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THIRD SECTION

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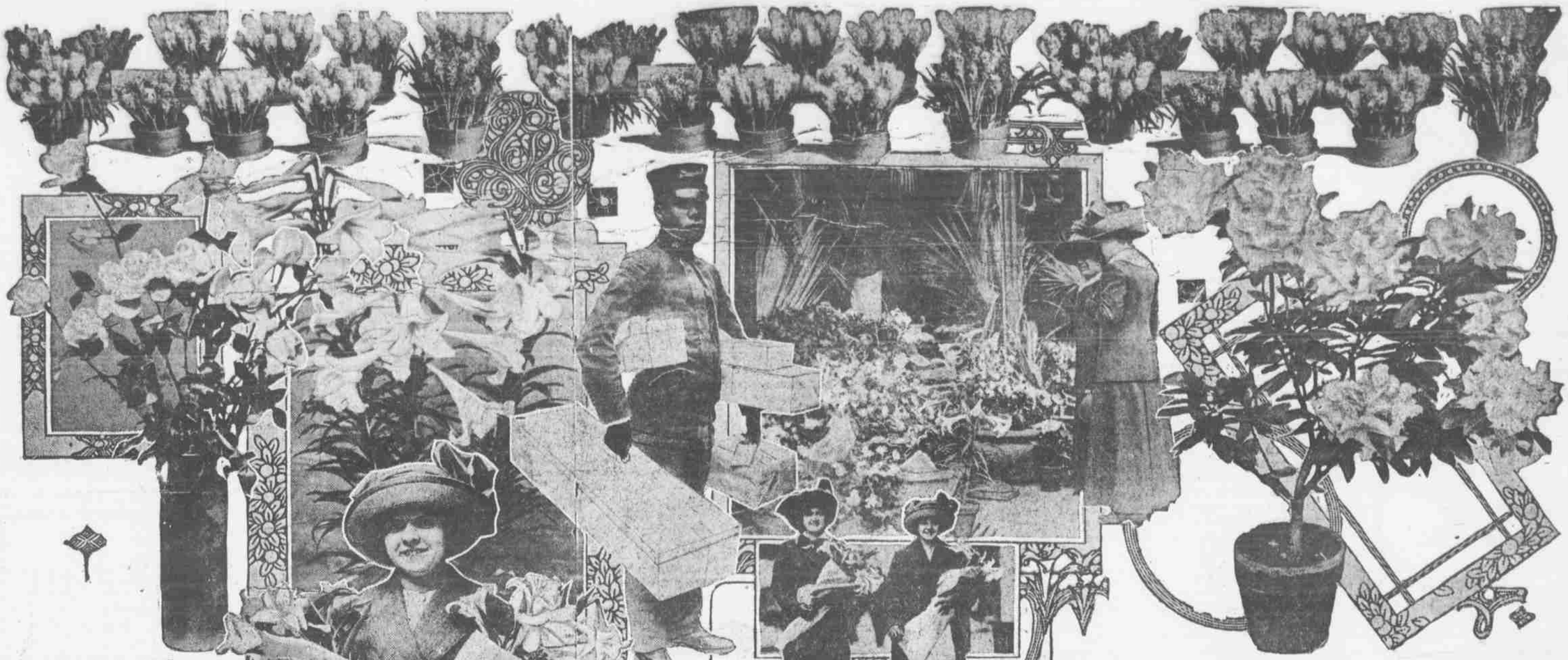
BUYING BLOOMS FOR EASTER



By CHARLES N. LURIE.

As "in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," so at Easter, which is, after all, apart from its religious significance and solemnity, the formal beginning of spring, his mind adverts to thoughts of the flowers which he will send to his sweetheart. More and more in recent years has Easter been made the occasion of gift giving in emulation of the Christmas custom, and generally the gift takes the form of flowers.

Not alone do swains send flowers to their inamoratas, but children remember their parents in the same way. The latter make the exchange of floral gifts a family affair, and often the custom extends to remoter relatives. Of course the churches are remembered with floral gifts, which are banked about the altars. This is frequently the work, especially in some denominations which believe in the power of symbols to arouse devotional thoughts, of the altar guilds. The elaborate adornment of churches with Easter flowers has "gone out" almost entirely, according to fashionable florists. One of them explains the passing of the custom to the expenditure for decoration on the church edifices themselves in the way of stained glass, etc.

