



P. GRAY MEEK At the age of 20 when he took charge of the Watchman

A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF THE WATCHMAN'S VETERAN EDITOR.

We shall not attempt a biography of the life of P. Gray Meek, for that would not be possible in the time given us nor would the space dedicated to his memory in this issue be sufficient to carry it.

He was a descendant of Robert Meek, who emigrated from Edinburg, Scotland, before the Revolutionary war, and who had six sons who served with Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania regiments in that conflict.

Born on his father's farm in Patton township July 12th, 1842, he was named Peter Gray in honor of the father of his mother who was Mary Ann Gray.

A program of an "Exhibition" at that Academy on the evening of April 7th, 1854, when he was not yet twelve years of age, presents him as having delivered two "Orations," appeared in a dialogue and a little play.

Two years later, when only fourteen years of age, he went to Lumber City, Clearfield county, to teach school and it has been family tradition that he lost his job because he was so small of stature that he could not control the large boys of the school.

On the day of his funeral John Q. Miles cleared him of this failure by referring to the incident and declaring that the juvenile pedagogue had not been run out, but mastered the situation and finished the term creditably.

His next occupation was as a clerk in Furst's store at Milroy where he remained until he returned to accept a similar position in the store of George Gates at Stormstown.

Stormstown was then a busy trade centre and at nights the big store was the rendezvous for scores of men. It was the duty of the young clerk to sleep in the place and it is little wonder that physical fear was hard to conceal by this undersized boy of less than sixteen when the primitive times and his sense of responsibility are considered.

And we here recall an incident that reveals a diamond in the rough so truly that we regard it worth recounting.

The late "Bill" McElhattan, so well known in Bellefonte, was one of the crowd that gathered nightly about the stove in Gates' store to tell ghost stories and swap yarns well calculated to make young blood run cold.

It was he who discovered the unred of the new clerk and it was he who left the crowd when locking up time came and slipped back to the store to offer company to the boy through the vigils of the night. In that gloomy, spooky room. And from that night until the one P. Gray Meek relinquished the job "Bill" McElhattan slept in the bed with him and never a soul knew of the unforgettable kindness it was.

He had saved a little money and with this he bought some patent rights on a churn. With an old horse and a two wheeled gig he started to make his fortune selling the rights.

His territory was through the New England States and his letters home reveal that all was not gold that glistened. His resourcefulness stood him in good stead, however, for he struck upon the happy practice of interesting some prospect with only one cow.

Then he would have to make headquarters there until they could accumulate enough cream for a churn-

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ing, all the time slipping out into nearby territory locating other probable buyers.

STARTING HIS CAREER IN JOURNALISM.

In the early fall of 1861, then slightly over 18 years of age, he came to Bellefonte and in partnership with the late Senator Cyrus T. Alexander, rented the "Democratic Watchman," which was then owned by Samuel Shugert, Daniel Garman, John Hofer and one other gentleman whose name we cannot recall, but our impression is that it was Major William F. Reynolds.

It turned out that Alexander was for Douglass and Meek was for Breckenridge and as they could not reconcile their differences they could not agree upon a policy for the paper.

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It was not the moral principle of slavery that he stood against. It was what he regarded as a violation of a fundamental tenet of Democracy, the rights of the States, but in the heat and passion of those awful days, he was misunderstood.

In 1863 he was arrested and taken before Squire Weaver on the charge of "high treason" and bound over, Samuel Gilliland having become his bondsman.

In 1864 he was twice arrested for publishing articles that grated harshly upon the ears of those who opposed freedom of the press and the Democratic party.

On the way to the jail he slipped a note, which he had written during the five minutes the lieutenant had accorded him in which to complete his business with Mr. Stitzer, to John Moran.

It was a message to his young wife, then almost a total stranger and with scarce a friend in the town, apprising her of his predicament. That afternoon he was marched down the street to the station and started on the way to a military prison in Harrisburg.

A crowd followed the procession, some friends were in it, but for the most part it was a hooting, menacing gathering. There was more of prophecy than he knew in one shout of a friend, the old Jewish merchant, Abram Sussman, who shouted from his store front: "You may take him to Harrisburg now, but by God we'll send him down there to make laws for you before we get through with this."

He remained in the famous cotton factory prison from Tuesday until the next Tuesday when he was released upon taking an oath to return for trial when never called. What the charge was he never knew as he was never called.

IN MEMORIAM.

It seems peculiarly appropriate that "The Democratic Watchman" should dedicate this page to the memory of its veteran owner and editor. For here, throughout the fifty-seven years he was in uninterrupted control of the paper his written words have been recorded in hopeful advocacy and unwavering defense of the principles of Democracy.

