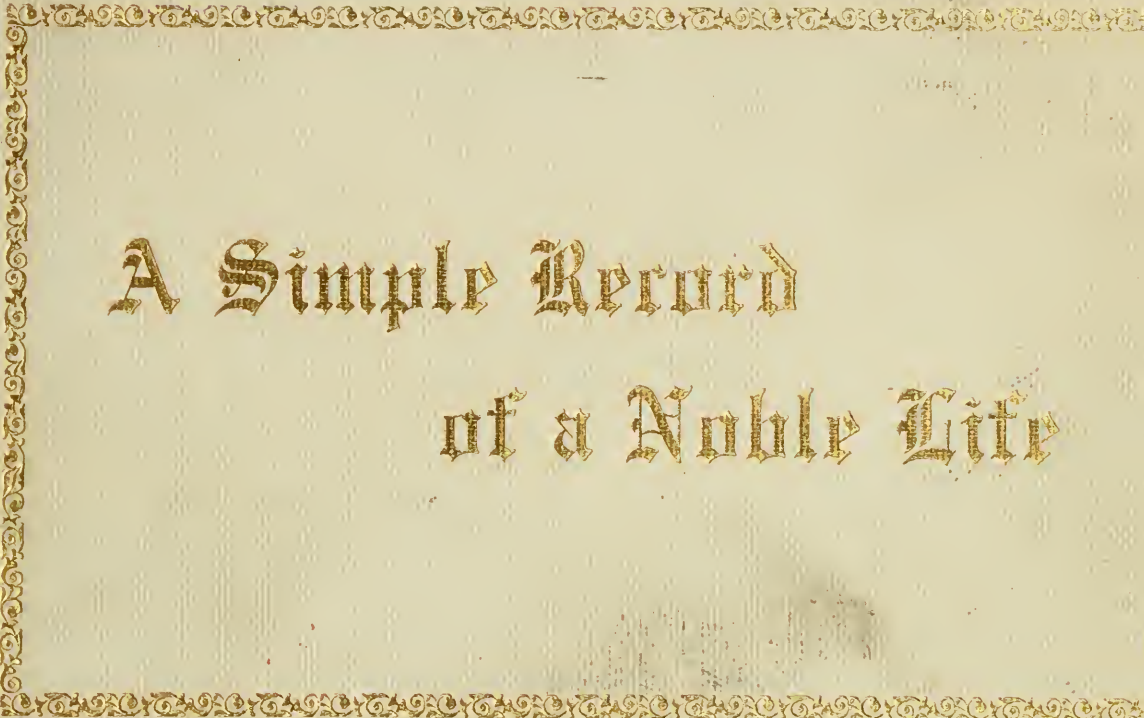


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A Simple Record
of a Noble Life



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Dora Kewell Parsons

DORA KNOWLTON RANOUS

AUTHOR—EDITOR—TRANSLATOR

A Simple Record of a Noble Life

BY
ROSSITER JOHNSON

*"Where'er she came she brought a spell
That lightened all the commonplace.
Whene'er she went a silence fell
And something shadowed every face."*



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DORA KNOWLTON RANOUS

A SIMPLE RECORD OF A NOBLE LIFE

IN the city of New York on the nineteenth day of January, 1916, passed from this life a woman whose abilities, accomplishments, achievements, and general character merit a permanent record—such a narrative as one may write with satisfaction and many may read with pleasure.

Alexander Hamilton Thompson married Augusta Comfort Knowlton, of Ashfield, Mass., in the eighteen-fifties. Colonel Thomas Knowlton, who fell in the battle of Harlem Heights, and whose statue stands before the State-house in Hartford, was Mrs. Thompson's great uncle. Washington, in his report, declared that Colonel Knowlton "would have been an honor to any country." Her father was Charles Knowlton, a physician well known in his day, who published in 1833 a book entitled, "Fruits of Philosophy," which may be called a corollary of Malthus' famous essay. This subjected him to intemperate criticism from many strictly conventional thinkers.

To Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were born two daughters—Grace, in 1857; Dora, August 16, 1859.

Their birthplace was the Knowlton homestead, a house of Colonial design, in the main street of Ashfield. The sisters had the advantage of a learned and judicious governess (afterward the wife of Henry C. De Mille, the dramatist), who taught them French and music at an early age. After that they attended the common school, where Dora was noted especially for her ability to "spell down" the class. Then they were graduated at Sanderson Academy, in their native village, and their schooling was completed at Packer Institute, in Brooklyn, where their parents had a winter home.

The family were Episcopalians; but Dora attended Henry Ward Beecher's church, attracted by his eloquence, and was a member of the famous Bible-class taught by Thomas G. Shearman, eminent as an advocate of free trade and as a writer of law books. Under his tutelage she read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and found pleasure in the study of it.

In their summer home the sisters were peculiarly fortunate; for in Ashfield were also the summer homes of Charles Eliot Norton and George William Curtis, who naturally attracted such visitors as James Russell Lowell, Francis Parkman, Charles Dudley Warner, and John W. Field. The last-named was a retired merchant of Philadelphia, who was learned in the languages and in love with literature, and had become an intimate friend of Lowell and of Robert Browning.

The great beauty of that village and its surroundings may be imagined from a passage in one of

Lowell's letters to Professor Norton: "Why I did not come to Ashfield, as I hoped and expected, I will tell you when I see you. Like that poor Doctor in the 'Inferno,' I have seen before me as I sat in reverie those yellow hills with their dark-green checkers of woods and the blue undulation of edging mountains (which we looked at together that lovely Sunday morning last year), I can't say how often. Perhaps I do not wish to see them again—and in one sense I do not, they are such a beautiful picture in my memory." And some years later he wrote: "I may be back before you leave Ashfield next summer, and, if so, shall next see you there—as good a place as I know of this side heaven."

