

## Anna Hitz

(17 Dec 1796 – 6 Mar 1883)

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*The Evening Star, March 6, 1883*

### **The Death of "Mother Hitz"**

#### **Interesting Reminiscences of the Hitz Family**

Mrs. Anna Hitz, whose death is announced, was the widow of John Hitz, Sr., and was born December 17, 1796, in Switzerland. In early life, as an exquisite miniature verifies, she was a noted village belle, beloved by all for her gentleness and exemplary character. Of her numerous suitors she accepted and was married, December 3, 1820, to the son of her employer, the most prominent man of the locality and then largely engaged in mining operations. Her husband, a thoroughly trained mining engineer carried on mining on a large scale in several localities. The public and self-sacrificing spirit of her father-in-law brought upon the family well nigh financial ruin and determined him and his son in the year 1831 to seek in America a wider and more remunerative field of activity for their energies and enterprise.

Hardly had they arrived in port at New York when illness and disaster sought its victims. One of the party was fatally burned and within one year three children of the subject of this sketch were buried. Thereupon the family, by canal and wagon, found its way to Washington in the vicinity whereof the elder Hitz leased a farm from a countryman of his, Mr. Paul Kinchy, and established the first thoroughly equipped dairy in this locality, whilst the younger Hitz proceeded with his wife and children to Fredericksburg, Va., to assume charge of an extensive mining enterprise inaugurated in Spotsylvania county by New York capitalists. Finally, returning to Washington, her husband temporarily assumed charge of the dairy established by his father, who in the meantime had died, and Mrs. Hitz again, within the space of one year, was called on to mourn the loss of three children. In 1853 Mr. Hitz was appointed consul general of Switzerland by the Swiss government, which position he held to the date of his decease in 1864.

Civil war had in the meantime set in, and among the first women found busy visiting the camps and hospitals which soon sprung up in and around Washington was Mrs. Ann Hitz, who seemed tireless in affording relief and giving comfort to the suffering. She went literally about "doing good," and so endeared herself to soldiers and others as to receive on all hands the appellation of "Mother Hitz," which mark of endearment has ever since been preserved to her. Her labors of love did not cease with the war, however, but the sick and the distressed, the forlorn and poor; never appealed to her in vain. Of thirteen children born to her, but three are now living--a son in Renovo, Pa., and a son, the late consul general of Switzerland, and Mrs. Margaret Scheitlin, in Washington; in addition to which are a large number of grand and several great grandchildren.

Mrs. Hitz was originally a member of and christened in the German Reformed church; then for many years the family was connected with the Unitarian Society of this city, and latterly Mrs. Hitz became an attendant and parishioner of Dr. Chester's Metropolitan Presbyterian church, in the immediate vicinity of her place of residence.

*Moore, Frank, Women of the War; Their Heroism and Self-Sacrifice, Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton & Co, 1867*

#### **Mrs. Ann Hitz**

In all the large cities along the border there were a number of ladies whose age or whose family cares did not allow them to leave home for sanitary enterprises, who, notwithstanding these circumstances, performed a large amount of very valuable hospital service. Washington city, especially,

furnished many of these local visitors, and among them none, perhaps, was more active, or impelled by higher motives, than the wife of the resident Swiss consul, Mr. John Hitz.

The circumstances that Mrs. Hitz is a foreign lady makes her conduct the more praiseworthy. Many of the ladies were drawn towards the army by the strongest ties. They had sons, brothers, husbands, and old neighbors in the various regiments. In hospitals they often met those they had known all their lifetime, and when bathing a fevered head or bandaging a shattered arm, the thought would often arise, "Perhaps some other woman is at this moment doing this very kindness to my brother." But the charity of Mrs. Hitz could have no such incentives. The union of the American states was a political question in which she could not be expected to feel a direct interest. The number of Swiss enlisted in the Union ranks was small; but the fact that she spoke the languages of Central Europe and could appreciate the feelings of the Germans, and address them in their mother tongue, made her presence in the Washington hospitals peculiarly grateful to that large class of recruits who could speak but little English.

