

Dick Prescott's Second Year at West Point

H. Irving Hancock

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by H. Irving Hancock

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DICK PRESCOTT'S SECOND YEAR AT WEST POINT
or
Finding the Glory of the Soldier's Life

H. Irving Hancock

CONTENTS

CHAPTERS

- I. The Class President Lectures on Hazing
- II. Plebe Briggs Learns a Few Things
- III. Greg Debates Between Girls and Mischief
- IV. The O.C. Wants to Know
- V. "I Respectfully Decline to Answer, Sir"
- VI. Greg Prepares for Flirtation Walk
- VII. The Folks from Home

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- VIII. Cadet Dodge Hears Something
- IX. Spooky Femme--Flirtation Walk
- X. The Cure for Plebe Animal Spirits
- XI. Lieutenant Topham Feels Queer
- XII. Under a Fearful Charge
- XIII. In Close Arrest
- XIV. Friends Who Stand By
- XV. On Trial by Court-Martial
- XVI. A Verdict and a Hop
- XVII. "A Liar and a Coward"
- XVIII. The Fight in the Barracks
- XIX. Mr. Dennison's Turn is Served
- XX. A Discovery at the Riding Drill
- XXI. Pitching for the Army Nine
- XXII. Greg's Secret and Another's
- XXIII. The Committee on Class Honors
- XXIV. Conclusion

CHAPTER I

THE CLASS PRESIDENT LECTURES ON HAZING

Leaving the road that wound by the officers' quarters at the north end, turning on to the road that passed the hotel, a hot, somewhat tired and rather dusty column of cadets swung along towards their tents in the distance.

The column was under arms, as though the cadets had been engaged in target practice or out on a reconnaissance.

The young men wore russet shoes, gray trousers and leggings, gray flannel shirts and soft campaign hats.

Their appearance was not that of soldiers on parade, but of the grim toilers and fighters who serve in the field.

Their work that morning had, in fact, been strictly in line with labor, for the young men, under Captain McAneny, had been engaged in the study of field fortifications. To be more exact, the young men had been digging military trenches---yes---digging them, for at West Point hard labor is not beneath the cadet's dignity.

Just as they swung off the road past the officers' quarters the young men, marching in route step, fell quickly into step at the command of the cadet officer at the head of the line.

Now they marched along at no greater speed, but with better swing and rhythm. They were, in fact, perfect soldiers---the best to be found on earth.

Past the hotel they moved, and out along the road that leads by the summer encampment. The brisk command of "halt" rang out. Immediately afterwards the command was dismissed. Carrying their rifles at ease, the young men stepped briskly through different company streets to their tents.

Three of these brought up together at one of the tents.

"Home, Sweet Home," hummed Greg Holmes, as he stepped into his tent.

"Thank goodness for the luxury of a little rest," muttered Dick Prescott.

"Rest?" repeated Tom Anstey, with a look of amazement. "What time have you, now, for a rest?"

"I can spare the time to stretch and yawn," laughed Dick. "If I am capable of swift work, after that, I may indulge in two yawns."

"Look out, or you'll get skinned for being late at dinner formation," warned Greg.

There was, in truth, no time for fooling. These cadets, and their comrades, had reached camp just on the dot of time. But now they had precious few minutes in which to cleanse themselves, brush their hair and get into white duck trousers and gray fatigue blouses. The call for dinner formation would sound at the appointed instant and they must be ready.

Sound it did, in short time, but it caught no one napping.

Nearly everyone of the young men in camp had just returned from a forenoon's work, and hot and dusty at that.

But now, as the call sounded, every member of three classes stepped from his tent looking as though he had just stepped from an hour spent in the hands of a valet.

Not one showed the least flaw in personal neatness. Moreover, the tents which these cadets had just quitted were in absolute order and wholly clean. At West Point no excuse whatever is accepted for untidiness of person or quarters.

With military snap and briskness the battalion was formed. Then at brisk command, the battalion turned to the left in column of fours, marching down the hot, sun-blazed road to cadet mess.

Despite the heat and the hard work of the forenoon---these cadets had been up, as they were every day in summer, since five in the morning---spirits ran high at the midday meal, and chaffing talk and laughter ran from table to table.

The meal over, the battalion marched back to camp. There were a few minutes yet before the afternoon drills. A few minutes of leisure? Yes, if such an easy act as dressing in uniform appropriate to the coming drill, may be termed leisure.

"Drills are going to be called off, I reckon," murmured Greg, poking his head outside the khaki colored tent after he had put himself in readiness.

"What's up?" demanded Anstey, lacing a legging.

"The sky is about the color of ink over old Crow's Nest," reported Greg.

Just then there came a vivid flash of lightning, followed, in a few seconds, by a deep, echoing roll of thunder. The summer storms along this part of the Hudson River sometimes come almost out of the clear sky.

"I'm always thankful for even the smallest favors," muttered Anstey, with a yawn.

"We'll have to make up this drill some other day, when it's hotter," Dick observed, but he nevertheless dropped on to a campstool with a grunt of relief.

Yes; each of these three cadets could now have a campstool of his own in quarters, for Prescott, Holmes and Anstey were all yearlings.

And a yearling is "some one" in the cadet corps. For the first few days after his release from the plebe class the yearling is quite likely to feel that he is nearly "the whole thing." By degrees, however, the yearling in summer encampment discovers that there is a first class of much older cadets above him.

There are no second classmen in summer encampment, until just before the time to break camp and return to barracks for the following academic year. Members of the new second class---men who have successfully passed through the first two years of life at the United States Military Academy---are allowed two months and a half of summer furlough, during which time they return to their homes.

