

AUNT RUTH.

A SKETCH BY AUGUSTA ALLEN.

Ever since the Ruth of olden time gave utterance to her filial devotion in the vow, "Whither thou goest, I will go," has the name been synonymous with all that is true and tender. Beauty is the acknowledged meaning of Ruth.

Light and beauty are akin; for at mention of the name, all that is shadowy in life melts away in a flood of soft, rich light; discordant sounds die away and all nature seems to swell and echo the sweet music of the name—Ruth.

My thoughts are of my childhood's day star, dear Aunt Ruth; shining so serenely through storm and sunshine, lighting up all the dark places of my crooked little path.

I see her now, with her slender form, her sweet face, with mild blue eyes and soft bands of snowy hair, put smoothly back from a brow so pure, that I love to fancy an invisible crown resting upon it. Who shall say that this was merely a childish fancy?

I used to wonder why she was not wearing the precious jewels of wifehood; why she was still a maiden, blessing, with her sweet presence, a brother's home. Not until long years after the stars in the invisible crown shone with heavenly radiance, did I learn that in her girlhood's joy, a cruel disappointment fell like a blight upon her life, robbing it of all its bright promise and shrouding it in darkest gloom.

Rising with a strength not of earth, she had buried her grief in her own heart, heaping its grave with the sweet flowers of charity and loving kindness, so that none who approached her saddened at sight of the little grave, but all wondered instead at the rare fragrance of the mound of blossoms. Never once did the sweet garlands upon this grave in her heart fade, for every day and every night they were renewed. In loving labor she lost sight of self and lived only for others.

Flitting here and there, feet, hands and heart intent upon the discharge of love services, she bore light and gladness wherever she went.

In the sick room, the hospital, the hovel and in all dark places it was the same. Even when the Death Angel bore a dear one from a circle, which was blessed by her presence, he went

not in darkness, but in a flood of golden glory.

In our home she bore the burdens of all with a never-changing cheerfulness. I shall never forget how she entered into all our little plans for work or pleasure, investing them with a charm which she alone could furnish.

How the long task lost its tediousness as she beguiled the time with wonderful stories of her New England childhood! How easy a disagreeable duty when we knew that some of her doughnuts, "real birds, and beasts, and men, you know," awaited its performance. How hateful seemed the committing of faults when we saw her soft eyes sadden with a grieved look; and how delightful the doing of good deeds, when we beheld her dear face light up with approval. The cattle and the horses knew her gentle touch and voice. Old Watch listened for her loved foot-fall. Kitty Gray purred with gladness at her approach. Even the flowers seemed eager to please her, and budded, bloomed, smiled and nodded for her as they would for no one else. The pigeons would flit about her without fear, and my delight knew no bounds one day when a wild bird rested for a moment upon her head. Her soul was a well-spring of good will toward all God's creatures, and a fount of love and sympathy for mankind. Old men and old women came to her for comfort, when chilled by the world's cold, and from her presence they carried hearts full of warmth, feeling that after all heaven and earth are not so far apart as they, in their trouble, had believed. Those oppressed by business cares rested in the peaceful atmosphere surrounding her, and when they took up their burdens again, thought them strangely light.

Mothers, grieving over the disobedience of loved children, came to her for sympathy, and went away singing new songs of faith and hope. Young men and maidens brought to her the secret joys and sorrows of their hearts. To the joy she added sweetness, and from the sorrow she took bitterness; and so they went out into the world again with beaming faces and glowing hearts. Children gathered about her and received from her lips words which proved seeds of virtue, which even now are bearing fragrant flowers and rare fruit in many lands.

When I was ten years old my foster-parents sold the old farm and moved to an adjoining State, leaving Aunt Ruth as good-angel in the home of a sister. It was hard to leave the old familiar haunts, the dear little school-house in the hollow, and all the loved playmates of my infancy, but hardest of all to leave Aunt Ruth. But it was agreed that in a short time we should send for her and she should come to grace our new home. Every member of our family was equally interested. Not a day passed without the formation of some new plan for her comfort or happiness.

We made flower-beds of marvelous length, and with great labor and mathematical exactness I measured every bed and sent the result to her in a queer combination of words, figures and pictured representations. We planted her favorite flowers and she was given a faithful account of the behavior of each plant as it grew.

Pet kittens and lambs were taught to perform wonderful feats for her edification, and the time drew near when our impatient waiting should have an end. But a letter came one day—a letter with a tiny black margin—and our hearts stood still while it told us that we were too late; that the one best loved by Aunt Ruth had already sent for her, and his white-winged messenger had borne her to a better home than ours. At first our grief seemed too great for endurance. Then the sweet faith and trust which she had breathed into our souls, fell like a mantle of light over our sorrow, and our mourning hearts were comforted.

So the years still glide on, each bearing us nearer to her; and the radiant stars in the invisible crown still shine on, luring heavenward all earth pilgrims who knew and loved Aunt Ruth.

This is the way a girl disposes of a young man. She says: You have asked me pointedly if I can marry you, and I have answered you pointedly that I can. I can marry a man who makes love to a different girl every month. I can marry a man whose main occupation seems to be to join in gauntlet in front of churches and theaters and comment audibly on the people who are compelled to pass through it. I can marry a man whose only means of support is an aged father. I can marry a man who boasts that any girl can be won with the help of a good tailor and an expert tongue. I can marry such a man but I w—o—n't!