

**DORA KNOWLTON RANOUS.
AUTHOR-EDITOR-TRANSLATOR.
A SIMPLE RECORD OF A NOBLE
LIFE; PP. 5-35 (NOT COMPLETE)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649261475

Dora Knowlton Ranous. Author-editor-translator. A simple record of a Noble life; pp. 5-35 (not complete) by Rossiter Johnson

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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.
Where'er she went a silence fell
And something shadowed every face."*



NEW YORK
PUBLISHERS PRINTING COMPANY
1916

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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