

THE STORY OF RUTH.

BY FESTINA LENTE, AUTHOR OF "HIC JACET," "MAY DAY," "VILLAGE SKETCHES," ETC.

"I suffer, I work.

"What of that? Suffering is my inheritance, work the condition in which I can gain most satisfaction. But I do not like either condition. I want to be happy, happy, happy, I hunger for happiness. I starve. And who am I?"

"Human! Is that my fault. Human, did I desire it?"

The world called him rough—impulsive; admired his broad acres and his maple groves, loved his money, and his homestead, would have married their daughters to him without remorse, though women were afraid of such an one.

He was faulty in manner; that was to be regretted. His heavy countenance wore more frowns than smiles; his speech was rough—irritating in its directness. He was reticent,—would court a silence which became painful to those enduring it.

His old Aunt Janet kept house for him, a babbling old woman, who loved to talk by the hour. Eli was never rough to her.

There was an old pony in the paddock, that was cared for tenderly. Men wondered why? It was a poor animal even in its best days. Eli's mother had ridden it once—far back in his memory that bright day shone. And he had adored his mother.

The world said that Eli had shown no tender feeling even when his mother died and he was but a lad. He had then a hard nature. There is usually a measure of truth in what the world says.

His laborers never complained that he was hard or stingy. Loafers were apt to abuse him and his ways. That was not surprising, since to such he gave the offer of five cents, or work, and the promise that a repeated visit

would produce unpleasant consequences, such as the watch dog let loose upon them, or a ducking in the pond. His premises were kept wonderfully clear of troublesome visitors. Wherever his hand reigned supreme, chaos gave place to order; out of doors he made all as he willed; indoors he gave no thought to anything,—that was Aunt Janet's business. Alas! Aunt Janet was getting old. Eli did not see it. Sukey, the help, was well aware of the fact, and profited by it. She did as little work as she conveniently could, and found that a few idle hours were really charming.

"Oh! I only mentioned it," quavered Aunt Janet. "Please, Eli, do not mind what I said."

As she spoke, the old lady bent her head to hide her face, and bit her lips, which quivered beyond control.

A long silence ensued. Aunt Janet peeped from behind her cover to see the expression of Eli's eyes.

"I won't have girls about my place," said he angrily, as he caught her timid glance. "They are all alike. She would like to come and visit you for a while, and help you through the summer season! No doubt she would, oh yes!"

"It does not matter," feebly came from Aunt Janet. "Of course I can do the work. Don't say another word about Ruth,—I only mentioned it."

She would have put the word "against" in place of "about" had she dared. Eli understood her. He got up; his bronzed face wore a wrathful expression. Aunt Janet always quailed before him when he was in this mood, yet always was unfortunate enough to say something calculated to increase his anger or bring to mind some greater