—a book about a child which is yet not a “children’s book”—must have the love of children as her most strongly-marked characteristic.

Renewing our acquaintance some time after at her own house in Portland Place, I resolved to ask her to tell me how she wrote “Little Lord Fauntleroy.” Before I ventured to introduce the subject, however, I could not but congratulate Mrs. Hodgson Burnett upon the beautiful house she had secured for her summer sojourns on this side of the Atlantic.

The drawing-room, large, lofty, and light, in which we sat was a dream of delicate colour; whilst the staircase I had just ascended had given me the pleasantest impressions of soft, velvety carpet, sweet-smelling flowers, and rich-leafed plants, and bright, sunny pictures.

“Your girlhood was spent in Manchester, I believe?”

“Yes; my family lived there for the first fifteen years of my life. Then in 1865 there came trouble in the cotton trade, and my mother decided to emigrate to America. We lived for some time in a village called Newmarket, in Eastern Tennessee. In America I think my faculty of observing was stimulated into greater activity by all the fresh and novel things there were around me, and also by my desire to earn money by writing. I had begun a story when I was only thirteen, and this I rewrote and finished and it was

eventually published under the title of 'Miss Carruthers' Engagement' in a Philadelphia magazine."

The authoress tells a pathetic little story in illustration of the early difficulties she had to overcome. When her first story was ready for the post, she had not the money for the necessary stamps, and she could not bring herself to ask her brothers for their assistance, because they had always ridiculed their sister's literary ambition. So the little girl went to a negro child of her acquaintance who earned money by selling wild grapes in the neighbouring town of Knoxville. It was arranged between them that the little authoress should gather the grapes in the woods whilst her partner sold them, and in this way she earned her postage-stamps.

It was in *Scribner's Magazine* that the famous story of Lancashire life, "That Lass o' Lowries," first appeared. With her other four books, "A Fair Barbarian," "Through One Administration," "Haworths," and "Louisiana," Mrs. Hodgson Burnett was already enjoying a high reputation with the American public when the singularly happy idea of writing a story about her little boy occurred to her.

"I can hardly say in what way it first came to me," said the authoress when I asked her as to the "how" and the "wherefore." "I had always been passionately fond of children, but I had never thought of putting my child-friends into stories. I am inclined to think that the idea must have taken root in what my friends and acquaintances were always saying about Vivian—his quaint conversation and his charming manner. 'Do you know, I never saw a child like him,' said once to me a distinguished man who had passed an hour in talking with him. And I remember a coloured servant exclaiming after Vivian had made some pretty little speech to her, 'Dat chile, he suttanly ain't like no other chile. 'Tain't jest dat he's smart—though cose he's smart: smart as they make 'em. It's sump'n else. An' he's the fren'liest little human I ever seed—he suttanly is!'

"That set me thinking about the effect Vivian's candour and unsophisticated speech might have upon different types of people. I was lying on my couch, convalescent, and had plenty of time for thought. The child was a sturdy little republican; he had recently read about the great War of Independence, and was full of ardent admiration for its heroes. So I thought one day how it would be if he were suddenly planted in the midst of an aristocratic English family—the suddenly-discovered grandson, say, of an English nobleman, with all the conservative

prejudices of his race. The situation was full of humorous possibilities, and after a time it forced itself upon me as the subject of a book. How could it be done? How could a young American boy be brought into daily contact with a proud English nobleman? I thought the story out one afternoon practically as it was written—son of a younger son, who had left England under the ban of his father's wrath because of his marriage with a comparatively poor American girl; elder brothers die, and the boy unexpectedly succeeds to the title and becomes the pet of his grandfather."

"And the name, 'Little Lord Fauntleroy,' did that occur to you at the same time?"

"Not at once. Names, to my mind, seem to signify character. I tried a dozen names before I decided on Fauntleroy as one exactly suiting the child I intended to write about. You see, the book was being lived, so to speak, from day to day before my eyes. Every day Vivian did something or said something which was a suggestion for the book. I used to read the manuscript as I finished a chapter to Vivian and his brother, and it was delightful to see how, sitting together in a large armchair, they would take in every word of the narrative. All the time Vivian was quite



MRS. HODGSON BURNETT.

(From a photograph by Van der Weyde, Regent Street, W.)

innocent of any idea that I was writing a book about him. 'I like that boy,' he once exclaimed; 'if you notice, he never forgets about dearest.'