There is as yet among folks with much money no recognized "Easter shopping," but none the less a good deal of money is left with the dealers in blooms. The demand for flowers at Easter increasing steadily, the prices go up correspondingly. For instance, orchids, which sold a few weeks before Easter for [illegible] a dozen, mount as the day approaches to from $12 to $24 a dozen. The higher prices are paid for the darker colored blooms, which are considered more beautiful. But the delicately tinted lighter orchids are also in great demand, and there is sometimes difficulty in supplying the market. As a general rule the orchid is a prime favorite at Easter, sharing the honors of the day with the Easter lily, the calla lily, the various roses, azaleas and other flowers. But no blossom is neglected when the [illegible] soft airs of April bring suggestions of flowering meads. Each one, even the humble daisy, has its admirers, who are willing to pay good prices for it.

Nothing Especially New This Year.

"There is nothing especially new in flowers this year," said a Fifth avenue florist a few days ago, "unless it be some newly developed varieties of delicate rambler roses." There are now in the market—only at the more fashionable florists, of course—about 300 varieties of roses from the little wide open crimson rambler to the great, proud, magnificent American Beauty. This latter rose retains its pre-eminence in favor and in price, coming sometimes when upheld by a long stem as high as $3 for a single specimen when bought by the dozen. But of course one need not pay $36 for a dozen American Beauties unless one has a long purse. There are azaleas, gardenias, jonquils, tulips, lilies of the valley, lilacs, daisies and other varieties of flowers enough to give a wide choice.

Easter lilies, the old standbys which have lost somewhat in fashionable favor this year, as they have been losing for a few years past, will sell about as usual—that is, for $3 to $36 a dozen. Contrary to the general opinion in New York and elsewhere, the best specimens of the Easter lily are not imported from Bermuda. "The Bermuda flower does not reach the American market in good condition," said an authority on the subject. "None of the good New York florists sells it. Our Easter lilies are all grown at home, within a radius of twenty-five miles of New York, in New Jersey and Long Island. They are raised from bulbs which are imported by the million from Japan. The bulbs are not grown here, for the Japanese can excel us easily in that respect. They grow the flowers out of doors, in the milder Japanese climate. We import very few or no flowers of any sort. Nursery stock, ornamental shrubs

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Battle of Shiloh Which Was Fought Fifty Years Ago

By AMBROSE BIERCE.

Many stories have appeared in histories and magazines of the great battle of Shiloh, but this story is the most wonderfully life-like and striking account ever penned. It will be interesting to old soldiers, especially to those who were in the battle as its verisimilitude is startling. It recently appeared in the San Francisco Examiner and is written by Ambrose Bierce.

This is a simple story of a battle; such a tale as may be told by a soldier who is no writer to a reader who is no soldier.

The morning of Sunday, the sixth day of April, 1862, was bright and warm. Revellie had been sounded rather late, for the troops, wearied with long marching, were to have a day of rest. The men were idling about the embers of their bivouac fires; some preparing breakfast, others looking carelessly to the condition of their arms and accoutrements, against the inevitable inspection; still others were chatting with purposeless dogmatism on that never failing theme, the end and object of the campaign. Sentinels paced up and down the confused front with a lounging freedom of mien and stride that would not have been tolerated at another time. A few of them limped unsoldierly, in deference to blistered feet. At a little distance in the rear of the stacked arms were a few tents out of which frowsy-headed officers occasionally peered, languidly calling to their servants to fetch a basin of water, dust a coat, or polish a scabbard. Trim young mounted orderlies, bearing despatches obviously unimportant, urged their lazy nags by devious ways amongst the men, enduring with unconcern the good humored raillery which was the penalty of superior station. Little negros of not very clearly defined status and function lolled on their stomachs, kicking their long, bare heels in the sunshine, or slumbered peacefully, unconscious of the practical waggery prepared by white hands for their undoing.

Presently the flag hanging limp and lifeless at headquarters was seen to lift itself spiritedly from the staff. At the same instant was heard a dull, distant sound, like the heavy breathing of some great animal below the horizon. The flag had lifted its head to listen. There was a momentary lull in the hum of the human swarm; then, as the flag drooped, the hush passed away. But there were some hundreds more men on their feet than before; some thousands of hearts beating with a quicker pulse.

