

RUTH HALL: A DOMESTIC TALE OF THE PRESENT TIME. By FANNY FERN. In one volume: pp. 400. New-York: MASON BROTHERS.

If 'RUTH HALL' be really an auto-biography, as seems to be inferred by many of our contemporaries, it is without exception the most 'out-spoken' production of its kind we ever encountered. Even her relatives 'get it right and left'—her father, her brother, her mother-in-law, all come in for their share, and no inconsiderable share either. There is one thing, however, which militates against the idea that it is an entirely authentic and veritable history; and that is, the praise that she is all the while awarding her heroine; her beautiful curls, her soft voice, her graceful manner, her charming little foot, and the like; yet even this may be an adroit piece of art, to avoid the disclosure of unpleasant truths in the first person. 'Any way,' the book is one of deep interest. It does not profess to be a novel proper. 'There is no intricate plot; there are no startling developments—no hair-breadth escapes.' 'I have avoided,' says the author, 'long introductions and descriptions, and have entered unceremoniously and unannounced into people's houses, without stopping to ring the bell.' And so she has; and what is more, when she gets into these houses, she lets you know, without any circumlocution whatever, what is going on there. Witness the following, for example, describing RUTH HALL's first interview with her mother-in-law after her marriage:

'"GOOD-MORNING, RUTH! MRS. HALL I suppose I *should* call you, only that I can't get used to being shoved one side quite so suddenly," said the old lady, with a faint attempt at a laugh.

"Oh! pray do n't say Mrs. HALL to *me*," said RUTH, handing her a chair; 'call me any name that best pleases you; I shall be quite satisfied.'

"I suppose you feel quite lonesome when HARRY is away, attending to business, and as if you hardly knew what to do with yourself, don't you?"

"Oh! no," said RUTH, with a glad smile, 'not at all. I was just thinking whether I was not glad to have him gone a little while, so that I could sit down and think how much I love him.'

'The old lady moved uneasily in her chair. 'I suppose you understand all about house-keeping, RUTH?'

'RUTH blushed. 'No,' said she, 'I have but just returned from boarding-school. I asked HARRY to wait till I had learned house-keeping matters, but he was not willing.'

'The old lady untied her cap-strings, and patted the floor restlessly with her foot.

"It's a great pity you were not brought up properly," said she. 'I learned all that a girl should learn before I married. HARRY has his fortune yet to make, you know. Young people, now-a-days, seem to think that money comes in showers, whenever it is wanted; that's a mistake; a penny at a time—that's the way we got ours; that's the way HARRY and you will have to get yours. HARRY has been brought up sensibly. He has been taught economy; he is, like me, naturally of a very generous turn; he will occasionally offer you pin-money. In those cases, it will be best for you to pass it over to me to keep; of course you can always have it again, by telling me how you wish to spend it. I would advise you, too, to lay by all your handsome clothes. As to the silk stockings you were married in, of course you will never be so extravagant as to wear them again. I never had a pair of silk stockings in my life; they have a very silly, frivolous look. Do you know how to iron, RUTH?"

"Yes," said RUTH; 'I have sometimes clear-starched my own muslins and laces.'

'Glad to hear it; did you ever seat a pair of pantaloons?"

"No," said RUTH, repressing a laugh, and yet half-inclined to cry; 'you forget that I am just home from boarding-school.'

"Can you make bread? When I say bread I mean bread—old-fashioned, yeast-riz bread; none of your sal-soda, saleratus, sal-volatile, poisonous mixtures, that must be eaten as quick as baked, lest it should dry up; yeast-bread—do you know how to make it?"

‘No,’ said RUTH, with a growing sense of her own good-for-nothingness; ‘people in the city always buy baker’s-bread; my father did.’

‘Your father! land’s sake, child, you mustn’t quote your father now you’re married; you haven’t any father!’

‘I never had,’ thought RUTH.

‘To be sure; what does the Bible say? ‘Forsaking father and mother, cleave to your wife,’ (or husband, which amounts to the same thing, I take it.) ‘And, speaking of that, I hope you won’t be always running home, or running anywhere, in fact. Wives should be keepers-at-home. RUTH,’ continued the old lady, after a short pause, ‘do you know I should like your looks better if you did n’t curl your hair?’

‘I do n’t curl it,’ said RUTH, ‘it curls naturally.’

‘That’s a pity,’ said the old lady; ‘you should avoid every thing that looks frivolous; you must try and pomatum it down. And, RUTH, if you should feel the need of exercise, do n’t gad in the streets. Remember there’s nothing like a broom and a dustpan to make the blood circulate.’

