

## JANE GREY SWISSELM.

**The First Woman Who Edited a Political Paper in This Country—Her Characteristics and Peculiarities—A Brave and Useful Life.**

Philadelphia Correspondent *Courier-Journal*: This woman's personality was of a rare order of power. Whoever respects courage and appreciates ability must pay homage to her memory. She was the pioneer of her sex in vigorous and effective journalism. She went into newspaper life when the sentiment of the public was against women expressing opinions in print on any subject stronger than roses or ribbons. She was the first woman in this country who edited a political paper. This was the *Saturday Visitor* (she always insisted on spelling it with an "o") of Pittsburg. It was established in 1848, and was devoted to the abolition of slavery.

It cost something to express opinions of that complexion in those days of prejudice and cruel conditions.

The inception of this paper was an inspiration, its life a revolution. "The *Visitor*," she said, "was quite an insignificant-looking sheet, but no sooner did the American eagle catch sight of it than he swooned and fell off his perch, and Democratic roosters straightened out their necks and ran screaming with terror. It created a pantaloon panic. A woman had started a political paper."

That meant that she had engaged in a crusade, the object of which was the capture of the bifurcated garments of men. Three-fourths of the secular editors from Maine to Georgia clutched their cassimeres in frantic despair, and resolved to defend them from this woman of advanced mind if the effort cost them their lives. Even the religious press, she said, found it difficult to get past the tailor-shop, and "pantaloon" became the watchword all along the line.

Mrs. Swisshelm was never in favor of woman-suffrage, though a friend to woman in the higher sense. She thought women quite as capable of voting as men, but she would rather have suffrage limited than expanded. She believed in an intelligence qualification. About the time she struck out into public life the woman's rights agitation began, and as it was the first of the revolt it naturally took grotesque and obnoxious forms. Mrs. Swisshelm gave it the cold shoulder and devoted herself to arousing people to knowledge of the tyranny which underlaid all the oppression and injustice women were subjected to. She and her neighbors were often the victims of mean oppressions, and she was horrified to learn that they were always in accordance with the law, that married women were legally chattels. She saw that it was not the men who were to blame, but the law—a law which enabled mean men to do mean things.

How can we judge of a personality unless we know something of the burdens borne? Mrs. Swisshelm's personal history is not rose-colored, it is even sad and sorrowful, or would be if her wonderful strength of character and courage had not lifted her above being made miserable by any worldly conditions. Her married life was unhappy—"a mistake," she said, "productive of mutual injury." After twenty years of it, in 1857 she took her only child, then a baby, in her arms and left for Minnesota. In three years her husband obtained a divorce on the grounds of desertion, and some years later he married again, and is, I believe, still living.

When she went North alone with her baby in her arms Mrs. Swisshelm was as near broken in heart as such a brave spirit could be. She dreamed of a quiet life in a cabin in the forests of Minnesota, whither the strife of the world could not follow. It was not to be. The stormiest part of her life was yet to come. Recalling this dream she writes: "I had not yet learned that every human soul is a company of armies, and wherever there is one there is strife."

Fate forced her into activity again. Indeed, she was but following the law of her nature, which called for action. She re-established the *Visitor* at St. Cloud, and became the object of the bitter hatred of the coarse bigots who abound in every age, but were distressingly numerous then. She saw her office destroyed by a brutal mob and her life and the lives of her friends endangered.

She became a lecturer, and after a stormy editorial and rostrum career went to Washington as correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, the first woman ever regularly engaged in that capacity. To her all women in that profession owe their present recognition.

After the War broke out Mrs. Swisshelm spent two years in the hospital. This part of her life she has recorded with more vividness than any other in the history of her life, entitled "*Half a Century*," published four years ago.

Of late years she has been entirely out of public life, living with her daughter, sometimes at Chicago and sometimes at her old home, Swissvale, in Pennsylvania, where she died the 22d of July.

Mrs. Swisshelm's style as a writer was forceful and fine. Occasionally, within the last decade, some overpowering injustice would arouse her indignation, and her pen would flash forth some of its old-time fire. There was no evidence of weakening in that wonderfully strong intellect. Age and illness shook the body—not the mind.

This woman, at whom every witless wittling who could control a handful of type has flung his arrows of prejudice, was deeply religious—not religious in the sense of bowing before a severe theology, but conscientious and godly, in the best sense. "The Lord and I," she said to a friend, "have always stood together. We always shall."

Her education was thoroughly theological. Every outlook of her early life was founded on cold Calvinism, and only two years ago she said to me: "It's the sort of religion I believe in to this day—Calvinism, with the hell-fire left out."

She lived sixty-eight years and never grew old. Her fine face was still full of the force and beauty of youth, and when she talked her firm voice rang out clear and full, without a hint of her years in it.

In dress Mrs. Swisshelm was plain to sovereignty. She never wore a flower, a feather, a ribbon, a ring, or a bit of jewelry in her life, and yet she always looked the refined lady. She never allowed the expense of her wardrobe to exceed \$40 a year. This line of conduct was not adopted because of eccentricity or meanness, but to avoid the possibility of being "talked about"; to give brutal men no opportunity of saying insinuating things about her. Not that she cared for anything any one said, but that her appearance and conduct might give the lie to any hint of evil. She was really a beautiful woman—beautiful even at 68; yet she took great pains to conceal her personal attractions—to appear plain, and even ugly.

Notoriety had no charm for her. She valued praise as little as she despised abuse. She was simply sufficient unto herself, caring not for the world's opinion in either case. To do right was reward enough for her.

ALICE LEE WESTON.