

IN MEMORIAM *—WILLIAM J. L. NICODEMUS.

August 1, 1834—January 6, 1879.

William J. L. Nicodemus was born August 1, 1834, at Cold Springs, Va. Soon after his birth, his parents moved to Maryland, settling near Hagerstown. In his early childhood, he gave evidence of unusual mental activity, developing a remarkable memory. His precocity was, however, unduly encouraged, and while still a small boy he was the victim of a severe attack of brain fever, which very nearly proved fatal. He recovered from this with almost wonderful rapidity, and soon regained a condition of sturdy health.

At quite an early age, his parents commenced sending him to the country school, and here he very quickly outstripped the other scholars, exhausted the meagre course of study of the district schools of the day, and fitted himself to teach, by the time he had reached the age of fifteen.

Teaching during the winter and working on the farm during the summer, occupied his energies during the next three years. Meantime, his unusual abilities and pleasant address had attracted toward him no little attention, and in his eighteenth year he received from the representative of his district an appointment as cadet in the West Point Military Academy, whither he went in the fall of 1854.

His life at West Point was, with all its rigors, an exceedingly pleasant and profitable one. He graduated from the academy in June, 1858, and the following month received his commission as second lieutenant in the Fifth Infantry. His first post was Newport Barracks, Ky., just opposite Cincinnati. Here his handsome face, genial and gentlemanly ways, and thorough enjoyment of the comparative freedom from rigorous discipline, soon made him a great favorite among his brother officers and in social circles.

* Prepared by Professor Allan D. Conover.

In Memoriam.

In May, 1851, he was promoted to first lieutenant of the Eleventh Infantry, and transferred to the Department of New Mexico, where he remained until June, 1862, acting, during that time, as assistant adjutant general of the department.

Meanwhile the confederate forces had entered the Department, and on February 21, 1862, came to an engagement with the Union troops in the battle of Valverde. In this action Lieut. Nicodemus showed great gallantry, and was recommended by Maj.-Gen. E. R. S. Canby, commanding the United States forces, for a brevet majority. After this battle the federal forces, divided into two commands, one at Fort Craig, the other a Fort Union, two hundred miles apart, the intervening county in the hands the enemy, and of hostile Indians, were in great danger of being forced to surrender. Every means of communication had been tried, and had failed. Lieut. Nicodemus volunteered to open communication and succeeded, though at great risk of his life. A union of the federal forces resulted.

The campaign which followed was short but stirring, and in it Lieut. Nicodemus took active part, and was present at every engagement. The enemy were driven from the Department. Lieut. Nicodemus was now made the bearer of important dispatches to Washington, whence he returned, and was, at his request, relieved, that he might join his regiment in the east.

He was now in the real theater of the war, and in October, 1862, after acting for a while on recruiting duty at Cincinnati, he was tendered, and accepted from the governor of Maryland, a commission as colonel of the 4th Md. Volunteers. He immediately joined his regiment in the field, but was soon afterward ordered with his regiment to Baltimore, to guard conscripts. It was a post of trust, and Col. Nicodemus, his regiment largely in sympathy with the men they guarded, passed two months of intense activity, on duty day and night, catching only short snatches of sleep in his clothes, but never a full nights rest. The strain proved too great, and ended in his complete nervous prostration. He resigned his commission, and, after a short rest, rejoined his regiment.

While in New Mexico, he had shown great efficiency on signal

In Memoriam.

duty, and February, 1863, was selected to take charge of the "Signal Camp of Instruction for officers and men." He was at the same time given command of the signal detachment of the department of West Virginia, and personally superintended a signal line of communication from Harpers Ferry to Washington, after the battle of Gettysburg until Lee had been driven south of the Potomac.

His valuable services in this Department were promptly recognized, and, in July, 1863, he was promoted Major of the Signal Corps of the army; in October following, was placed in charge of the Signal Bureau; was promoted Lieut. Colonel of Signal Corps in September, 1864, and was soon after made Inspector of Signal Corps. In this position, he acted until August, 1865, when he was mustered out as Lieut. Colonel, and then rejoined his regiment, the 12th Infantry, as captain, to rank from October, 1861. In March, 1865, he was brevetted Major in the regular army, "for faithful and meritorious services during the war."

Captain Nicodemus was stationed, during his service on the Signal Corps, very largely at Georgetown, and here he became acquainted with Miss Fannie E. Pettit, to whom he was married December 27, 1864.

