

ANNALS OF IOWA
October, 1866

MAJOR OF GENERAL CROCKER.

Marcellus Monroe Crocker, whose portrait adorns the frontispiece of this number of THE ANNALS, was born on the 6th of February, 1830, in Johnson County, Indiana, where his early life was spent, in such occupations and amid such scenes as usually beguile the tender years of a western farmer's son. In 18_4, he removed with his father's family, to Fairfield, Jefferson County, Iowa, and two years later, on the recommendation of Augustus Caesar Dodge, then a Senator in Congress from the infant State of Iowa, he was appointed a cadet in the United States Military Academy at West Point. After two years creditably spent at the academy, he was suddenly called home by the death of his father. Seeing his mother but poorly provided for, with a noble self-sacrifice, he at once resigned his cadetship, that he might the better assist her in the support of herself and his sisters,—thus voluntarily renouncing the pomp of an epauletted soldier's life,—so attractive to a youth of eighteen with Crocker's taste and talents for the profession of arms.

In 1850, Crocker, then twenty years of age, entered upon the study of the law, and was also married to a young lady whose heart he had won by relating another than the Story he was reading at the law office. His previous studies at West Point being a good basis for those of the law, his quick and comprehensive mind, with this advantage, was enabled at once to grasp the great principles of jurisprudence, and he was accordingly admitted to the bar the following year.

The same year that he was licensed to practice, he opened an attorney's office in Lancaster, Keokuk County, where he pursued his profession honorably and successfully till 1854, when he removed to Des Moines, and was soon afterwards recognized as one of the leading lawyers of the State.

When the rebellion broke out, Crocker was among the first to respond to the President's call for seventy-five thousand soldiers, by raising the first military company organized in central Iowa, which was incorporated into the 2nd Iowa Infantry, of which he became the first major, by the direct vote of the regiment itself; with which rank he served till the following September, when he was promoted to the grade of Lieutenant Colonel. On the 30th of October, 1861, he was commissioned a full colonel, and given the command of the 13th Iowa Infantry, then organizing at Camp McClellan. He remained in command of his regiment till the battle of Shiloh occurred, when the commander of the brigade to which the 13th was attached being wounded and disabled early in the action of the first day, Crocker, as the next senior officer, took his place.

Shortly after the battle of Shiloh, the renowned "Iowa Brigade," composed of the 11th, 13th, 15th and 16th Iowa Infantry, was formed, and its command assumed by Crocker—he being the ranking colonel in it. Much of the celebrity which this brigade acquired, is due to the discipline and esprit *de corps* given it by its first commander, who, though just and generous, was of a naturally irascible temper, made still more irritable by constant ill-health. None knew better than Crocker himself, of this defect in his character, and he was ever ready to make amends for any harsh word into which momentary warmth might betray him. When a fit of passion took possession of him, in the change assumed by his features, his nose would appear pale and

flattened, and the boys of the "Iowa Brigade," who adored him for his well known goodness of heart, and for the many dangers and glories he had shared with them, would nevertheless joke at the expense of Crocker's nose, and call it the "Brigade Barometer"—saying, after the manner of the almanacs, if Crocker's nose was natural in hue and shape, "fair weather" might be expected; if white and flat, "*look out for storms.*"

On the 29th of November, 1862, Crocker was appointed a Brigadier General, but the confirmation of his appointment by the Senate was deferred till the following March, up to which latter date, he remained in command of the "Iowa Brigade." Gen. Grant's army was about moving for the rear of Vicksburg when Crocker received his commission as Brigadier, and he was immediately put in command of the 7th Division of the 17th Army Corps, which, under him, greatly distinguished itself at the battle of Jackson on the 14th of May, and bore a conspicuous part at the battle of Champion's Hill on the 16th of May, 1863.

Shortly after the capture of Vicksburg, Gen. Crocker was assigned to the command of Natchez, Miss., and from thence led an expedition to Harrison's Landing, La. He accompanied Gen. Sherman in his expedition, in the early part of 1864, from Vicksburg to Meridian, and in the spring of the same year began the Atlanta campaign with the 17th corps. However, his health became so wretched, and his strength so prostrated, that he was obliged to leave the field, after accompanying the army as far as Rome, Ga., and, with the hope of improving his physical condition, accept a command in the department of New Mexico. Here his health improved, and at his own request, he was ordered to report to the commander of the department of the Cumberland in the spring of 1865. His anxiety to return to the field and to active duty, induced him to start from New Mexico too early in the season, and, as a consequence, before his Journey was finished, his health was worse than ever. On his retirement from his New Mexican command, which included the custody of a large number of Indian prisoners, Gen. Carleton, commanding the department, issued a special order, complimenting Gen. Crocker in the highest terms for the able and judicious manner in which he had discharged his responsible duties there.

By the time Crocker had reached the Missouri river, the Army of the Cumberland was well nigh disbanded. So, after resting a short time at his home in Des Moines, on the 6th of August 1865, he started for Washington, to report for orders. It proved to be his last visit to his family, for on the 26th of the same month he died at Willard's Hotel, in Washington City, of the slow but certain destroyer, consumption, which for so-many years had harassed and hindered him, and never loosened its grasp but to mock and secure a tighter hold of its victim.

His remains were taken to Des Moines, where they were buried by the citizens of the State Capital with imposing and appropriate ceremonies.

Gen. Crocker was a little above the average height, of slender, active frame. He was sought out by all within the sphere of his acquaintance, as an agreeable, quaint-spoken companion, full of pleasant sayings for his fields. He was impetuous, warm-hearted and generous, and brave beyond suspicion. He was married three times, and leaves behind him children, and a widow to whom he was married in 1855.

In 1860, Gen. Crocker united with the Methodist Episcopal Church, and remained a member of that religious body up to time of his entering the service, yet never made a public profession of religion; but his devotion to his mother and sisters—providing as he did for the former till her death, and for the latter till their settlement in life; the faithful manner in which he discharged every duty, and the resignation and fortitude with which he bore his sufferings and met his death, attest that his life was acceptable to God, as it was useful to his fellow-citizens and glorious to his country.