‘You keep a rag-bag, I suppose,’ said the old lady. ‘Many’s the glass dish I’ve peddled away my scissors-clippings for. ‘Waste not, want not.’ I’ve got that framed somewhere. I’ll hunt it up, and put it on your wall. It won’t do you any harm to read it now and then.’

‘I hope,’ continued the old lady, ‘that you do n’t read novels, and such trash. I have a very select little library, when you feel inclined to read, consisting of a treatise on ‘The Complaints of Women;’ an excellent sermon on Predestination, by our old minister, Dr. Diggs; and Seven Reasons why JOHN ROGERS, the martyr, must have had ten children, instead of nine, (as is generally supposed.) Any time that you stand in need of rational reading come to me;’ and the old lady, smoothing a wrinkle in her black-silk apron, took a dignified leave.

It would be difficult to find in any contemporary work, foreign or native, a more touching scene than the death of the heroine’s little girl. One can hardly read it without sobbing; and yet it is scarcely more affecting than a similar picture of the burial of her husband, with whom she had passed a wedded life of the most uninterrupted happiness:

‘Slowly the funeral procession wound along. The gray-haired gate-keeper of the cemetery stepped aside, and gazed into the first carriage as it passed in. He saw only a pale woman veiled in sable, and two little wondering rosy faces gazing curiously out the carriage-window. All about, on either side, were graves; some freshly-sodded, others green with many a summer’s verdure, and all treasuring sacred ashes, while the mourners went about the streets.

‘Dust to dust!’

HARRY’S coffin was lifted from the hearse, and laid upon the green-sward by the side of little DAISY. Over him waved leafy trees of his own planting; while through the branches the shifting shadows came and went, lending a mocking glow to the dead man’s face. Little KATY came forward, and gazed into the yawning grave till her golden curls fell like a veil over her wondering eyes. RUTH leaned upon the arm of her cousin, a dry, flinty, ossified man of business; a man of angles; a man of forms; a man with veins of ice, who looked the ALMIGHTY in the face complacently, ‘thanking God he was not as other men are;’ who gazed with stony eyes upon the open grave, and the orphan babes, and the bowed form at his side, which swayed to-and-fro, like the young tree before the tempest blast.

‘Dust to dust!’

RUTH shrinks trembling back, then leans eagerly forward; now she takes the last lingering look at features graven on her memory with lines of fire; and now, as the earth falls with a hard, hollow sound upon the coffin, a lightning-thought comes with stunning force to little KATY, and she sobs out, ‘Oh! they are covering my papa up; I can’t ever see papa any more!’

‘Dust to dust!’

The sexton smooths the moist earth carefully with his reversed spade; RUTH’S eyes follow his movements with a strange fascination. Now the carriages roll away, one after another, and the wooden man turns to RUTH and says, ‘Come.’ She looks into his stony face, then at the new-made mound, utters a low, stifled cry, and staggers forth with her crushing sorrow.

‘O Earth! Earth! with thy mocking skies of blue, thy placid silver streams, thy myriad memory-haunting odorous flowers, thy wheels of triumph rolling — rolling on over breaking hearts and prostrate forms, maimed, tortured, crushed, yet not destroyed. O mocking Earth! snatching from our frenzied grasp the life-long-coveted treasure! Most treacherous Earth! are these thy unkept promises?

‘Oh! hadst thou no Gethsemane, no Calvary, no guarded tomb, no risen LORD!’

As a pendant to this touching scene, read the following. RUTH, who has struggled with poverty and want in the support of her children, finds herself at last obliged, through the cruelty of those who had forborne to help the widow and the fatherless, to part with her husband's clothes :

'HARRY's clothes were collected from the drawers one by one, and laid upon the sofa. Now a little pencilled memorandum fluttered from the pocket; now a handkerchief dropped upon the floor, slightly odorous of cologne or segars; neck-ties there were shaped by his full, round throat, with the creases still in the silken folds; and there was a crimson smoking-cap — RUTH's gift — the gilt tassel slightly tarnished where it had touched the moist dark locks; then his dressing-gown, which RUTH herself had often playfully thrown on, while combing her hair: each had its little history, each its tender home-associations, daguerreotyping on tortured memory sunny pictures of the past.

'Oh! I cannot! I cannot!' said RUTH, as her eye fell upon HARRY's wedding-vest; 'oh! Mr. DEVELIN, I cannot!'

'Mr. DEVELIN coughed, hemmed, walked to the window, drew off his gloves, and drew them on, and finally said, anxious to terminate the interview, 'I can fold them up quicker than you, Mrs. HALL.'