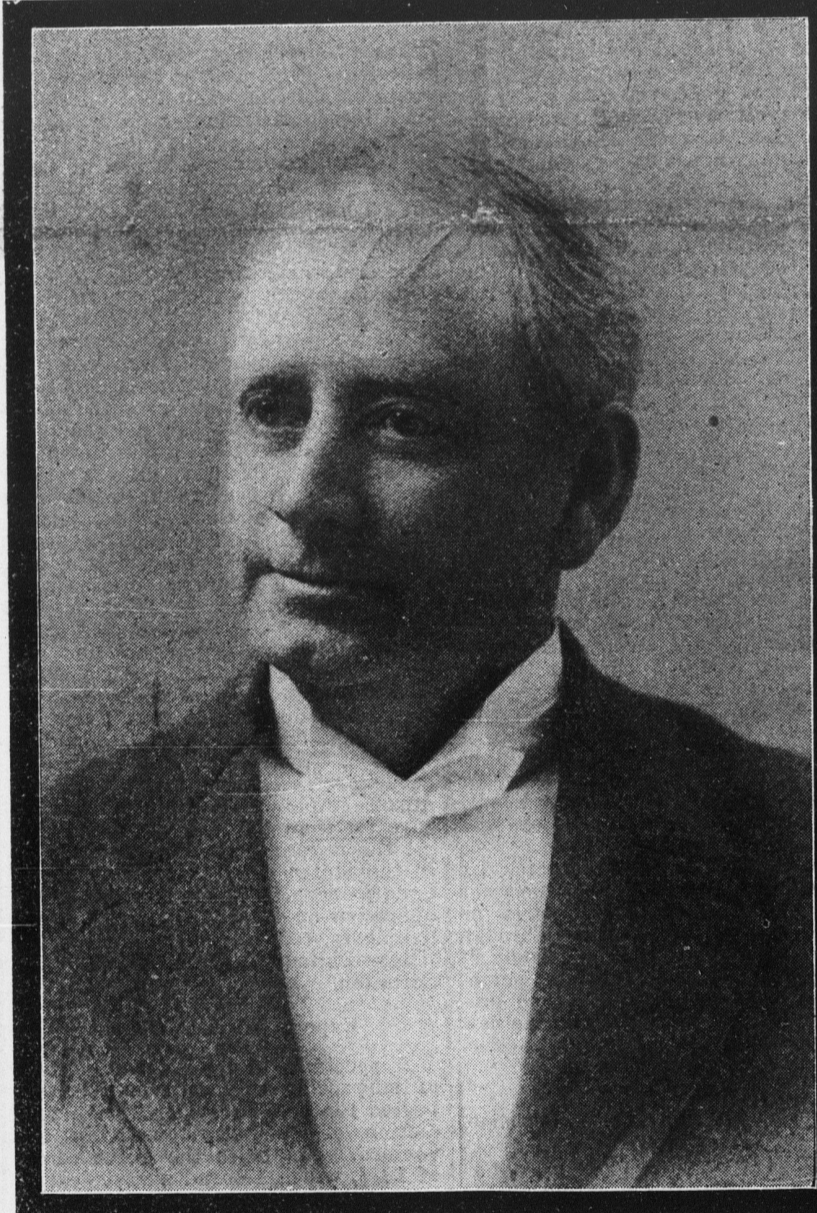
So indissolubly have the man and the journal been associated for more than half a century, and so consistently has it propounded his ideals of right in all things that P. Gray Meek and "The Democratic Watchman" have come to be synonymous terms wherever either is known.

Born to Democratic journalism in the bitter travail of Civil war times his career has not been without its tragedies. Insulted, mobbed, imprisoned he clung to his convictions with a tenacity and courage that turned odium into respect and commanded serious consideration of his opinions.

P. Gray Meek and "The Democratic Watchman" have ever been constructive; insofar as it was given them to distinguish the things that were right from the things that were wrong.

As to the measure of his services to his fellow men others must speak. As to the final summing up of his life's work as editor of this paper there can be no such text of the balance for what is written is written and so long as men read and think his voice will be heard and continue to mould some thought.

Through the gloom of the separation of the man and his medium there looms a heartening hope. A hope that if others of his public services fade in the memory of man this journal, "The Democratic Watchman," may courageously go forward a living monument to him who made it.



P. GRAY MEEK At the age of 55

In May of 1865 he was arrested for the last time by United States marshal Hartshorn, upon the oath of a Clearfield postmaster named Frank. He was taken to Pittsburgh and bound over for appearance before the United States circuit court sitting in Erie.

Later the marshal offered to settle the case for \$300, but the proposal was refused and trial demanded. It never came and that indictment, if there was one, is still on the docket.