Dora Knowlton also had a loving appreciation of those natural beauties, and in her mature life in New York, when the day for vacation came round, she invariably fled as a bird to her mountains, there to rejoice once more in the strength of the hills, the song of the stream, the freshness of the breeze, and the dreaminess of the summer clouds. And when, after her return to the city, she spoke of her visit there, it was usually with specific mention of some features that forever interested her—Mill-Hill Woods, the walk around the pond, climbing the hillside for berries, and the White Sisters. The last-named were a double row of birch trees with a path between, which, from some fancy or perchance some actual experience, she called the Lovers' Walk. This was just across the way from her early home. She also entertained her associates with animated descriptions

of the cleaning to which the village is subjected every May, and the feast and frolic that follow in the Town Hall. Those famous American authors, who occasionally were guests at Mrs. Thompson's dinner-table, gave to the place an air of scholarship and to the conversation a literary flavor that had an educating effect on the young sisters and showed its influence in Dora's after life. Their portraits, with autograph notes addressed to her, hung on the wall of her living-room to her latest day.

Mrs. Thompson believed that her daughter Dora had dramatic ability, and wished to test that belief by putting her on the stage. Dora wrote in her journal (the original of which is before me) that they tried for three or four years to get her an engagement. Then she took a course of lessons from Frederic C. P. Robinson, an English actor, who had played in New York theatres. "He was an admirable teacher and a perfect gentleman, and I liked and admired him very much. He is an excellent actor and has an enviable reputation in the profession. His wife is charming, and they were both very kind to me. They told me how to procure an engagement, and Mrs. Robinson took me to a dramatic agency and introduced me. This was in June, 1879. I then returned to my home in Ashfield to await results. After I had been there a week I received a summons to New York to meet Mr. Augustin Daly, who was making up a company for his new theatre at Broadway and Thirtieth Street." Mr. Daly gave her an engagement, and she signed

a contract to play in his company through the season (which began in September), for a weekly salary of ten dollars.

From this point the story is told in her published "Diary of a Daly Débutante."

In that unusually fine company, under one of the most skilful of managers, she received an initiation into the profession that was at once pleasant and effective. Of that company, two members—John Drew and Ada Rehan—became stars, with a long and brilliant career. And Dora made there a few lifelong friends. Among these were Margaret Lanner, who became Mrs. Thomas L. Coleman, and Georgine Flagg, who became Mrs. Brainerd T. Judkins. Two of the pleasantest episodes in the last year of her life—reunion of friends long parted—were her visits to Mrs. Coleman in Washington and Mrs. Judkins in Nantucket. Another was a casual meeting in Broadway with John Drew, when, at his suggestion, they stepped aside from the crowd and talked over old times.

With an ambition for more rapid advancement in the profession, she left Mr. Daly's company, and shortly afterward was engaged by the Kiralfy Brothers to play in their spectacular drama made from Jules Verne's popular novel, "Around the World in Eighty Days."

When her "Diary of a Daly Débutante" was published, she received numerous letters asking that the story be continued, saying that it ended too suddenly, and demanding to be told "what hap-

pened next.” Accordingly, when she had leisure for it, she once more opened her old journals and wrote a narrative of her adventures with the Kiralfy company. This manuscript has not been published, because it is not long enough to make a salable book; and therefore some of the most entertaining passages are transcribed here. So far as they go she tells her own story better than I could tell it; and her experiences in the Kiralfy company were very different from those on the Daly stage.

Once there was a somewhat conceited young woman, who became discontented, since she didn't know when she was well off. So she resolved to leave the home nest—the pretty little theatre at Broadway and Thirtieth Street, New York—because she fancied she was not rising in her profession as rapidly as she deserved! Being tempted, through a friend, by the prospect of playing “a really good speaking-part” in a big, spectacular play that had been “all the go” for a season or two, this venturesome damsel cut loose from the ties that held her to the wholesome, if somewhat strict and severe, routine of a two years' apprenticeship at Daly's Theatre, and joined the “aggregation of talent and beauty” (I am quoting our playbills) conducted by the Brothers Kiralfy, and set out on the road once again. Crowded houses were the rule with “Around the World in Eighty Days.”

My mother gave a reluctant consent to my new venture; but I was quite sure that, with my experience to guide me, I should do very well, and perhaps rise to dizzy heights of glory—possibly become leading lady—one never could tell. I joined the large company (after an interview with the business manager) at a rehearsal of “Around the World in Eighty Days.”

We were to rehearse for two weeks, before leaving New

York, at the queer old theatre known as Niblo's Garden, Broadway and Prince Street. The region behind the scenes opened directly into the bar of the Metropolitan Hotel, in those days a fashionable resort, and the patrons of the bar found it easy to penetrate to the back of the stage of Niblo's Garden and become acquainted with the ladies of the ballet (they had not to face a martinet like old John at Daly's) in such plays as the famous "Black Crook." This was told to me by a veteran dancer of those days, who assured me that she had been one of Lydia Thompson's British Blondes.

I had heard about that company before, and, having a taste for studying unusual types and picking up notes as I went along, I used to talk quietly "out in front" with some of these graduates of the Lydia Thompson school, often being much amused at their confidences and becoming very worldly-wise, as I fancied.

There are three Kiralfy brothers—Arnold, Imre, and Bolossy. The latter is a swarthy, black-eyed little Hungarian, all fire and vivacity, with a keen eye for artistic stage effect, for color and beauty, and an ear equally keen for harmony and euphony. He plays the violin beautifully, and rehearses his ballet capering around like a mad grasshopper, half-singing the air he is playing as he goes. He has the orchestra to accompany him, too, but he chooses to play the lead on the first violin. His every-day speech is a weird polyglot of all the languages of Europe, and a few of Asia, I think.

Among the more interesting members of the dramatic cast is a funny man, well known as "Mose" Fisk, a "low comedian," to speak technically, who plays the part of *Passepartout*, the valet of *Phileas Fogg*, the hero, who lays a wager of £5,000 with his fellow members of the Eccentric Club of London that he will make the tour of the world in eighty days. This character is played by a tall, good-looking, dark man named Keane, slow, deliberate, and

very English in manner, never angry or excited at anything, nor ever in a hurry, which is quite befitting the character of *Fogg* as Jules Verne presents him.

