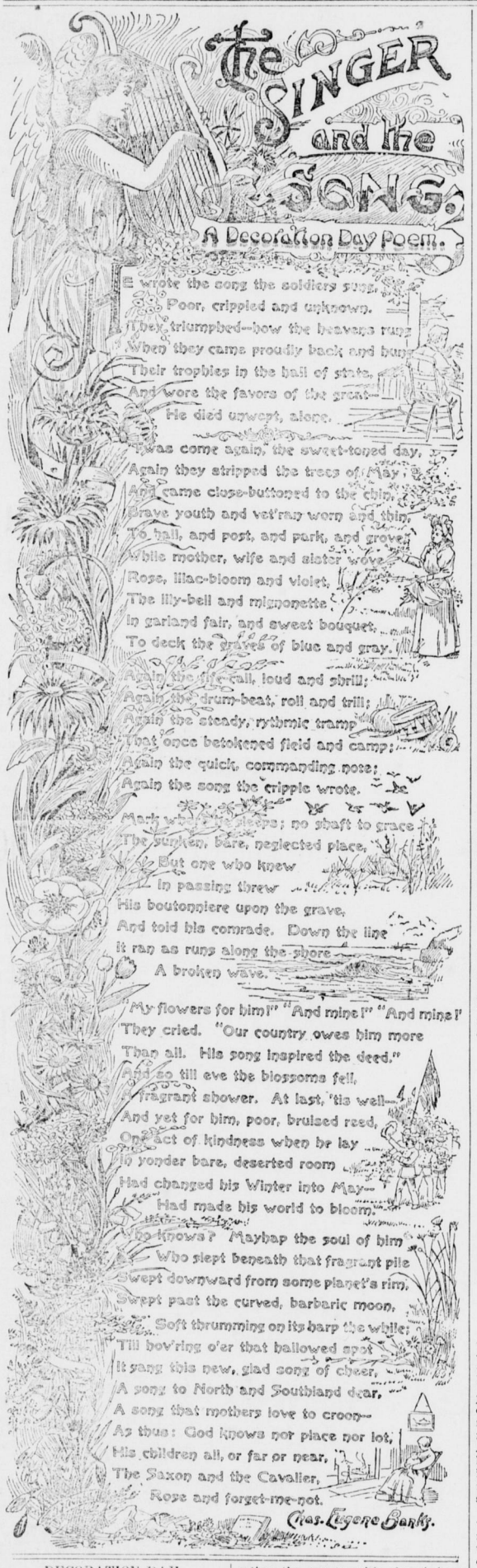

DECORATION DAY.

BY WILLIAM ROSSER CORBE.

Out from the long past comes the memory of a nameless soldier grave and of a heart that broke because her love was not. Out from the past come the shadows of numberless unknown and named heroes, who gave their all of life to perpetuate the union. In the trying times of strife and carnage, when cannons belched and muskets flashed death everywhere, little mounds of earth sprang up in rows here and there in the southland. The memory of these known and unknown dead suggested the beautiful custom of decorating the graves with the choicest flowers of spring, the practice proclaiming to the children and children's children forever that the deeds of these men who died for God and country shall be memorialized as long as courage rates as a virtue.

As time passed members of the army of veterans who returned to their homes dropped out of life, so that now, besides the great national burial places in the south, every cemetery of the north is hallowed by the presence of sleeping soldiers. Wherever these heroes lie flowers are taken at each recurring anniversary and placed as votive gifts upon every sacred altar grave of liberty. History tells of sky-piercing monoliths, of colossal statues and artistic mausoleums erected to the memory of great captains of conquering armies, while thought—if thought there was at all—of the hosts of common soldiers who poured out their life blood for the glory of these chieftains, was as a flitting fancy at eventide, banished with its birth. It remained for the American people, who govern for themselves and are alone supreme, to declare that the humblest life sacrificed in the cause of freedom is as sacred as the penates of the household—as priceless as that of the general who bared his breast to death-dealing bullets.