Readers of the foregoing volume in this series, "Dick Prescott's First Year at West Point", are already familiar with the ordeals, the hard work, the sorrows and the few pleasures, indeed, of plebe life at West Point.

These readers of the former volume recall just how Dick and Greg reached West Point in March of the year before; how they passed their entrance examinations and settled down to fifteen months of plebedom. Such readers recall the fights in which the new men found themselves involved, the hazing, laughable and otherwise, will be recalled. Our former readers will recollect that about the only pleasure that Dick Prescott found in his plebedom lay in his election to the presidency of his class---position that carries more responsibility than pleasure for the poor plebe leader of his class.

But now all was wholly and happily changed. Dick, Greg and Anstey were yearlings, entitled to real and friendly recognition from the upper classmen.

It is only seldom that yearlings are accused of b.j.-ety (freshness), for about all of that is taken out of the cadet during his plebedom.

But the greatest sign of all to the new yearling is that now, instead of finding himself liable to hazing at any time, he is now the one who administers the hazing.

It is rare that a first or second classman takes the trouble to

haze a plebe. A first or second classman may notice that a plebe is a little too b.j. If so, the first or second classman usually drops a hint to a yearling, and the latter usually takes the plebe in hand.

So far, our young friends had been yearlings just three days. They had not, as yet, exercised their new function of hazing any plebes. The first three days in camp had been too full of new and hard duties to permit of their doing so.

As Greg looked out of the tent, the wind suddenly sprang up, driving a gust of big raindrops before it. In another moment there was a steady downpour. Cadet corporals in raincoats darted through the company streets, carrying the cheering word that drills were suspended until change of orders.

"I hope it rains all afternoon, then," gaped Anstey, behind his hand. "It's a rest for mine---you bunkies (tentmates) permitting."

Anstey stretched himself on his bed and was soon sound asleep.

In summer encampment, taps sound at 10.30, and first call to reveille sounds at five in the morning. Six hours and a half of sleep are none too much for a young man engaged at hard drilling and other work. The cadet, when his duties, permit, may, however, snatch a few minutes of sleep at any time through the day. Cadets in camp quickly get the knack of making a few minutes count for a nap.

"It's going to be a good one," declared Greg, as the rain settled down into a monotonous drumming against the shelter flap over the tent.

"A long one, too," spoke Prescott hopefully. "Greg, I actually believe that the wind is growing cool."

"Don't speak about it," begged Greg. "I'm superstitious."

"Superstitious?"

"Yes; if a rain comes up just after dress parade and guardmount, then it'll keep up the rest of the evening, when we might be enjoying ourselves after a strenuous day of work. But if you get to exulting over the rain that is to get us out of a drill or two, or bragging about a cool breeze getting lost around here in the daytime, then the raindrops cease at once, the wind dies down, and the sun comes out hotter than it has been before in a week!"

Dick took another look outside.

"Then I won't say that this rain is going to last all afternoon, but it is," Dick smiled.

"Now, you've spoiled it all!" cried Greg.

"Say, Holmesy, old spectre!" hailed a laughing voice across the street.

"Hullo!" Greg answered.

"Haven't a cold, have you?"

"No."

"Don't feel that you're marked for pneumonia?"

"What are you driving at Furlong?" Greg called back.

"Come along over, if you can brave the storm!" called yearling Furlong. "You and the rest."

"Shall we go over, Dick?" asked Greg, turning around.

"Yes; why not? If nothing else, we'll leave Anstey in peace for his big sleep. Duck out. I'll be on your heels."

The flap across the way was thrown open hospitably as Greg entered, followed by Cadet Prescott.

"Where's old Mason and Dixon?" demanded Furlong, alluding to the fact that Anstey was a Virginian.

"He has turned in for a big sleep," Greg informed their hosts.

"Great!" chuckled Furlong. "Let's peep in and throw a bucket of water over him. He'll wake up and think the tent is leaking."

"Don't you dare!" warned Dick, but he said it with a grin that robbed his rebuke of offence. "Old Mace (short for 'Mason and Dixon') has been tired out ever since being on guard the first night in camp. He actually needs the big sleep. I believe this rain is for his benefit."

"Say that again, and put it slowly," protested Furlong, looking bewildered.

Griffin and Dobbs, the other two yearlings who tented with him, laughed in amusement.

"Now, that we've lured the class president in here," continued Cadet Furlong, "we'll call this a class meeting. A quorum isn't necessary. You've got my campstool, Mr. President, so we'll consider you in the chair. May I state the business before the meeting?"

"Proceed, Mr. Furlong," requested Prescott gravely.

"Then, sir, and gentlemen-----" began Furlong.

"The chair calls you to order!" interrupted Dick sternly.

"Will the chair kindly explain the point of order?"

"It is out of order to make any distinction between the chair and 'gentlemen.'"

"I yield to the---the pride of the chair," agreed Furlong, with a comical bow. "Mr. Chairman and other gentlemen, the question that I wish to put is-----"

Cadet Furlong now paused, glancing solemnly about him before he continued:

"What are we going to do with the plebes?"

Dick dropped his tone of presiding officer as he answered:

"I take it, Miles---pardon me, _Furlong_, that your question really means, what are we going to do to the plebes?"

"Same thing," contended the other yearling.

"Why should we do anything to them?" asked Dick gravely.

"Why should we---say, did you hear the man?" appealed Furlong, looking around him despairingly at the other yearlings. "Why should we do anything to the plebes? And yet, in a trusting moment, we elected old ramrod to be president of the class! Why should we---o-o-o-o-h!"

Cadet Furlong made a gurgling sound in his throat, as though he were perishing for lack of air.

"Prescott isn't serious," hinted Griffin.

