

Original.

AUNT RUTH.

BY MRS. SERA SMITH.

READER dear, when thou beholdest one of those unappropriated ladies, one of those "better halves" of creation, who has dared to take the responsibility of going through the world alone in her blessedness, art thou for asking the reason? Art thou curious to deal out the wherefore of such an anomaly? I know thou art. And yet it is a vain fantasy; for ten to one thou wilt stray very wide of the truth, seeking for romantic incidents and heart-breaking catastrophes, when the cause may be found in the most common-place circumstances imaginable. Some may, and probably many do, remain "single," after the example of good Queen Bess, simply because their "proud stomachs" cannot brook any will but their own; others for any and every reason but the lack of an offer. But wherefore ask why? Did't thou never behold an ambitious vicar, springing in its loveliness, at first imploringly and gently spreading out its delicate tendrils for support, but none appearing, how it daily grew sturdy in its helpless solitude, the stock becoming more and more consolidated, knots and excessiveness making their appearance, till it stands alone, asking and needing help from none? Did't thou never see this? Then why ask a reason for the solitary state of many of the beautiful of creation? Such is the fact, and that is enough.

I plead guilty to having suffered much from this kind of idle curiosity, especially in the case of *Aunt Ruth*, whose sketch I am about to give thee, and the result may serve as a caution to all, who are looking to find aught that is strange or marvellous in these things.

Aunt Ruth was somewhat small in stature, with black glossy hair, and sparkling eyes, a round, pretty forehead, a neat nose, and small mouth. I like to be explicit in these things, for, indeed, her little person was so pretty that it increased the mystery of her blossoming solitude. I have often heard those who were familiar with my good Aunt in her younger days, tell of the conquests she achieved, and how every girl in the village, if she married at all, must be content to take up with one of the discarded lovers of Aunt Ruth. Many were the middle aged men pointed out to me, who at one time imagined themselves ready to die "all for the love" of Aunt Ruth. True, they were now sturdy, robust men, who looked entirely guiltless of such folly, but such had been the fact.

Perhaps Aunt Ruth might have been a little too prim-looking for a belle, even in her "palmiest" days, but then her bewitching smile must have done great execution. Even now, when I dare not "guess" at her age, she is exceedingly loveable, and would be entirely so, were it not for a certain air of precision and nicety, which must always characterised her. She is now the very pink of maidenly neatness and propriety. I should be utterly horrified to behold a hair upon her head misplaced; and a crimp upon the skirts of her dress or a spot upon her muslins would alarm me with serious fears for her health, or the sanity of her mind. Her pocket-

handkerchief has always a peculiar fold, and her ruffles a particular stiffness, that make them look as if belonging to Aunt Ruth and no one else.

She is in great demand by all the married ladies, not one of whom, I verily believe, but rejoices at her state of "single blessedness," for the little hands of the good spinster are just the things for certain delicate kinds of needle work; and then nothing can exceed her admirable taste in such matters. Aunt Ruth, in return, will glance at the care-worn faces of the married ladies, and at their multifarious cares, and perplexities, and, with as much of a shrug as her fine taste will venture upon, declare, "well, it must be confessed, I am one of the wise ones."

She is secretary to most of our charitable societies, and missionary societies; indeed is an active member in every thing of the kind, except the Maternal Association, and it was at one time seriously considered whether she could not be made a member of this, for the sake of having her for secretary, for her penmanship is exquisite, looking like her own self, small, neat and firm.

Now, dost thou ask, why is she single? Gentle reader, thou must have divined the reason. It is simply this. Aunt Ruth was always so *vice*. Many and many were her admirers, and "offers," but somehow they did't exactly suit. She could't always tell why, to be sure, but she did't like them, and that was enough. One was as illiterate as a Hotentot, or as clumsy as a bear; another had carrotty hair, and a sheepish look—one was too sentimental, another too matter-o-factish, etc. etc.; and so the dear creature went on multiplying objections until considerable past twenty, and every body prophesied she would "go through the swamp and at last take up with a broken stick." The old ladies shook their heads and looked grave, the young ones curled their pretty lips, tossed their heads, and one after another married the rejected lovers of the fastidious maiden, and settled down into sober, every-day matrons.

At length the village circle was enlivened by the addition of another to the number of beaux, and, of course, one more to the list of Aunt Ruth's admirers. This was in the person of a black-eyed, dashing young sailor, all animation, wit and humor, and retailing his nautical yarns with the best grace imaginable. Henry Jackson walked, and sang, and talked with Aunt Ruth, and, for once, she seemed exactly suited. There could be no mistake about it. Whatever Henry Jackson might choose to say or do, he was sure to suit Aunt Ruth.

