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Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio.

WOMAN.

If a woman once errs,
Kick her down, kick her down;
If misfortune is hers,
Kick her down;
Though her tears fall like rain,
And she ne'er smiles again—
Kick her down.
If man breaks her heart,
Kick her down, kick her down;
Redouble the smart—
Kick her down;
And if low her condition,
Or, on to perdition—
Kick her down,

Ay! pass her by on the other side; speak no word of encouragement to her; measure not her fall by her temperament or her temptations, but by the frigidity of your own unsolicited, pharisaical heart. Leave no door of escape open; close your homes and your hearts; crush every human feeling in her soul; teach her that the Bible and religion are a fable; check the repentant prayer on her Magdalen lip; thrust her back upon the cruel tender mercies of those who rejoice at her fall; send her forth with her branded beauty, like a blight and mildew. "Stand aside, for thou art holier"—holier than the Sinless, whose feet were bathed with tears, "and wiped with the hairs of the head." Cast the "first stone" at her, O thou whited sepulchre! though those holy lips could say, "Neither do I condemn thee—go, and sin no more!"

THE PASSIONATE FATHER.

"Come here, sir!" said a strong, athletic man, as he siezed a delicate-looking lad by the shoulder. "You've been in the water again, sir! Haven't I forbidden it?"

"Yes, father, but—"

"No 'buts!' Haven't I forbidden it, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I was—"

"No reply, sir" and the blows fell like a hailstorm about the child's head and shoulders.

Not a tear started from Harry's eye, but his face was deadly pale, and his lips firmly compressed, as he rose and looked at his father with an unflinching eye.

"Go to your room, sir, and stay there till you are sent for. I'll master that spirit of yours before you are many days older!"

Ten minutes after, Harry's door opened, and his mother glided gently in. She was a fragile, delicate woman, with mournful blue eyes, and temples startlingly transparent. Laying her hand softly upon Harry's head, she stooped and kissed his forehead.

The rock was touched, and the waters gushed forth. "Dear mother!" said the weeping boy.

"Why didn't you tell your father that you plunged into the water to save the life of your playmate?"

"Did he give me a chance?" said Harry, springing to his feet, with a flashing eye. "Didn't he twice bid me be silent, when I tried to explain? Mother, he's a tyrant to you and to me!"

"Harry, he's my husband and your father!"

"Yes, and I'm sorry for it. What have I ever had but blows and harsh words? Look at your pale cheeks and sunken eyes, mother! It's too bad, I say! He's a tyrant, mother!" said the boy, with a clenched fist and set teeth; "and if it were not for you, I would have been leagues off long ago. And there's Nelly, too, poor, sick child. What good will all her medicine do her? She trembles like a leaf when she hears his footsteps. I say 'tis brutal, mother!"

"Harry"—and a soft hand was laid on the impetuous boy's lips—"for my sake—"

"Well, 'tis only for your sake, yours and poor Nelly's, or I should be on the sea somewhere—anywhere but here."

Late that night, Mary Lee stole to her boy's bedside, before retiring to rest. "God be thanked, he sleeps!" she murmured, as she shaded her lamp from his face. Then, kneeling at his bedside, she prayed for patience and wisdom to bear uncomplainingly the heavy cross under which her steps were faltering; and then she prayed for her husband.

"No, no, not that!" said Harry, springing from his pillow, and throwing his arms about her neck. "I can forgive him what he has done to me, but I never will forgive him what he has made you suffer. Don't pray for him—at least, don't let me hear it!"

Mary Lee was too wise to expostulate. She knew her boy was spirit-sore under the sense of recent injustice; so she lay down beside him, and, resting her tearful cheek against his, repeated, in a low, sweet voice, the story of the crucifixion. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!" fell upon his troubled ear. He yielded to the holy spell.

"I will!" he sobbed. "Mother, you are an angel; and if I ever get to heaven, it will be your hand that has led me there."

There was hurrying to and fro in Robert Lee's house that night. It was a heavy hand that dealt those angry blows on that young head!