"Yes, I am," contended Dick, half stubbornly. "Griffin, what did you think of yearlings---last year?"

"What I thought, last year," retorted Cadet Griffin, "doesn't much matter now. Then I was an ignorant, stupid, unregenerate, unsophisticated, useless, worthless and objectionable member of the community. I hadn't advanced far enough to appreciate the very exalted position that a yearling holds by right."

"We now know, quite well," broke in Dobbs, "that it is a yearling's sacred and bounden duty to lick a plebe into shape in the shortest possible order. Though it never has been done, and never can be done inside of a year," he finished with a sigh.

"Do you seek words of wisdom from your class president?" Cadet Prescott inquired.

"Oh, yes, wise and worthy sir!" begged Furlong.

"Then this is almost the best that I can think of," Dick went on. It will never be possible to stamp out wholly the hazing of plebes at West Point. But we fellows can make a new record, if we will, by frowning on all severe and needless forms of hazing. I had the reputation of getting a lot of hazing last year, didn't I?"

"You surely did, old ramrod," murmured Furlong sympathetically. "At times, then, my heart ached for you, but now, with my increased intelligence, I perceive how much good it all did you."

"I took my hazing pretty well, didn't I?" insisted Dick.

"All that came your way you took like a gentleman," agreed Dobbs.

"At that time," went on Prescott, "I made up my mind that I'd submit, during my plebedom. But I also made up my mind---and it still my mind---that I'd go very slow, indeed, in passing the torment on to the plebes who followed me."

Dick spoke so seriously that there was an awkward pause.

"I don't want you to think that I'm going to set up as a yearling saint," Dick added. "I don't mean to say that I may not put a single plebe through any kind of pace. What I do mean is that I shall go very slowly indeed in annoying any plebe. I shan't do it, probably, unless I note a case of such utter b.j.-ety that I feel bound to bring the plebe quickly to his senses."

"You cast a gloom over us," muttered Furlong. "So far we haven't done any hazing. We were thinking of ordering a plebe in here, and starting in on him, so as to get our hands in. We need practice in the fine art."

"Don't let me interfere with your pursuit of happiness," begged Dick, with mock politeness.

"But, seriously, old ramrod, are you as strong for the plebe as we have just been led to believe? Are you prepared to take the plebe to our heart and comfort him---instead of training him?"

"Do you believe we ought to take the plebe right into our midst, and condole with him until we get him over his homesickness? Do you feel that we should overlook all the traditional b.j.-ety of the plebe, and admit him to full fellowship without any probation or instruction?"

"No," spoke Dick promptly. "I don't believe in patting the plebe on the shoulder and increasing his conceit. When a candidate first comes to West Point, and is admitted as a cadet, he is one of the most conceited simpletons on earth. He has to have that all taken out of him, I admit. He must be taught to respect and defer to upper classmen, just as he will have to do with his superior officers after he goes from here out into the service. The plebe must be kept in his place. I don't believe in making him feel that he's a pet. I do believe in frowning down all b.j.-ety. I don't believe in recognizing a plebe, except officially. But I don't believe in subjecting any really good fellow to a lot of senseless and half cruel hazing that has no purpose except the amusement of the yearlings. Now, I think I've made myself clear. At least, I've said all that I have to say on the subject. For the rest, I'll listen to the ideas of the rest of you."

There was silence, broken at last by Greg, who said:

"I think I agree, in the main, with Prescott."

"Oh, of course," grunted Dobbs, in a tone which might mean that Greg Holmes was but the "shadow" of Dick Prescott.

Greg looked quickly at Dobbs, but saw nothing in the other's face that justified him in taking open offence.

Somehow, though none of the others said anything to that effect,

Cadet Prescott began to feel that he was a bit in the way at a conference of this sort. He didn't rise to leave at once, but he swung around on his campstool near the door.

Without throwing the flap open, Prescott peeped through a slit-like opening. As he did so he saw something that made his eyes flash.

The rain was pouring a little less heavily now. Down the company street came a cadet with a pail of water.

It was Mr. Briggs, a round faced, laughter loving, somewhat roly poly lad of the plebe class.

Just as Mr. Briggs was passing the tent in which Anstey lay making up some needed sleep, a snore came out.

Briggs halted, glancing swiftly up and down the company street.

No upper classman being in sight, Mr. Briggs peeped into the tent. He saw Anstey, asleep and alone.

Instantly raising the flap just enough, Mr. Briggs took careful aim, then shot half the contents of the pail of water over the chest and face of Yearling Anstey.

Dick Prescott watched unseen by the b.j. plebe. Mr. Briggs fled lightly, but swiftly four tents down the line and disappeared into his own quarters.

From across the way, came a roar of wrath.

Anstey was up, bellowing like a bull. Yet, roused so ruthlessly from a sound sleep, it took him a few seconds to realize that his wetting must be due to human agency.

Then Anstey flew to the tent door, looking out, but the chuckling plebe was already in his own tent, out of sight.

"After what I've just said," announced Dick grimly, "I think I know of a plebe who requires some correction."

"Listen to our preacher!" jeered Furlong.

CHAPTER II

PLEBE BRIGGS LEARNS A FEW THINGS

"Anstey!" called Prescott softly across the company street.

"Oh, was it you idiots?" demanded the Virginian, showing his wrathful looking face.

"No," replied Dick. "Come over as quickly as you can."

It took Anstey a few minutes to dry himself, and to rearray himself,

for the Virginian's sense of dignity would not permit him to go visiting in the drenched garments in which he had awakened.

"Which one of you was it?" demanded Anstey, as he finally entered the tent of Furlong and his bunkies.

