

MRS. JOSEPHINE K. HENRY

(By Harriet M. Cloz.)

The Editor has kindly requested me to write a sketch of Josephine K. Henry, but when I think of the wealth of work accomplished by her I am overwhelmed with the thought of not what to write, but what not to write.

Woman's Progress devotes 3,000 words to Mrs. Henry as a representative woman, and yet does her scant justice. Volumes have been written vaunting the life of men whose work is less valuable than hers, for platitudes flow easily from the pen for one who labors with the popular throng but expressions of appreciation are piteously scarce for the pioneer in unpopular work, and the flag of crimson flames on my face at the tear-compelling thought that my sister-women for whom she has toiled have silently, if not insolently accepted the sacrifices made for them.

Josephine Williamson seems to have been the Southern incarnation of Destiny. Born in Newport, Ky. her father a Virginian, her mother, Mary Kirby, of Leeds, England, she was reared in the home atmosphere of cultured accomplishments and independent thought, yet with the community surroundings of conventional conservatism and the latter naturally furnished the irritant of unjust restraint which developed our beloved comrade into the superb self-reliant champion of the oppressed.

During her early years while storing the mind with practical facts she did not neglect the aesthetic, for in addition to perfecting herself in instrumental and vocal music she did creditable work as a composer. I may also mention in this connection that she possesses the poetical spirit and during these later years she has paid tribute to our time in rhymes that sear and shame our system, but she declares that sentiment is a wasted energy when dealing with the desperately demonic conditions about us.

In March 1868 Josephine Williamson was married to Captain William Henry of Versailles, Ky. Here she has since resided and here, about a year ago Captain Henry died. Grief has been an oft-time guest in the heart of Mrs. Henry. In 1891 the only son 23 years of age was cruelly crushed to death in a railroad wreck at Crete, Illinois, and times, and yet, she finds leisure to sympathize with the actors in the great tragedy of life, which is so often too intensely bitter for tears. As a field reformer Josephine K. Henry stands supreme—alone. Other women have courageously grappled single lines of work and gained much, and deserve credit, but property privilege, social inequality,

political intrigue, the disgraces of intemperance, the horrors of superstition, the terrors of the domestic dogmas which have made possible the economic dependence and sex enslavement of women—all have been assailed by our sister until the mountains of misery are beginning to diminish.

For over 20 years this indefatigable worker has been active in the political arena and with the aim always of securing consideration and a measure of justice for her suffering sisters. Her six year's fight in the Kentucky legislature to secure equal property rights for women was perhaps, her severest struggle. She wrote hundreds of articles for the press on property rights and the state was deluged with literature on the subject. Twenty thousand copies of one pamphlet alone being distributed. She spoke throughout the state and at every session of the Legislature for six long years. It was a weary work, but after seeing much of her private fortune melt away for the cause she championed, she was at last victorious, and Kentucky women, today, enjoy equal property rights with men through her effort.

We are told that "man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn," but women's ingratitude to women furnishes a full parallel, for years after when the writer became acquainted with Mrs. Henry and expressed appreciation of her work she said: "You are the first woman who has said a word of commendation."

For a number of years Mrs. Henry was auditor for the National Women's suffrage Association and spoke at the annual conventions in Washington, D. C., Atlanta, Ga. Grand Rapids, Mich. and many other places. She also served as Superintendent of Legislative and petition work for the Kentucky Women's Suffrage Association.

Eighteen years ago Josephine K. Henry was the candidate party for clerk of the Supreme Court of her State. In this campaign she was the first woman in the South to run for a State office. A few years later the same party nominated her for Superintendent of Public Instruction and later in the season the State Populist Convention proffered the same position on their ticket, which was a unique compliment.

Again she traversed the State making hundreds of speeches and we find her always in progressive paths always moving onward and away from the outworn and so-called sacred precedents—toward the humane actuality of "equal rights to all, special privileges to none."

The climax of her political career was

reached when she was named as a possibility for president of the United States, and the great dailies of the country consumed not only columns but pages in interviews and to the reproduction and discussion of the many creditable and concise recommendations by her for legislative procedure.

Mrs. Henry's political work has been prodigious. Her sustained courage nothing less than superb and her achievements stupendous, and while the work has been unusual for a woman, it entailed no actual animosity.

But harken to the howl of execration that arose when this pioneer for principle advanced still another step and attacked the mighty—monster—the religious superstition. The former not of affable toleration was dropped from discussion and when her javelin tipped with reason's point reached Jehovah's vital, a cry ascended from pulpit and people and press which drowned every plaudit that preceded it.

In seeking to secure equitable laws for her sisters, the champion of freedom had discovered that the subjection of Christian women throughout the centuries and their present degradation and economic dependence is due to Bible mandates and the administration of its precepts by the Priesthood, and though reviled by former friends and anathematized by religionists she calmly pursued the policy of exposing the inconsistencies and injustice of our Christian system.

In expressing herself on this point Mrs. Henry says: "I pride myself more in my Freethought work than all else I have tried to do." And she has accomplished much. Speaking at National and State Conventions, contributing to the numerous Freethought publications in the United States, Canada and England. Her name appended to an article decides the editor as to its worth. She is the only woman who appears in "Facts Worth Knowing," a pamphlet which has reached a circulation of 200,000. Her contribution in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's innovation—The Woman's Bible was highly commended by Mrs. Stanton who coincided with her estimate of Bible responsibility for wrong.

Mrs. Henry was one of the chief champions of Editor Charles C. Moore during his persecution by the uncompromising Christian enthusiasts and also a substantial supporter of the Blue Grass Blade and for many years almost a constant contributor.

For propaganda work this prolific writer has had published the pamphlets—Property Rights of Kentucky Women, Women and Christianity, Woman and the Bible, and Marriage and Divorce, all of which should be read and studied by credulous Christians.

Mrs. Henry has held office in the various Free Thought organizations and is now President of the American Freethought Association. Nor the least of her work as a

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