

F. R. 1833-1900

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F. R. 1833-1900 by Horace Howard Furness

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HORACE HOWARD FURNESS

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IN MEMORIAM

FAIRMAN ROGERS

FAIRMAN ROGERS was born in Philadelphia on the fifteenth of November, 1833, and died in Vienna on the twenty-second of August, 1900. Within this span of sixty-seven years there is comprised a life of unusual fulness,—but how brief for the large circle of his friends!

He was the only son of Evans Rogers, a retired iron-merchant of wealth, and of Caroline Augusta, a daughter of Gideon Fairman, the inventor of what is known, I think, as 'engine-turning' in the engraving of bank-notes. To this invention is due the elaborate and artistic designs, at this day, on our national paper-currency, whereof we are justly proud. In addition to this aptitude for mechanics, Gideon Fairman possessed unusual intellectual and social charms. To the end of his life he was an intimate friend of Washington Irving. I have heard my father say that Washington Irving on one occasion declared that were he condemned to a life-long imprisonment with the privilege of choosing the society of but one friend, his choice as a companion would be Gideon Fairman.

It is worth while to recall these characteristics of

the grandfather ; they reappear emphasized, if possible, in the grandson.

Fairman Rogers's father, sprung from a sturdy Pennsylvania stock which claims descent from John Rogers, 'the Martyr,' was an unyielding disciplinarian, and, while indulging his son in whatever wealth can give, inculcated those principles of moral restraint, exactitude in method, and precision in details which were afterward so marked a feature in the son's career. Through the boy's mother, a woman of rare personal beauty, was transmitted, with no loss in the transmission, a heritage from Gideon Fairman of a serenity of temper which none of the vexations of life could ever ruffle.

Under such influences the young lad grew up, disclosing from his earliest years a bent for mechanical devices ; and was admired, caressed, and loved by all who knew him ; he was fond of riding, of dancing, of swimming, of skating ; his abbreviated, customary name, 'Fair,' lent itself readily in his childhood to the endearing and equally appropriate 'Fairy.' Competent as he was in many directions, he was most apt in Physics and Mechanics. Even while yet a school-boy, before he was admitted to college, he gave, at the request of his school-teacher, a lecture to his schoolmates on the electric telegraph, illustrated by means of wires attached to the walls and ceiling of the school-room. The exact date of this truly precocious

performance I do not know, but, inasmuch as he entered college in 1849, it must have been in his fourteenth or fifteenth year,—that is, in 1847 or 1848,—an early date, I fancy, for any one not professional, still more for so young a lad, to have been thus familiar with the subject in its infant days.

He entered The University of Pennsylvania in his sixteenth year,—his seventeenth year began in the following November. After passing his entrance examination, he sojourned during the summer with his family at Bethlehem, in this State ; here, in a family also sojourning in the quaint old Moravian town, he met his 'fate' in Miss Rebecca H. Gilpin. From this boy-love at first sight he never after for an instant swerved, but remained the enamoured, loyal lover through boyhood, manhood, and through age. After their marriage, in January, 1856, forty-four full years of mutual devotion hallowed a union whereof the world affords only too few examples.

In the University his career was creditable from the start to the close. While not taking the highest rank, he was always among the best. For Latin and Greek he cared little, but to the Mathematics and Physics he devoted all his zeal. A friendship here begun between the young collegian and Professor John F. Frazer, and continued with ever-increasing closeness as years advanced, exerted an abiding and beneficial influence on the character of the younger man.

After he was graduated in 1853, young Rogers travelled for many months in England and on the Continent, where his route was mainly determined by his eagerness to examine the most famous works of modern engineering skill.

After his return, probably in 1855, another warm and enduring friendship enriched his life, and was destined largely to control it. He became acquainted,—possibly at the table of Professor Frazer,—with Professor Alexander Dallas Bache, the Superintendent of The United States Coast Survey, who was evidently at once attracted to the quick-witted, well-equipped, sunny-tempered young man, and eventually accepted his services as a volunteer aid in the Government work then on hand in the measurement of a Base Line in Florida. Here was practice in the field,—such as any engineer double young Rogers's age would have been glad to gain,—under an officer the highest authority in the land in Civil Engineering, the most rigid and punctilious of military disciplinarians when on duty, the genial, warm-hearted friend, and, within the limits of becoming mirth, the most jovial of companions in hours of relaxation. Sterile, indeed, must be the soil which would not respond to such influences. In young Rogers's case the soil was ready to teem with flower and fruit. The hardest of hard work ruled the day, and in the evening, on board the Government boat, in the lagoons of

Florida—"Sir," said Dr Johnson, "we had good talk." Throughout his life Rogers delighted to recall the varied charms of this and similar expeditions under the command of Professor Bache.

After the return from his wedding tour in Europe he was busily occupied, until the breaking out of the Rebellion in 1861, in giving series after series of Lectures on Physics and its branches at The Franklin Institute and on Civil Engineering at The University of Pennsylvania, where he had been installed in the chair of that department. Later, in 1861, he delivered a lecture on 'Roads' before The Smithsonian Institution in Washington; and still later, in 1863, he held for a year the appointment of Lecturer in Harvard College. All these Lectures were marked by complete mastery of the subject, by thorough minuteness of detail, coupled with clearness of exposition and a quiet, refined manner of delivery, utterly devoid of pedantry or pretence.

In 1857 he was elected a member of The American Philosophical Society,—the youngest man, it was so stated at the time, (he was only twenty-four years of age) on whom this honour had been conferred. In the summer of the same year he accompanied Professor Bache to Maine, again as a volunteer aid, for the purpose of measuring the Epping Base Line, near Cherryfield, in that State.

The outbreak of the Rebellion found Professor

Rogers a member of The First Troop of Philadelphia City Cavalry, a time-honoured and aristocratic militia organization, (dating from the days of the Revolution) of which our city has been always justly proud by reason of its admirable drilling and its handsome uniform. Throughout the long, still years of peace its duties had consisted in the ornamental yet needful office of acting on State occasions as escort to the Governor of the State or to the President of the United States. But now this profound repose was broken by a call to arms. Although, probably, not a young man had joined The City Troop, in days gone by, with any thought that he should ever have to put his sabre to warlike use, yet now—

‘So near to grandeur is our dust,
So close to God is man,
When Duty whispers low, “Thou must,”
The youth replies, “I can.”’

and not a stripling but sprang to the saddle. In the hurried preparation for actual service, I well remember hearing what requisitions were made on Fairman Rogers’s forethought,—he was but a private in the ranks then,—and on his ingenuity in all questions of detail, however minute. He spent a whole evening showing, over and over again, to almost every member in turn, with smiling patience, the most expeditious and convenient way of packing