"No one here," Dick replied. "The other gentlemen don't even know what happened, for I haven't told them."

So Anstey withdrew his look of suspicion from the five cadets. No cadet may ever lie; not even to a comrade in the corps. Any cadet who utters a lie, and is detected in it, is ostracized as being unfit for the company of gentlemen. So, when Dick's prompt denial came, Anstey believed, as he was obliged to do.

"It was a plebe, Mace," continued Dick.

"I'll have all but his life, then!" cried the southerner fiercely.

"I wouldn't even think of it. The offender is only a cub," urged Dick. "If you accept my advice, Mace, you won't even call the poor blubber out. We'll just summon him here, and make the little imp so ashamed of himself that the lesson ought to last him through the rest of his plebedom. I'm cooler than you are at this moment, Mace, but none the less disgusted. Will you let me handle this affair?"

"Yes," agreed Anstey quickly.

As for Furlong, Griffin and Dobbs, it was "just nuts" for them to see their class president, lately so stately on the subject of hazing, now actually proposing to take a plebe sternly in hand. The three bunkies exchanged grins.

"Tell us, Mace," continued Dick, "have you had any occasion to take Mr. Briggs in hand at any time?"

"So it was Mr. Briggs?" demanded Anstey angrily, turning toward the door.

"Wait! Have you taken Mr. Briggs in hand at any time?"

"Yes," admitted Anstey. "When you and Holmesy were out, last evening, I had Mr. Briggs in our tent for grinning at me and failing to say 'sir' when he addressed me."

"You put him through some performances?"

"Nothing so very tiresome," replied Anstey. "I made him brace for five minutes, and then go through the silent manual of arms for five more."

"Humph! That wasn't much!" grunted Furlong.

"I guess that was why Mr. Briggs felt that he had to get square," mused Dick aloud. "But a plebe is not allowed to get square by doing anything b.j."

Again Anstey turned as if to go out, but Dick broke in:

"Don't do it, Mace. Try, for the next half hour, to keep as cool as an iceberg. Trust the treatment of the impish plebe to us. Greg, old fellow, will you be the one to go down and tell Mr. Briggs that his presence in this tent is desired immediately?"

Plebe Briggs was alone in his tent, his bunkies being absent on a visit in another tent. Mr. Briggs was still grinning broadly as he remembered the roar with which Anstey had acknowledged the big splash.

But of a sudden Mr. Briggs's grin faded like the mist, for Greg was at the doorway.

"Mr. Briggs, your presence is desired at once at Mr. Furlong's tent."

"Yes, sir," replied the plebe meekly. He got up with an alacrity that he did not feel, but which was the result of the new soldierly habit. Mr. Briggs threw on his campaign hat and a raincoat, but, by the time he was outside of the tent, Holmes was just disappearing under canvas up the company street.

"I guess I'm in for it," muttered the plebe sheepishly, as he strode up the street. "Confound it, can a yearling see just as well when he's asleep as when he's awake?"

He halted before Furlong's tent, rapping on the pole.

"Mr. Briggs, sir."

"Come in, Mr. Briggs."

The plebe stepped into the tent, drawing himself up and standing at attention.

For some seconds none of the yearlings spoke. In fact, only Dick looked at the fourth classman.

"Mr. Briggs," demanded Prescott at last, "where is your bucket?"

"In my tent, sir."

"You will fill it, and report back here with it at once."

"Very good, sir."

"Now, what on earth is coming?" quaked the plebe, as he possessed himself of his bucket and started for the nearest tap.

In the shortest time possible the young man reported back at the tent, his bucket as full of water as it would safely carry.

"Set the bucket down, Mr. Briggs, at the rear of the tent."

The plebe obeyed, then stood once more at attention.

"Mr. Briggs," continued the president of the yearling class, "it was you who threw water over Mr. Anstey?"

"I am not obliged to answer that, sir," replied the plebe.

"You're quite within your rights there, mister," Dick admitted.
"But I looked out of this tent just in time to see you do it.
Have you any wish to deny it now?"

"No, sir."

"Mister, you have given us the impression that you are altogether to b.j.-ish to amount to anything in the cadet corps. Your sense of humor is bubbling over, but your judgment is so small that it would roll around inside the eye of a needle. This is a serious condition, and we judge that your health will be sadly affected if the condition is not promptly cured. One the first symptoms to be subdued is that of a swollen head. The head needs reducing in size. Take off your hat, and kneel in front of the bucket."

This Mr. Briggs did, meekly enough, now. There is never any sense in a mere plebe refusing to follow the commands of a yearling.
"You will remain in that kneeling posture, mister, unless you are released from it. Now, thrust your head down into the water, as far as you can without interfering with your breathing. Remain in that position. Take your hands off the floor, sir, and do not rest them on the floor again. Continue with your head in soak until you are directed to do otherwise."

Even Anstey had to look grimly satisfied with this punishment. The unhappy plebe certainly did present a most laughable yet woeful appearance. It seemed impossible to keep this position, without occasional steadying by the hands, but it had to be done. If the reader does not consider it a hard feat to kneel thus, with one's head immersed in the water, the reader can easily satisfy his curiosity on the point.

Having thus put the plebe in soak, the yearlings all turned away from him, conversing among themselves on one subject and another.

Yet, had the plebe ventured to raise his head somewhat out of the water, or to seek support from his hands, he would quickly have discovered that he was being effectively if covertly watched.

Minute after minute the plebe remained "in soak." To him it seemed, of course, like hours.

At last, when human endurance of the Briggs brand could last no longer, the plebe gave an expected lurch sideways, falling flat, upsetting the bucket and causing much of the water flow along his own neck and beneath his underclothing.