Two years later, on August 10th, 1867, he was chosen by acclamation by the Democratic county convention as its candidate for Assemblyman, and in the issue of the "Watchman" of August 16th we find one of the only two references this modest man has ever made to his own ambitions in the paper that he edited for fifty-seven years. It follows:

"The editor of this paper has to thank his fellow Democrats for the unusual compliment of a nomination by acclamation for a first term in the Assembly. His record is well known and the sentiments he has often expressed remain unchanged. Should he be elected, of course, he will do all that in his judgment will be best for

the interests of the party and the county." He was elected by a majority of 615. Joseph L. Neff, of Potter township, was his opponent.

He was nominated in 1868 and elected by a majority of 312. Andrew Gregg was his opponent.

In pursuance of the rotation rule he declined to be a candidate in 1869, but entered the lists again in 1870 and was elected by a majority of 714. His opponent was R. H. Duncan.

In this campaign, both for the nomination and the election, he had serious opposition within his own party for he had advocated the repeal of the Public Library act, which was really a camouflaged Law Library, which authorized the purchase of law books with public funds.

This was resented by the lawyers everywhere and they made trouble for the one who dared to destroy their rights—as they viewed them. He had pushed through his railroad fence law for Centre county and his lumbermen's act, referred to in another column of this issue in the splendid tribute paid his memory by Hon. Ellis L. Orvis, however, and the farmers, lumbermen and

THE TRIBUTE OF HIS FELLOW CITIZENS.

Bellefonte paid tribute to the memory of P. Gray Meek by stopping all business at 9:30 Wednesday morning and gathering at the Court House for a public memorial service.

Mr. Hammon Sechler was chosen chairman of the gathering and opened the meeting with the following remarks:

All of the responses were voluntary and are published in their order: Gentlemen: It is altogether right and proper that a meeting of our townsmen should be held today to pay our last tribute of respect and admiration for our departed friend.

He was a man of kind disposition, a good neighbor, a good home man. In addition to that, a man of wide reputation, a man of distinction, a man known far and wide. Of that part of his life I will not attempt to speak.

They are others here who are far better qualified to speak of those things than I am, and in the few moments I will ask your attention, I will confine myself to speaking of P. Gray Meek—the neighbor, the citizen, the friend, the character of every-day life here amongst us.

Coming to Bellefonte over fifty years ago, having no knowledge of man, nor woman nor child in Centre county. I had no trouble in forming acquaintances very quickly, and some very pleasant and very satisfactory acquaintances, but in the course of a few days after my arrival I went to the "Watchman" office to put an advertisement in his paper when I started in business.

I had no recollection then that I had ever seen Mr. Meek, and did not know who he was until I went into his office. It was only a few minutes I was there, the call was a short one, but when I left I found we were quite well acquainted.

We did not have to get acquainted, we found ourselves acquainted. The conversation passed was of an ordinary character, but when I came away after that short visit I discovered that I had not only made an acquaintance, but that I had found a friend.

He appealed to me—the reception he gave me and the conversation we had—so that when I came away I knew I had a friend besides an acquaintance, and it proved to be a friendship that was vast and sincere, and now of over fifty years standing.

It never diminished, it was over fifty years of continual, uninterrupted friendship. It might not be worth speaking of here at this time, but that is not the thought. The thought is that that was characteristic of the man, coming from his heart, and no doubt in this audience now there are other men who came to Bellefonte about that time who can give the same testimony of the same friendship and friendly feeling he exercised toward me.

It was characteristic of the man. From that day to this there has hardly been a day that there was not some interchange of friendship in business, or social life, or in some transaction. I will say to you younger men, which you will find as you pass along, it was a friendship that was formed and grew continuously and was cemented together for over fifty years, and it will cost us a sincere wrench of heart that we can't get away from.

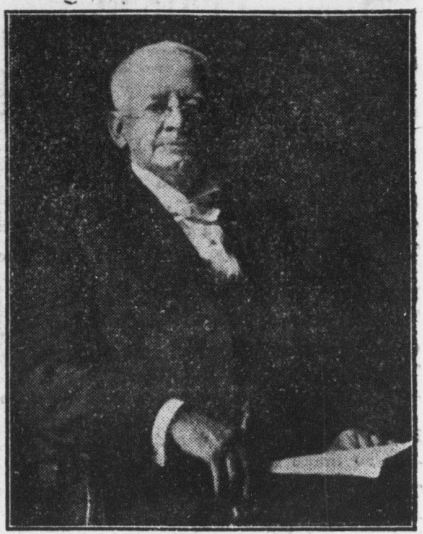
As my last tribute of respect to our neighbor and friend, speaking figuratively I would like always to have a wreath to lay on his bier as a token of my love and admiration of the friendship I have enjoyed with P. Gray Meek.

Honorable Ellis L. Orvis: Fellow Citizens: It is my honorable duty by a committee on resolutions to present these resolutions, and I will make a few remarks on the life and character of our distinguished fellow citizen. These remarks must necessarily be brief because the clock shows the approaching hour of ten, and the funeral services begin at half past ten, and there are others here who should and must express some tribute to his memory.

