

A MIRACLE AT CEDAR SPRINGS

By A. M. Carpenter in The Spartanburg Herald.

Out at Cedar Spring Institute, the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind, is Ruby Miller, a little thirteen-year-old girl, who lost her sight and hearing at the age of two and a half years, who does not remember ever hearing the human voice or ever seeing the sunlight or any other beautiful thing, and yet is talking and laughing daily with her teachers and playmates, is studying English, history, geography and arithmetic, making clothes for her dolls, and is leading as active and as happy a life as the normal girl of her age. It is a miracle; it is nothing less. And the story of it is a story of love and devotion and painstaking effort almost beyond belief.

Most people are familiar with the achievements of Laura Bridgeman and Helen Keller, the first deaf and blind persons in this country to be educated. But Laura Bridgeman and Helen Keller lost their sight and hearing after their early childhood, and they had fairly good vocabularies when their education began. Ruby Miller lost her sight and hearing in her earliest childhood, before she could fairly talk, and she was not placed under the care of the teachers at Cedar Spring until after she had passed her sixth year. By that time she had forgotten all that she ever knew. And yet Dr. N. F. Walker, the president of the Cedar Spring school, and his teachers have penetrated the double veil behind which this little girl's life was cast, and have found behind the darkness and the silence a bright intellect and a loving heart. These they have developed, step by step and today Ruby Miller is a wonderfully sweet and attractive child. She has a keen intellect, a wholesome sense of humor, and a heart throbbing with love for her teachers and playmates and for the whole world. She is as well informed on world history and on current events as the average child of her age; she writes creditable compositions on various subjects, using a common typewriter or the Braille system of raised letters with equal facility, and, more than all this, she is learning to speak distinctly and correctly. It is wonderful—it is nothing less than a miracle—and every normal man or woman who has ever been in her presence has gone away abashed and ashamed and humbled in the sight of God for failure to make the best use of all the faculties, with which they have been endowed.

Ruby Miller was born in Columbia, and was a normal child. When about two and a half years old she had a severe illness, and when she began to recover she was blind and deaf. Physicians could do nothing for her; her case was hopeless. Her parents kept her in their home until she was six years old, and then they sent her to Cedar Spring. Dr. Walker and his teachers began working with her and for her, but for a long time apparently no progress was made. For more than a year their efforts were in vain; they were unable to teach her a single thing. The child would eat and sleep, and that was about all. At times she would give way to fits of temper—if she had wants or desires she had no way of making them known. A more pitiful condition could not be imagined.

After she had been in the school for about a year Miss Sarah Banks, herself a graduate of the school and an especially gifted woman, was assigned as her teacher, and for the past six years has been the little girl's constant companion. Laurens Walker, principal of the school, says Miss Banks is entitled to all the credit for Ruby Miller's training and development, but Miss Banks will not have it that way, but divides the honor between Dr. N. F. Walker, the president, and Laurens Walker, his son, the principal. But the Walkers and Miss Banks always put Ruby first; they do not think they have done anything especially remarkable themselves, but they think Ruby is the brightest child they have ever known and they never tire of talking of her and her sweet character and her patience and eagerness to learn. And Ruby Miller doesn't think she has done anything out of the ordinary. Her idea, and it is frequently expressed, is that everybody is good to her. She often says she fears she is unable adequately to express her love and gratitude.

The teachers began Ruby's educa-

tion by trying to teach her simple words, using the finger alphabet. For a year they did not accomplish anything, and Miss Banks felt that her work had been a failure and wanted to resign. Mr. Walker would not hear of it; on the other hand he offered to increase her salary. A little had been accomplished by the end of the second year, and after that her progress has been more rapid each year. Mr. Walker said the other day that she had accomplished more during the past year than during all the previous years. Her progress now can be marked almost daily.

After she had mastered the art of spelling words on her fingers, and reading words spelled in that manner by others, the next step was to develop her vocal chords and teach her to utter sounds and frame the sounds into words. With her fingers held lightly on the lips of one speaking in an ordinary tone she learns to pronounce the words herself. If she mispronounces a word her teachers correct her, and she holds her fingers to the lips of the one speaking and makes another effort. Now her teachers are gradually requiring her to use her vocal cords in all her conversations, while they use the fingers in talking to her. Sometimes in her eagerness she talks too fast and it is difficult to understand all that she says, but this simple fault is being overcome. She pronounces most of her words as clearly and distinctly as an ordinary person.

She mastered the Braille alphabet for the blind, and can read with fluency books printed in that language. She uses the Braille system of writing with equal ease, and is now mastering the new system of that language recently adopted. She uses a common typewriter with skill, and writes a cleaner page than many experienced newspaper reporters, but she cannot read it after she has written it, and this is a handicap. If some genius would invent a typewriter that would print a raised letter she would be greatly helped.

