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The Bald Campaigner

“When man was made mortal,” said the Bald Campaigner, “no thought seems to have been given to death’s disastrous effect upon truth. I’m a poor hand at politics, but I’ve been told that when a member of Congress ‘goes before’ a day is set apart for the survivors to tell lies about his character, ability and services and pelt the remains with poetry. Not an honorable member of either house appears to think it wrong and disgraceful to tell such lies as will make the unsuspecting reader think better of the dead man than he deserved, notwithstanding that history is thereby falsified and the dead man no way advantaged. The dirty fellows!”

In delivery of this heavy judgment the Bald Campaigner, forced backward by the recoil, sank into an armchair, whence he surveyed the reporter with an expression more military than civil. The reporter hastened to apologies.

“There are others,” continued the Bald Campaigner, with asperity. “The other day the remains of General Rosecrans were reburied at Arlington. At the ‘exercises’ the President and several other distinguished statesmen made speeches—beg pardon, delivered eulogies. The President limited himself to generalities and preserved his self-respect; the others unblushingly said the things that were not. All agreed that General Rosecrans in all his battles was an eminent day-saver, though none explained the necessity of so much day-saving. He saved the day at Corinth, at Stone River, at—Lord love us!—Chickamauga! (I have observed, by the way, that in most of the battles of the Civil War the number of day-savers always equaled the number of Generals engaged, the commander of the army included.) These monstrous assertions were made by Messrs. Henderson, Speaker of the House of Representatives Senator Foraker, and Representatives Hepburn and Gardiner, all of whom served under Rosecrans and must know better if they know anything. All are brilliant historians, but Mr. Hepburn shines with a peculiarly lambent luster.

“At Chickamauga, Rosecrans caused the defeat of the entire right wing of his army by withdrawing Wood’s division from the center just as the enemy was making a charge against it—there is no dispute as to that. Mr. Hepburn had the hardihood to call this “the mistake of a staff officer.” He was himself a staff officer of General Rosecrans; why did he not name the officer? Why, in all the controversy, has that marplot never been named?

“Caught in the rout of his right, General Rosecrans was swept from the field, and although many of his officers, among them his chief of staff, returned and fought all the rest of the day under Thomas, he held his way into Chattanooga, whence he sent to Washington a ‘scare’ telegram announcing the defeat of his army. And this while the guns of the unbeaten Thomas were thundering in his ears!

“General Rosecrans was a courageous and dutiful soldier. He always did the best he knew how, and no one can do more than that. He was an accomplished and amiable gentleman, one of the most interesting and lovable characters that I ever met. His men’s belief in him and

devotion to him were marvelous; but those of his higher officers who were educated soldiers had little confidence in him, and events justified their doubt. May he sleep well, and God be good him! As to his distinguished eulogists, may they learn," concluded the Bald Campaigner with an impressive gesture of his remaining arm, "that while loyalty to the illustrious dead is a good thing, a reverent regard for the purity of history is a better, and truth regardless the best of all."