As our chairman was speaking the thought was born strong in me, and it is shared amongst us, that as years are given to us of life, we must pay a heavy price for that life. It becomes our duty to bury our dead comrades. It is the price of life. With the death of Senator Meek has passed away a generation of giants. He is the last of a remarkable coterie of distinguished men that reflect so much lustre on their birth place and home—men, who just before the Civil war and during that frightfulness in our country's history, distinguished themselves, Bellefonte and Centre county, by their prominence in State and nation.

They leave no survivors amongst us, and the remarkable thing is that Senator Meek born of that generation, many of whom have passed away, twenty, thirty or forty years ago, has survived, out-lived them all, and at this late hour he occupies a very large space in my life's experience, and you can realize how solemn it is therefore for me on this sad occasion.

Mr. Meek was a remarkable man in this respect, that he came to Bellefonte almost sixty years ago as a boy, only nineteen or twenty years of age, and looked much younger—looked like a youth you remember, and how young



P. GRAY MEEK At the age of 73 when he gave up active work

he looked for so many years! He assumed the editorship of the "Watchman" and immediately made it a prominent journal in the State. Assumed the leadership in his county before he could vote. I challenge a comparison in this county. Became a State leader while he was a boy. A man of that type has many activities and in so brief a time we can't touch upon them all, but I should say, roughly speaking, his life flowed in four great currents, that of a journalist, a legislator, a politician and a man of family life, and in all these activities or channels he achieved distinction and notice.

Under his management, as I said before, the "Watchman" immediately became one of the foremost papers in the State. Printed as it was in an interior county, in a very small town, it only became so because of his peculiar ability and force. The "Watchman" for fifty-five years at least has been more quoted than any other county paper in the State. He showed his taste by at once making one of the most tasteful, most agreeable looking papers in the State. It has an unique appearance. None of you can recall a newspaper resembling it in its appearance.

Mr. Meek was not only strong, he was belligerent. When he stood for anything he stood for it not only strongly, but fiercely. He fought hard, and therefore made strong enemies. During the stress and deep feeling of the Civil war he felt it his duty to oppose the policies of the National Administration, and he criticized fiercely, so much so at one time that a company of soldiers was sent here and he was arrested and taken to Harrisburg to be tried for treason, of which he was honorably acquitted, and so from that time to this, however varied his activities away from here, he never permitted his paper to weaken in its influence. He always cared for it and saw to it that the "Watchman" should not only represent his views but represent them in such a way that it would affect the thought of the State. So Bellefonte has always been justly proud of this paper, and he is one of the sons of Centre county who has created for himself a distinction as a journalist, and his life is unique in that respect.

While still a boy he was elected to the Legislature in 1868, and he was re-elected, I think, in 1871. He made his mark there. Coming from a rural section of this county his sympathies were always with the farmer, and therefore one of the first objects he had was to have passed a law of fences—a law that is still on the statute books and has proved itself a friend of the farmer. It would be very unpopular to repeal that legislation today, and is possibly the only piece of legislation that creates a law in this county and the neighboring county of Clinton that is a general law with regard to fences.

In 1871 the great industry of central Pennsylvania was lumbering. Millions of dollars were invested in it, and thousands of men were employed. At one time the Susquehanna in the spring was crowded with the rafts of the beautiful and magnificent forest groves of Pennsylvania—the beautiful white pine. Our men would go out in the mountains and work there the winter in those days, and it was the custom of the lumberman to buy the camps and food for his men during the winter, and then sell his logs in the spring to some town further down the river. The result was that the men's wages would accumulate during the winter and be at the risk of their employer. The lumbermen in those days were largely speculative. I presume 75 per cent. of them failed in those times, resulting in the sweeping away of the accumulated wages of their men. Senator Meek, in sympathy with the poor man, and that was a distinct characteristic of the man, had passed the lumberman's law, allowing him to collect his wages, and forcing upon the buyer to take notice whether the wages of those men were cared for. And there was considerable other legislation that ought to be referred to, but concerning which we haven't time to mention.

Afterwards Senator Meek became the Chief Clerk of the House. As we all know, that is one of the most important positions at Harrisburg, and in the earlier days even more important than today, when legislation was passed in a much more loose way than today, when legislation was probably more in the hands of the Chief Clerk than in the committees. He filled that position, responsible as it was, with general credit to himself and satisfaction to the State. Later this district made him Senator by one of the largest majorities ever given to a candidate for that office in this district.

But I can say without hesitation that P. Gray Meek's life was more noted in his political activities than in any other line. He was a born politician, he was a successful politician, an unique politician. In the Civil war he was a stormy opponent in the State, abhorred by Republicans, worshipped by Democrats, and yet he was able by his charming personality, to overcome the bitterness of his earlier years, and I say without hesitation

(Continued on page 4, Col. 4.)