The girl who plays the *Princess Aouda*, the leading part, is handsome, with bronze-red hair, brilliant black eyes, and a fine figure, though she seems to me a rather tame actress for so good a part as that of *Aouda*, which she takes much too coolly. She is rescued by *Fogg* and *Passepartout*, who save her from death on the funeral pyre of her old rajah husband, for she is to be burned alive with his body, after the cheerful custom of the India of a former day. *Passepartout* has disguised himself, following his master's orders, in an old robe of the dead rajah, whose body he has hidden behind the funeral pyre, which *Passepartout* mounts himself, and, lying down, covers himself with a white sheet and awaits the moment when the doomed Princess is led to the pyre by priests, chanting and praying. Just as the girl begins to ascend the fatal pile, which fakirs are waiting to light with flaming torches, the disguised valet springs to his feet, looking very like a ghost in his white drapery, and shouts: "Down on your knees, every one of you!" The superstitious Indians, to a man and a woman, believing he is really the departed rajah come to life, plump down on their knees and hide their faces, and there they lie gibbering and wallowing. Meantime *Passepartout*, with surprising agility for so fat a man as Mr. Fisk, seizes the *Princess*, and, flinging her over his shoulder with no more ceremony than if she were a bag of flour, makes off through the woods in the darkness, and to the river, where presently he is joined by the waiting *Phileas Fogg*.

The fair victim is very good-looking. In her youth she was educated by an English-speaking governess, which accounts for her familiarity with the English language, and also for her sister *Nemea's* knowledge of it. Both girls have accepted the custom of *suttee* for the widowed

Aouda; but she appears very glad indeed to be rescued even in that rough manner by the Englishman.

This gentleman's mind is set chiefly on getting around the world on time, yet he smuggles *Aouda* and her sister out of India and takes ship for the United States. The sisters accompany him through various exciting scenes, but in the end *Aouda* actually has to propose herself as a bride to this phlegmatic Englishman, and all turns out happily.

The Princess is Miss Georgia Raymond, from Boston. She does not take much interest in her part, and her temper seems none of the sweetest. Several little set-tos between herself and the stage-manager have already promised lively times to come. Her stage sister, *Nemea*, is played by a beautiful and interesting girl, Marie Lewes, who has violet-blue eyes and a voice like music. I see that she reads very good books while we are waiting at rehearsals.

Miss Susie Kirwin is another attractive girl, piquante and graceful. She plays *Bessie*, the sweetheart of *Passe-partout*. She has a lovely contralto voice, and dances like a fairy. [In later years, Miss Kirwin became the star of the well-known Wilbur Opera Company.]

Other persons of some interest are William H. Fitzgerald, the assistant stage-manager, and William V. Ranous, who plays the difficult part of *Fix*, a Scotland-Yard detective, who believes that *Phileas Fogg* is a much wanted criminal. So he gets on *Fogg's* trail and follows him all round the world. For myself, I am to play the part of *Nakahira*, a favorite handmaiden of the Princess *Aouda*, whose heart is nearly broken at the terrible fate impending over her young mistress.

One morning we were informed that there would be a rehearsal of the ballet in costume. The stage was cleared, and at a signal the girls filed out. They were a sight! All sorts of duds are worn for ballet rehearsal, it seems—anything goes; and this was surely a motley array. The

most deluded youth that ever dangled after the dancers at the stage door would take to flight if he could gaze at this crowd. Their costumes consisted of soiled tights, faded with much washing, worn ballet shoes, different from any other kind of shoe worn by woman, voluminous tarletan skirts, by no means in their first crisp freshness, over an underpinning of somewhat soiled and worn lingerie—a far from fascinating spectacle! Atop of the skirts were old, worn corsets, sometimes with a corset-cover, sometimes not. A few wore little, short dressing-jackets instead.

Pretty well up stage was a plain little woman dressed in a rather prettier and more decent costume than the other women wore. She was holding fast to a projecting flat, and against another she was rubbing her toes to and fro—first one big toe and then the other. I asked who she was and why she appeared to be trying to wear holes in the scenery. Little Miss Parker—“one of the Parker Sisters, you know”—told me she was Signora Adela Paglieri, our Italian *première danseuse*, and that she was “toughening her toes,” which she has to do for fifteen minutes several times a day, to make them hard enough for her to stand erect on their tips and whirl round like a teetotum.

Finally the ballet was ready to begin. The orchestra went into their places, and enter Bolossy, who, violin in hand, and, bowing to the ladies, announced that they would dance the “Dance of the Serpents” first. He taps with his bow and the music begins. Immediately there was a vision of waving legs and arms, and one was fairly compelled to inspect the array of faded lingerie and passé tights. The girls danced well, with a high degree of ease and finish, but Bolossy was not altogether pleased. His sensitive ear and eye detected that one or two were not in strict time with the music. He tapped again, then waved the bow frantically like a baton—down, left, right, up!

“Now watch me and lissen, ladies,” he cried: “*Von*, two, tree, four—*von*, two, tree, four—*von*, two, tree, four—*von*, two, tree, four [profanity thrown in, keeping time with the music], ladies! *Von*, two, tree, four [and more bad words]. He shouts his profanity in strict time with the orchestra, while the men play away unmoved. In fact, no one seems shocked but myself. I couldn’t help remembering Augustin Daly in his more impetuous moods; but he never said anything like this, and to women, too. No, Augustin was a Sunday-school teacher compared with Bolossy.

Presently Bolossy flew to the line of startled maidens. “You girl here,” he exclaimed, stopping beside a young woman, “vy do you not bring your feets up ven ze music goes up? Ve haf not electrics in our stage floor to hold zem down. See—zis vay!” And, bending over, he seized the offending foot and elevated it to the angle he wished it to describe. Then he went on: “Vonce more, plees, ladies.”