"Among the arrivals of troops just before the first battle at Bull Run, were the Twelfth and Twenty-fifth New York. They were quartered on Capitol Hill, near the Casparis House. Wet and weary when they arrived, no preparation had been made to receive them, no refreshments were at hand, and the commissary arrangements were imperfect. Our house was near the camp, and my husband threw open our doors, and we went to work with a will.

"All the boilers we could find were filled with coffee, and we collected all the bread we could either buy or beg. Among these volunteers we found some little German drummer boys, one of them so homesick for his mother! 'O, madame,' he would exclaim, 'may I come and see you every day? You are so like my mother!' Poor boy! In a day or two marching orders came, and they went out to that first, disastrous battle. When he came to bid me good-by, he said, 'Please pray for me and my comrade; he has no mother.' The tears fell as I asked God to bless them both. They were in the engagement the next day; one was killed and the other taken prisoner, but managed to make his escape.

"My husband, as Swiss consul, and a member of the German Aid Society, visited the hospitals almost daily, and becoming well known, wherever a patient was brought in whose language could not be understood, we were sent for. One poor man from New York City, whose mind was much affected by his sufferings, could not be induced to take any food except such as I cooked and carried him. In his delirium he imagined that I was indeed his mother, and that the nurse was trying to poison him.

"On his return to the North, as he passed through Baltimore, he recognized the place where the regiment to which he belonged had been attacked by the mob, and recovered his wandering senses. From his brother I afterwards received a letter of grateful acknowledgment for what I had been able to do for him in his suffering and helpless condition.

"One of the nurses in the Armory Square Hospital sent me word that there was a patient there whose language no one of them could understand. On going down I found a poor German, suffering sadly from a wounded limb, unable to make his wants known, and apparently about to die.

"As soon as I spoke to him, the effect of a few words of his mother tongue operated like magic. For some time I attended him daily, and all seemed well, till one day a sudden change came upon him. He sent a special message to me, and I took with me a priest to his bedside, as he was a Catholic. We saw him die in peace.

"After the great battle of Antietam, when even the Capitol was crowded with the wounded, Dr. Campbell came to me one morning, and wished me to visit one of the patients in the old House of Representatives. I found there a poor fellow from Pennsylvania refusing to take either food or medicine, but begging for someone to pray for him. I knelt by his cot, and when I arose he was calm, and willing to do anything I advised him. He recovered, and always insisted that it was that prayer that saved his life.

"At Mount Pleasant Hospital there was another patient who had not found any one who could understand a word he said, till they sent for me.

"He was delirious, and believed the nurses, and even his own wife, who had now come to attend him, were trying to poison him, and he would not take a mouthful of food. After praying with him and dressing his wounds, he grew calm, and consented to do everything I wished of him.

"Several cases like this came under my care, and I found no difficulty in managing them. My only secret was, that I never lost patience with them, listened quietly to all their complaints, sympathized with their hardships, and gradually led them to do what was for the best."

Miss Hall, Mrs. Fowle, and all who were active in the Washington hospitals, unite in their praises of Ms. Hitz. Hundreds of sick and dying Germans made her their mother confessor, and she could be seen almost every day sitting by the cot of some sufferer, and reading blessed words of heavenly consolation in tones that recalled the fatherland and the home from which they were so far away. She was beloved and honored by a great number of American soldiers, whose names she never knew, and whose faces she has forgotten.

"When travelling in the East," she writes, "I have been at many places unexpectedly recognized by fine-looking young men, who came forward with, 'Mother Hitz,' don't you remember me?' My experience," she adds, "among the American soldiers has been altogether a most pleasant one. Certainly more patient, God-fearing men could not be found in any army; and it is but a just tribute to the young men of this country for me to say, that in all my visits among them in camps and hospitals, as long as the war continued, I never heard a word improper for the ear of a lady."