of these nights, if they burn me alive for it!" A wild, long laugh, rang through the deserted room, and ended in a hysteric sob; she threw herself on the floor, in convulsive sobbings and struggles.

In a few moments the frenzy fit seemed to pass off; she rose slowly, and seemed to collect herself.

"Can I do anything more for you, my poor fellow?" she said, approaching where Tom lay; "shall I give you some more water?"

There was a graceful and compassionate sweetness in her voice and manner, as she said this, that formed a strange contrast with the former wildness.

Tom drank the water, and looked earnestly and pitifully into her face.

"O, Missis, I wish you'd go to him that can give you living waters!"

"Go to him! Where is he? Who is he?" said Cassy.

"Him that you read of to me,—the Lord."

"I used to see the picture of him, over the altar, when I was a girl," said Cassy, her dark eyes fixing themselves in an expression of mournful reverie; "but, *he isn't here!* there's nothing here, but sin and long, long, long despair! O!" She laid her hand on her breast and drew in her breath, as if to lift a heavy weight.

Tom looked as if he would speak again; but she cut him short, with a decided gesture.

"Don't talk, my poor fellow. Try to sleep, if you can." And, placing water in his reach, and making whatever little arrangements for his comfort she could, Cassy left the shed.[3]

* * *

1852

3. At the end of the novel, Cassy and Emmeline turn out to be kin of George and Eliza, and the entire group is joyously united in Canada. In New England, Topsy joins the church and eventually becomes a missionary to Africa. George Shelby Jr., who arrives at Legree's plantation just in time to witness Tom's death, is inspired by Tom's goodness to emancipate all the slaves on the Kentucky plantation.

FANNY FERN (SARAH WILLIS PARTON)
1811–1872

Sarah Payson Willis was born in Portland, Maine, on July 9, 1811, the fifth of nine children of Nathaniel Willis and Hannah Parker Willis. Two of the Willis sons rose to prominence, Nathaniel Parker as a poet and later an influential journalist, and Richard Storrs as a music critic. Sarah Willis became one of the first women in the United States to have her own newspaper column; and for years, famous as "Fanny Fern," she was among the nation's best-paid authors. In the 1840s Ralph Waldo Emerson struck an essentially American vein in celebrating self-reliance; a decade later Fanny Fern struck a more deeply buried vein in her protests against unequal treatment of women, both in her columns and, very powerfully, in her novel *Ruth Hall* (1854), which Joyce W. Warren calls "nearly unique" in its time for a portrait "of a woman as the self-reliant American individualist."

At home the self-reliant Sarah Willis resisted her father's Calvinist theology, and as a girl she resisted the religious indoctrination at the Adams Female Academy in Derry, New Hampshire, and the Hartford Female Seminary conducted by Catharine Beecher. In 1837 Sarah Willis married Charles Harrington Eldredge, a cashier in a Boston bank. They had three daughters in a domestic life marked by debt and tragedy; the eldest child, Mary, died in childhood, and her husband, who had overborrowed disastrously, lost their house before he died suddenly in 1846, at thirty-five. Neither her own father, recently remarried, nor her in-laws were willing to support her in a house of her own. Willis optimistically set out to support herself and her daughters by sewing, something the older and wealthier Catharine Sedgwick had been sure any competent woman could do. Living in boardinghouses and enduring sexual harassment, Willis could not keep both children with her. Forced to put her older daughter in the care of the increasingly hostile Eldredges, she at last took her father's advice that remarriage was her only option and in 1849 married Samuel P. Farrington, a Boston widower with two daughters. To judge from surviving documents and from her portrayal of the character John Stahle in *Rose Clark,* she quickly found Farrington jealous, tyrannical, and sexually repulsive. She left him after two years, a revolutionary act for which she was left impoverished and ostracized.