No member of the dramatic company ever speaks to, or in any way associates with, any member of the ballet, with the exception of Signora Paglieri, who is so evidently a lady of education and refinement that she is much admired by every one. Besides, she is a *première*; the others are only *coryphées*—it makes a big difference in their social standing. I fancy that the actresses look at me rather curiously, after I have been talking to some of the ladies of the ballet, which I occasionally do, for I find them interesting and very odd, naive, and amusing. Once I said something to one of the actresses about Miss Somerville, and she answered, with a shrug, “I don’t know her—she belongs to the ballet, you know.” “Yes, I know,” I replied, “but I thought you might have talked to her.” “My dear girl,” she said, with a hateful little laugh, “you can’t have been in this business long, or you would know that the dramatic people *never* talk to the ballet.” And

the ballet don't wish to talk to the dramatic people, any more than those superior beings desire to get chummy with them. But they are always good-natured and never are rude to me, though their manners toward one another are not exactly those of Lady Clara Vere de Vere.

My new costume is most becoming — a pretty, warm-colored Oriental dress, with a sort of bolero jacket of black velvet embroidered with gold over a loose white silk sort of shirt, and a deep crimson, gold-fringed, very wide scarf round my waist, hanging low in front. I look like a character in an Arabian-Nights story, only I haven't any veil. I wish I could wear one. But I am not a grand lady in the play, so am not supposed to wear a veil, as the *Princess Aouda* does. We had a dress rehearsal yesterday, with scenery and props. *Aouda* wears a lovely costume, and the ballet is quite gorgeous.

Here we are in Boston again—good old rural Boston! The company assembled at the pier in New York, and I was astonished at the gorgeous get-up of the ballet. The dramatic ladies wore simple traveling-dress, but several of the dancers sported long, real sealskin coats, quantities of jewelry, and imposing hats, with a profusion of towering feathers, and glittering rhinestones. As soon as we were on board, our nice little business manager, Mr. Fitzgerald, introduced me to Miss Marie Lewes, asking whether we would be willing to share a stateroom, since accommodations on the boat were limited. I had no objection, and pretty Miss Lewes smiled graciously, so we took possession of a good stateroom and proceeded to get acquainted. There was no such easy time with the leading lady. At the proposal that she “double up” (as they call it) with Miss Kirwin, she flew into a tantrum and said she expected, *being* leading lady, to have a room to herself. After some argument, in which Miss Kirwin kept her temper admirably, the leading lady consented ungraciously to admit the soubrette.

I found Miss Lewes cultivated and well mannered as well as pretty. She is a cousin of George Henry Lewes, the writer, husband of George Eliot, and she took out of her bag a book entitled "The Impressions of Theophrastus Such," by George Eliot, which Mr. Lewes had given her, and which she prizes highly, for it has George Eliot's autograph. We talked books a while, and retired early. She is a most agreeable companion. Evidently, Mr. Fitzgerald thinks so, for he calls often at our door on little errands: to bring us letters, or the New York papers, or just to inquire again whether we are comfortable. On Sunday, when he came, it seemed to Marie rather inhospitable to keep him standing in the doorway, so she invited him in to sit down, which was all right, for our room was in perfect order and we were dressed for the day. Marie has a way of making our room look attractive, even for a day or two, by putting upon the mantel framed photographs, and throwing an old camel's-hair shawl across a couch, and slipping the bed-pillows into two handsome silk covers that she carries in her trunk. I suppose he was lonely and was glad to come in on a dull Sunday. While he and Marie were talking, I tried to get a few "impressions" from "Theophrastus Such," which, to tell the truth, I found rather dry. But I saw that they wanted to talk by themselves, so I felt obliged to play "gooseberry," as the English express it.

Little Miss Parker walked into the green-room one night with a big workbag, from which she took out several pairs of men's stockings, a darning-egg, needles, and darning-cotton. Thrusting her little fist into one of the stockings, she held it up, displaying a large hole, and said: "I expected to find these in Mose's stockings, as he hasn't had me to look after them for some time, and he does wear such awful holes in his heels!" Then she proceeded to darn the stocking very neatly. I laughed, but she assured me that she always darned Mr. Fisk's stockings

when they were on the road together, "or his poor feet would be on the ground," she said. It appears that Mr. Fisk used to be a "variety sketch" partner of little Parker's father, and she had known him from infancy.

My dear Marie left the company when we reached Brooklyn. She does not like this company or the play very well. With the exception of me, she says, she does not like any one in the play; and she has had an offer of a much better part in a regular dramatic company with no ballet. The only thing that consoles me for her going is the fact that I am to play her part of *Nemea*—not that I like the part particularly; but it is the second juvenile part, next to that of the lead, *Princess Aouda*, and has a little more pay. Little Miss Parker is to take my part of *Nakahira*. I shall go on as *Nemea* to-morrow night in Philadelphia, where we open at the old Walnut Street Theatre. *Nemea* hasn't much to say or do, except to trot around with *Aouda* and get in everybody's way. She is a lady in the play, and of course has to wear a veil. Miss Lewes draped her veil on me before she left; it is very becoming, and I look quite Oriental, with my black eyes, my brunette complexion, and my long, dark hair, which I shall wear all down in the scenes in India, and not put it up till we reach England (in the play). I got through the part of *Nemea* all right, and every one said I looked well in my new costume. We shall play in Reading, Pa., to-morrow night; then in Easton, Allentown, Bethlehem, and Wilkesbarre, before going to Pittsburgh, and then we are booked to play for two weeks in Cincinnati.