"Mister, you are not on your knees, as directed," exclaimed Cadet Prescott.

"I---I am sorry, sir, but I couldn't help falling over," replied crestfallen Mr. Briggs, standing at attention beside his overturned bucket.

He wriggled slightly, in a way eloquently suggestive of the water that was trickling over his skin under his clothing.

"Did you get wet, mister?" asked Dick.

"Yes, sir."

"Skin wet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, that is really too bad, mister," continued Prescott in a tone that hinted at a great deal of sympathy. "You mustn't be permitted to get chilled. Exercise is what you need."

Dick paused.

"Poor, young Mr. Briggs stood mute, blinking back.

"Milesy, may Mr. Briggs have the use of your piece for a few minutes?"

"Why, surely," declared Cadet Furlong in a tone of great cordiality.

"Mr. Briggs, take Mr. Furlong's piece, and go through the silent manual of arms," ordered the president of the yearling class.

Mr. Briggs picked up the rifle that Furlong pointed out to him. Then, trying to look very grave in order to hide the extreme sheepishness that he really felt, Mr. Briggs brought the rifle up to port arms.

"Proceed through the manual, mister," Dick counseled. "And keep going until we decide that you have done it long enough to put you past the danger of pneumonia."

Standing stiffly, the plebe started through the manual of arms. As soon as he had gone once through, with West Point precision in every movement, the plebe started in all over again.

"Now, do this to the stationary marching, mister," added Dick gravely, as though prescribing something for the very immediate benefit of the luckless fourth classman.

With that, Mr. Briggs began to "march," though not stirring from the spot on which he was stationed. Left, right! left, right! left, right! his feet moved, in the cadence of marching. At the same time the victim was obliged to raise his feet.

"Bring the feet up higher and more smartly, mister," directed Dick.

Passing the rifle through every movement of the manual of arms, lifting his feet as high as he could, and yet obliged to bring them down noiselessly to the floor, Plebe Briggs quickly began to drip with perspiration.

Yet his inquisitors sat by with the judicial gravity of drill sergeants. For ten minutes Mr. Briggs continued this grotesque work. He knew better than to stop; it would not be wise, even, to send any appealing glances at his inquisitors.

"Halt!" called Prescott softly, at last.

Briggs stopped, holding himself at attention after he had allowed the butt of the rifle to touch the floor noiselessly.

"Mister, return Mr. Furlong's piece."

The plebe obeyed, wondering what next was in store for him. Prescott noted that Mr. Briggs's legs were trembling under him.

"That is all, for the present, mister," announced the class sergeant. "But you will hold yourself in readiness, in case we call you out for a soiree this evening."

"Yes, sir," assented the plebe.

"You may go."

Mr. Briggs judged that he had better salute the yearling class president very carefully as he passed out with his bucket. This he did, then hastened down the company street.

This time, when he had vanished behind his own tent flap, Mr. Briggs didn't indulge in any grimaces or chuckles. Instead, he made haste to get off his dripping garments and to get out others, after he had enjoyed a rub down.

"Serves me right!" muttered the plebe. "I had been getting along first rate, with nobody bothering me. Then I had to get that b.j. streak on this afternoon. Now, I suppose I'm a marked plebe!"

CHAPTER III

GREG DEBATES BETWEEN GIRLS AND MISCHIEF

"Considering that you are the noble class president, who had just made us feel so ashamed over our thoughts of hazing," muttered Mr. Furlong, "I must say, Prescott, that I don't look upon you as any tyro at hazing."

"This case was very different," Dick answered quietly. "This plebe, Briggs, was caught in a very rank piece of b.j.-ety. We couldn't let his offence go by. We hazed him for a straight cause, not merely for being a plebe. What I object to is annoying plebes simply because they are green men."

"But what about that soiree you mentioned to the plebe?" demanded Griffin eagerly.

"I told him only to be ready if called," Prescott made reply.

"I had no intention of bringing him over for a soiree this evening, unless the plebe does something else raw in the meantime."

A "soiree" is an institution of the summer encampment. The plebe who is in for a soiree may be either a man who has committed some

direct offence against the upper classmen, or a plebe who has been observed to be simply too b.j. in general. Mr. Plebe is directed to present himself at the tent of some upper classman. Several yearlings are here gathered to receive him. He is taken in hand in no gentle way. He is rebuked, scored "roasted." He is made to feel that he is a disgrace to the United States Military Academy, and that he never will be a particle of value in the Service. Mr. Plebe is hauled over the coals in a fashion that few civilians could invent or carry out. Very likely, on top of all the lecturing, the man will be severely hazed. He is also quite likely, especially if he show impatience, to be called out for a fight.

The b.j.-est plebe, after a soiree by capable yearlings, is always afterwards observed to be a very meek plebe.

The rain continued so long that not only were afternoon drills escaped, but dress parade as well. It was not, in fact, much before supper time that the rain stopped and the sun came out briefly. But the brief period of relaxation had been appreciated hugely throughout camp. Three quarters of the cadets under canvas had found time for at least a two hours' sleep.

When the battalion marched back from supper, and was dismissed, the young men turned to for their evening of leisure and pleasure.

Over at Cullum Hall there was to be a hop for the evening.

Not all cadets, however, attend hops at any time.

Not long after supper many of the cadets began to dress carefully.

"Going to the hop, old ramrod?" inquired Mr. Furlong, standing just outside his tent while he fitted a pair of white gloves over his hands.

"Not to-night," returned Dick indifferently.

"Why, do you know, you haven't shown your face at hop yet?" Furlong demanded. "Yet when we were under instruction in the plebe class, you turned out to be one of our best dancers."

