

demands a sigh long enough and strong enough to inflate a pair of bellows, and asks you 'what you want with it, and if a half-a-dollar won't do?' Gracious kings! as if those little shoes, and stockings, and petticoats could be had for half-a-dollar! O, girls! set your affections on cats, poodles, parrots or lap-dogs: but let matrimony alone. It's the hardest way on earth of getting a living. You never know when your work is done. Think of carrying eight or nine children through the measles, chicken-pox, rash, mumps, and scarlet fever,—some of them twice over. It makes my head ache to think of it. O, you may scrimp and save, and twist and turn, and dig and delve, and economize and die: and your husband will marry again, and take what you have saved to dress his second wife with; and she'll take your portrait for a fire-board!

"But, what's the use of talking? I'll warrant every one of you'll try it the first chance you get; for, somehow, there's a sort of bewitchment about it. I wish one half the world were not fools, and the other half idiots."

1851, 1853

Hungry Husbands¹

"The hand that can make a pie is a continual feast to the husband that marries its owner."²

Well, it is a humiliating reflection, that the straightest road to a man's heart is through his palate. He is never so amiable as when he has discussed a roast turkey. Then's your time, "Esther," for "half his kingdom,"³ in the shape of a new bonnet, cap, shawl, or dress. He's too complacent to dispute the matter. Strike while the iron is hot; petition for a trip to Niagara, Saratoga, the Mammoth Cave, the White Mountains,⁴ or to London, Rome, or Paris. Should he demur about it, the next day cook him another turkey, and pack your trunk while he is eating it.

There's nothing on earth so savage—except a bear robbed of her cubs—as a hungry husband. It is as much as your life is worth to sneeze, till dinner is on the table, and his knife and fork are in vigorous play. Tommy will get his ears boxed, the ottoman will be kicked into the corner, your work-box be turned bottom upwards, and the poker and tongs will beat a tattoo on that grate that will be a caution to dilatory cooks.

After the first six mouthfuls you may venture to say your soul is your own; his eyes will lose their ferocity, his brow its furrows, and he will very likely recollect to help you to a cold potato! Never mind—*eat it*. You might have to swallow a worse pill—for instance, should he offer to kiss you!

Well, learn a lesson from it—keep him well fed and languid—live yourself on a low diet, and cultivate your thinking powers; and you'll be as spry as a cricket, and hop over all the objections and remonstrances that his dead-and-

1. From *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Port-Folio. Second Series* (1854); the column was first published in *True Flag*, April 23, 1853.

2. From a newspaper column or domestic advice manual by someone other than Fern. Fern began many of her columns with passages from the conventional writings of the day.

3. In the Bible, when the Persian king Ahasuerus offered the Jewish woman Esther half his kingdom while complimenting her in front of his court, she responded by offering to prepare him a banquet (Esther 5.1–5).

4. Popular vacation spots in New York, Kentucky, and New Hampshire, respectively.

alive energies can muster. Yes, feed him well, and he will stay contentedly in his cage, like a gorged anaconda. If he were my husband, wouldn't I make him heaps of *pison*⁵ things! Bless me! I've made a mistake in the spelling; it should have been *pies and things!*

1853, 1854

"Leaves of Grass"¹

Well baptized: fresh, hardy, and grown for the masses. Not more welcome is their natural type to the winter-bound, bed-ridden, and spring-emancipated invalid. "Leaves of Grass" thou art unspeakably delicious, after the forced, stiff, Parnassian² exotics for which our admiration has been vainly challenged.

Walt Whitman, the effeminate world needed thee. The timidest soul whose wings ever drooped with discouragement, could not choose but rise on thy strong pinions.

"Undrape—you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded;
I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no."

* * *

"O despairer, here is my neck,
You shall *not* go down! Hang your whole weight upon me."

Walt Whitman, the world needed a "Native American" of thorough, out and out breed—enamored of *women* not *ladies*, *men* not *gentlemen*, something beside a mere Catholic-hating Know-Nothing;³ it needed a man who dared speak out his strong, honest thoughts, in the face of pusillanimous, toadeying, republican aristocracy; dictionary-men, hypocrites, cliques and creeds; it needed a large-hearted, untainted, self-reliant, fearless son of the Stars and Stripes, who disdains to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage;⁴ who does

"Not call one greater or one smaller,
That which fills its period and place being equal to any;"

who will

"Accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of
on the same terms."

Fresh "Leaves of Grass!" not submitted by the self-reliant author to the fingering of any publisher's critic, to be arranged, re-arranged and disar-

5. I.e., poison; phonetic spelling, as the word might be pronounced in a local dialect.

1. From the May 10, 1856, issue of the *New York Ledger*. Fern met Whitman a few months before she published this review, and, for a short time, they developed a literary friendship. Fern's husband, James Parton, had introduced the writers, but the friendship came to an end in 1857 when Whitman failed to repay money he had borrowed from Parton. In her review, Fern responds to the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1856. All quotations are from poems in that volume.

2. In Greek mythology, Mount Parnassus was the home of the Muses.

3. The anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Party formed during the late 1840s and early 1850s in response to fears shared by some native-born Protestants about increasing Catholic immigration. At first it was a secretive party, with members urged to say "I know nothing," if asked about the party's activities. Under the name of the American Party, the Know-Nothings did well in elections of the early 1850s, but the party fell apart in 1856 as a result of sectional divisions over its proslavery platform.

4. In Genesis 25, Esau, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, sells his birthright (or inheritance) to his brother, Jacob, for a mess of pottage (meal of lentils).