Again the flag made a warning sign, and again the breeze bore to our ears the long, deep sighing of iron lungs. The division, as if it had received a sharp word of command, sprang to its feet, and stood in groups at "attention." Even the little blacks got up. I have since seen similar effects produced by earthquakes; I am not sure but the ground was trembling then. The messcooks, wise in their generation, lifted the steaming camp-kettles off the fire and stood by to cast out. The mounted orderlies had somehow disappeared. Officers came ducking from beneath their tents, and gathered in clusters. Headquarters had become a swarming hive.

The sound of the great guns now came in regular throbbings—the strong, full pulse of the fever of battle. The flag flapped excitedly, shaking out its blazonry of stars and stripes, with a sort of fierce delight. Toward the knot of officers in its shadow dashed from somewhere—he seemed to have burst out of the ground in a cloud of dust—a mounted aide-de-camp, and on the instant rose the sharp clear notes of a bugle, caught up and repeated, and passed on, by other bugles, until the level reaches of brown fields, the line of woods trending away to far hills, and the unseen valleys beyond were "vocal of blown horns," the fainter strains half downed in ringing cheers, as the men ran to range themselves behind the stacks of arms. For this call was not the wearisome "general" before which the tents go down; it was the exhilarating "assembly," which goes to the heart as wine, and stirs the blood like the kisses of a beautiful woman. Who that has heard it calling to him above the grumble of great guns can forget the wild intoxication of its music?

The Confederate forces in Kentucky and Tennessee had suffered a series of reverses, culminating in the loss of Nashville. The blow was severe; immense quantities of war material had fallen to the victor, together with all the important strategic points. General Johnston withdrew Beauregard's army to Corinth, in Northern Mississippi, where he hoped so to recruit and equip it as to enable it to assume the offensive and retake the lost territory.

The town of Corinth is a wretched place—the capital of a swamp. It is a two days' march west of the Tennessee, which here and for a hundred and fifty miles further, to where it falls into the Ohio at Paducah, runs nearly north. It is navigable to this point—that is to say, to Pittsburg Landing, where Corinth gets to it by a road worn through a thickly wooded country seamed with ravines and bayous, rising nobody knows where and running into the river under sylvan arches heavily draped with Spanish moss. In some places they are obstructed by fallen trees. The Corinth road is at certain seasons a branch of the Tennessee river. Its mouth is Pittsburg Landing. Here in 1862 were some fields and a house or two; now there is a national cemetery and perhaps other improvements. It was at Pittsburg Landing that Grant established his army, with a river in his rear and two toy steamboats as a means of communication with the east side, whither General Buell with thirty thousand men was moving from Nashville to join him. The question has been asked: Why did General Grant cross to the enemy's side of the river, in the face of a superior force, before the arrival of Buell? Buell had a long way to come; perhaps Grant was weary of waiting. Certainly Johnston was, for in the gray of the morning of April 6th, when Buell's leading division was en bivouac near the little town of Savannah, eight or ten miles below, the Confederate forces, having moved out of Corinth the day before, fell upon Grant's advance brigades and destroyed them. Grant was at Savannah, but hastened to the Landing in time to find his camps in the hands of the enemy and the remnants of his beaten army cooped up with an impassable river at their backs for moral support. I have related how the news of this affair came to us at Savannah. It came through the air—a medium that does not transmit copious details.

III.

On the side of the Tennessee river, over against Pittsburg Landing, are some low bare hills, partly inclosed by a forest. In the dusk of the evening of April 6th, this open space, as seen from the other side of the stream—whence, indeed, it was anxiously watched by thousands of eyes to many of which it grew dark before the sun went down—would have appeared to have been ruled in long, dark lines, with new lines being constantly drawn across. These lines were the regiments of Buell's leading division, which, having moved up from Savannah, through a country presenting nothing but interminable swamps and pathless "bottom lands," with rank overgrowths of jungle, was arriving at the scene of action breathless, footsore and faint with hunger. It had been a terrible race, some regiments had lost a third of their number from fatigue, the men dropping from the ranks as if shot, and left to recover or die at their leisure. Nor was the scene to which they had been invited likely to inspire the moral confidence that medicines to physical prostration. True, the air was full of thunder, and the earth was trembling beneath their feet; and if there is truth in the theory of the conversion of force, these men were storing up energy from every shock that burst its waves upon their bodies. Perhaps this theory may better than another, explain the tremendous endurance of men in battle. But the eyes reported nothing but matter for despair.