"Oh, I'll be in at one of the hops, later on in the summer," responded Prescott.

"One?" gasped Furlong. "Oh, you wild, giddy thing! You're going to do better, aren't you, Holmesy?" continued Furlong, as Dick's old chum came out, fitting on a pair of white gloves.

"I'm going over and put my head in danger of being punched, I suppose," grinned Greg. "I'm going to have the nerve to 'stag it' tonight."

The man who "stags it"---that is, does not escort any young woman friend to the hop, must needs dance, if at all, with the girl some other cadet has "dragged." This sometimes causes bad feeling.

"I'm going to drag a 'spoony femme' tonight," declared Furlong, contentedly. "She's no 'L.P.,' at that."

"Dragging a femme" is to escort a young woman to the hop. If she be "spooky," that means that she is pretty. But an "L.P." is a poor dancer.

"Hotel?" inquired Greg.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Furlong, turning to leave. "Miss Wilton. I don't believe you've met her. Unless she dislikes your looks I may present you to her."

"Do," begged Greg. "I'd enjoy going through a few dreamy numbers."

Mr. Furlong, having permission to go to the hotel for Miss Wilton, started off, moving at his best soldier's step. After registering at the hotel office, in the book kept for that purpose, as every cadet is required to do, Mr. Furlong hoped for several minutes of talk with his pretty partner, either in a corner of the parlor, or on the veranda. Only the parlor and the veranda are open to cadets having permission to call at the hotel.

Greg, having no companion to go after, brought out his stool and seated himself beside Dick in front of the tent.

"Why don't you go over to the hop tonight, Dick?" Greg asked.

"Mainly because I don't wish to," replied Prescott, with a smile.

"Granted. But I am rather wondering why you don't wish to."

"I think you can keep a secret, Greg," replied his old Gridley chum, looking quizzically at Holmes. "Greg, I'm too awfully lonesome to trust myself at the hop tonight.

"Eh? Why, old ramrod, the hop ought to be the very place to lose that lonesome feeling."

"Just what I'm afraid of," responded Prescott.

"You---eh---huh! You're talking riddles now.

"Greg, a cadet can't marry. Or, if he does, his marriage acts as an automatic resignation, and he's dropped from the cadet corps."

"I know all that," Holmes assented.

"Now, here at West Point, with this nearly male-convent life, a fellow often gets so blamed lonesome that almost any girl looks fine to him, Greg. First thing he knows, a cadet, being a natural gallant, anyway, goes so far in being spoons with some girl that he has to act like a gentleman, then, and declare intentions. A fellow can't show a nice girl a whole lot of spooky attentions, and then back off, letting the girl discover that he has been only fooling all summer. You've heard, Greg, of plenty of cadets who have engaged themselves while here at the Academy."

"Yes," nodded Greg. "There's no regulation against a cadet becoming engaged to a girl. The regulation only forbids him to marry while he's a cadet."

"Now, a fellow like one of us either goes so far, in his lonesomeness, that he's grateful to a bright girl for cheering him and imagines he's in love with her; or else he finds that the girl thought he was in love with her, and she expects him to propose. Greg, I don't want to make any mistakes that way. It's easy for a cadet to capture the average girl's heart; it's his uniform, I suppose, for women always have been weak when uniforms enveloped fellows who otherwise wouldn't attract their notice. Greg, I wonder how many cadets have been lonesome enough to propose to some girl, and afterwards find out it was all a mistake? And how many girls fall in love with the uniform, thinking all the while that it's the fellow in the uniform? How many cadets and girls recover from the delusion only in after years when it's too late. I tell you, Greg, when a fellow gets into this cadet life, I think the practice of going too often to a hop may be dangerous for cadets and girls alike!

"I'll get cold feet if I listen to you long," laughed yearling Holmes grimly. "I wonder if I'd better pull these gloves off and stay where I am?"

"I didn't have any idea of seeking to persuade you," Dick replied. "If you feel proof against the danger, run right over to Cullum and enjoy yourself."

"I was just thinking," mused Greg, "of a promise you and Dave Darrin made some girls back in Gridley."

"I remember that promise," nodded Dick.

"You and Darrin promised Laura Bentley and Belle Meade that you'd each invite them to hops, you to West Point and Dave to Annapolis, just as soon as either one of you had a right to attend hops."

"I know," nodded Prescott.

Greg was silent. After a few moments Dick ventured:

"Greg, I kept that promise the day we moved into encampment---the first day that I was a yearling."

"Oh! Are Laura and Belle coming on West Point soon?" Holmes asked eagerly.

"I don't know. I'll be mighty glad when I do know. But undoubtedly Darrin has invited them to Annapolis, too. Now, it may be that, even if the girls can get away to travel a bit, they can't go to West Point and to Annapolis in the same season. So the girls may be trying to make up their minds---which."

"I hope they come here," murmured Holmes fervently.

"So do I," Prescott replied promptly.

"Dick---do you---mind if I ask a question," demanded Greg slowly.

"No," smiled Dick, "for I think I know what it is."

"Are you---is Laura---I mean-----"

"You wonder whether Laura and I had any understanding before I left Gridley? That's what you want to know?"

"That is what I was wondering."

"There is no understanding between us--not the least," Prescott replied. "I don't know whether Laura would consent to one, now or later. I don't know myself yet, either, Greg. I want to wait until I have grown some in mind. Laura Bentley is such a magnificent girl that it would be a crime to make any mistake either as to her feelings or mine."

"Do you think good old Dave and Belle Meade had any understanding before Dave left Gridley?"

"Dave went away after we did," Prescott answered. "So I can't be sure. But I don't believe Dave and Belle are pledged in any way."

