

THE STORY OF A TALENTED WOMAN

A great deal has been said of late about the "strenuous life," and doubtless a majority of those who hear it spoken of think that reference is made to men who are engaged in business or wrapped up in politics. Few stop to think that men—business men and public men—are not the only ones who live the strenuous life, and that there are those who are apart from the glitter of politics and the rush of trafficking who may be, and often are, the highest exponents of strenuousness. The hundreds of thousands of Commoner readers who have been entertained and instructed by Mrs. Helen Watts-McVey have little idea, perhaps, of the vast amount of work she does, of the immense burdens that have been borne by her since early childhood, or of the never-ending struggle which she has so bravely waged against adverse fate. And yet, despite struggles and heartaches and reverses that would have appalled a vast majority of the men whom the world believes to be strenuous, this cheerful, optimistic, clever and earnest woman has gone about her daily tasks with a smiling face and willing hands, and has given hope and cheer and comfort to thousands of her sisters throughout this broad land.

The life story of Mrs. McVey should be an encouragement to many women—an inspiration to stronger and more determined effort. Believing that the thousands whom she has entertained and instructed would be interested in a brief biographical sketch of the editor of the "Home Department," The Commoner takes pleasure in telling briefly and incompletely, the life story of this talented woman.

Mrs. Helen Watts-McVey was born in southern Wisconsin. Her early childhood was spent on a farm, and she was one of twelve children. Her schooling was obtained in a near-by village, and at the age of fourteen she began teaching classes in the school in order to pay tuition in branches not included in the school curriculum. Later she attempted to teach the village school but was forced by failing health to abandon all hopes of being a teacher. At this juncture her ambitions were changed and the current of her life turned in a direction that has resulted in a wider influence than she could ever have wielded as a teacher in the public schools. The civil war having claimed all of her brothers except one little fellow, she entered a printing office and learned the printer's trade in order to care for her aged parents. She was the first girl in all that region to work in a printing office.

In 1865 the family removed to Missouri and the daughter resumed her trade as compositor, working in Sedalia, where she was again the pioneer "girl printer." In the autumn of 1866 she was married to John W. McVey and moved to a farm in Pettis county. While learning the trade of compositor and during her work as such, Mrs. McVey had also taken up literary and newspaper work, and this she continued after moving upon the farm. She contributed both verse and fiction to the New York Weekly and the Frank Leslie publications, all the while performing all the work that devolves upon the average farm wife, looking after the welfare of her children and bringing them up to be an honor to their parents. In 1871 the first great grief of her life came—the death of her little boy. In

1874, through the ill-health of the husband and father and the dishonesty of a relative, the little farm was lost and the family plunged into absolute penury. Here it was that the splendid courage of Mrs. McVey was manifested. The family moved to St. Louis, and while Mr. McVey secured work as a market gardener and house builder, Mrs. McVey took up regular newspaper work, at the same time caring for her two little boys and several other children. Her work consisted of type-setting, proofreading and miscellaneous editorial work.

In 1877 she was given the "Home Department" of Coleman's Rural World, but the increasing ill-health of her husband soon forced her to give this up and remove to Sedalia and resume work as a compositor. In 1881 her eldest



MRS. HELEN WATTS-M'VEY

son, a brilliant lad of thirteen, died at Eureka Springs, Ark., while the family was there for treatment for Mr. McVey's blindness.

In 1888 the family returned to St. Louis and Mrs. McVey accepted a position as department editor on the Christian-Evangelist and also became a proofreader in the Christian Publishing company's establishment. This work she continued with success for upwards of a year and was then forced to give it up. Later she was given department work on the Journal of Agriculture, and this work she performed at home, filling the position until the paper changed hands and

policy. However she was still retained as a staff correspondent, a position she still holds upon both of the agricultural papers mentioned. In 1894 she assisted in the compilation of a cook book which has since gone through many editions and which is still, in book publishing parlance, "a good seller." In the spring of 1900 the family removed to Wright county, Missouri, taking up a residence on an Ozark farm in the hopes of securing better health. During the next four years, during most of which time Mr. McVey was either absent or in very bad health, Mrs. McVey ran the farm and at the same time conducted a department in the Midland Farmer. Then the farm was sold and Mr. and Mrs. McVey returned to St. Louis. In 1902 she was made editor of the "Home Department" of The Commoner, which place she still holds and fills to the complete satisfaction of all concerned with possibly one exception—herself. She is still an occasional contributor to various household magazines.

