

Captain Errol ; and there was the strange marriage of Bevis, the dead Lord Fauntleroy, and the strange wife, of whom no one knew anything, suddenly appearing with her son, and saying that he was the real Lord Fauntleroy and must have his rights. All these things were talked about and written about, and caused a tremendous sensation. And then there came the rumor that the Earl of Dorincourt was not satisfied with the turn affairs had taken, and would perhaps contest the claim by law, and the matter might end with a wonderful trial.

There never had been such excitement before in the county in which Erleboro was situated. On market-days, people stood in groups and talked and wondered what would be done ; the farmers' wives invited one another to tea that they might tell one another all they had heard and all they thought, and all they thought other people thought. They related wonderful anecdotes about the Earl's rage and his determination not to acknowledge the new Lord Fauntleroy, and his hatred of the woman who was the claimant's mother. But, of course, it was Mrs. Dibble who could tell the most, and who was more in demand than ever.

"An' a bad lookout it is," she said. "An' if you were to ask me, ma'am, I should say as it was a judgment on him for the way he's treated that sweet young cre'tur as he parted from her child,—for he's got that fond of him an' that set on him an' that proud of him as he's a'most drove mad by what's happened. An' what's more, this new one's no lady, as his little lordship's ma is. She's a bold-faced, black-eyed thing, as Mr. Thomas says no gentleman in livery 'u'd bemean hisself to be gave orders by ; and let her come into the house, he says, an' he goes out of it. An' the boy don't no more compare with the other one than nothin' you could mention. An' mercy knows what's goin' to come of it all, an' where it's to end, an' you might have knocked me down with a feather when Jane brought the news."

In fact there was excitement everywhere at the Castle : in the library, where the Earl and Mr. Havisham sat and talked ; in the servants' hall, where Mr. Thomas and the butler and the other men and women servants gossiped and exclaimed at all times of the day ; and in the stables, where Wilkins went about his work in a quiet depressed state of mind, and groomed the brown pony more beautifully than ever, and said mournfully to the coachman that he "never taught a young gen'leman to ride as took to it more nat'ral, or was a better-plucked one than he was. He was a one as it were some pleasure to ride behind."