In 1851, under pseudonyms, Sarah Payson Willis Eldredge Farrington became a journalist, for pay, at first for fifty cents an article. Over the course of the year, writing for the Boston *Olive Branch,* she found her tone (colloquial, flippant, ironic, and often outrageous) and a new name. As "Fanny Fern" in the *Olive Branch* and in the New York *Musical World and Times* she quickly became a national institution, an embodiment of the new American woman. Negotiating a series of ever more favorable contracts, she collected her columns in *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Port-Folio* and *Little Ferns for Fanny's Little Friends* (1853), then *Fern Leaves,* second series (1854). In December 1854 she published *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time,* a sensation because readers knew it was in large part autobiographical and because it involved a new feminist heroine who struggled successfully for opportunities in a society where laws gave husbands rights over their wives' property. On the strength of her mingled fame and notoriety, in 1855 she signed a near-fabulous contract with Robert Bonner, the editor of the weekly New York *Ledger* for one hundred dollars per column. Her popularity was such that Bonner prospered under these hitherto unthinkable terms, seeing the circulation of the *Ledger* reach four hundred thousand in 1860, at a time when the population of New York State was fewer than four million. Since the *Ledger* was shared in many households, more like a weekly magazine than a newspaper, Fern's readership was enormous.

In the flush of her success, in 1856 she married the journalist James Parton, the author of a successful biography of Horace Greeley, and moved to Brooklyn, a ferry ride away from the publishing center, the southern tip of Manhattan. (Parton's being a decade her junior was rightly perceived as a bold statement in Fern's politics of sexuality.) Fern's second novel, *Rose Clark,* a depiction of a woman's disastrous second marriage, was published later in 1856, and *Fresh Leaves* in 1859, the year in which she and her husband and daughters settled in Manhattan on East Eighteenth Street, a more practical location for her.

A second-generation feminist, Fern was not an organizer or joiner like L. Maria Child or Caroline Kirkland. Having endured harsher experience than most of the women writers who preceded her, she protested first against obstacles she had encountered herself. Only later did she comment on general topics such as the connection between poverty and vice, a subject on which her views, unlike Sedgwick's, were based on personal experience. Up until her death from cancer in 1872 she continued to play a unique and expanding role in American journalism and literature.

We regret to be obliged to speak thus of a lady's book: it gives us pleasure, when we can do so conscientiously, to pat lady writers on the head; but we owe a duty to the public which will not permit us to recommend to their favorable notice an aspirant who has been unwomanly enough so boldly to contest every inch of ground in order to reach them—an aspirant at once so high-stepping and so ignorant, so plausible, yet so pernicious. We have a conservative horror of this pop-gun, torpedo female; we predict for Fanny Fern's "Leaves" only a fleeting autumnal flutter.

1857

A Law More Nice Than Just[1]

Here I have been sitting twiddling the morning paper between my fingers this half hour, reflecting upon the following paragraph in it: "Emma Wilson was arrested yesterday for wearing man's apparel." Now, why this should be an actionable offense is past my finding out, or where's the harm in it, I am as much at a loss to see. Think of the old maids (and weep) who have to stay at home evening after evening, when, if they provided themselves with a coat, pants and hat, they might go abroad, instead of sitting there with their noses flattened against the window-pane, looking vainly for "the Coming Man."[2] Think of the married women who stay at home after their day's toil is done, waiting wearily for their thoughtless, truant husbands, when they might be taking the much needed independent walk in trowsers, which custom forbids to petticoats. And this, I fancy, may be the secret of this famous law—who knows? It *wouldn't* be pleasant for some of them to be surprised by a touch on the shoulder from some dapper young fellow, whose familiar treble voice belied his corduroys. That's it, now. What a fool I was not to think of it—not to remember that men who make the laws, make them to meet all these little emergencies.

Everybody knows what an everlasting drizzle of rain we have had lately, but nobody but a woman, and a woman who lives on fresh air and out-door exercise, knows the thraldom of taking her daily walk through a three weeks' rain, with skirts to hold up, and umbrella to hold down, and puddles to skip over, and gutters to walk round, and all the time in a fright lest, in an unguarded moment, her calves should become visible to some one of those rainy-day philanthropists who are interested in the public study of female anatomy.