The problem of human government must be sought to be solved by each successive generation. Blessed is that one which throws such added light that the next one may discern with clearer vision the working of the still-to-be-solved question. The errors of a people—their discontent and mistakes, may sorely try the safety as well as the perpetuity of a government. The labors, the pains and the sorrows of the soldier army must ever serve as warning, as entreaty, as encouragement and as strength to the living and their successors. Each returning Decoration day teaches the lesson of the priceslessness of liberty and union.

For the soldiers who sleep and the cause for which they died the wooded dells are searched, the broad fields are scanned and cultivated gardens are stripped of their choicest gifts. Hail the nation that honors its defenders, dead and living, and let Decoration day be and abide forever, a holy day in the nation. Time has softened the asperities of other days; the opposing passions of men, whose differences were based upon honest conclusions, have been subdued into respect and admiration for the courage that stamped the action of each in the trying times of infinite peril, and a common country is the heritage of all. The custom of decorating the graves is in no sense an awakener of strife, but a sublime tribute to exalted worth.

The once ensanguined fields of the south are now being turned over by bright plowshares, and will presently yield fair harvests to the peaceful workers; the voices of the mockingbird and brown thrush fill with melody the groves through which once passed hostile armies. The sound of war is heard no more in the land, and may the memories and lessons of Decoration day preserve an everlasting peace to the nation. The one great baptism of blood should be efficient to the perpetual sealing of the republic in peace and harmony throughout the length and breadth of the land.

BARNEY JENNINGS' CHARGE.

Barney Jennings lived a very uneventful life in his Carolina home until the breaking out of the late civil war. His opportunities were very few, and he had not availed himself of those he might have seized. He was a shiftless, harmless, happy-go-lucky fellow, with abundance of leisure and little or no cash.

When he offered his services as a soldier in the southern army the captain was averse to accepting him because of his unsavory reputation, and only yielded after most urgent entreaty on the part of the ne'er-do-weel. Barney served in the army of the Potomac, or James, participating in the leading battles and winning an enviable name as a fighter. Had he been able to read or write he would have been given a commission.

Alas! at Chancellorsville poor Jennings had his left leg shot away, and his soldier days ended, much to his disgust and discomfiture. Returning home, he hobbled about on a "peg-leg," surrendering himself to whisky drinking and fighting over again his battles, under the "stoops" of the village stores or before the tall bars of the saloons.

HIS LAST TRIBUTE.

Whatever scruples he may have had before the war as to accepting charity, he now felt himself a proper ward of the community. Poor fellow! his appetite for liquor grew stronger every day, and he soon passed into a state of nearly continuous inebriety. His heart nearly broke when tidings came from Appomattox; but, like a brave soldier, he accepted the issues of battle, saying. "The feller wot lams yer is jestefied in hol'in' on s'long's his hilt do'n' slip."

Before Barney fought at Chancellorsville there had been a battle near his native village, and in the little cemetery were graves of union as well as confederate soldiers who had fallen in that contest. Those of the former were in a group in a deserted and neglected corner of the burial ground, and when the beautiful custom was inaugurated of decorating with flowers the sleeping places of the heroes Barney was greatly distressed because the programme did not include those of former foemen.

"They mought er been wrong," he persisted, "in pilin' down onter us, but they fit p'intedly, 'n' I reckon they'd wives 'n' mammies that cried over 'em."

But Barney was a trifle ahead of his neighbors in spirit of amity. The day came, when a wealth of flowers was spread over each southern soldier's grave, while no thought was bestowed upon those that were concealed by weeds, beneath the scraggy oaks and elms. When the speeches and hymns were over a party of young people strayed down in the union quarter, and their astonishment was great when they saw that every grave was covered generously with wild flowers. Near by they saw Barney extended upon weeds his bloated body had broken by its weight.

The touching tribute was Barney's last act upon earth; for he never awoke from the sleep into which he had fallen. He died beside the graves of former enemies, whose courage had inspired his praiseworthy action.

When the next anniversary day came loving hearts recalled Barney's charge over in the deserted corner, and since that time no distinction has been made in that little cemetery between the union and the confederate dead.

HISTORY OF THE DAY.

