

As the wife of Mr. Colfax, the Vice President elect, as the latest sensation, and the observed of all observers, in Washington, and as the newspapers are teeming with glowing accounts of her sweet personifications, would it be very inappropriate for one who numbers her face among the pictures in his boyhood's gallery, and whose youthful memory paints her girlhood in fresh warm ^{traits} characters, to venture to send you a few lines in regard to an old playmate, made famous by the love of a good great man? I have often wondered, when thinking of her late nuptials, if among the friends whose warm wishes she knew followed her, into her new sphere she counted the two old ^{schoolmates} classmates at R—, whom fate or chance, or a kind Providence, tossing up and down on the turbulent waves of civil war had finally left high and dry in reconstructed North Carolina. Born in an adjoining township, knowing well her entire family from my earliest childhood and but two years her junior, I may be said to know Nellie^m Wade and her characteristics. We did not call her "Nellie" then, but a noble Latin name more befitting the delicate girl, was the pet name of her younger days. There is no one in whom exaltation every friend can more heartily rejoice than hers. Possessing the strong, sturdy common-sense, and something of that slowness of growth which characterizes the wades, she ever and which shows forth so prominently and strongly in that grand old

Senator who now fills the seat which her husband
is soon to occupy, she unites with it the tender warmth
and delicacy which distinguishes her mother's family,
with that perpetual thirst for intellectual nourishment
which characterizes the young woman of the Western
Reserve, — that neutral ground on which the charac-
teristics of the East and West, meet and mingle
with such strange and subtle results, where the intensity
and laborious refinement, the perfect polish and tem-
pered kindness of New England, begins to be toned down
and modified by the widening influences of the Great
North-west. In her younger days, before the last decade
had fanned the flame of intellect in the States further to the
~~westward~~ westward, this Western Reserve, the daughter
of Connecticut, — its very name marking the great
purpose for which it was "reserved," and giving an
educational tone and aspiration to all those New-
England families who sought there a home, was just
on the edge of that intellectual flame, of which
New England is the focus. There was no part of the
West so like its parent mother. There was no part of
New England but what claimed kinship with the Reserve.
The warm home spirit of New England, and its puritanic
activity, was modified here, by the width of view and
forbearing charity which peculiarly marks the Great
West. There is no part of the West which has so little

Corruption of the old New England Stock as this region of the Reserve. There is not to be found west of the heels in ~~a~~ ^{another} region of one fourth its extent - unless it be a portion of Kansas, - which has as slight an admixture of foreign or Middle State blood. Not one family in ten but ~~of~~ ^{draws} its stanchness originally from the mountains of New England. A thrifty race upon a soil of moderate fertility, great wealth and great destitution are alike almost unknown. No where else in the United States is republicanism, liberty and equality so well exemplified. The change from New England often reversed the relations of the various families. The "Brahmin" blood of many old families did not give them any preeminence in the Reserve, and so it came that what has formed a sort of aristocracy in Massachusetts Rhode Island and Connecticut, an aristocracy too as contemptible and despicable as the F. F. Vism. of the South, ^{only}, thank God, not so extensive and deeply rooted, was nipped in the bud, and the Reserve never knew an aristocracy, until Aildon poured its short-lived crowd of puffed up parvenus into its borders. The result of this was that in intelligence and morality, this region stood proudly preeminent, a preeminence which it still maintains. In opinion liberal, in act puritanically strict, it is a region of exceptional morality and philanthropy. Perhaps in no other class is the peculiarity of this region so noticeable as in its young women. Education is a mania almost

This fact clearly appears in the political history of this region. It has been Whig and Republican ever since the days in which "the memory of man runneth not to the contrary." ~~It was the~~ Astabula was the banner county of whiggery in the days of the "Great Henry", and curiously enough the township from which Mrs Schuyler Colfax comes was the banner township of the United States when Clay was defeated, and also when Lincoln was elected. It is not strange that the representatives of such a people should have taken the stand which Fiddings and Wells maintained upon the subject of Slavery. They could not have done otherwise. They represented the Reason because they spoke the thoughts and sentiments which beat in the breasts of three fourths of the people of that region, and spoke them earnestly and bravely. They were the ^{brave} teachings of the mother spoken by brave sons.

Writings on
Nelle Wade
Colfax
The President's
wife of the
Western
Reserve

with them. It does not seem to be sought, as in New England as a means for the attainment of an end or as in other regions as an accomplishment, but chiefly for itself. Surrounded by these influences, one of this people was Nellie Wade. Not one of an aristocracy looking with scorn upon the people, nor one whose life was dwarfed by a perpetual struggle with want, but one of the people, gaining her own development, with the sturdy self-reliance which characterizes the young women of that region. The education which she received, or rather which she acquired, was in no sense superficial. It did not partake of the flabbiness of female seminarianism. She was not sent to school, but went there. She did not dawdle but studied. I well remember while at the Academy, that she always stood well in her classes. Here she received a thorough and commonsense drill, an actual education. The finish which I doubt not true experience and society have put upon this substantial framework I cannot speak of, but I can well believe the reports that she is self-possessed and collected on all occasions. She could not be otherwise, with that strong vitality, genuine common sense, and thorough education. She was a frank, earnest-hearted, ^{unassuming} girl, and these characteristics she will ever retain. With a mind of such tone and a youth of such experience, she is fitted to be the wife of the pure-hearted Statesman who has chosen her. She is a jewel,

"pale as the icicle

That's curled by the frost from forest snow
and hangs on Dian's temple."

She has no moral snobishness which shuts its eyes on vice.
She has no kinship with female lobbyists, and ~~would~~ ^{believes}
~~block at the presence of a Mrs. Cab~~ in the right as firmly
as her husband. She is the right kind of a woman to have
a place in society at Washington, not a mere lady
but that nobler thing - an American woman. Her in-
fluence will be healthy. The mere thing of fashion, the but-
terfly the smooth, will be abashed at her presence. A
few more such in positions of assured influence
would do much to purify Washington.

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

Nellie Wade Coffey
(vice president's wife)
of the Western
Reserve

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