The passionate father's repentance came too late—came with the word that his boy must die!

"Be kind to her" said Harry, as his head drooped on his mother's shoulder.

It was a dearly-bought lesson. Beside that lifeless corpse Robert Lee renewed his marriage-vow; and now, when the hot blood of anger rises to his temples, and the hasty word springs to his lip, the pale face of the dead rises up between him and the offender, and an angel voice whispers, "Peace, be still!"

THE PARTIAL MOTHER.

Fancy that little, pale neglected, sensitive child, meekly returning that touching answer to the mother of her petted, beautiful sister! Who could not find a warm corner in their heart for her? Who would not hasten to make those sad, pensive eyes beam happiness? Who would not raise her estimate of her own powers, chilled and crushed in the germ, by the hand that should wipe away every childish tear? Ah! "the coat of many colours" is not yet worn out. The sullen brow of defiance, or the early grave, is too often the sad penalty. Other Josephs and Ishmaels may yet "thirst in the desert;" other Jacobs and Elis have their "grey hairs brought with sorrow to the grave." How seldom is equal justice done to the children of a large family! The superficial, the brilliant, the showy, the witty, throw a dazzling glare over parental eyes. They make not the less gifted but often warmer-hearted child, as she creeps with swelling heart and filling eyes to some unnoticed corner, to sob, with passionate tears, "Ah, it's only me!"

Frown not impatience at the little shrinking creature at your side—slow of speech and stammering of tongue, turning his eye timidly even from a mother's glance—because the quick flush of embarrassment mounts to his forehead, and he stands not up with a bold, flashing eye, to answer the pleased guest! Chide him not! Let him hide his tearful eye and blushing cheek in the folds of your dress, if he will; put a loving arm about him, and let him creep to your heart, and nestle there, till the little dove gains courage to flutter and soar with a strong wing. He shall yet, eagle-like, face the sun! You shall yet scarce keep in sight his soaring pinions! Bear with him yet a while, ambitious mother!

THE BALL-ROOM AND THE NURSERY.

"You are quite beautiful to-night," said Frank Fearing to his young wife, as she entered the drawing-room dressed for a ball; "I shall fall in love with you over again. What! not a smile for your lover-husband? and a tear in your eye, too? What does this mean, dearest?"

Mary leaned her beautiful head upon her husband's shoulder, and turned pale as she said, "Frank, I feel a strange, sad presentiment of some impending evil—from whence I cannot tell. I have striven to banish it, but it will not go away. I had not meant to speak of it to you, lest you should think me weak or superstitious: and, Frank," said his sweet wife, in pleading tones, "this is a frivolous life we lead. We are all the world to each other; why frequent such scenes as these? A fearful shadow lies across my path. Stay at home with me, dearest! I dare not go to-night."

Frank looked at her thoughtfully a moment, then, gaily kissing her, he said, "This vile east wind has given you the blues; the more reason you should not give yourself time to think of them. Beside, do you think me such a Blue Beard as to turn the key on so bright a jewel as yourself? No, no, Mary, I would have others see it sparkle and shine, and envy me its possession; so throw on your cloak, little wife, and let us away."

"Stop a moment, then," said Mary, with a smile and a sigh, "let me kiss little Walter before I go; he lies in his little bed so rosy and so bright. Come with me Frank, and look at him."

With kisses on lip, brow, and cheek, the child slumbered on, and the carriage rolled away from the door to the ball.

It was a brilliant scene, that ball-room! Necks and arms that shamed for whiteness the snowy robes that floated around them, eyes rivalling the diamond's light, tresses whose hue was borrowed from the sun, manhoods's peerless form and open brow, odorous garlands, flashing lights, music to make the young blood race more swiftly through the veins—all, all were there, to intoxicate and bewilder.