All this seems very easy to write and is easy to read—but how difficult it has been to live it all! Mrs. McVey's life has been indeed a busy one. She has raised three sets of children. Until their death a few years ago she was the support and comfort of her aged parents; she has seldom employed help in her home. But she had an ideal, and she has steadily sought to attain it. Because of this she has won a high place in the grand army of useful women. She writes with a broad, practical knowledge gained by hard experience and thorough study. As a mother, housekeeper, farm wife and city wageworker she has been brought face to face with the sternest problems of life, and the profit she has gained by these experiences she shares with her sisters throughout the length and breadth of the land. Her son is an engineer on the Missouri Pacific railroad, and she has one little foster-daughter upon whom she lavishes the tenderest mother love. She has "mothered" many girls, and all of them have become excellent housekeepers who are well trained in domestic and housewifely duties.

It requires something more than a school education and an encyclopedia to answer the thousand and one questions that are asked of Mrs. McVey every week in the year. Her correspondence is immense, and questions that can be answered only by a woman of broad experience are put to her every day. Many of these require diligent research and the most careful attention as to details. But she is happiest when conferring favors upon others. She has lived a life of self-sacrifice, and as a result her life, while filled with crosses, has been filled with the joy that can only come through doing good to others. She combines the sentimental and the practical to a wonderful degree, as may be seen every week in her department in The Commoner. This necessarily brief sketch can not be closed without calling especial attention to just one of Mrs. McVey's articles—the one appearing in The Commoner Thanksgiving week and bearing the title, "One Thanksgiving Day." No true man or woman can read that beautiful little story without being stirred to the depths. It reveals, better than printed words can do, the characteristics of the wife and mother whose weekly talks with Commoner wives and mothers have been, and are, so warmly welcomed by hundreds of thousands.

"ONCE WAS BORN A MAN"

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ing classes, or the emancipation of the negroes, and yet never have done a loving act to one. Easy to be a great philanthropist and yet to have no strong friendships, no deep personal attachments. For the idea of a universal Manlike sympathy was not new when Christ was born. The reality was new. But before this, in the Roman theatre, deafening applause was called forth by this sentence: "I am a man; nothing that can affect man is indifferent to me." A fine sentiment—that was all. Every pretense of realizing that sentiment, except one, has been a failure. One, and but one, has succeeded in loving men—and that by loving men.

The hanging of the stocking, the exchange of gifts and the words of cheer, are not all of the day we celebrate; the world needs to be reminded of the perfect character of the One whose birth has hallowed this day. This is not alone the duty of the pulpit; for too often the pulpit places the Nazarene so high as to almost remove him from human ken. Too often it shows but scant attention, to the matchless eloquence and the pro-

found wisdom that characterized his conversation, and the loving kindness he ever displayed toward men of all creeds, of all nationalities and of all walks of life. It is proper that the press do its part in keeping this perfect character before busy men. The statesman, the merchant, the professional man, the laborer, as well as the little child needs to be ever kept in touch with the "one perfect specimen of humanity God has exhibited on earth."

We need His rules of life to save us from ourselves; we need His splendid counsel to inspire us to make the best of the talents with which we are endowed; we need the example of His love, His tenderness and His mercy in order that we may act justly in dealing with the weak or unfortunate. And who will say that whether He be regarded as man or accepted as Savior, the world would not be happier if the precepts He gave and the examples He set swayed the hearts of men and controlled the conduct of nations?

R. L. M.

NOBLE "DEFENDERS"

Testimony before the New York insurance committee discloses that of the nine insurance companies so far investigated, seven paid large

sums of money to Andrew Hamilton the lobbyist. The Equitable, Mutual Life, New York Life, Prudential Life, the Metropolitan Life, Provident Savings and Mutual Reserve carried Hamilton on their payrolls. The money paid by these companies to Hamilton was for the purpose of corrupting men holding official position. Every one of these companies also contributed—out of their policyholders' money—to republican campaign funds in order that the "national honor" might be preserved.

WHERE THEY DON'T "STAND PAT"

Representative Shackelford of Missouri has introduced a bill to place printing paper and wood pulp on the free list. Every republican editor is in favor of this plan and would openly advocate it if he could be assured that in striking down the protected interests which prey upon newspaper publishers the protected interests which prey upon the people generally would not be interfered with.

Secretary Root refuses to adopt the bill of Pines. The Pine islanders should proceed to submit maps showing where a canal would be a good thing.