The custom of decorating with fragrant spring flowers the graves of departed friends is an old one, but the observance of Decoration day as it is understood to-day is shrouded in some mystery, in spite of the fact that the significant national rite is not yet thirty years old. Towns innumerable, both in the north and in the south, lay claim to having originated the day. After sifting, with perfect impartiality, all the testimony relating to the important subject, the best authorities are inclined to accord to Mrs. Charles J. Williams, of Columbus, Ga., the honor of being the mother of Decoration day.

But before speaking at length of this noble southern woman, who saw in "Memorial day" a grand opportunity to reunite the surviving heroes of the struggle between north and south, it might be well to state that the decoration of soldiers' graves did not become a really national custom until 1868, in which year, under date of May 5, Gen. John A. Logan, commander in chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued a general order from which we quote:

"The 30th day of May is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the land. In this observance no form of ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit."

When Gen. Logan issued this order he had no idea that young and old,

GEN. JOHN A. LOGAN.

soldier and civilian, would respond to his simple appeal with patriotic enthusiasm and that Decoration day would become one of the established holidays of the nation. And there is no reason to believe that the beautiful custom will ever cease to be observed. If there were, the Americans of the future need but recall these words of gallant John A. Logan to remind them of the duty they owe to the men who died to save their country:

"We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the nation can do to add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of our slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed mounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect—no ravages of time—testify to the present or coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cause of a free and undivided public. If other eyes grow dull and their hands slacken and their hearts grow cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as light and warmth of life remain to us. Let us then at the time appointed gather around their sacred remains and garland the passionless mounds above them with the choicest flowers of spring time. Let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor. Let us in this solemn presence renew our pledges to aid and assist those whom they have left among us, a sacred charge upon a nation's gratitude—the soldiers' and sailors' widows and orphans."

With reverence and gratitude the aged, the fair and the young of our land strew the graves of the departed heroes with bright blossoms upon every returning 30th of May. They remember the service rendered by the dead. But they have learned to do more. They have been taught to make pleasant the last days and respect the gray hairs of those who survived the war and are even now preparing to join their comrades in the grand encampment on the other shore. It is well that while we moisten with a tear the hallowed grave of a departed friend, we lend a helping hand and give a cordial smile to the wheezing veteran by our side.

The southern Memorial day owes, as has been said, its origin to Mrs. Mary Anna Williams, of Columbus, Ga. Mrs. Williams was the daughter of Maj. John Howard, of Milledgeville, Ga.,

Mary Anna Williams

MRS. WILLIAMS AND HER AUTOGRAPH.

and was a superior woman. She combined the loveliest womanly traits of character with that self-reliance and determination generally attributed to the sterner sex. She was liberally educated in the best schools of Charleston, S. C., and Philadelphia, and was accomplished in music, painting and languages. She married Maj. J. C. Williams on his return from the Mexican war. He was a lawyer of high standing and speaker of the house of representatives about the time the war broke out. While colonel of the First Georgia Regulars in the army of Virginia he contracted disease from which he died in 1862, and was buried in Columbus, Ga. Mrs. Williams and her little daughter visited his grave every day, and often comforted themselves by wreathing it with flowers. While the mother sat thinking of the loved and lost ones, the little girl would pluck the weeds from the unmarked soldiers' graves near her father's, and cover them with flowers, calling them "her soldiers' graves," and say they had no one else to care for them. After a short while the dear little girl was summoned by the angels to join her father. The sorely-bereaved mother then took charge of these unknown graves for the child's sake, and as she cared for them thought of the patriots' graves throughout the south, far away from home and kindred, and in this way the plan was suggested to her of setting apart one day in each year that love might pay tribute to valor throughout the southern states. In March, 1866, she addressed a communication to the daily paper at Columbus suggesting our "Memorial day" custom. She then wrote to the Soldiers' Aid societies, and they readily responded, and reorganized under the lead of memorial associations. Mrs. Williams died April 15, 1874, and was buried with military honors.

TONY'S PRETTY FLOWERS.