Peerless in the midst—queen of hearts and of the dance—stood the young wife of Frank Fearing. Accepting the offered hand of an acquaintance, she took her place among the waltzers. She made a few turns upon the floor, then, pale as death, she turned to her husband, saying, "O Frank I cannot—I feel such an oppression here, here," and she placed her hand on heart and brow.

Frank looked annoyed; he was very proud of his wife; her beauty was the admiration of the room. She had never looked lovelier than to-night. Whispering in her ear, "For my sake, dear Mary, conquer this weakness," he led her again to the dancers. With a smile of gratified pride he followed her with his eyes, as her fairy form floated past him, excitement and exercise lending again to her cheek its loveliest glow, while on all sides murmurs of "Beautiful, most beautiful!" fell on his ear. "And that bright vision is mine," said Frank to himself; "I have won her from hearts that were breaking for her."

When the dance was over, following her to the window, he arranged her scarf about her neck with a fond care; and with a "Thank you, dearest," was leaving her, when she again laid her hand upon his arm, saying, with a wild brilliancy in her eye, "Frank! something has happened to Walter; take me home now."

"Pshaw! Mary, dear, you looked so radiant, I thought you had danced the vapours away. One more, dearest, and then, if you say so, we will go."

Suffering herself to be persuaded, again those tiny feet were seen spurning the floor; towards the close, her face grew so deadly pale that her husband, in alarm, flew to her side.

"The effort cost you too much, Mary," said Frank; "let us go home." He wrapped her cloak carefully about her. She was still and cold as a marble statue.

As the carriage stopped at their door, she rushed past him with the swiftness of an antelope, and, gaining her boy's chamber, Frank heard her exclaim, as she fell senseless to the floor, "I knew it! I told you so!" The child was dead.

The servant in whose care it had been left, following the example of her mistress, had joined some friends in a dance in the hall. That terrible scourge of children, the croupe, had attacked him, and alone, in the still darkness, the fair boy wrestled with the "King of Terrors."

From whence came the sad presentiment that clouded the fair brow of the mother, or the mysterious magnetism drawing her so irresistibly back to her dying child? Who shall tell?

For months she lay vibrating between life and death—

"Yet the Healer was there who had smitten her heart,
And taken her treasure away;
To allure her to heaven he has placed it on high,
And the mourner will sweetly obey,
There had whispered a voice—'twas the voice of her God—
"I love thee! I love thee! pass under the rod!"

* * * * * * *

Other fair children now call her "mother;" but never again, with flying feet, has she chased the midnight hours away. Nightly, as they return, they find her within the quiet circle of home—within call of helpless chidhood. Dearer than the admiration of the gay throng, sweeter to her than viol or harp, is the music of their young voices, and tenderly she leads their little feet "into the green pastures, and unto the still waters of salvation," blest with the smile of the Good Shepherd, who saith, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

ALL'S WELL.

Twelve o'clock at night, and all's well!

False prophet! Still and statue-like, at yonder window, stands the wife. The clock has told the small hours; yet her face is pressed close against the window-pane, striving in vain, with straining eye, to pierce the darkness. She sees nothing; she hears nothing but the beating of her own heart. Now she takes her seat, opens a small Bible, and seeks from it what comfort she may, while tears blister the pages. Then she clasps her hands, and her lips are tremulous with mute supplication. Hist! there is an unsteady step in the hall. She knows it! Many a time and oft it has trod on her very heart-strings. She glides down gently to meet the wanderer. He falls heavily against her; and, in maudlin tones, pronounces a name he had long since forgotten "to honour." Oh, all-enduring power of woman's love! No reproach, no upbraiding—the slight arm passed around that reeling figure, once erect in God's own image." With tender words of entreaty, which he is powerless to resist, if he would, she leads him in. It is but a repetition of a thousand such vigils! It is the performance of a vow with a heroism and patient endurance too common and every-day to be chronicled on earth—too holy and heavenly to pass unnoticed by the "registering angel" above!