Well, here [in Wilkesbarre] is a great change, the most unexpected! I am playing the part of the *Princess Aouda*, and am the leading lady at last! It happened as a result of Miss Raymond's disregard of stage rules and of her peppery temper. We were playing in Bethlehem, and Miss Raymond, with the Misses Kirwin and Parker,

occupied a dressing-room next to mine. All was quiet until, between the acts, there was a decided odor of tobacco smoke, and Miss Kirwin said: "Really, Miss Raymond, you shouldn't do that, you know. The rules against smoking in the dressing-rooms are very strict." "Suppose you mind your own business, Miss," snapped Miss Raymond. The manager came in, and rebuked Miss Raymond severely for smoking behind the scenes, at the risk of starting a serious fire. The next day she left the company. The house had been all sold out, and a puzzling situation was produced. The manager asked: "Miss Knowlton, how well do you know *Aouda's* lines in this play?" "Almost as well as I know *Nemea's*," I answered, for I had watched the whole play night after night, and I had a wonderful memory. Therefore I was advanced to the place of leading lady, and after one rehearsal I filled it to the manager's satisfaction. When Bolossy saw me play the part he shook hands with me and said: "Leetle Miss Nollton, I sank you for coming to our help, and congratulate you on your performance. I did not sink you had it in you. You do ze *Princess vair*' well. A leetle more lady-like veekness might be better—not qvite so mooch strengt'. Remember, you are *sheared!*"

In Cincinnati a circus was laid up in winter quarters, and for their performances in that city the Kiralfys were able to borrow an elephant named Chief, on which *Aouda* should ride to the sacrifice. I went to the theatre at the usual time, and as soon as I entered I heard my name called in loud stage whispers all over the place. "Here I am. Who wants me?" I called, running out on the stage. Mr. M—— came to meet me with outstretched hands. "Come here!" said he, solemnly, leading me across the stage, which was set for the first act. "There he is! Look at him!" I gasped with amazement, and looked up, and up, and up at the biggest elephant I have

ever seen. His head was up among the flies; he is like a young house—an enormous creature! Beside him stood a much smaller elephant—his wife, named Alice. “He never will go anywhere without his wife,” said Mr. M——; and I felt a wild sort of hysterical desire to scream with laughter at this domestic devotion, and with terror at the idea of being expected to ride that monster.

“Now,” said Mr. M——, as easily as if he were proposing that I get into a carriage, “it’s early yet, but we haven’t time for a rehearsal, so I’ll just call the keepers, and we’ll tell you how to manage the escape.” “Why, surely, you don’t expect me to get on that huge beast?” “Sure, why not? It’ll be very easy. You see, he’s trained, and knows what acting is. You do the farewell act just as usual, standing in front of Chief when you make your speech and give away your jools, and then cross over to the funeral pyre with the priests and torch-bearers, and climb up on the wood-pile. Chief will stand right in the middle of the stage, and Alice next to him. She ain’t got to do anything, but she’ll look well, and it’ll be a grand scene. You do everything just as usual, only when *Passepartout* rises and shouts “Down on your knees,” instead of picking you up himself he will lead you down to the foot of this little ladder—see?—and you must run up it quick, while Chief stands still, with a keeper on each side of the ladder to hold it steady. When you get to the top, you just scramble into that elegant palanquin; the keepers will lead Chief off left—and you see it’s as easy as falling off a log!” “I see,” I said; “that sounds very well; but suppose I should fall off the ladder?” “Oh, you won’t! The boys will look out for that.”

I began to dress just as the orchestra went on. Oddly enough, they played De Kontski’s *Le Reveil du Lion*. If they had called it “The Awakening of the Elephant,” it would have suited the case better. To add to my distraction, the ladies came flocking around the door of my

dressing-room, with expressions of horror and warning, and Miss Lejoie offered her smelling-salts. I slipped out to the stage at last. Right in the middle of the stage space stood the two elephants. A gorgeous sight they were: Chief with his crimson and gold blanket and that gaudy, glittering palanquin on his back; beside him his faithful Alice, embodiment of all the wifely virtues.

By and by the curtain rose, and the procession formed, after the few preliminary speeches. The priests marched on first, followed by torch-bearers and musicians, banging on tom-toms at regular intervals—*boom! boom! boom!*—while a deep-toned bell rang behind the scenes. Then came the dancing-girls, chanting a farewell hymn, followed by miscellaneous slaves and the people of my palace, these last being weeping damsels. Then came my sister *Nemea*, and finally I brought up the rear of the train, walking between two priests, accompanied by torch-bearers. I paced along slowly, with downcast eyes, like the bride at a church wedding, trying to remember Bolossy's injunction that I was "shcared" and trying to act so, though supposed to be drugged with opium. Chief was quietly swinging his trunk, and looking very huge and dark; and the others filed off right and left, leaving me planted right in front of his nose—or his trunk—and I began my farewell speech. I removed my sparkling tiara and my necklace of priceless jewels, and handed them to my weeping maids, asking them to keep them for my sake. My rings and bracelets came next, and I flung back my beautiful veil and my long hair, which rippled down to my knees, feeling that I made a very picturesque and pathetic figure.

Suddenly Chief lifted his trunk and made a tremendous trumpeting. I started violently, but thought in a flash that probably he did not want to kill me, so that, unless he should take a fancy to wind his trunk around me, lift me into the air, and shake "a day-day" with me at the

audience, I would stand my ground. Then I perceived that the great moment had come. I glided swiftly to the funeral pyre, arranged my hair and veil effectively, folded my hands on my breast, trying to look meek and resigned, and waited for the torch-bearers to advance. They were about to apply their flaming torches to the pile, when up sprang the faithful *Passepartout* with his alarming cry, which sent everyone to his knees. *Passepartout* rushed down the pyre, sweeping me along with him, and hurried me to the foot of the ladder, giving me a sort of "boost" to the first rungs. Up I clambered, when suddenly that wretched elephant, not knowing what was expected of him, took it into his head to turn half-way around, leaving me almost hanging in mid-air. He felt like an earthquake moving under me, and I expected to be dashed to the ground under his feet. The keepers got excited, but couldn't make him understand what they wished. In the wings stood Mr. M—— calling to me: "Come down! Come off! Run for it!" and the wings on the O. P. side were filled with the excited stagehands, calling: "Come off, girl! Come off!" But the music drowned their cries. The audience, too, was getting very much wrought up, and cheered like mad.

I stood there, deadly scared, but thought like a flash how tame and flat and silly I should appear if I should climb down and run, after all that fuss and preparation; so, gathering what remaining "spunk" I possessed, I made a rush up the ladder, and pitched myself headlong into the palanquin, while the audience shouted.