The spring had been so late in coming that the good and loyal people of Teckerdsville scarcely knew what they should do about flowers for Decoration day. The hitherto never-failing snowballs and lilacs were in embryo, while of the wild flowers not even a spring beauty or a wood violet was to be seen.

The ladies got together and talked over the situation; the committee of arrangements solemnly decided that something surely had to be done, and that without delay. Then the ladies met the committee, when there was much more talking than ever, which finally culminated in a wrathful outburst from Old Mrs. Malliner, a soldier's widow:

"See yere, now, all there is we'se gotter have flowers ter put onto the graves 'n' all the snivelin' 'n' talkin' back in the worl' hain't ergoin' ter hurry up spring one bit. What's more, we jist kain't put off decoratin'; so we'll hafter take up er collection fer buyin' uv 'em. Here goes my quarter."

This innovation was a startling one to the Teckerdsvillians, who, if patriotic, were also economical, and their contributions were not made with startling alacrity. Still, after much persistence and a thorough canvass of the town, an amount was raised that, in the opinion of everybody, was ample for the end desired. There being no hothouse or flower store in Teckerdsville, Tony Malliner, only son of the widow, was instructed to proceed to Detroit and make the purchase.

Decoration day opened warm, but with every promise of an all-to-be-desired occasion. The villagers decked themselves in their best attire, the farm wagons came lumbering into town, filled with happy creatures, glad to get away for a day from the arduous toil of the home. Bluejays chattered

ALAS! THE FLOWERS DID NOT MATERIALIZE.

in the apple trees, robins sang soft love notes to their mates, and sparrows twittered upon every hand.

Presently, however, as the crowds gathered, so did the clouds. Patriotism, however, is strong, and the people like to get together in the country. Hence, while they gossiped and speculated upon the possible events of the day, they gave little heed to the falling smoke from the chimneys or the fitful whiling of the winds, those sure precursers of a rainfall.

The speaker, the preacher, the church choir and the chairman had gathered upon the stage that stood on the outer edge of the cemetery, while two or three thousand people were gathered in front. Then a raindrop fell sputtering here and there upon the new bonnets or dresses of the women, and the derbys of the men. Neighbor regarded neighbor nervously, but no one flinched as a slow, drizzling, but decidedly wetting rain set in.

Chairman, preacher, speaker, choir all did their part without abatement of one jot or tittle of the programme. Loyally the people stood at their posts, uttering no complaints, if they did fail to cheer.

Then, after the benediction was pronounced, the chairman called up the committee to distribute the flowers. Alas! the flowers did not materialize. In their stead, in the paper boxes once containing them, were wretched masses of pulpy, vari-colored paper, tangles of wrapped wire, etc. Tony had purchased a lot of miserably made paper flowers instead of nature's own dear gifts.

"They was so much cheaper," he was careful to explain.

Still there was no end to small flags, so that two of them were placed upon each soldier's grave and thus amends were made in part for Tony's blunder. But Teckerdsville never did and never will forgive him the sorry trick he played.

The Old Guard Dwindles.

There are more soldiers' graves to decorate to-day than ever before. The old guard dwindles.

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Robert Scott and Mary Ann Iles vs. Agnes Brady and J. J. Brady.

Common Pleas, Luzerne county, No. —, May term, 1895.

Chas. Orion Stroh, attorney.

The following real estate will be sold by William Walters, sheriff of Luzerne county, on Saturday, June 8, 1895, at 10 a. m., at the arbitration room in the court house.

All that certain lot or piece of ground situate on the east side of Centre street, Freeland borough, Luzerne county, Pa., which is marked No. 7, of block "K," on the maps or plans of Woodside addition as printed on the back of Jeddo Coal Company's deeds and described as follows:

Beginning at a point 150 feet south of the southeast corner of the intersection of said Centre street with Luzerne street; thence south along said Centre street 25 feet; thence east 130 feet more or less on a line parallel with said Luzerne street to an alley; thence north along said alley on a line parallel with said Centre street 25 feet; then west 130 feet more or less on a line parallel with said Luzerne street to point of beginning.

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