

## MISCELLANEOUS.

## WASHINGTON LETTER.

Washington, D. C., Dec. 14, 1897.—Your correspondent improved the last pleasant Sunday by a wheeling trip to our National Cemetery, on purpose to tell the readers of the "News" how it looks in the season of falling leaves. Arlington House and the fine estate of a thousand acres, which was the home of General George Washington's adopted son from 1802 to the time of his death—lies on the Virginia hills, just four miles from the Capitol dome, as the crow flies. To reach it, you pass through quaint old Georgetown—its tumble-down mansions built a century ago, its narrow steets, and old, old canal, and the dilapidated warehouses of a by-gone port; its great reservoir, and brand new power-house of the electric railway, and smelt-market, (in a double sense); its ancient Catholic university and community of priests and nuns and professors; its proud "First Families," and the historic cemetery where many more of the F. F. Vs may be found; its swarms of smiling darkeys and mongrel curs; its frank squalor and happy-go-lucky poverty. All this is Georgetown, and a great deal more which can better be felt—and smelled—than described.

Then you cross the long wooden bridge, on top of the canal aqueduct, which spans the Potomac, where all is as "quiet" today as during those weary months when McClelland's forces lay along the placid river, and then you are out of D. C. and in beginning with Rosslyn, the little hamlet, at the farther end of the bridge. Next you speed along an unfenced road, which is as full of holes and gullies as only a Virginia road can be, the "sacred soil" on either side as red as brick dust and apparently incapable of growing a weed; past several negro settlements, from the doors of whose shanties black faces, grin and yellow dogs fly out to snap at your heels—a mile or so, to the northernmost entrance of the cemetery grounds.

Arlington House is situated at the highest point of the ridge which overlooks Washington, so that a straight line drawn from its doorstep to the Capitol building, would be about on a level with the plumed helmet of the Goddess of Liberty atop the dome—337 feet above low-tide in the river. The whole estate of 1,000 acres, which lies along the highway between Georgetown and Alexandria, is enclosed with a substantial wall of red freestone; but only about 200 acres of it, immediately surrounding the mansion, are used for cemetery purposes. There are three imposing gateways in the wall, and over the arch of the principal one is inscribed these words: "Here rest 15,585 of the 315,558 citizens who died in defense of our country, from 1861 to 1865."

Entering the gate nearest Georgetown, you are at once in the midst of countless graves—foot-high, marble headstones, undulating up-hill and down, far as the eye can reach. To the right and left of the winding road extends the "silent bivouac of the dead," and imagination involuntarily conjures up the scene when Gabriel blows his trumpet in the morning, and this Grand Army of our Republic gets up in answer to the summons! Each white stone tells its own brief but pathetic story. They are familiar names, which in most instances speak of their Anglo-Saxon origin on the farms and in the village workshops of the North; as, for instance, here is Henry Robinson, from the Minnesota volunteers, besides George

Long of the Maine cavalry, with Charles Windom from an Ohio village on one side and James Knight, from Pennsylvania on the other. There are few foreign names to be seen; but, strange to say, those of women appear on many of the slabs. Why they are here, it is impossible to understand. To be sure, there were "Belle Boyds" and female spies in the war—but all these could not have been of that description. Perhaps they were nurses in the hospitals around Washington, where they died of diseases contracted from the sick and wounded soldiers; or maybe they were "daughters of the regiment," and a few may have been those strange characters who shed the habiliments of their sex, donned the warrior's garb and marched, Amazon-like, to their graves. In either case, the spirit of heroism was within them and they deserve to slumber with the Grand Army. The colored troops, two or three thousand of them, are encamped by themselves in one corner, and like their white companions-in-arms, the majority went to glory from Virginia battle-fields and Washington hospitals.

At length, wearied of interminable headstones, you turn to the left, by some leaf-strewn pathway under the memorial oaks, work southward up and down the gentle hills, cross two or three little creeks—always with graves on either hand—till suddenly an opening in the trees discloses just ahead, looking very much as it pitality in its halcyon days "befo' the war," as they say in Virginia.