Immediately the keepers, seeing that I was safe, turned Chief clear around, headed in the right direction, and we humped and heaved along off the stage to the wall at the left, where Chief had stood before. Alice coolly turned around and followed.

Down went the curtain, and a frantic cheering and stamping went up from the audience. The whole ballet

and chorus and the entire company came rushing across the stage and, looking up at me, clapped their hands, shouting: "Good! Brava! Bully for you, Miss Knowlton! By Jove! that was a plucky thing to do!" They kept this up till Mr. M—— came to us, saying excitedly: "There's a curtain-call! Let Miss Knowlton get down, and we'll ring up on her along with Chief. Come down, little girl, we'll help you on the ladder." "I'll come down," I cried, "only, you must drive away all those men. How can I come down a ladder with them standing there staring?"

Mr. M—— shooed them all away, and I came down in a hurry. He ran me out on the stage, where they were holding the curtain, while the orchestra played, and the people were still cheering. The keepers led Chief close to the curtain, and Mr. M—— made me stand beside him and put my hand on his side, where it looked as tiny and white as a doll's hand. Then they rang up the curtain, and the enormous audience simply howled with delight again and again. But Chief wasn't a bit scared this time. He knew what applause was, and gloried in it; just waved his trunk from side to side and did his best to bow politely. Down came the curtain, and the great act was over.

I rode the elephant at every performance in Cincinnati, and we were good friends; but afterward Chief became "musty" and killed two men, and he had to be shot.

In this company Dora Knowlton (Miss Thompson) met William V. Ranous, a man of many attractions, with a remarkable voice for singing, and especially able as a stage manager. When they were in Canada, playing in Steele Mackaye's "Hazel Kirke," they were married at Whitby, May 26, 1881, and soon afterward she left the stage. Their daughter Alice was born in Ashfield, May 9, 1882.

The marriage proved unfortunate, and after a few years—for the best of all reasons, the one indisputable reason—she left her husband and, taking the little Alice, went to live with her mother. A few years later still, the separation was made final and irrevocable. She never married again.*

In the old home in Ashfield her time was occupied with reading and study and the care of the little daughter. There John W. Field, who, with his wife, delighted to spend a summer in that pretty village, taught her Italian and was in many ways a wise counselor and friend. Milo M. Belding, head of a large silk-manufacturing firm, is a native of Ashfield, and came there usually to his summer home. Perhaps it was this circumstance that suggested to Mrs. Thompson the idea of raising silk-worms for certain entertainment and possible profit. The unused carriage-house was fitted up for the purpose, and Mrs. Ranous assisted her mother in the enterprise, while the little Alice looked on wonderingly and talked about the “vumms.” The knowledge thus obtained enabled Mrs. Ranous afterward to prepare an illustrated lecture on Silk, which in the winter of 1902-3 she delivered several times in Greater New York. In those days the village was enlivened with frequent dramatic entertainments by home talent, in which she sustained important parts.

She had already lost her father and her sister, when in 1892 she lost her mother also. After that she lived most of the time in New York city, where she

* Mr. Ranous died in California in 1915.

made new friends—among them S. G. W. Benjamin, the author and artist—and where she had an occasional call from Murat Halstead, who was an old friend of her father. Her uncle Willis Knowlton, who was a skilful photographer, at that time had a studio in Fourth Avenue.

About 1893, through unfortunate investment, she lost the property that she had inherited. But this did not at all discourage her. She mastered stenography in half the usual time required, and set at work to earn her own living and the funds necessary for her daughter's education. This was completed in the Henry C. De Mille school at Pompton, N. J.; and then the daughter, loving as she was beloved, also learned stenography and began to support herself. She had inherited her mother's brightness and gentle dignity, and in addition had an artistic talent that showed itself in graceful and spirited drawings, and withal a dramatic talent for effective recitation.

Mrs. Ranous served for some time as assistant in an establishment that dealt in rare books and autographs, and acquired much knowledge of that peculiar business. She had always been interested in autographs, and had made a small but interesting collection.

Later she obtained employment with the firm of Silver, Burdett & Co., publishers of school books; and it was her good fortune to find there Francis Bellamy at the head of the department to which she was assigned. With his kindly instruction and encouragement she learned much more than the or-

dinary duties of a stenographer and typewriter, and began that development of her natural editorial powers which within a few years produced remarkable results. The first test of them, aside from her routine of office duty, was the editing, in manuscript, of a book written by a Wall Street magnate who was a master of finance, but not of English composition, and Edward Bellamy's posthumous novel, "The Duke of Stockbridge."

In the spring of 1901 she entered the school-book department of D. Appleton & Co., where I—being then the head of another department—made her acquaintance. I soon discovered her natural brightness, her exact scholarship, and her industrious tendency; and knowing that she would be glad of opportunities to use her spare hours advantageously, I assigned cyclopædia articles to her, and she wrote them to perfection. Then I gave her books to review for a magazine of which I had that department; and this also she did to my satisfaction. Following that, it was natural for me to encourage her in the direction of original writing and to help her so far as I could in the further development of her editorial powers. Her equipment included familiarity with the best English literature, an accurate knowledge of the French and Italian languages and of much of their literature, a reading knowledge of Spanish, a full sense of humor, a knowledge of music, being a good performer on the piano, methodical keenness as a proofreader, and, crowning all, the rare gift of editorial instinct. Before long she

was able to take up the clumsiest manuscript and, going through it once, change it into correct, idiomatic, smooth-flowing English, amend its misquotations, and give it a logical arrangement.

The Appleton establishment, which had gone into bankruptcy, fell into the hands of men who knew nothing of the book business and blundered in every possible way. At one time they thought to improve its affairs by dismissing some of the most valuable employees and putting in cheap substitutes. By that operation Mrs. Ranous was displaced.