But, alas, with all his recklessness, he somehow lacked the courage to tell a lady that he loved her. Had it been otherwise, this sketch had never been written, and Aunt Ruth, instead of being as she is, the pink of maidenly precision, might have been humdrum Mrs. Jackson, and a slattern into the bargain. Henry knew every rope in a ship, and knew how to manage the toughest wind that ever blew, so that his snug little barque could ride it out in safety; wouldn't mind hoisting his colors, trimming his sails, and heaving to, to fire a salute to the commodore himself, when occasion served, for all these things were familiar to him; but somehow, all his dashing forsook him, and he could never

give his lips the right pucker to say, "I love you." So he was forced to resort to pen and ink to say what every body knew before.

Now, Aunt Ruth was nice in all matters. She shuddered at the least infringement of maidenly decorum. No wonder, therefore, she delayed some days to answer the epistle of her lover. To do so earlier, might argue an indelicate precipitation. Unhappy maiden! the letter was destined to be her only solace through the rest of her solitary pilgrimage.

Henry waited, and wondered, puzzling in vain to conceive the cause of her silence; for, frank and ardent himself, he could scarcely be expected to sympathize with the scruples of a maiden so exceedingly particular. At length, from waiting and wondering, his pride became piqued, and to convince his "lady love" that, if rejected, he was inconsolable, in sheer revenge he offered himself to a village rival, with fewer charms indeed, but also with fewer scruples than Aunt Ruth.

In the mean time, the unconscious maiden feasted on the honied words with which the warm-hearted sailor had clothed the language of his love, little dreaming of the storm that was gathering around her.

Propriety at length became fully satisfied, and she was seated at her desk to pen a response. Aunt Ruth must have weighed every word; the one chosen must have been just the thing, neither too warm, nor too cold; and every letter must have been made just as it should be. While thus occupied, a young gossip came in with the astounding intelligence that Henry Jackson and Lucy Cobb were published. Aunt Ruth turned slightly pale, and her small foot beat time to her thoughts. When her reporter had left the room, she took the paper on which she had been writing, and slowly, and thoughtfully, tore it piece by piece, carefully wiped her pen, arranged her papers, and closed the escrutoire, and from that day never appeared to think any thing more about it.

It was observed, that from that time Aunt Ruth began to wear a pocket, in which it was supposed the precious letter was deposited; for, more than once, she has been detected conning the characters upon a sheet of paper somewhat worn and discolored by age, which she afterwards deposited with a saddened smile and a suppressed sigh, in her pocket. Still further, she has been seen gluing strips of paper upon the severed angles of a decaying document, which she concealed in her own quiet way. It must have been the long-treasured letter.

Great hath been my curiosity to behold it—to luxuriate in its delicious periods. But in vain. When we have been inmates of the same chamber, and I have been witness to all the ceremony of a "Maiden Lady's" toilet—have witnessed the removal of one garment after another, each one being carefully folded before it was laid aside, and then the identical pocket deposited beneath her pillow; how I have longed to lay sacrilegious hands upon it! But no; Aunt Ruth's propriety had become contagious, and I could not—dared not do it. No, no, it were a cruelty.

But the luxury of perusing the precious relic was reserved for two saucy urchins, of twelve and fourteen, brothers. By some unaccountable fatality, the strings

of Aunt Ruth's pocket, one day, broke from their allegiance, and dropped it upon the floor. The two boys held their breath till she was fairly out of sight, and then pounced upon the prize. Scissors, thimble, pin-ball, and all the eteteras of an old maid's pocket, were unceremoniously tumbled upon the floor, and the sacred letter dragged out in a trice. Attracted by the noise, I found them kneeling in the midst of Aunt Ruth's treasures, and reading the letter with all the gloe and eagerness of unsentimental boyhood. The honied words, that had been like the dew of Heaven to the heart of Aunt Ruth, were gabbled over amidst shouts of merriment.

Scarcely had I discovered them, when she made her appearance. I will not attempt to describe the mingled apprehensions of her face. One instant she paused to take in the whole evil, and then rushed upon them. I had never before seen her flustered. The graceless rogues took to their heels, bursting out into a shout and laugh, such as boys only can utter. Since that I have overheard them repeating something to each other with a chuckling laugh, at which Aunt Ruth will color, and look uneasy, and I grow seriously angry with them for their unfeeling merriment.

Original.

THE BOY'S MOUNTAIN SONG.

FROM THE GERMAN.

BY RUFUS DAWES.

I AM the mountain shepherd boy;
Beneath me castles rise in joy;
Here, first, the earliest sunbeams play,
Here, last, at evening, linger they;
I am the boy of the mountain!

Here is the torrent's fountain head;
I drink it from its rocky bed;
As rushing wildly on its way
Among the crags, I dash the spray;
I am the boy of the mountain!

The mountain—it is all my own—
The storm-clouds are its circling zone;
From north to south they, howling, hush
My song amidst their clamorous rush;
I am the boy of the mountain!

While far below, the thunders tear,
Here stand I, in the calm, blue air;
I know, and call to them: touch not,
But leave, in peace, my father's cot!
I am the boy of the mountain!

And should the larum-bell resound,
And beacon-fires flame up around,
I then descend and join the throng,
And swing my sword and sing my song;
I am the boy of the mountain!