'If you please,' replied RUTH, sinking into a chair; '*this* you will leave me, Mr. DEVELIN,' pointing to the white satin vest.

'Y-e-s,' said Mr. DEVELIN, with an attempt to be facetious; 'the old doctor can't use that, I suppose.'

'The trunk was packed, the key turned in the lock, and the porter in waiting, preceded by Mr. DEVELIN, shouldered his burden and followed him down-stairs and out into the street.

'And there sat RUTH with the tears dropping one after another upon the wedding-vest, over which her fingers strayed caressingly. Oh! where was the heart which had throbbed so tumultuously beneath it on that happy bridal eve? With what a dirge-like echo fell upon her tortured ear those bridal words, 'till death do us part.'

Without going into particulars, it may suffice to say that the poor widow finally succeeded, after running the gauntlet of indifferent editors and selfish publishers, in winning name, fame, and fortune, and, as we infer, a husband, although this last is not very explicitly stated. With a brief programme of what 'FANNY FERN' would be as an editor, we take our leave of her present volume :

'I wish I had a paper. Would n't I call things by their right names? Would I know any sex in books? Would I praise a book because a woman wrote it? Would I abuse it for the same reason? Would I say, as one of our most able editors said not long since to his reviewer, 'Cut it up, root and branch; what right have these women to set themselves up for authors, and reap literary laurels?' Would I unfairly insert all the adverse notices of a book, and never copy one in its praise? Would I pass over the wholesale swindling of some aristocratic scoundrel, and trumpet in my police report, with heartless comments, the name of some poor, tempted, starving wretch, far less deserving of censure, in God's eye, than myself? Would I have my tongue or my pen tied in any way by policy, or interest, or clique-ism? No, Sir! The world never will see a paper till mine is started. Would I write long descriptions of the wardrobe of foreign *prima donnas*, who bring their cracked voices and reputations to our American market, and 'occupy suites of rooms lined with satin, and damask, and velvet,' and goodness knows what, and give their reception-*soirées*, at which they '*affably notice*' our toadying first citizens? By JUPITER! why *should n't* they be 'affable?' Do n't they come over here for our money and patronage? Who cares how many 'bracelets' Signora — had on, or whose 'arm she leaned gracefully upon,' or whether her hair was braided or curled?' If, because a lord or a duke once 'honored her' by insulting her with infamous proposals, some few brainless Americans choose to deify her as a goddess, in the name of GEORGE WASHINGTON and common-sense, let it not be taken as a national exponent. There are some few Americans left who prefer ipecac in homœopathic doses.'

There is one great merit in this book which we have omitted to set forth. *The interest never flags.* FANNY FERN knows enough of 'dramatic effect' to be aware that the stage must never be vacant, nor the actors ever idle. Her volume, we may add, is well printed, upon good paper, and bears upon its outer cover a fac-simile of her signature — a bold, firm 'hand-of-write.'

EDITOR'S TABLE.

The Feast of Saint Nicholas.



SELDOM have we so feelingly appreciated the inaccessibility, in winter, of our mountain-home on the Hudson, as on the morning of the sixth of December; for on the evening of that day our good Society of SAINT NICHOLAS were to hold their annual Festival at the Saint NICHOLAS Hotel, and we had pledged ourselves to be present. How we waded through the untrodden snow to the dépôt, just in time to see the engine snorting on its way, trailing its white cloud of vapor through the wintry air; how we followed after, hoping still to be in time for the boat; how the pier,

—— ‘immeasurably spread,
Seemed lengthening to the view:’

how we arrived in season to see the steamer paddling off into the middle of the Tappaän-Zee; how we walked back, melancholy, and watched growlingly all day the trains rushing townward during the day, over the river, ‘it boots not now to say:’ but it was a sore trial. For, ‘by the same token,’ we had been compelled to be absent from the previous ‘tasting-supper’ of our brother stewards — for such was thrice *our* honored office — greatly to our regret; for well we knew what we were losing. Howbeit, next to being present at the great ‘Festival,’ was to read a succinct account of it from the authentic report prepared by an esteemed friend and brother-steward, for the Society’s official organ, the KNICKERBOCKER, which we here annex:

‘THE sixth of December, a day dear to the Sons of Saint NICHOLAS, found them assembled in goodly numbers at the magnificent hotel that bears his venerated name, to do all honor to the day and memory of their illustrious patron-saint. At half-past five o’clock P.M. the Society met for the transaction of the usual preliminary business, which being over, the Honorable JOHN A. KING, of the ‘Committee of Instalments,’ proceeded, with appropriate remarks and ceremonies, to instal the following officers elect for the ensuing year: