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THE FIRST MEMORIAL PROCESSION

"Never was there in the history of man such mourning as that which accompanied the funeral procession of Abraham Lincoln." These words were spoken by Bishop Simpson in the spring of 1865, when the body of the martyred president was laid to rest in Oak Ridge Cemetery at Springfield, Illinois.

For two whole weeks "The Black Train," as it was called, had been moving toward its final destination. It was detained at centers of population along the way that the multitudes might pay their respects to the lamented chieftain. During this period more people looked upon the remains of the late commander-in-chief of the American armies than had ever before viewed the form of a man from whom life had departed.

The emotional upheaval which swept over the country at the announcement of the assassination of Lincoln was augmented by the breaking forth of an undercurrent of restraint, which had been prevalent during the entire period of the war, but which was now so intensified by this dramatic climax that it could be repressed no longer.

It is not strange that there grew out of this period of mourning something that could not be exhausted in a single demonstration, but as the season of flowers returned from year to year the hearts of the people responded to the call of that melancholy man whose spirit again moved among the people. Thus there emerged in the very midst of the songs, and blossoms, and verdure of springtime a melancholy day that we have chosen to call Memorial Day.

It was appropriate indeed that the Grand Army of the Republic should have its first headquarters in the city where Lincoln lay buried, and it was altogether fitting that an intimate friend of Lincoln, General John A. Logan, should be the National Commander of the G. A. R. to issue the order for the first general observance of May 30 as the annual Decoration Day.

This national Memorial Day evi-

dently found its origin in the "National Day of Mourning," observed at the suggestion of President Johnson, June 1, 1865, in which many veteran unions throughout the land participated.

Logan's order called for "the strewing of flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades." It also anticipated, as the commander stated, that it would be observed annually "as long as a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of the departed."

The strewing of flowers on soldiers' graves was a custom which is said to have originated in the southland at the close of the war. The women who went out to decorate the graves of southern soldiers strewed flowers on the graves of the northern soldiers as well, refusing to discriminate between the resting places of the blue and the gray.

Press dispatches reveal that during the very days that the northern women were scattering flowers along the route traveled by the funeral procession of Abraham Lincoln, their southern sisters were scattering flowers over the graves of Lincoln's comrades who were buried in the south.

It is doubtful if America ever had a flower festival of such proportions as the display at the time of the Lincoln funeral rites. It lasted for eighteen days, extended over a distance of 1600 miles and it is estimated that 7,000,000 people observed the floral offerings used in beautifying the burial path reaching from the Atlantic to the Prairies. The profusion and beauty of the decorations hardly can be exaggerated.

A description of the surroundings of the martyr's body as it lay in state in the guest room of the west wing of the white house was concluded with these words:

"No corpse in the world was better prepared according to appearances. The white satin around it reflected sufficient light upon the face to show us that death was really there; but there were sweet roses, and early magnolias, and the balmiest of lilies strewn around, as if the flowers had begun to bloom even upon his coffin."

And so the festival of flowers began, when the coffin was ready to be transported to the capitol it was covered with white flowers, and six white horses drew the carriage containing the casket.

At Baltimore, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Jersey City, and New York, as well as the way stations where the train stopped for a moment, flowers in profusion were deposited near the remains.

At Buffalo the floral display which stood at the head of the coffin was "an

elegant harp of choice white flowers"; at Cleveland it was a floral cross; and at Columbus the coffin rested on "a mound of moss in which were dotted the choicest flowers," in all of these cities the press reports spoke of an abundance of flowers used in the decorations.

Although the people at Richmond, Indiana, realized that the funeral train would reach there by two o'clock in the morning, nevertheless, they built an arch over the railroad, thirty feet high with a span of twenty-five feet. It was trimmed with evergreen and dotted with white roses. The writer, within the past few days, has talked with an aged lady who, as a small girl, was one of those chosen to place a wreath on the bier of the lamented president.

At Indianapolis numerous floral wreaths and crosses were used in the decorations; one of the leading participants in the arrangement of the display was the mother of Arthur F. Hall, president of The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company. He has preserved some of the flowers used in the decoration, which came to him from his mother.

At Chicago, and all through Illinois, the contributions of flowers increased. At Springfield, where Lincoln's body lay in state at the capitol, the press reports claim that the decorations there surpassed anything that had been attempted during the entire procession.

And still they bring wreaths to Springfield to decorate the tomb of Lincoln, not only on Memorial day, but the flower festival in his honor continues throughout the year.

Walt Whitman gives us an account of the inspiration for his song in his reminiscences of Good Friday, in 1865, the day the president was assassinated:

"I remember I was stopping at the time, the season being advanced, where there were many lilacs in full bloom. By one of those caprices that enter and give tinge to the events without being at all a part of them, I find myself always reminded of the great tragedy of that day by the sight and odor of these blossoms. It never fails."

The first stanza of the memorable poem follows:

"When lilacs last in the dooryard
bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in
the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with
ever-returning spring.
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure
to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and droop-
ing star in the west,
And thought of him I love."