But this proved to be to her advantage; for after a short interval she entered upon a career of editing and translating in which she achieved remarkable success. A periodical connected with the book trade makes it a point to say a little something, editorially, about nearly every book that is published. When the great flood of books came in with approaching holidays, the editor called on Mrs. Ranous to assist in disposing of them; and the rapidity with which she turned out scores of short, crisp notices, hitting the heart of the book every time, was a cause of amazement.

In 1903 she was engaged to assist Robert Arnot, a learned Oxonian, in editing sets of books for the subscription business of M. Walter Dunne. They thus prepared the works of Benjamin Disraeli in twenty volumes, those of Guy de Maupassant in fifteen volumes, and those of Gustave Flaubert in ten volumes. By far the larger number of translators, while understanding the foreign language

sufficiently, are defective as to any mastery of idiomatic and graceful English; and a great part of the work performed by Mrs. Ranous consisted in correcting existing translations so as to supply that quality and increase the readableness of the books. Besides this, she read all the proofs and was expert in managing the "make-up."

This work extended into 1904; and on its completion she was engaged, still in association with Mr. Arnot, upon a set of books known as "The Immortals." This consisted of translations of twenty French novels, each of which had been crowned by the Academy. For this set, besides doing her usual editorial work, she made original translations of Bazin's "Ink-Stain," France's "The Red Lily," Theuriot's "A Woodland Queen," and De Massa's "Zibeline," "A Turn of Luck," "The Scar," and "Mount Ida." This work was completed in 1905.

Meanwhile the daughter, Alice, was married, December 31, 1903, to Samuel D. Chubb, a young business man of New York; and in the spring of 1905 they removed to southern California, taking with them their little Catherine Alice, born January 13 of that year. When autumn approached, Mrs. Chubb was seriously out of health, and her mother, as soon as possible, went to her. Every means of restoration was tried there, including a sojourn at Redlands in the orange belt. But no improvement resulted, and she brought the mother and child back across the continent to her home in New York. There again every expedient of medical skill was



Alice Ranous Chubb



Catherine Alice Chubb

powerless against tuberculosis, and in March, 1906, Mrs. Chubb passed away, leaving her mother with a shadowed life and a broken heart. Mrs. Ranous assumed the charge of the child Catherine, and began all over again the task of supporting, rearing, and educating, which she relinquished only when the granddaughter was in her eleventh year and Mrs. Ranous's health was so broken as to forbid a continuation. And the second parting was only less mournful than the first had been. The child, who was to her grandmother another Alice and called her "mother," is now in her father's house in Brooklyn.

To me, that story, with its duplicate chapters, is heroic; the tears come to my eyes when I contemplate the pathos and the tragedy of it.

Mrs. Ranous had devised a set of sixteen volumes entitled "The Literature of Italy," to include good translations, with biographical sketches, from the time of Dante to the present day. It was accepted for publication by the house known as the National Alumni, and at her invitation I was associated with her in the editorship. We had some help from contributors, including William Michael Rossetti and Charles Eliot Norton, James C. Brogan, Evangeline M. O'Connor, Maurice Francis Egan, Florence K. Cooper, and Cardinal Gibbons; and we produced a beautiful set of books that has no competitor. Mrs. Ranous made original translations of D'Annunzio's "The Flame" and Serao's "The Conquest of Rome."

The next year (1907) we were again associated, in producing a set of twenty volumes entitled "The

Authors' Digest." This consisted of condensed versions (about four thousand words each) of six hundred of the best novels of all nations. We had a large staff of contributors; and our duty was to determine which novels should be included, assign the work to the condensers, see to it that they got at the heart of the stories and kept within bounds, and then carefully edit every page of the manuscript. While this was in progress I was obliged to spend six weeks in a hospital; and for that time she carried on her own work and a large part of mine, visiting the hospital nearly every day for consultation.

In 1909-10 Mrs. Ranous was with the Pearson Publishing Company and edited sets of Flaubert and Maupassant, which carry her name on the title-page. And in 1910-11 she wrote a large number of original articles for the historical volume of the "Foundation Library for Young People."

From July, 1911, to September, 1912, she was on the staff of the "Standard Dictionary," where she was entrusted with the critical and important work of reading the plate proofs. Immediately after that she was taken on the staff of the "Century Magazine," where her services were fully appreciated and she might have remained indefinitely; but when the editors resigned, in 1913, the whole staff was changed by their successor. The retiring editor, Robert Underwood Johnson, has paid this tribute to her memory: "Mrs. Dora Ranous, one of my editorial assistants for about two years, was one of the most intelligent and scholarly women I have ever known,

having a fine sense of style and the very highest literary and ethical standards. She was a person not only of excellent literary judgment, but of great personal refinement and dignity.”

Then came an interval, which she improved by compiling a cook-book for an Ashfield townsman who had become a publisher in New York.

When the great European war broke out, in August, 1914, I was asked by Thomas Nelson & Sons to produce for them a book of information concerning the European countries, their geography, their population, and their armaments, with brief narratives of their wars since Napoleon's time, and various related subjects. In organizing a small staff for this work, I called first upon Mrs. Ranous, and she was the most efficient assistant that I had, writing many chapters and reading all proofs. The volume was completed in good season, and was published with the title “The Clash of Nations.”

The very day after this was finished Mrs. Ranous was called to the headquarters of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, to edit the addresses delivered before the International Convention that had been held in Kansas City. These fill a large volume, containing about one million words, and she edited every page of the manuscript, and read all the proofs, her work being acknowledged with thanks in the General Secretary's Introductory Note. This done, she next edited an elaborate cable code for the use of the missionaries. In that office, as everywhere else, she very quickly won the

kindest regard of her associates. The many young women employed there clustered about her with complete confidence in her rare judgment and un-failing kindness and used to call her their mother.

Besides these larger literary tasks, she accomplished many minor ones between times.

In 1915, under the patronage of Milo M. Belding, she finished a peculiar piece of work—the “gran-gerizing” of Howes’ “History of Ashfield,” which she extended with illustrations till it made two volumes, which were sumptuously bound and deposited in the Belding Memorial Library in that village. Her last visit to her old home was to attend the dedication of the new Library building in the summer of that year.