"Funny game, the whole thing!" sighed Greg, rising. He had drawn off one of his white lisle-thread gloves, but now he was engaged in putting it on again.

"Confidence deserves to be paid in the same coin, Greg," warned his chum. "Did you leave any girl---back in Gridley---or elsewhere."

"Dick, old ramrod," replied Cadet Holmes, frankly, as he finished drawing on his glove, "I'm unpledged, and, to the best of my belief, I'm wholly heart free."

"Look out that you keep so for two or three years more, then," laughed Dick, and Holmes, nodding lightly, strode away.

Despite the hop, there were some visitors in camp that evening. Dick was presently invited over to join a group that was entertaining three college boys who had dropped off at West Point for two or three days.

Greg spent an hour or so at the hop. He was introduced to Miss Wilton, a pretty, black-eyed little girl, and danced one number with her. He presently secured another partner. But too many of the cadets were "staggering it" that night. There were not feminine partners enough to go around.

"My cue is to cut out, I guess," mused Greg, finding himself near the entrance to the ballroom.

Once outside, Greg drew off his gloves, thrusting them in under the breast of his gray uniform coat. He wasn't quite decided whether to go back to Cullum later. But at present he wanted to stroll in the dark and to think.

"I reckon I'll take Dick's line of philosophy, and cut girls a good deal," decided Greg. "Yet, at West Point in the summer, it's either girls or mischief. Mischief, if carried too far, gets a fellow bounced out of the Academy, while girls---I wonder which is safer?"

Still guessing, Cadet Holmes wandered a good way from Cullum Hall, and was not again seen that night on the polished dancing floor.

* * * * *

Anstey had gone visiting some other yearlings. Dick, after leaving the college boys and their hosts, felt that a slow stroll outside of camp would be one of the pleasantest ways of passing the time until taps at 10.30. Even after the rain, the night was close and sultry.

"Don't you sing, Prescott?" called a first classman as Dick passed near the head of the color line. "Some of our glee-club fellows are getting together to try some old home songs."

But Dick shook his head. Though he possessed a fair voice, the singing of sentimental or mournful ditties was not in his line that night. He heard the strumming of guitars and mandolins as he left camp behind.

Dick did not hurry, even to get away from the music. He kept on up the road, and by the hotel, but was careful not to enter the grounds, though three or four yearlings called gayly to him from the hotel veranda. He had no permission for tonight to visit the hotel.

"I'm not going to get into a row with the K.C. for a stupid little violation like that," he muttered.

Presently Dick's stroll took him over in the neighborhood of "Execution Hollow," the depression in the ground below where the reveille gun is stationed.

Suddenly Dick halted, an amused look creeping into his face.

"Now, who'd suspect good old Greg of getting into sheer mischief, all by himself?" the class president asked himself.

For Holmes was bending a bit low, a hundred yards or so away, and stealing toward the fieldpiece that does duty as reveille gun.

"It would be a shame to bet on what Greg's up to---it would be too easy!" muttered Prescott, standing behind a flowering bush at the road's edge. "Greg is going to load the reveille gun, attach a long line to the firing cord, and rig it across the path here, so that some 'dragger,' coming back from seeing his 'femme' home, will trip over the cord and fire the gun. The dragger can't be blamed for what he didn't do on purpose, and cute little Greg will be safe in his tent. But if Greg should happen to be caught it might mean the bounce from the Academy! And, oh, wow!"

Cadet Prescott's heart seemed to stop beating. Glancing down the road he saw a man standing, there, in the olive drab uniform of the Army officer. Captain Bates, of the tactical department, was quietly watching unsuspecting Cadet Holmes.

CHAPTER IV

THE O.C. WANTS TO KNOW

As has been said, Cadet Prescott felt as though his heart had stopped beating.

In another instant mischievous Cadet Holmes would actually be slipping a shell into the reveille gun, if it were not already loaded, and then attaching a cord, to lay a trap for some other unsuspecting cadet.

Captain Bates, who was quietly looking on, would have Mr. Holmes red handed.

Charges would be preferred. Undoubtedly Greg would soon be journeying homeward, his dream of the Army over.

Dick could not call out and warn Greg.

That would be a breach of discipline that would recoil surely upon Mr. Prescott's head, making him equally guilty with his chum.

Yet, to see Greg walk unsuspectingly into the "tac.'s" hands in this fashion! It was not to be thought of.

For two or three seconds all manner thoughts played through Dick's mind.

But, no matter what happened to him, loyalty would not allow him to stand by a mere mute spectator of Greg's downfall.

Prescott felt sure that he himself had not yet been seen by the Army officer.

Slipping out from behind the bush, Cadet Prescott stepped briskly along the path, bringing one hand sharply to his cap in salute.

"Captain Bates, have I your permission to speak, sir?"

Dick Prescott's voice, though not unduly loud, carried like a pistol shot to Greg's alert ears.

Young Mr. Holmes did not immediately change his course, start or do anything else that would betray alarm. Yet, ere Captain Bates's voice could be heard in reply, Greg had swung slowly around, and he came toward the path.

"Permission is granted, Mr. Prescott," replied Captain Bates---but, oh, how coldly he spoke.

The Army officer seemed trying to look Mr. Prescott through and through, for Bates thoroughly suspected Dick of a bold stroke to save his friend from watchful tac. eyes.

"There was a question that came up among some of the yearlings in camp today, sir," Dick went on, very respectfully. "I found myself ignorant, as were some of the others, as to the correct

answer to the question. As you are the officer in charge of the encampment, I have made bold, sir, to ask you the answer."

"Is it a matter relating directly to military tactics or discipline, Mr. Prescott?" asked Captain Bates, speaking as coldly as before.

