

John True's Decoration Day.

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS.

JOHN TRUE came home from his work one day with a slower step than usual. It was a June day in 1861. John True lived in Dogberry, a Massachusetts village. He was a house painter by trade, and had on his working clothes, which were not becoming, being of an unassured bleached cotton-color to begin with, and splashed with conflicting tones of paint, in which red had obtained a murderous predominance. But John had one of the figures that conquer clothes; he swung easily at the hips, carried a straight shoulder, and put down an elastic foot. He had curly hair, and the indefinable expression in the background of the eyes, belonging to a man who has a happy home.

It was not a sharply individualized home, being a cheap white house, like other cheap white houses in Dogberry; too heavy in the brows, too narrow in the cheeks, uncertain in the jaws, and of a chilly expression. It had white shades and a white fence, and an acre or two of land, wherein nature seemed to relieve herself in a gasp of green, and to dash up the deep sepia loam where the potatoes grew, in a riotous outburst of personal feeling. There were currant bushes in the garden, and a tall cherry tree, which budded late, now pale with drooping blossoms. As the master of the house came up the front yard he stopped to examine the cinnamon rose-bush, and looked over at the cabbages in the southwest corner.

A child's voice came through the open door and windows—a little boy's voice; he was singing; he sang one of the Sunday-school hymns taught in the emaciated (white) meeting-house on the hill beyond

the village. The result of his musical effort was somewhat to this effect:

"My omeizzen Ye-ev-ing, my
Resizzenere;
Ven wy shoulda ma-a-ma,
If twyalayspere?"

Another voice sounded clearly within, but that one sang a wordless lullaby, "sh-shing" to sleep a gurgling baby; and neither the coo nor the lullaby struck a false note against the shrilling song of the theologically minded little musician, who piped on gloriously.

John True, out by the cinnamon rose-bush, said to himself:

"Happy to-day, aint they?" And then, when he had said it to himself, he said it aloud to the roses:

"The folks seem happy to-day, don't they?"

Nobody from within had seen him yet, and he lingered about, fussing with the bush. In general, he held that the floral kingdom was created for the amusement of the female mind; cabbages called for a certain masculine force. But he picked a rose-bud clumsily, before he went to examine the cabbages, which he did with a vague attention that overflowed upon the potato patch; he had a sense of strengthening his character by concentration upon these sturdier facts. It took him a good while to get into the house.

He came at last, with what seemed a reluctant step, in which there was this curious thing to be noticed, that he trod softly, like a man who is afraid that he shall wake the sleeping. Yet clearly the baby had nothing to do with it, for little Mrs. True's was one of the exceptionally