Mrs. Burnett then tells me about the hero of the story as he is now—a youth of 17, studying at one of the American colleges. As many readers will know, Dr. and Mrs. Burnett have had the misfortune to lose their elder son, and the authoress' maternal affection is now lavished upon the younger. "He has never caused me a moment's uneasiness," she says with gladsome face. "I have always trusted to his sense of what is right, and that, I am convinced, is the best way with children. Even now I should as soon think, for

if he is to succeed in his career, and it is very seldom indeed that the temptation proves too strong."

Mrs. Hodgson Burnett remembers her own childhood with extraordinary distinctness. She remembers how she used to weave stories together almost as soon as she could think, and how she began to put them on paper from the age of seven. Some of these infantile stories were actually the prototypes, it seems, of those she has since published in magazines and books.

"But how well you must have remembered Lancashire life to have been able to write in America such a book as 'That Lass o' Lowries.' And the dialect—how did you

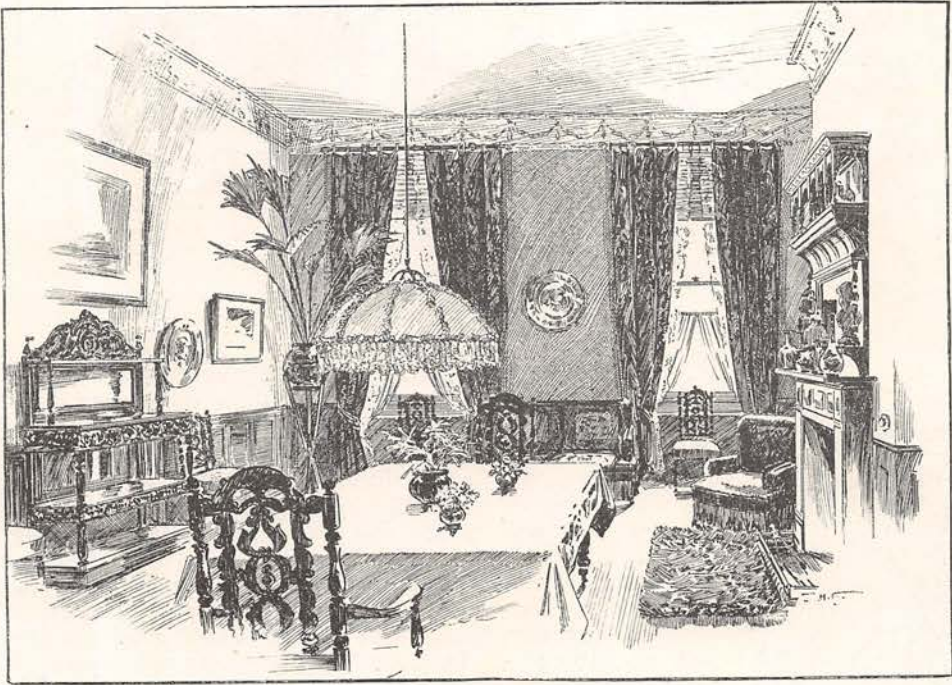


MRS. BURNETT'S DRAWING-ROOM.

example, of asking Dr. Burnett to attend to his patients as of telling Vivian to go to his books. He is fond of social pleasure, and dances or tennis parties sometimes form a sore temptation; but he has been led to thoroughly realise the necessity of hard work

manage, while still so young, to learn the Lancashire dialect?"

"Oh, I was always rather good at picking up the talk going on around me. I used to sit at the window of my school in Manchester listening to the conversation of the people



THE DINING-ROOM.

in the street below. I was equally successful in America in acquiring the negro dialect. By the way, the first story I sent to *Scribner's Magazine* was returned because, as the editor afterwards confessed, it was sup-

posed that it had been 'cribbed' from some English periodical. It was not regarded as possible that a writer in the wilds of Tennessee should be so well acquainted with English life." FREDERICK DOLMAN.



TO SLEEP.

DRAW close the curtains of the brain,
 O Sleep!
 And let my slumbers
 Be profound and deep.
 Let no dreams come
 To stay the death of grief—
 To mar, with conscious touch
 The soul's relief.
 To dream is but to wake again to care,
 And thou shouldst bring oblivion to despair.

But if, O Sleep! thou needs must play
 The host,
 And to the revels
 Bid full many a ghost—
 Let them be such
 As are of tender grace:
 Kind deed, soft word, true love
 And smiling face.
 Send me, I pray thee, that my pain may cease,
 If not oblivion, dreams that bring me peace.
MATTHIAS BARR.