"All's well!" False prophet! In yonder luxurious room sits one whose curse it was to be fair as a dream of Eden. Time was when those clear eyes looked lovingly into a mother's face, when a grey-haired father laid his trembling hand, with a blessing, on that sunny head, when brothers' and sisters' voices blended with her own in heart-music around that happy hearth. Oh, where are they now? Are there none to say to the repenting Magdalen, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more?" Must the gilded fetter continue to bind the soul that loathes it, because man is less merciful than God?

"All's well!" False prophet! There lies the dead orphan. In all the length and breadth of the green earth, there was found no sheltering nest where that lonely dove could fold its wings when the parent-birds had flown. The brooding wing was gone that covered it from the cold winds of unkindness. Love was its life; and so it drooped!

"All's well!" False prophet! Sin walks the earth in purple and fine linen: honest poverty, with tear-bedewed face, hungers, and shivers, and thirsts, "while the publican stands afar off!" The widow pleads in vain to the ermined judge for "justice;" and, unpunished of Heaven, the human tiger crouches in his lair, and springs upon his helpless prey!

"All's well!" Ah, yes, all is well! for "He who seeth the end from the beginning" holds evenly the scales of justice. Dives shall yet beg of Lazarus. Every human tear is counted, They shall yet sparkle as gems in the crown of the patient and enduring disciple! When the clear, broad light of eternity shines upon life's crooked paths, we shall see the snares and pitfalls from which our hedge of thorns has fenced us in; and, in the maturity of our full-grown faith, we shall exultingly say, "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!"

HOW WOMAN LOVES.

"Walter," said Mrs. Clay, "you have not tasted your coffee this morning. Are you ill?" and she leaned across the table, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"No—yes, not quite well. I had a great deal to occupy me yesterday;" and he arose from his seat to avoid the scrutiny of those clear eyes, adding, "If I shouldn't be home at the dinner-hour, Marion, don't wait for me; I may be detained by business. And now kiss me before I go."

"If Walter would only leave that odious bank!" said Marion to herself. "Such a treadmill life for him to lead! They are killing him with such close application;" and she moved about, busying her little head devising certain pathetic appeals to the "Board of Directors" for a mitigation of his sufferings.

When one is away from a dear friend, 'tis a satisfaction to be employed in performing some little service for him, how trifling soever it may be. So Marion passed into the library, arranging Walter's books and papers, producing order out of confusion from a discouraging and heterogeneous heap of pamphlets and letters, moved his easy-chair round to the most inviting locality; and then her eyes fell upon a little sketch he had drawn. "Poor Walter!" said she, "with his artist eye and poet heart, to be counting up those interminable rows of figures, day after day, that any man who has brains enough for the rule of three could do just as well. To think he must always lead such a treadmill life! never feast his eyes on all that is beautiful and glorious beyond the seas, while so many stupid people are galloping over the continent, getting up fits of sham enthusiasm, just as the 'Guide Books' direct! It is too bad." She wished heartily she had brought him other dowry than her pretty face and warm heart.

Well, dinner-hour came, but came not Walter. Marion was not anxious, because he had prepared her for his absence; but she missed his handsome face at the table, and pushed away her food untasted. She was unfashionable enough to love him quite as well, although she had been married many happy years, as on the day when the priest's blessing fell on her maiden ear.

"Come here, Nettie," said she to a noble boy. "Spring into my lap, and let me look at papa's eyes;" and she pushed back the clustering curls from his broad, white forehead. "Tell me, Nettie, which do you love best, papa or me?"

"Papa said I must love you best, because he does," said the child.

"Bless your baby-lips for that sweet answer! Where can that dear papa be, I wonder?"

The words had but just escaped her lips when her father entered—not with his usual beaming smile and extended hand, but with a slow, uncertain step, as if he could with difficulty sustain himself, and such a haggard look!

"Send away the child," said he huskily; "I want to speak with you, Marion."

"He is not dead? don't tell me that!" said she, with ashen lips, her thoughts at once reverting to her husband.

"Better so, better so," said the old man, shaking his grey head, "than to live to disgrace us all as he has!"