Ruby Miller knows all the human emotions—love, fear, jealousy and even hate, but love is her dominating passion. She loves her teachers and playmates, and she is passionately devoted to some of them. She dearly loves Laurens Walker, principal of the school, who has devoted many hours to her training, and she loves Miss Banks, who has been her companion and teacher for so long. Much of her love is centered in Loree Walker, a little blind girl, who is a year or so younger than herself. The other day one of her visitors was a magazine writer from New York City. She was told that he was going to write a story about her for one of the magazines. "I want him to write about Loree, too," she said quickly. "She is such a good little girl." She would not rest until assured that Loree should have a place in the story too.

One day someone asked if she did not think Laurens Walker was a good man. "Yes," she replied quickly. "He is a good man—he is God's man." She had been taught that God is good, and she knew that Laurens Walker was good to her, therefore he was "God's man."

"Does Mr. Laurens Walker ever whip you?" she was asked.

A shy, sweet smile swept over her face. "Not now," she replied. "I don't need whipping now, for I obey him. But I did not obey him when I first came here. I was a bad girl then; I was a regular little heathen. I did not know God then. Mr. Laurens does not punish the children if they obey him."

No normal child of her age, nor any grown person, for that matter, has any better philosophy of life.

Ruby's days are divided into hours of study and work and play. She has about the same studies as the ordinary girl of her age. She uses the ordinary school text books, and is well grounded in English, and is doing good work in mathematics. She does the usual problems in addition, multiplication and subtraction with ease. And she knows history and geography and is kept well informed on current events. During the progress of the world war she closed her nightly prayers with a petition for early peace. She knew what the war was about, and she rejoiced when the right triumphed.

In her working hours, which are planned as diversion from the time spent on her books, and in order to keep her active little mind busy, she is making gany baskets out of fibre and even pine needles, and her workmanship is really good. A few days ago she wanted to make a new dress for one of her dolls and was given a piece of cloth. She cut the garment and did all the sewing herself, and it was a good fit. Many a girl with good eyes could not have done half so well.

She knows all about the school building, and goes up and down the stairs

and around the grounds almost as well as any of the other children. A few days ago, while some visitors were present, Laurens Walker told her he would send for Loree Walker, her little chum. "Let me go," she exclaimed, and jumped up and hastened out of the room and down the stairs and returned in a few minutes with her arms entwined around her chum. "Loree is such a good girl," she said, as she came forward. "Sometimes I just get hungry to have her with me and love her."

"Introduce Loree to the visitors," said Mr. Walker spelling the words into Ruby's hand.

"I don't understand," was her reply.

"Why," he replied, "when visitors come I tell you their names and I tell them your name."

"Oh," she said, "I understand now." And she carried off the introductions as prettily as anyone could have done it.

"That was something new for her," said Mr. Walker to the visitors, with his eyes shining. "But she got away with it, didn't she?"

Many stories might be told to illustrate this wonderful little girl's accomplishments, and the wide and varied amount of knowledge that she has acquired, but all would only go to prove this outstanding fact: That with the exception of being deaf and blind, Ruby Miller is as well educated as the average girl of her age; that she has many accomplishments aside from mere book knowledge, and that she is happier than many, many girls who have all the faculties and who have had every advantage that friends and relatives and money could give. She has a happy disposition, pure faith in God and deep love for her friends and companions.

Just now she is looking forward to the school vacation in the summer, and she wants to go to her home in Columbia for her vacation. She wants to go barefooted during the summer, and she wants the teachers to let her hair grow long. "I am getting to be quite a big girl now," she says, "and I should not have short hair." Laurens Walker promised her the other day that her hair should not be cut again. Then one of her visitors said he would send her some hair ribbons. "Thank you," she said, prettily. "I won't need it for awhile yet, but I will keep it until I do need it."

There are now 250 children at the Cedar Spring Institute, and there are no happier children anywhere. Dr. Walker has for years eliminated the word "unfortunate" children from the school vocabulary. He has carefully taught all these blind and deaf children that they are not unfortunate, that there is work and opportunity for them in the world, and that they can make of themselves what they will. Many of the graduates of the school, some blind and some deaf, are holding responsible positions in various lines and are making the best of citizens. The children at Cedar Springs do not feel that they are in need of sympathy and they resent it if it is offered. The literary department of the school carries pupils through the high school grades and fits them for college or university, while the boys are taught various trades and the girls are taught all the domestic sciences. Graduate of Cedar Spring are well equipped for all the duties of life.

It is a fact that should be mentioned here that during all the years that he has been at the head of the school the legislature has never refused a single dollar that Dr. Walker has asked for. He makes up his budget year after year, showing what he needs and the purposes for which he proposes to spend it, and the figures are never changed. No other state institution has ever had such treatment at the hands of the legislature. This year the legislature did an unusual thing, even for Cedar Spring, for it appropriated \$7,000 for the erection of a residence for the president of the school. Dr. Walker did not ask for the appropriation, and knew nothing of it until he found the item in the bill. Dr. Walker has made his home for years in one end of the administration building and has never thought of having separate quarters, but last summer some members of the legislature, while visiting the institution decided that it would be a nice thing if he could have a home of his own, which to spend his declining years and they put the appropriation through without asking him anything about it. He was greatly surprised when he learned what had been done, but he appreciates it, of course.