From 1865 to 1868, Captain Nicodemus was stationed at Washington. In 1868, he was detailed to give instruction in Military Science and Tactics at the Western University, at Pittsburg, Pa., and remained there two years.

In 1870, the Regents of the University of Wisconsin elected Captain Nicodemus to the chair of Military Science and Civil and Mechanical Engineering, a position which he accepted, at the same time resigning his commission as captain in the regular army.

In thus breaking away from the associations which his early education and long and active military career had so well fitted him to enjoy, in time of peace, and where his position promised him speedy promotion at least one step, and a life of comparative ease and freedom from anxiety, Captain Nicodemus was actuated by a desire to secure for his wife and young family the benefits and advantages of a permanent home. This sacrifice for those he loved typifies the man.

In Memoriam.

In February, 1870, he moved to Madison, bringing his family with him, and immediately entered upon the duties of his new position.

Ambitious and energetic, he soon gave life to the department to which he had been called. He thoroughly remodeled the course in Civil Engineering, and soon drew around him a number of students of that specialty, winning from them, by his thorough but kindly manliness, his enthusiastic devotion to their wants, and his efforts for their subsequent welfare, a warm and lasting regard. Equal success crowned his efforts in the Department of Military Science, where he succeeded in making both popular and useful the drill, which before had always been extremely irksome to the students.

His genial manner and varied experience made him a very pleasant companion, and he soon won the regard of his fellow workers at the University, and of a large circle of acquaintance among those in public and private life around him. With some of these he was associated in business enterprise, and they know, and have felt, as others cannot fully, the thorough honest manfulness of his character, his wholesome integrity in small as well as great affairs, his manly way of meeting any draft on his time and energies they had a right to call for.

With the State Geological Commission, whose surviving members now mourn his loss, he has been associated in sympathy from the commencement of their labors, as a sharer in their work, since 1875, when he was commissioned Topographical Assistant of the Survey. Of his work for the survey, those atlas maps to which his name is signed, speak sufficiently.

Since his settling in Madison, Professor Nicodemus had more than once been tempted to leave, and among other proffers, he received one from Gen. Sherman, with whom he was personally well acquainted, asking him to accept a position as Professor of Mathematics at \$2,500 per annum, in gold, in a college just being started by the Khedive of Egypt.

Of modest, retiring disposition, Professor Nicodemus rarely spoke of himself or of his many experiences. Possessed of large store of nervous force, he rapidly and efficiently accomplished whatever he

In Memoriam.

took in hand. Ambitious to provide for the wants of his family, should they ever be left without his care, he felt pressed to engage in business enterprise outside of the duties of his professorship, and never slack in his duty to the university, he must have drawn very largely on his vitality, to accomplish the work he undertook. This is more especially true of the past collegiate year, when, burdened more than usually with the needs for instruction in his growing department, and with his work for the Geological Survey, he shared largely in the labor, the risks and anxieties consequent on publishing his large state map. The draft on his nervous system proved great, and brought on *insomnia*, which finally developed alarmingly.

Shortly after the beginning of the fall term, his condition became so precarious as to necessitate absolute rest, and he obtained leave of absence. With country air and complete rest he was rapidly regaining his normal state of health, when he was suddenly called to his home, to watch and care for one of his little children, who, attacked with a malignant type of diphtheria, hovered for a long time between life and death, but finally recovered. This care and anxiety probably lost him all he had gained, and though he again attempted his duties, he was soon compelled to give them up and again seek rest. He returned once more at the beginning of the winter term, and though at first apparently well, soon became subject to the same trouble. He struggled against it, but all in vain. His trouble grew on him, till finally he was unable to sleep at all. He resorted to the use of opiates, and it is probable that on the night of January 5th, he unwittingly took an overdose of laudanum. Discovered toward morning in an utterly unconscious state, he once or twice rallied, never becoming fully conscious, but finally, after a terrible struggle, gave up his life at 2:30 P. M., January 6th. His widow and four small children, the oldest thirteen, are left to mourn his loss.

Prof. Nicodemus was a devout, consistent member of the Roman Catholic church, and dying, received its last offices. His was a truly liberal Catholic spirit, and his life and bearing bespoke the real goodness of the man.

MADISON, WIS., February 1, 1879.