"Who dare couple 'disgrace' with Walter's name?" said Marion, with a flashing eye. "Not you—oh! not you, dear father!" And she looked imploringly in his face.

"He has disgraced us all, I say!" said the proud old man; "you and I, and that innocent child. He has embezzled money to a large amount, and is now in custody; and I've come to take you home with me—you and Nettie—for you must forget him, Marion."

"Never, never, never!" said she solemnly. "'Tis false! —my noble, generous, high-minded husband! never! There is a conspiracy; it will all be cleared up. O father, unsay those dreadful words; I will never leave him, though all the world forsake him. Let me go to him father!"

"Marion," said the old man, "he will be sentenced to a felon's cell; there is no escape for him. When that takes place, the law frees you. Would you disgrace your boy? Come back to your childhood's home, and forget him; 'tis your duty, He is unworthy your love or mine. If not," said the old man, marking her compressed lip and heightened colour, "if not—"

"What then?" said Marion calmly.

"You are no child of mine!" said the irritated old man.

"God help me, then!" said Marion; "for I will never leave nor forsake him."

If was a sight to move the stoutest heart, that fair, delicate woman in the prison-cell. Walter started to his feet, but he did not advance to meet her. There was little need. Her arms were about his neck, her head upon his breast. Once, twice he essayed to speak; but her hand was laid upon his lips—she would not hear, even from his own mouth, that he had fallen. The old jailer, stony-hearted as he was, drew his coat-sleeve across his eyes as he closed the door upon them.

"Some fiend from hell tempted me" said the wretched man at last; "but the law frees you from me, Marion." said he bitterly.

"Yours till death!" whispered the weeping wife.

"God bless your noble heart, Marion! Now I can bear my punishment."

If "death loves a shining mark," so does malice. Every petty underling who owed Walter Clay a grudge took this opportunity to pay the debt. The past was ransacked for all the little minutiæ of his history; dark hints and inuendoes where thrown out to prejudice still more the public mind. There were cowardly stabs in the dark from pusillanimous villains who would have been livid with fear had their victim been free to face them. Reporters nibbed their pens with an appetite; and the "extras" teemed with exaggerated accounts of the prisoner and the trial. Even the sacredness of the wife's sorrow was intruded upon by those ravenous must-have-a paragraph gentry. Then there were the usual number of sagacious people, who shook their empty heads, and "always expected he would turn out so, because those who held their heads so high generally did." First and foremost were these "Good Samaritans" at the trial, noting ever flitting expression of the agonised prisoner's face, and only wishing it were in their power to prolong his acute suffering and their exquisite enjoyment, months instead of hours. "Good enough for him!" was their final doxology, when the verdict of "Guilty" was rendered. "It will take his pride down a peg." O most pharisaical censors! who shall say that, with equal opportunity and temptation, your vaunted virtue would have better stood the test!

"The worst is over now," said Walter, as Marion bathed his temples. "I will struggle to bear the rest, since you do not desert me, Marion. But Nettie—poor, innocent Nettie!" and the strong man bowed his head, and wept at the heritage of shame for that brave boy.

And so days, and weeks, and months dragged their slow length along to the divided pair: he, in the livery of ignominy, bearing his sentence as best he might among the desperate and degraded, experiencing every moment a refinement of torture of which their dull intellects and deadened sensibilities knew nothing; she, pointed out as the "felon's wife" by the rude crowd, shrinking nervously from notice, trembling at the apprehension of insult, as she toiled on heroically, day by day, for daily bread.

Whence came that quiet dignity with which Walter Clay exacted respect even from his jailers? Ah! there was a true heart throbbing for him outside those prison-walls. Nightly was he remembered in her prayers. Daily she taught their boy to lisp, even now, his father's name. Like music to his ear was that light footstep echoing through the gloomy corridor to his cell. Tenderly those loving arms twined about his neck; sacred and true were the holy words with which she cheered his sinking spirit. Hopefully she painted the future—this trial past—when, in some home beyond the seas, he should yet be the happier for being so chastened by sorrow, and where no malicious tongue should remind him of his temptation or his fall. Sweetly upon his ear fell those soothing words, first uttered by sacred lips, "Go and sin no more."