One evening, after a long rainy day of scribbling, when my nerves were in double-twisted knots, and I felt as if myriads of little ants were leisurely traveling over me, and all for want of the walk which is my daily salvation, I stood at the window, looking at the slanting, persistent rain, and took my resolve. *"I'll do it,"* said I, audibly, planting my slipper upon the carpet. "Do what?" asked Mr. Fern, looking up from a big book. "Put on a suit of your clothes and take a tramp with you," was the answer. "You dare not," was the rejoinder; "you are a little coward, only saucy on paper." It was the work of a moment, with such a challenge, to fly up stairs and overhaul my philosopher's wardrobe. Of course we had fun. Tailors must be a stingy set, I remarked, to be so sparing of their cloth, as I struggled into a pair of their handiwork, undeterred by the vociferous laughter of the wretch who had solemnly vowed to "cherish me" through all my tribulations. "Upon my word, everything seems to be narrow where it ought to be broad, and the waist of this coat might be made for a hogshead; and, ugh! this shirt-collar is cutting my ears off, and you have not a decent cravat in the whole lot, and your vests are frights, and what am I to do with my hair?" Still no reply from Mr. Fern, who lay on the floor, faintly ejaculating, between his fits of laughter, "Oh, my! by Jove!—oh! by Jupiter!"

Was that to hinder me? Of course not. Strings and pins, woman's never-failing resort, soon brought broadcloth and kerseymere[3] to terms. I parted my hair on one side, rolled it under, and then secured it with hair-pins; chose the best fitting coat, and cap-ping the climax with one of those soft, cosy hats, looked in the glass, where I beheld the very fac-simile of a certain musical gentleman, whose photograph hangs this minute in Brady's entry.[4]

Well, Mr. Fern seized his hat, and out we went together. "Fanny," said he, "you must not take my arm; you are a fellow." "True," said I, "I forgot; "and you must not help me over the puddles, as you did just now, and do, for mercy's sake, stop laughing. There, there goes your hat—I mean *my* hat; confound the wind! and down comes my hair; lucky 'tis dark, isn't it?" But oh, the delicious freedom of that walk, after we were well started! No skirts to hold up, or to draggle their wet folds against my ankles; no stifling vail flapping in my face, and blinding my eyes; no umbrella to turn inside out, but instead, the cool rain driving slap into my face, and the resurrectionized blood coursing through my veins, and tingling in my cheeks. To be sure, Mr. Fern occasionally loitered behind, and leaned up against the side of a house to enjoy a little private "guffaw," and I could now and then hear a gasping "Oh, Fanny!" "oh, my!" but none of these things moved me, and if I don't have a nicely-fitting suit of my own to wear rainy evenings, it is because—well, there *are* difficulties in the way. Who's the best tailor?

Now, if any male or female Miss Nancy[5] who reads this feels shocked, let 'em! Any woman who likes, may stay at home during a three weeks' rain, till her skin looks like parchment, and her eyes like those of a dead fish, or she may go out and get a consumption dragging round wet petticoats; I won't—I positively declare I won't. I shall begin *evenings* when *that* suit is made, and take private walking lessons with Mr. Fern, and they who choose may crook their backs at home for fashion, and then send for the doctor to straighten them; I prefer to patronize my shoe-maker and tailor. I've as good a right to preserve the healthy body God gave me, as if I were not a woman.

1858

1. First printed in the New York *Ledger* on July 10, 1858, the source of the text. "Nice": finically exacting.

2. A suitor with good prospects for financial or professional advancement.

3. Cassimere, woolen cloth used in men's apparel.

4. Photographer Matthew Brady's studio was at 207 Broadway, at the corner of Fulton. The "musical gentleman" may have been the great Italian baritone Giorgio Ronconi (1810–1890), famous for creating roles in operas by Gaetano Donizetti; several weeks before Fern published this article, New Yorkers lamented his departure for Europe.

5. A prude.