

FREE-LOVE AND TROUSERS.

HIT. BY MARY E. WALKER, M. D. New York: The American News Company. 1871.

Grecian annals inform us that the trophies of Miltiades disturbed the rest of the envious and ambitious Themistocles. History is prone to repeat itself. In our day we have seen the ambitious Mary E. Walker repeating, with slight variations, the covetous conduct of the sleepless Athenian. The trousers of mankind will not permit her to rest. After a lifetime of ceaseless effort and audacious persistency she has won and worn the precious garment. Still her unrest remains forever with her. An ambition which even the possession of trousers will not allay beckons her onward. She now insists that women everywhere shall imitate her example and, emancipating themselves from skirts, array themselves in the bifurcated bliss of manly clothing. With this purpose she has lectured, written, and talked. Now she comes before the public as the author of a book, in which her cherished hobby is urged upon the women of America in language which is breathless with its eager scorn of grammar and vigorous with the intensity of italics. True, she touches slightly upon the topics of free-love and tobacco, painting the beauties of the former and asserting the horrors of the latter. Nevertheless, the chief burden of her book is the advantages of trousers. In her view, men may smoke and women may marry, but, bad as these vices are, there is yet hope for the world in the universal wearing of trousers.

The author at the very outset places us in a perplexing difficulty in regard to her sex. Her name would seem to indicate her femininity, while her dress apparently proclaims her to be a man. Not content with thus assuming the characteristics of two sexes she speaks of herself as though she belonged to a third sex, more undesirable than either of the others. She says in her preface, "In cases where I shall be severely treated I shall be consoled with the thought that the critics are earning their bread, and that they are more capable of displaying their talents in 'unkind cuts' than in culling what little of merit *it* may possess." Of course by "*it*" (the italics are ours) the writer means herself. Thus we are unable to decide whether she should be called "he," "she," or "it." For the sake of uniformity we shall continue to speak of her as though she were a woman. Nevertheless, the fact that her portrait, which is prefixed to the book, represents her as a man, while she obviously is accustomed to speak of herself as "*it*," makes us uncertain whether

we can be fully justified in applying to her only feminine pronouns.

The connection between free-love and trousers, by which the advocate of the one inevitably becomes the eulogist of the other, may not be apparent. It is, however, fully explained by the author of this volume. She describes the sort of clothing which she wears herself, and in which she wishes to encase the fair limbs of American women. "The linen" remarks Miss (or should we say Mrs. or Mr.?) Walker, "is made with high neck and loose waist, and whole drawers, and long sleeves with wristbands attached; thus making a complete undersuit in one garment.

The pants are made like men's and are either buttoned to the waist of the undersuit or are arranged with the usual suspenders. The dress is made to hang free of the body, the waist and skirt of one piece like a sack-coat, and falling to the knees." This is the garment, or rather the three garments, in which Mrs. Walker insists that all women should be clothed. In this description of the triple armor wherewith she makes herself proof against the too fervid admiration of designing men, we at once perceive the origin and excuse of her advocacy of free-love.

It need no longer be a mystery why virtuous women should wear trousers and advocate the abolition of marriage. The former circumstance is a full explanation of the latter. A fondness for the advocacy of theories which the propounder cannot be called upon to put into practice is a characteristic of the modern reformer. Mr. Phillips proposes the hanging of rich men because he feels confident that, rich as he is, no one will think of hanging him. Mr. Greeley pleads for the abolition of the franking privilege, knowing that he can never be in a position to lose any vested right in the matter; and Mr. Mary E. Walker and other trouser-clad women theoretically approve of free-love, feeling a sublime confidence that they can under no conceivable circumstances be asked to put their theories into practice. The clergyman who from the safe fortress of the pulpit challenges his hearers to contradict his assertions is not more safe from hostile disputation than is Master Walker, when, clad in her impenetrable mail, she dares to provoke the unwise admiration of dissolute men. The female preacher of free-love fully comprehends that her strength lies in her epicene garments. Bold beyond the bravery of man must be that being who would whisper of love to the inhabitant of the "complete undersuit in one garment" and the "pants made like men's."

To the advocacy of free-love and trousers Miss Walker has added a few desultory remarks upon miscellaneous topics which fulfil their purpose of increasing the size of her book. She is not always either gentle or reasonable. Perhaps it may be true that women would regard the cook-stove with a fonder affection than they now bestow upon it if they could but feel that "men's brains had been heated to agony over it." Still a woman whose cook-stove really possessed a charm for her because some unhappy man had been burned to death in it does not present an amiable appearance to most people. Also it may be perfectly true that men would be morally improved by child-bearing, but it seems hopeless to expect that they will ever avail themselves of that means of improvement to any great extent.

Of Mr. Walker's style it is only necessary to say that she evidently fully coincides with Mr. Grant White in his conviction that the English is a grammarless tongue, while, unlike him, she boldly acts upon that theory. Her style also exhibits traces of the influence upon her mind of "the immortal Tupper," as she enthusiastically calls that eminent poet. Her statements frequently have the same rugged strength and startling originality which we find everywhere in the pages of Tupper. Indeed were she to induce the Proverbial Philosopher to clothe himself in her cast-off garments of femininity, the two might write both prose and poetry in a fraternal partnership which would recall the mutual labors of William and Mary Howitt. After learning of Mrs. Walker's admiration of Tupper no one will be surprised to find that she has a very slight opinion of St. Paul, and that "such martyrs as the noble Sage and the sainted Richardson" are the objects of her unreserved adoration.

King Solomon, though living prior to the invention of printing, asserted that of making of books there was, even in his day, no end. But at that happy period silly women had not intruded themselves into literature. Had Miss Walker lived in Judea during the reign of that wise though inexcusably married monarch, she would doubtless have provoked him into the declaration that to the making of stupid books by silly women an immediate end should be put by the summary tearing to pieces of the rash authors. And there is also as little doubt that any reader of Miss Walker's book will sincerely wish that her birth had been antedated some score of centuries, and that Judea had been her native place.