Before us ran the turbulent river vexed with plunging shells, and obscured in spots by blue sheets of low-lying smoke. The little steamers were doing their duty nobly. They came over to us empty, and went back crowded, sitting very low in the water, apparently on the point of capsizing. The further edge of the water could not be seen; the boats came out of the obscurity, took on their dreadful cargoes, and vanished in the darkness. But on the heights above, the battle was burning brightly enough a thousand lights kindled and expired in every second of time. There were broad flushings in the sky, against which the branches of the trees showed blackly. Sudden flames burst out here and there, singly and in dozens. Fleeting streaks of fire crossed over to us by way of welcome. These expired in blinding flashes and fierce little rolls of smoke, attended with the peculiar metallic ring of bursting shells, and followed by the musical humming of the fragments as they struck into the ground on every side, making us wince but doing little harm. The air was full of noises. To the right and the left the muskets rattled smartly and petulently; directly in front it sighed and growled. To the experienced ear this meant that the death line was an arc of which the river was the chord. There were deep, shaking explosions and smart shocks; the whisper of stray bullets and the hurtle of conical shells; the rush of round shot. There were faint, desultory cheers, such as announce a momentary or partial triumph. Occasionally, against the glare behind the trees, could be seen moving black figures, singularly distinct, but apparently no longer than a thumb. They seemed to me ludicrously like the figures of demons in old allegorical prints of hell. To destroy these and their belongings the enemy needed but another hour of daylight; the steamers would in that case have been doing him fine service by bringing more fish to his net. Those of us who had the good fortune to arrive late could then have eaten our teeth in impotent rage. Nay, to make his victory sure, it did not need that the sun should pause in the heavens; one of the many random shots falling in the river would have done the business, had chance directed it into the engine-room of a steamer. You can perhaps fancy the anxiety with which we watched them leaping down. But we had two other allies besides the night. Just where the enemy had pushed his right flank into the river was the mouth of a wide bayou, and here two gunboats had taken station. They, too, were of the toy sort, plated perhaps with railway metals, perhaps with boiler iron. They staggered under a heavy gun or two apiece. The bayou made an opening in the high bank of the river. The bank was a parapet, behind which the gunboats crouched, firing up the bayou as through an embrasure. The enemy was at this disadvantage: he could not get at the gunboats, and he could only advance by exposing his flank to their ponderous missiles, one of which would have broken a half mile of his bones and made nothing of it. Very annoying this must have been—these twenty gunners beating back an army because a sluggish creek had been pleased to fall into a river at one point rather than another. Such is the part that accident may play in the little game of war.

As a spectacle this was rather fine. We could just discern the black bodies of these boats, looking very much like turtles. But when they let off their big guns there was a conflagration. The river shuddered in its banks, and hurried on, bloody, wounded, terrified; objects a mile away sprang toward our eyes as a snake strikes at the face of its victim. The report stung us to the brain, but we blessed it audibly. Then we could hear the great shell tearing away through the air until the sound died out in the distance, then, a surprisingly long time afterward, a dull, distant explosion, and a sudden silence of small arms told their own tale. There was fine shooting along the Tennessee in the spring of '62.

IV.

There was, I remember, no elephant on the boat that passed us across that evening, nor, I think, any hippopotamus. These would have been out of place. We had, however, a woman. Whether the baby was somewhere on board I did not learn. She was a fine creature, this woman; somebody's wife, though. Her mission, as she understood it, was to inspire the failing heart with courage; and when she selected mine I felt less flattered than astonished at her penetration. How did she learn? She stood on the upper deck with the red blaze of battle bathing her beautiful face, the twinkle of a thousand muskets mirrored in her eyes; and displaying a small ivory-handled pistol, she told me, in a sentence punctuated by the thunder of great guns, that if it came to the worst she would do her duty like a man! I am proud to remember that I took off my hat to this little fool.

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