But nothing is too good for a man who has been for so long at the head of such a school as Cedar Spring, a man who has surrounded himself with a corps of teachers capable of teaching the deaf and blind, and even teaching a child who is both deaf and blind and developing her into an attractive and accomplished young woman.

For Ruby Miller is just now starting. She has acquired a thirst for knowledge, and her mind is strong enough to absorb and retain. Within

a few more years she will be one of the best educated and most cultured young women to be found anywhere. Is it any wonder that one who thinks of what she has done, and of what has been done for and with her, should feel wreathed in the realization of his neglect of his own talents and opportunities?

Is any greater lesson taught by any of the miracles than is given in the story of Ruby Miller?

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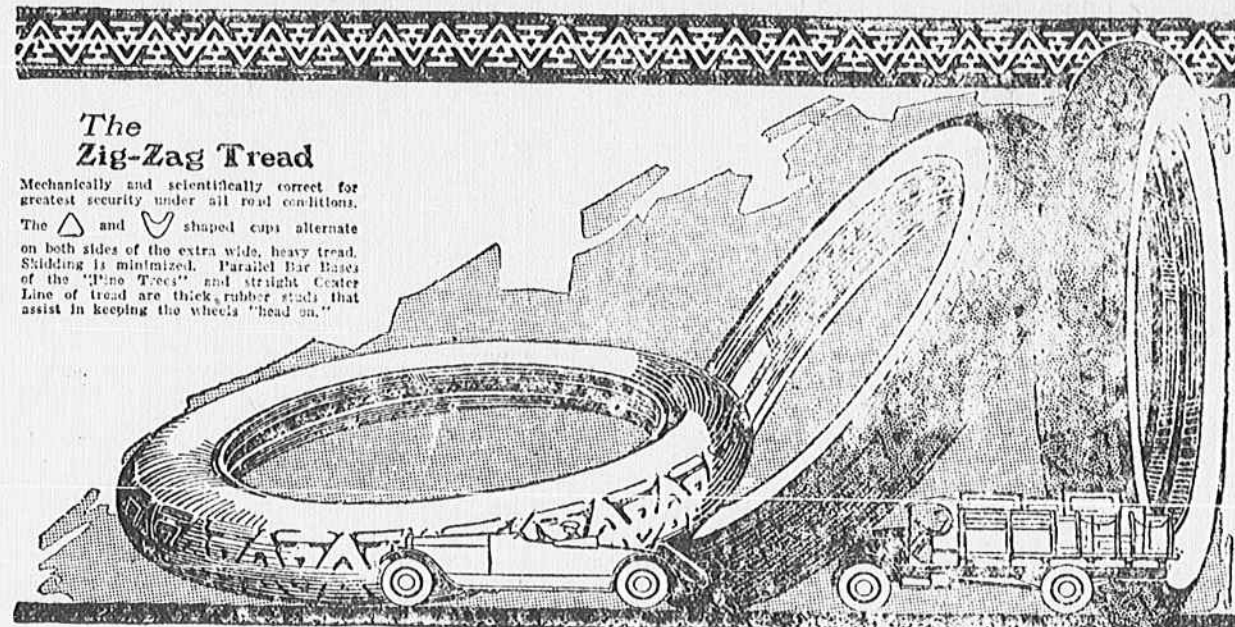
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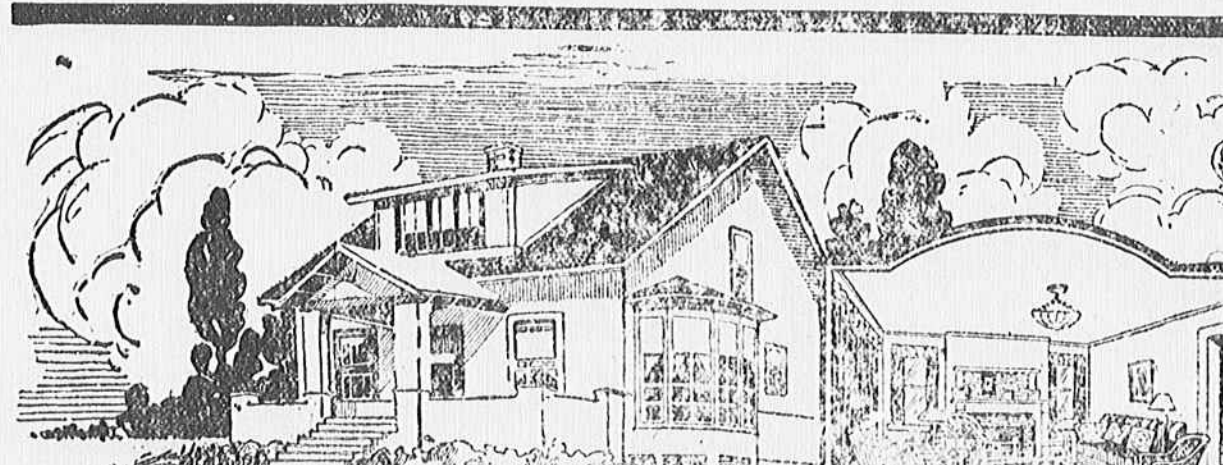
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