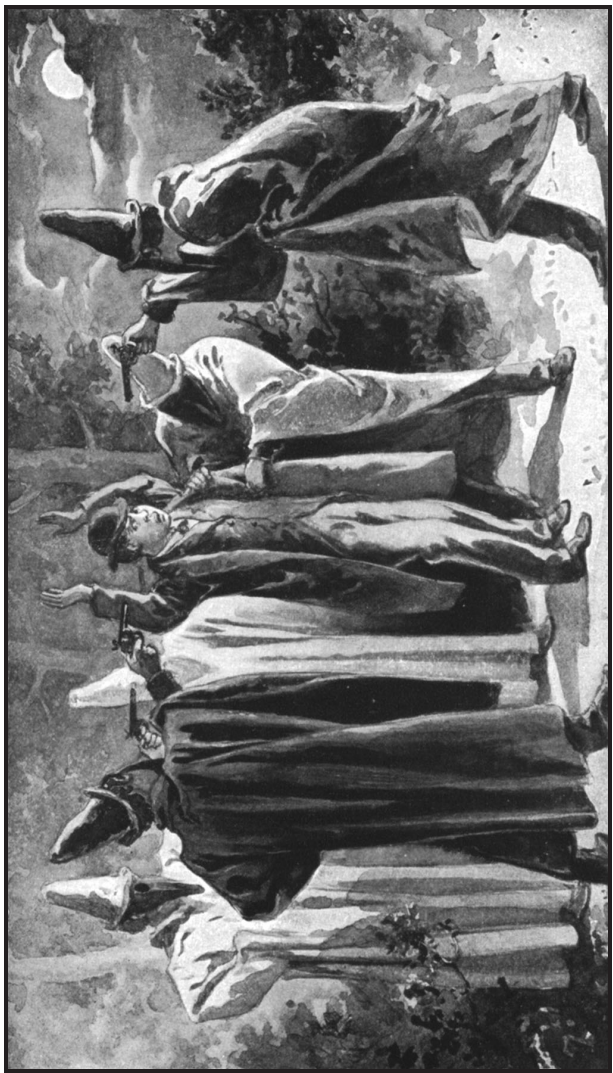


Ethelred Preston

**OR THE ADVENTURES
OF A NEWCOMER**



"Your money or your life!"

Ethelred Preston

OR THE ADVENTURES
OF A NEWCOMER

By

Fr. Francis J. Finn, S.J.

AUTHOR OF TOM PLAYFAIR, PERCY WYNN,
HARRY DEE, ETC.

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Chapter I

A LETTER FROM ETHELRED'S MAMA

SEATED at his desk on a bright Wednesday morning toward the end of January, Father Edmunds, the reverend president of Henryton College, was gazing with a look of weariness upon the enormous mass of papers, pamphlets and letters piled up before him. The gaze and the weariness lasted but a moment; then he fixed his eyeglasses firmly upon his nose and set to work at distributing. While slipping the letters from his hand to a table at his side, he scanned their superscriptions, dropping some to the right and a great many to his left. The larger pile thus formed was made up of letters addressed to the students; the smaller, of those addressed to himself and his community. From the letters Father Edmunds went to the pamphlets, magazines and newspapers; and here the wastebasket came into service. With a dexterity born of long experience, the president could ascertain, in most cases at a glance, and without opening their wrappers, the general

character of the enclosed missives. Before he had done with examining these, the wastebasket had received a very generous moiety of current literature. The morning's mail thus sorted, Father Edmunds touched his bell, in answer to which a young gentleman, his private secretary, entered the room.

"For the vice president," said Father Edmunds, pointing to the mail of the students.

The secretary bowed, took the mail in his hands and withdrew.

Having thus narrowed his field of labor, Father Edmunds addressed himself to a more careful examination. Again taking up the letters, he selected his own. Opening these, he skimmed rapidly over the first five, pigeonholing three and dropping two into the wastebasket. But the sixth letter gave him pause.

It was enclosed in a dainty, scented, square envelope, and was a very lengthy production. Setting aside the evidence of the perfumery, the communication was evidently the work of a woman; it was written down and across the page in fat sprawling letters, where *m*'s and *w*'s and *x*'s and *v*'s were utterly indistinguishable. Father Edmunds sighed; he had struggled through such letters before. Nothing could be skipped, noth-

ing taken for granted. Not infrequently the most important part of such missives was to be found where crossings were thickest. He began, then, the reading with mild resignation. Suddenly an expression of awakening interest came upon his features. As he reached the third page a smile began to flicker; it burst into a flame at the fourth, and blazed on merrily to the end, when he exclaimed:

“Little Lord Fauntleroy the second!”

He laughed quietly, and added:

“I fancy the small boys of Henryton College are going to be awakened from their mid-winter dullness. I must see the vice president at once.”

“Father Howard,” he exclaimed, as he entered the vice president’s room a moment later, “have you room in the junior division for a Little Lord Fauntleroy?”

“I have, certainly; but I’m not so sure about the boys. They may try, in their innocent but abrupt way, to find out whether he is really and truly real.”

“Well, it would appear that he is real enough; just read this letter.”