From Washington, the mansion appears snow-white amid the surrounding green, but a nearer view shows it to be yellow. It was built in the Grecian style, designated from drawings of the temple of Paestum, near Naples. The central portion of the edifice is 60 feet square, with two wings, each 40 feet square, giving a frontage of 140 feet. This is faced by a portico, 25 feet deep, with eight magnificent Doric columns, 26 feet high, supporting its pediment. These figures convey no idea of the dignity and aristocratic pretensions of the place, nor of the air of snug comfort and generous good cheer which yet lingers around the dismantled home. By the way, the general impression that this house was owned by Robert E. Lee at the time of the "late unpleasantness," and that it was confiscated on account of his participation in the Rebellion, is a mistaken one. General Lee never owned so much as a brick in its walls. It belonged to his wife, who was a Custis and inherited it from George Washington. Parke Custis, the adopted son of our first President. And she had only a life interest in the estate, which, at her death, would have reverted to Gen. Custis Lee, the next descendant in line. The Lee family occupied it till 1861, when they went south to cast their fortunes with the Confederacy. In the following year, it was taken as the military headquarters of Gen. McDowell, of the U. S. army, and was occupied by the Federal forces till '63; when it was sold by the government under the direct tax act, for the sum of \$65 over due taxes.

The money was tendered again and again by General Lee's friends, but was refused. Those were troublous times, when injustice ran riot on both sides, and the barbarities we are now condemning in Cuba were not wholly unknown in our more enlightened land—as, for example, the execution of Mrs. Surrat for the crime of keeping a boarding house. After the war Mrs. Lee brought suit against the government for the recovery of the property,

or the value of it, as the government had already turned it into a burial ground, which, of course, ruined it so far as the family was concerned. Finally in favor of the Lee heirs; whereupon a bill was introduced in the Senate (by Senator Edmunds of Vermont) to pay Mrs. Lee the sum of \$250,000 for the property. The bill was passed and the money was turned over to General Custis Lee, the heir-at-law under the will of his grandfather, as recorded in the Fairfax county court house; all but \$20,000, which was retained by the government until the state of Virginia had been paid all taxes due. As will be seen, there was some injustice even in this, especially after the direct tax law had been repealed—making the rightful owners of the place pay for it during the time it was forcibly held by other parties. The national cemetery was formally established by the government in 1867, upon 200 acres of the land. Besides the Boys in Blue, a few hundreds who wore the Gray are also buried here; and back of the mansion is a much older family graveyard, enclosed within a stone wall. In the latter lies Mary Randolph, one of the proud Randolphs of the Roanoke valley and mother of Mrs. Robert E. Lee. Near the beginning of the century she came up from Richmond to live with her daughter, Colonel Parke Custis' wife, who was then the mistress of Arlington; and there she found a final resting place, the first occupant of the family burial ground. Beside her lie Colonel Parke Custis and Eleanor, his lovely wife, who was once the gayest belle of all the surrounding region.

Close by this tiny gods-acre is an object of great interest to the country at large—the great granite sarcophagus, under which so many mothers' boys sleep in one grave. Four cannon are mounted on top, with a pyramid of balls between, and the polished face of the monument bears this inscription:

Beneath this stone repose the bones of 2,111 unknown soldiers, gathered after the war from the field of Bull Run and the route to the Rappahannock. Their bodies could not be identified, but their names and deaths are recorded in the archives of their country, and its grateful citizens honor them as its noble army of martyrs. May they rest in peace.

In the rear of this is the amphitheater, where every year the services of Memorial Day are performed. It is covered with a large circular arbor, over which a variety of grape vines and flowering creepers furnish dense shade in their season. All about are flag staffs and beautifully-kept flowerbeds, and benches scattered upon green lawns, and pathways leading to shady nooks beneath grand old trees—a very paradise for a summer-day's loitering.

The interior of Arlington house still bears some resemblance to the time when its great rooms were famous for elegant hospitality and the "first society" of the infant republic ate, drank, danced and made merry within them. From the day of its building, the proud old mansion always sheltered some of the noblest men and most beautiful women of America, and no other of the several historic houses of the country has so plainly retained the savor of greatness. Monticello flourished only while Jefferson lived. The Heritage fell into obscure hands soon after Jackson died; Ashland, Sunnyside, Marshfield shared the same ignoble fate Mount Vernon had no succession of fame; the illustrious Washington of long ago was enough.

Beneath the cornices of Arlington parlors may yet be seen the hooks that once held the celebrated pictures which George Washington's adopted son brought from it. Vernon, includ-