

FOURTEEN TO ONE.*

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS.

I.

THE Rev. Mr. Matthews was hitching up his horse to go to the post-office. The horse was old; the man was old. The horse was gray; so was the man. The waggon was well worn of its paint, which was once a worldly blue, and the wheels sprawled at the axles like a decrepit old person going bow-legged from age. The Reverend Mr. Matthews did not use the saddle, according to the custom of the region; he was lame and found it difficult to mount.

It was a chilly day, and what was once a buffalo robe lay across the waggon seat; a few tufts of hair remained upon the bare skin, but it was neatly lined with a woman's shawl—an old plaid, originally combining more colours than a rag mat, but now faded to a vague general dinginess which would recommend it to the "low tone" of modern art. The harness was as old as the buffalo robe, as old as the shawl, as old as the horse, one might venture to say as old as the man. It had been patched, and mended, and lapped, and strapped, and tied, past the ingenuity of any but the very poor, and the really intelligent; it was expected to drop to pieces at the mildest provocation, and the driver was supposed to clamber down over the bow-legged wheels and tie it up again, which he always did, and always patiently. He was a very patient old man; but there was a spark in his dim blue eye.

The reins, which he took firmly enough in his bare hands, were of rope, by the way. He could not go to the post-office on Mondays because his wife had to use the clothes-line. He felt it a special dispensation of providence that women did not wash on Saturdays, when his number of *Zion's Herald* was due.

She came out of the house when he had harnessed, and stood with her hands wrapped in her little black-and-white checked shoulder shawl, watching him with eyes where thirty years of married love dwelt gently. Something sharper than love crossed her thin face in long lines; she had an expression of habitual anxiety refined to feminine acuteness; for it was the year 1870, and it was the State of Tennessee.

Mrs. Matthews stood in that portion of the house which Tennessee does not call a loggia, neither is it a porch, a piazza, or a hall. Two chimneys of stone or of clay, according to the social status of the owner, flank the house on each side. The Rev. Mr. Matthews' chimneys were of clay, for he was a minister of the Methodist faith. His house was built of logs. There were sheds, and something resembling a barn for the horse. All were scrupu-

*The writer of this narrative affirms that it is substantially true.