Father Howard took the scented envelope, drew out the enclosure—and this is what he read:

REVEREND EDMUND C. EDMUNDS

Reverend Dear Sir: It is after reflection and thought and many tears that I address myself to your kindness. I now find myself, dear reverend sir, forced to face a trial, which, alas, but one week ago I could not so much as have fancied. My darling little boy and I must part. Ah, dear Father, if you but knew what that meant. No one but a mother can appreciate the grief which fills my heart. The dear child is the picture of his father. He is lovely and innocent and has never been away from my side—not even for one day. Whatever he knows—and he has gone quite far in spelling and botany, including the language of flowers—I have taught him myself, and in my teachings I have addressed myself to the heart rather than to the head. He is not at all like other boys, of whom it may be said that they are uniformly rude, but has all the refinements of a young lady. He is docile, amiable, cheerful, happy as the day is long—the sweetest child imaginable. All his little ways are lovely. He is generous to a fault, in which he resembles his father, and is as sensitive as I was in the days of my youth, and conscientious to a degree approaching scrupulousness. And yet I am not, after the fashion of most mothers, blind to his faults. My

little Ethelred is just the least trifle impetuous and inconsiderate. By those who do not understand him, he might even be called thoughtless. Nevertheless, he is *so* open to reason! A little talk, if kindly and considerately given and accompanied with a little coaxing, will never fail to bring him to his senses. He has never been subjected to corporal punishment—the dear child is high-strung, and *so* nervous, and would be injured for life by such barbarous treatment. *Under no circumstance must this child be touched*—this point I insist upon.

Ethelred is a delicate child. Just after teething he contracted a severe illness. [Here the fond mother goes into a detailed account of all Master Ethelred's various ailments and maladies, mentioning incidentally, but at some length, several diseases which, by an especial providence, he had just narrowly escaped. As these details are of little interest to the public at large, and do not bear directly upon the story, I omit them.]

Now, dear reverend sir, in view of what I have told you, you must see how necessary it is that the greatest care be taken of Ethelred's health. He should get a glass of milk at least four times a day—twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon.

“The boy should by all means bring a cow along,” muttered the vice president.

If possible, he should have sweet bread every morning at breakfast, a glass of port wine at dinner, and dry toast at supper.

“He should bring his cook along too,” interjected the president.

Ethelred is not a Catholic. I am an Episcopalian in theory, and my dear boy will probably join the same church. I am not a bigoted woman, and believe that there are good Catholics, many of whom will doubtless go to Heaven. My boy is naturally very religious, and I send him to your school because I understand that the moral training there is excellent. Miss Martin, whose nephew, Earl Meriwether, attends your College, gives me an excellent account of it. I do not know Earl personally, though his lamented mother and I were most *intimate* friends at school, and I feel that Earl, whose reputation stands very high, will be a suitable companion for my boy—as far as *any boy* can be a suitable companion for one who has had such home training as my Ethelred has enjoyed. If there are any *good* Catholic boys attending your College, supposing, of course, that their manners make some such approach toward refinement as we have reason to expect of

boys of the better class, I see no objection to my boy's associating with them *under due inspection*.

I am so agitated, dear reverend sir, that I find it almost impossible to put my thoughts on paper with any appearance of order. I should 'ere this have explained to you my reason for being obliged to separate myself from my sweet child. It is inevitable. Yesterday I received a telegram from London, England, stating that my husband has there been attacked by hemorrhages, and that his position is precarious.

Of course I must start by the next steamer. Gladly would I bring my little Ethelred along, but the poor child is so sensitive to seasickness that it would be literally flying in the face of providence to imperil his precious health—mayhap his life—by taking him along. The parting is difficult, but it must be made. Again and again I beg you to bestow every attention upon my darling, and *a mother's prayer* and *a mother's blessing* will accompany you through life.

Thanking you in advance for your kindness, and asking you to overlook the inaccuracies and blunders of a well-nigh distracted mother, I am, dear reverend sir,
Yours most earnestly and beseechingly,
ELEANOR PRESTON

P.S. Enclosed you will find a check or a draught or a bank note (I am not quite sure of the correct term) for four hundred dollars for Ethelred's expenses. On reaching London I shall forward more. My child will reach you on Thursday morning. I have been holding him back in hopes of getting some trusted friend to accompany him on his trip. I would go myself, but could hardly do so without missing the first steamer. Be a father, dear reverend sir, to my precious darling.

E. P.

"Such a boy," the president remarked, "hardly requires testimonials as to his character."

"Not if he's anything at all like what his mother makes him out to be," answered Father Howard. "Let us hope that he really is a swan in the eyes of others than his fond parent. Meantime it would be good to write for references. If you have no objection, I shall attend to that part of the matter myself."

And there was no objection.

On the next morning, at about the same hour, the college porter brought Father Edmunds a card. He read with a smile—

Master Ethelred Preston,
Albany Villa, Brighton
[At Home Tuesdays]

“I’m on my road to meet our Little Lord Fauntleroy,” said Father Edmunds as he encountered the vice president in the hall.

Father Edmunds was a man whom long experience as a disciplinarian and as a superior had schooled in the control of his emotions. But as he entered the parlor and glanced at the new pupil he started back, while a slight exclamation forced itself from his lips. And he had reason for being astonished.

Chapter II

*IN WHICH THINGS BEGIN TO GO BADLY WITH
EARL MERIWETHER*

WHILE Father Edmunds was mastering his astonishment in the parlor, matters were not proceeding with their wonted smoothness in the class of First Academic.