

juvenile literature was a worthy gentleman who felt it his mission to convert all the world to his particular belief. But much as she liked to write for children, Jo could not consent to depict all her naughty boys as being eaten by bears or tossed by mad bulls, because they did not go to a particular Sabbath-school, nor all the good infants, who did go, as rewarded by every kind of bliss, from gilded gingerbread to escorts of angels, when they departed this life with psalms or sermons on their lisping tongues. So nothing came of these trials; and Jo corked up her inkstand, and said, in a fit of very wholesome humility, —

“I don’t know anything; I’ll wait till I do before I try again, and, meantime, ‘sweep mud in the street,’ if I can’t do better; that’s honest, at least;” which decision proved that her second tumble down the bean-stalk had done her some good.

While these internal revolutions were going on, her external life had been as busy and uneventful as usual; and if she sometimes looked serious or a little sad no one observed it but Professor Bhaer. He did it so quietly that Jo never knew he was watching to see if she would accept and profit by his reproof; but she stood the test, and he was satisfied; for, though no words passed between them, he knew that she had given up writing. Not only did he guess it by the fact that the second finger of her right hand was no long inky, but she spent her evenings downstairs now, was met no more among newspaper offices, and studied with a dogged patience, which assured him that she was bent on occupying her mind with something useful, if not pleasant. . . .

## ANNIE FIELDS

### *From Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*

Annie Fields (1834–1915) was thrown into the New England literary community by way of her husband, James Thomas Fields, a partner in the publishing house of Ticknor and Fields and editor of the *Atlantic*. James Fields was one of the most powerful publishers in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, and Annie became the center of a kind of literary salon in New England, conversing with virtually all the major and minor writers of the day. These literary friendships became the basis of her best-known works, her books of literary reminiscence. Among these is *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton, 1897). In the following passage, Fields highlights the difficul-

ties Stowe faced as a professional writer attempting to support her family while attending to the never-ending domestic duties required of a nineteenth-century middle-class woman.

One of her friends at this time was anxious to get her to finish a story she had partly written, and for the conclusion of which the editor was waiting. This friend’s account of difficulties is amusing, because both the ladies chose to be amused, and carried the matter off in such a humorous vein; but it easily has another side, when we consider Mrs. Stowe’s health, and the work which lay before her.

“‘Come, Harriet,’ said I,” wrote her friend, “as I found her tending one baby and watching two others just able to walk, ‘where is that piece for the “Souvenir” which I promised the editor I would get from you and send on next week? You have only this one day left to finish it, and have it I must.’

“‘And how will you get it, friend of mine?’ said Harriet. ‘You will at least have to wait till I get house-cleaning over and baby’s teeth through.’

“‘As to house-cleaning, you can defer it one day longer; and as to baby’s teeth, there is to be no end to them, as I can see. No, no; today that story must be ended. There Frederick has been sitting by Ellen and saying all those pretty things for more than a month now, and she has been turning and blushing till I am sure it is time to go to her relief. Come, it would not take you three hours at the rate you can write to finish the courtship, marriage, catastrophe, *éclaircissement*, and all; and this three hours’ labor of your brains will earn enough to pay for all the sewing your fingers could do for a year to come. Two dollars a page, my dear, and you can write a page in fifteen minutes! Come, then, my lady housekeeper, economy is a cardinal virtue; consider the economy of the thing.’

“‘But, my dear, here is a baby in my arms and two little pussies by my side, and there is a great baking down in the kitchen, and there is a “new girl” for “help,” besides preparations to be made for house-cleaning next week. It is really out of the question, you see.’

“‘I see no such thing. I do not know what genius is given for, if it is not to help a woman out of a scrape. Come, set your wits to work, let me have my way, and you shall have all the work done and finish the story, too.’

“‘Well, but kitchen affairs?’

“We can manage them, too. You know you can write anywhere and anyhow. Just take your seat at the kitchen table with your writing weapons, and while you superintend Mina, fill up the odd snatches of time with the labors of your pen.”

“I carried my point. In ten minutes she was seated; a table with flour, rolling-pin, ginger, and lard on one side, a dresser with eggs, pork, and beans, and various cooking utensils on the other, near her an oven heating, and beside her a dark-skinned nymph, waiting orders.

“Here, Harriet,” said I, ‘you can write on this atlas in your lap; no matter how the writing looks, I will copy it.’

“Well, well,” said she, with a resigned sort of amused look. ‘Mina, you may do what I told you, while I write a few minutes, till it is time to mould up the bread. Where is the inkstand?’

“Here it is, close by, on the top of the tea-kettle,” said I.

“At this Mina giggled, and we both laughed to see her merriment at our literary proceedings.

“I began to overhaul the portfolio to find the right sheet.

“Here it is,” said I. ‘Here is Frederick sitting by Ellen, glancing at her brilliant face, and saying something about “guardian angel,” and all that — you remember?’

“Yes, yes,” said she, falling into a muse, as she attempted to recover the thread of her story.

“Ma’am, shall I put the pork on the top of the beans?” asked Mina.

“Come, come,” said Harriet, laughing. ‘You see how it is. Mina is a new hand and cannot do anything without me to direct her. We must give up the writing for to-day.’

“No, no; let us have another trial. You can dictate as easily as you can write. Come, I can set the baby in this clothes-basket and give him some mischief or other to keep him quiet; you shall dictate and I will write. Now, this is the place where you left off: you were describing the scene between Ellen and her lover; the last sentence was, “Borne down by the tide of agony, she leaned her head on her hands, the tears streamed through her fingers, and her whole frame shook with convulsive sobs.” What shall I write next?’

“Mina, pour a little milk into this pearlash,”<sup>1</sup> said Harriet.

“Here,” said I, ‘let me direct Mina about these matters, and write a while yourself.’

“Harriet took the pen and patiently set herself to the work. For a while my culinary knowledge and skill were proof to all Mina’s investigating inquiries, and they did not fail till I saw two pages completed.

“You have done bravely,” said I, as I read over the manuscript; ‘now you must direct Mina a while. Meanwhile dictate and I will write.’

“Never was there a more docile literary lady than my friend. Without a word of objection she followed my request.

“I am ready to write,” said I. ‘The last sentence was: “What is this life to one who has suffered as I have?” What next?’

“Shall I put in the brown or the white bread first?” said Mina.

“The brown first,” said Harriet.

“What is this life to one who has suffered as I have?” said I.

“Harriet brushed the flour off her apron and sat down for a moment in a muse. Then she dictated as follows: —

““Under the breaking of my heart I have borne up. I have borne up under all that tries a woman, — but this thought, — oh, Henry!””

“Ma’am, shall I put ginger into this pumpkin?” queried Mina.

“No, you may let that alone just now,” replied Harriet. She then proceeded: —

““I know my duty to my children. I see the hour must come. You must take them, Henry; they are my last earthly comfort.””

“Ma’am, what shall I do with these egg-shells and all this truck here?” interrupted Mina.

“Put them in the pail by you,” answered Harriet.

““They are my last earthly comfort,”” said I. ‘What next?’

“She continued to dictate: —

““You must take them away. It may be — perhaps it *must* be — that I shall soon follow, but the breaking heart of a wife still pleads, ‘a little longer, a little longer.’””

“How much longer must the gingerbread stay in?” inquired Mina.

“Five minutes,” said Harriet.

““A little longer, a little longer,”” I repeated in a dolorous tone, and we burst into a laugh.

“Thus we went on, cooking, writing, nursing, and laughing, till I finally accomplished my object. The piece was finished, copied, and the next day sent to the editor.”

<sup>1</sup> *pearlash*: A refined potash, calcium carbonate.