No, Walter Clay was not deserted quite! He was not degraded, even there and thus, while he could hold up his head and boast of a love so devoted, so pure, so holy!

The hour of emancipation came at last, and Walter Clay stepped forth under the broad blue sky, once more a free man; and in the little room where the heroic wife had suffered and toiled, she once more clasped her husband to her breast.

"And Nettie, where is he? Let me kiss my boy," said the joyful father. "Where's Nettie?"

"On the Saviour's bosom!" said Marion, with a choking voice.

"Dead? And you have buried this sad secret in your breast, and borne this great grief unshared, lest you should add to my sorrow!" And he knelt at her feet reverently.

"God knows you had enough to bear!" said Marion, as they mingled their tears together, and gazed at the long, bright, golden tress, all that remained to them of little Nettie.

"What an interesting couple!" said a travelling artist in Italy to his companion "That woman's face reminds one of a Madonna—so pensive, sweet, and touching. If she would but sit to me! Who are they, Pietro?"

"They came here about a year since, live in the greatest seclusion, and seem anxiously to avoid all contact with their own countrymen. All the poor peasantry bless them; and Father Giovanni says they are the best people, for heretics, he ever saw."

A MOTHER'S SOLILOQUY.

'Tis mine! bound to me by a tie that death itself cannot sever. That little heart shall never thrill with pleasure, or throb with pain, without a quick response from mine. I am the centre of its little world; its very life depends on my faithful care. It is my sweet duty to deck those dimpled limbs—to poise that tiny, trembling foot. Yet stay—my duty ends not here! A soul looks forth from those blue eyes—an undying spirit, that shall plume its wing for a ceaseless flight, guided by my erring hand.

The hot blood of anger may not poison the fount whence it draws its life, or the hasty word escape my lip, in that pure presence. Wayward, passionate, impulsive, how shall I approach it but with a hush upon my spirit, and a silent prayer?

O careless sentinel! slumber not at thy post over its trusting innocence!

O reckless "sower of the seed!" let not "the tares" spring up!

O unskilful helmsman! how shalt thou pilot that little bark, o'er life's tempestuous sea, safely to the eternal shore?

"Tis ours!"

A father bends proudly over that little cradle! A father's love, how strong, how true! But oh, not so warm, not so tender, as hers whose heart that babe hath lain beneath!

Fit me for that holy trust, O good Shepherd, or fold it early to thy loving bosom!

THE INVALID WIFE.

"Every wife needs a good stock of love to start with." Don't she? You are upon a sick bed; a little feeble thing lies upon your arm that you might crush with one hand. You take those little velvet fingers in yours, close your eyes, and turn your head languidly to the pillow. Little brothers and sisters—Carry, and Harry, and Fanny, and Frank, and Willy, and Mary, and Kitty—half a score—come tiptoeing into the room "to see the new baby." It is quite an old story to "nurse," who sits there like an automaton, while they give vent to their enthusiastic admiration of its wee toes and fingers, and make profound inquiries, which nobody thinks best to hear. You look on with a languid smile, and they pass out, asking, "Why they can't stay with dear mamma, and why they mustn't play puss in the corner, as usual?" You wonder if your little croupy boy tied his tippet on when he went to school, and whether Betty will see that your husband's flannel is aired, and if Peggy has cleaned the silver and washed off the front-door steps, and what your blessed husband is about that he don't come home to dinner. There sits old nurse keeping up that dreadful treadmill trotting, "to quiet the baby," till you could fly through the key-hole in desperation. The odour of dinner begins to creep up stairs. You wonder if your husband's pudding will be made right, and if Betty will remember to put wine in the sauce, as he likes it; and then the perspiration starts out on your forehead, as you hear a thumping on the stairs, and a child's suppressed scream;