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# COVER THEM OVER WITH BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS



## A Memory of Memorial Day When the "Old Vets" Were Young

By ROBERTUS LOVE

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OUT of the past arises a boyhood memory. It beckons back to a day of wonderful experience. It is the recollection of my first "Decoration day." I think it was as far back as 1882; yes, it must have been that year, because it was only the fall before that our folks moved from the little old town that was too small even to celebrate Memorial day to the big town where there was a G. A. R. post and in the city cemetery near the high school building were many soldiers' headstones.

"Tomorrow's Decoration day," said Will Gray, my best chum. "Let's march to the cemetery with the G. A. R.'s."

"What do they do at the graveyard?" I asked. "Who's dead?" "Do?" he bawled, hilarious at my verdant ignorance. "Why, they put flowers on the soldiers' graves an' make speeches an' fire s'lutes. It's 'bout as big a day as the Fourth."

So the next morning Will and I were outdoors early, watching the crowds come in from the country and casting eyes of hero worship upon the G. A. R. men as they walked about, identified by their blue uniforms. There was a surprisingly large number of them. We did not call them "the old vets" then. They were not old vets. They were measurably young fellows, some of them little more than thirty and few of them very far past forty. Most of them were robust, erect, soldierly looking men. But here and there was one with an empty sleeve, and yonder came a youngish looking fellow on crutches. The right leg of his blue trousers was empty almost to the knee.

"Hello, Pete!" called out a blue clad man with both arms and legs intact. "Think you can keep up with us today?"

"Well, Jim," replied the man on crutches, "maybe I could if I hadn't kept a little ahead of you in that charge at Chickamauga, where the early bullet got my leg."

"That's one on you, Jim," laughed an empty sleeve man.

In front of the headquarters of Major James Wilson post, G. A. R., the men formed in fours, and the long column began its march toward the cemetery. The undersized man beating the drum—ter um, ter um, ter um, tum, tum!—to which the marching men kept step looked very familiar to me. Why, it must be "Teed" Bremer, the little German shoemaker who had half soled my shoes.

"I didn't know Teed was a G. A. R.," I said to Will Gray. "He looks too young to have been in the war."

"Sure he's one of 'em," replied Will. "He was a drummer boy all through the last half of the war."

And there in line, carrying proudly a tattered flag that first flew in battle at Shiloh, was our family grocer, who had sold me many a cabbage for the household table. Right behind him marched the drug clerk from whom I had bought quinine to eradicate the "ager" I brought along from the little old town. And—I could scarcely believe it—there also marched the "p'fessor," principal of the high school.

"Ter um, ter um, ter um, tum, tum!" throbbed little "Teed" Bremer's wartime drum, to the rhythm of which Will Gray and I and many others, men, women and children, kept step along the sidewalks as the G. A. R.'s marched in midstreet up the hill to the cemetery. Behind the veterans walked thirty-six little girls, clad in white, one for each state then in the Union, carrying wreaths and baskets of blossoms.

In the cemetery we gathered around the grave of Major Wilson. One of the veterans laid a large wreath upon the major's grave. Others decorated the graves of humbler soldiers. A rifle squad fired a salute. The bugles sobbed dirge. The chaplain offered prayer. Then the "p'fessor" mounted upon a big box, delivered the address of the day—an eloquent tribute to all the brave and honored dead.

Every 30th of May, in thousands of towns throughout the reunited nation, scenes such as the one here but partially described take place, and yet, after all, how dissimilar they have come to be! How much thinner and shorter must be the column that marches this year from the headquarters of Major Wilson post! How bent and gray and feeble must be the survivors of those stalwart men of '82!

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