If Mrs. Ranous had not been kept so constantly at work as an editor, earning her living thereby, she might have done much in the way of original work that would at least have been very creditable, and perhaps permanent. She occasionally told me what she called her Apple Valley Stories—quaint episodes of rural New England life—and I urged her to write them; but she seldom found any leisure time when she was not too tired. Those stories were varied, from the humorous tale of the Gold-headed Cane to the pathetic picture of the old sexton on his death-bed, when all was gone but his subconsciousness, raising his weak arms and going through the motion of ringing the curfew bell.

She did, however, leave in manuscript a few short stories and a half-written novel with an ingenious original plot. Friends to whom she had occasionally

read passages from the journal that she kept while she was in the Daly company urged her to publish it, and the book was issued anonymously in February, 1910, by Duffield & Co., with the title "Diary of a Daly Débutante." Its reception by the reviewers was generously appreciative. There was much guessing as to the authorship; but all guesses were wrong except that which was made by two of the Daly company.

The reviewer in *Everybody's Magazine* said of it: "The book would be a delightful bit of reading if only for its perfectly unconscious revelation of personality and its utterly naive embodiment of the spirit of youth—that ever attractive but evanescent spirit which fiction so often tries to capture and fails to hold. But there is more to it than this: there are the life and the setting and the atmosphere and the habitués of that famous green-room of the eighties miraculously arrested, preserved, and exposed to our gaze with all the color, the movement, and the intonations of reality. Have you ever seen an insect in a lump of amber?—a bit of vanished life caught by chance and preserved in perfection for later eyes to look at through the transparent medium of its embalming? If so, you have seen a prototype of the Diary of a Daly Débutante."

The *New York Times* said: "The charm of the book is due to its revelation of the influence of theatrical surroundings upon the fresh mind of an unsophisticated girl."

The *Rochester Post-Express* said: "In its way, this Diary of thirty years ago—revealing minutely

the functions and incidents, great and small, of a peculiar life of which outsiders know so little—is as truly a ‘find’ as some of the famous ones.”

The *Boston Transcript* called it: “A piquant series of pictures of life in a theatrical company in New York and on its travels.”

The *New York Evening Mail* said: “The chronicle is artless and extremely entertaining, as it gives an intimate description of a great manager and teacher at work among his people.”

The *Boston Times* said: “It is a stroke of good luck to come into possession of this book, as it contains so much that is interesting about the vanished mimic life of other times.”

The *Minneapolis Bellman* said: “She tells everything frankly; and you come to trust her as a very credible witness, setting down naught in malice.”

The *Chicago Dial* said: “The tone of the Diary is good-natured throughout. The daily entries are just such as a well-bred and wide-awake young lady might be expected to write under the given conditions.”

The *New York Outlook* said: “The stage of the eighties must have been, besides a place to do hard work, a scene of almost idyllic good humor and perfect propriety.”

The *Theatre Magazine* said: “Written by an ardent young beginner, with eyes wide open, ready to magnify the details, the small incidents that probably would not seem to any other worth recording—it is just these points in the book that give it so much vividness and life.”

Life said: "It is vivid with the vividness of the present anticipating the future, instead of with that of the present recalling the past. In its little way it is that delightful thing, an unintended masterpiece."

A score of other reviews, of similar import, might be quoted. Of seventy-three press notices, only a single one spoke slightly of the book, and about a dozen made long extracts from it.

In her last year she wrote for Sturgis & Walton a volume entitled "Good English in Good Form," and she lived to read the proof, but not to see a copy of the bound book.

For several years she was a familiar caller in our home, coming in, as it might happen, to break bread, or look over the books, or play the piano, or have a nap in a quiet alcove. Every member of the family was fond of her. It was a pleasure to listen to her conversation. Whether argumentative or narrative, this was always animated and in correct, idiomatic, graceful English. She never exploited her knowledge of other tongues; and she managed the dramatic points to a nicety. Her literary abilities were well supplemented by her personal charm. Every one that knew her admired her—not with an awesome admiration, but with that which gently draws us toward dignified familiarity. Hers was one of the purest and sweetest natures that I ever have known.

She had a cheerful faith in a future life, and expected to be again with her beloved daughter, somewhere, somehow, in unbroken happiness. Now she rests beside that daughter in the cemetery at Ash-

field—her native Ashfield, where the shelves of the Belding Library are enriched with her works.

With unselfish devotion to the responsibilities that she had assumed, she addressed herself to her work with steady energy, cheerfulness, and hope. Her mother and her mother's mother had died of paralysis, and she always expected to go the same way. She had a considerable stroke in December, 1914, and a lighter one six months later. Then her sense of taste was gone, her strength declined steadily, and it was discovered that she had a serious heart trouble, which gave her constant pain. At the last, also, her sight was failing; and as she had not a living relative except the little grandchild and a cousin in Iowa, the sense of loneliness in its intensity overwhelmed her—we saw that she was losing her mind—and the end came. Alas! that one who with patient courage has borne the heat and burden of the day should be denied the enjoyment of a calm and restful evening.

Mourn we must when such a life stops far short of three score and ten; but thank God we may, that it has been and that we have known it. If, in the freshness of grief, we concentrate our thought upon a calamity like this, it seems that the spirit has passed away from all that is left to us—

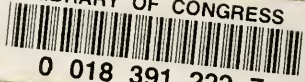
—“and yet
Life loiters, keeps a pulse at even measure,
And goes upon its business and its pleasure,
And knows not all the depths of its regret.”

FROM HER LAST LETTER

Sunday night. - My heart
has been hurting me cruelly
all the week, but is worse than
ever tonight. I can hardly
breathe, and I never shall be
any better. O, to be freed from
my terrible burden! God bless
you and your family for all
your heavenly kindness. Don't
forget my sister Catherine. She
never will know what her mother
has suffered. - And I never
can be any better, to add to
anything else, my eyes are
failing me. I long for
peace and rest and to find
again, if it is possible, my
own dear Alice.

Dora Knowlton Ranous.

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