

*Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858-1865.* Edited with introduction and notes by Arthur J. Larsen. The Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, 1934. Pp. ix, 327, illustrated, \$2.50.

The Swisshelm Letters were published in the St. Cloud *Democrat* from time to time during a period of seven years. The author of these editorial letters was a pioneer in the editorial field. Through her determination and tireless efforts she succeeded in establishing her newspaper in St. Cloud, Minnesota. In its columns she used the influence of her pen for Abolition and Woman's Rights, and also wrote on other timely topics. In the first letter, that of November 25, 1858, she said: "The destruction of our press here brought the revelation we dreaded; for we found that we had no more hesitancy in talking to as many people as could get within hearing distance than in talking to one. . . ."

While her press was being reconstructed, Mrs. Swisshelm gave her messages orally and found that she possessed "some talent for public speaking" which she felt called upon to improve. "It is therefore probable that in the future," she ventured, "we may use the voice of speech as well as the voice of the pen . . . as by that means we may hope to reach many that would otherwise be inaccessible."

The Letters appear under fourteen chapter titles. They are well written, entertaining and instructive. Of the public lectures mentioned in these chapters, the author says: "I find people much more willing to hear me on subjects connected with Woman's Rights than on the rights of slaves. I regret this, for women, as such, have few wrongs compared to those of the slave. . . ."

The description of highways and modes of travel are of historic value. Old fashioned customs are revealed in the author's stories of her entertainment in the towns in which lectures were delivered. Women readers were favored by word-pictures of scenery, comments on homely arts, bits of gossip, notes on fashions, and accounts of social functions which the author attended.

After a visit to the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry stationed at Ft. Snelling, the camp and camp life were described for the benefit of those whose sons were there. While in the hospital service at Washington, D.C., Mrs. Swisshelm

wrote of her experiences in order to show the kind of service that was being rendered to the soldiers and to suggest possible opportunities to "enquiring friends" for supplying comforts needed by the men in the wards.

The Readers of the *St. Cloud Democrat* were made acquainted with laborers and editors, ministers and lecturers, legislators and governors, army officers and soldiers, congressmen and cabinet officers, and President and Mrs. Lincoln. The author attended one of President Lincoln's public receptions. When the President clasped her hand she told him that she "hoped the Lord would have mercy on him, as the people had none." She reported that "in the midst of his drudgery he laughed a great hearty, honest laugh." She derived pleasure from seeing the President and characterized him as "a man whose honesty had never been questioned by friend or foe."

Some of the rumors heard and believed of Mrs. Lincoln by Mrs. Swisshelm were shattered by the friendly smile and cordial greeting. She wondered why Mrs. Lincoln, surrounded by so many admiring friends, should recognize her and "give one of the brightest smiles of the evening to a little, old woman, noted for nothing but Abolitionism." The editor then added: "I intend to publish all the evidence I have and all I can get of her loyalty and good feeling. . . ."

The "Introduction" of thirty-two pages, prepared by Arthur J. Larsen, includes a biographical sketch of Mrs. Swisshelm. On the last page of his "Introduction," the editor says of the letters:

They give a charming and intimate picture of frontier Minnesota in the period of strain just preceding the Civil War and during the first two years of the conflict. The letters from Washington, written between 1863 and 1865, depict some of the breath-taking suspense endured in the national capital during those years. Those describing hospital conditions record sufferings of the wounded and sick and also reveal the sympathy and poignant grief of the journalist-nurse as she ministered to their needs.

The volume is well printed and attractive, the footnotes have been carefully prepared, and the index is adequate. The book will prove interesting and valuable, not only to readers in the Northwest, but to many persons in every part of the country. The preface, written by the Superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, shows

a fine understanding of the contents and importance of the letters. A single sentence from the preface will give the prospective reader an excellent notion of the nature of the volume: "They [the letters] contain a sharply etched record of what an observant and emotional woman saw, heard, thought, and felt as she journeyed about the young state of Minnesota and as she labored in the nation's capital in the time of Abraham Lincoln."

BERTHA THOMAS LYNCH.

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*The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War.* By George Fort Milton. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934. Pp. xvi, 608, illustrated, \$5.00.

This work is a study of the success of the more extreme elements North and South in preventing the triumph of Stephen A. Douglas. "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 'Bleeding Kansas', 'Bully Brooks' assault on Sumner, the Dred Scott case, Buchanan's hate for Douglas, Harper's Ferry—but for these there might have been no Civil War." Such is the statement of the author (p. 237), as he weighs the evidence. In what way could the great civil conflict have been prevented? By accepting the point of view of Douglas who rejected both the northern and southern plans for congressional intervention in the Territories. Believing in the "operation of economic laws," the Little Giant "felt that climate, soil and other natural characteristics of the western Territories would make them free. He thought the Missouri Compromise repeal would not extend slavery, but would reduce southern opposition to the formation of new Territories. A series of new free Territories would be established; finally the South would find competition too unprofitable and severe, and slavery would die a natural death. But the South would have no legitimate complaint, for its honor would have been respected and its constitutional rights scrupulously offered and maintained. This, to Douglas, was national ground" (p. 183).

Why did not a majority of the people North and South rally around the standard of Douglas? A major disaster was the break-up of the Democratic party at Charleston. "As late as March, 1860," Milton declares, "there was a good chance to avert Cession" (p. 370). Because the party machinery