"Indirectly, sir, I think."

"Then state the question, Mr. Prescott."

Greg, having reached the path, halted at attention several yards away from his bunkie.

"The question that came up, sir," continued Dick, and he was speaking the truth, for the question had been discussed, "is whether there is any regulation, or any tacit rule that requires a cadet of the upper classes to attend any stated number of hops in the season, or during the year?"

"No cadet, Mr. Prescott, is required to attend any hop unless he so elects. The single exception would be that any cadet, having once made an engagement to attend a hop, would be bound by his word to attend, unless he had received proper release from that engagement. Such release, in nearly all instances, would come from the young woman whom the cadet had invited to attend a hop with him."

"Thank you, sir." Again Dick saluted very respectfully.

"Any other questions, Mr. Prescott?"

"No, sir."

Dick saluted carefully. Captain Bates returned the salute, and turned to go.

Cadet Holmes, waiting until he found himself once more in range of the tactical officer's vision, raised his hand to his cap in very correct salute. This salute, also, Captain Bates returned, and then strode on toward camp.

"You came near missing me, Holmesy," Dick remarked carelessly and in a low voice, though he felt very certain that his tone overtook the departing tac.

In silence, at first, Greg and Dick turned and walked in the opposite direction together.

"Going to load the signal gun, eh, Greg!" chaffed Prescott.

"Yes," confessed white-faced Holmes, a quiver in his voice.

"It's a childish sport, and a dangerous one. Better leave it to the fellows who are tired of being at West Point," advised Dick quietly.

"Oh, what a debt I owe you, old ramrod!" cried Greg fervently.

"Not a shadow of a debt, Greg. You'd have done just the same

thing for me."

"Yes, if I could have been quick enough to think of it. But I probably wouldn't have figured it out as swiftly as you did."

"Yes, you would," Dick retorted grimly, "for it was the only way. What's that bulging out the front of your coat, Greg?"

"The cord," Greg confessed, with a sheepish grin.

"Better get rid of it right where you are. Even a fishline is rope enough to hang a cadet when he gets into trouble too close to the reveille gun."

Greg had barely tossed away the coil of cord when-----

Bang! bang! bang!

Bang! bang! BANG!

The fusillade ripped out within a hundred yards of where they now stood.

Dick and Greg halted in amazement. They did not start, or jump, for the soldier habit was too firmly fixed with them. But they were astounded.

As they stood there, staring, more explosions ripped out on the night air, over by Battle Monument.

Cadets Prescott and Holmes could see the flashes, also, close down near the ground, as though an infantry firing squad were lying prostrate and firing at will.

Bang! bang! bang! The fusillade continued.

Behind the two cadets sounded running footsteps.

"Hadn't we better duck?" demanded Greg.

"No; it would look bad. We had no hand in this, and we can stick to our word."

Over at camp, orders were ringing out. Though the two cadets near Battle Monument heard indistinctly, they knew it was the call for the cadet guard.

Now the nearest runner passed them. It was Captain Bates, on a dead run, and, as Bates was not much past thirty, and an athlete, he was getting over the ground fast.

As he passed, Bates, without slackening speed, took Dick and Greg in with one swift glance.

Back in Gridley Dick and Greg certainly would have dashed onward to the scene of the excitement. As young soldiers, they knew better. Their presence over by Battle Monument had not been officially requested. Yet, as it was not time for taps, the cadets could and did stand where they were.

Two different armed forces were now moving swiftly forward to reinforce the O.C., as the officer in charge is termed.

Two policemen of the quartermaster's department---enlisted men of the Army, armed on with revolvers in holsters---ran over from the neighborhood of the nearest officers' quarters.

Cadet Corporal Haynes and the relief of the guard, moving at double quick, passed Dick and Greg on the path.

"Some fellows touched off firecrackers," whispered Greg to his chum.

"Number one cannon crackers," guessed Prescott.

They could see Captain Bates take a dark lantern from one of the quartermaster's police detail, and scan the ground closely all around where the cannon crackers had been discharged.

"Nothing more doing," muttered yearling Prescott. "We may as well be going back to camp, Greg. But we'll lose a heap of that six hours and a half of sleep tonight."

"Think so?" demanded Holmes moodily.

"Know it. The tac. saw us twice on this path, and he has us marked. The O.C. and the K.C. (commandant of cadets) will hold their own kind of court of inquiry tonight, and you and I are going to be grilled brown."

"We didn't set the cannon crackers off; we didn't see anyone around the monument, and we don't know anything about it."

"All true," nodded Dick. "But we'll have to say it in all the different styles of good English that we can think of."

Dick and Greg reached the encampment, and passed inside the limits, just before they heard the guard marching back.

Then all was ominously quiet over at the tent of the O.C., Captain Bates.

Tattoo had gone some time ago. Now the alarm clock told the bunkies that they had just three minutes in which to get undressed and be in bed before taps sounded on the drum.

"It's a shame, too," muttered Dick in an undertone. "We won't be any more than on the blanket before the summons from the O.C. will arrive."

"Here it comes, now," whispered Greg, nudging his bunkie.

But it was Anstey, their tentmate, hastening to be undressed in time against taps.

"What was the row?" asked the Virginian.

"Cannon crackers over at Battle Monument," replied Dick. "We were over there at the time."

"You were?" asked Anstey quietly, but shooting at them a look of amused suspicion.

So many cadets were now seeking their tents that our three bunkies did not notice that one footstep ceased before their door, for a moment, then passed on.

The man outside was Bert Dodge, also of the Dodge was a former Gridley High School boy and a bitter enemy of Dick's. The origin of that enmity was thoroughly told in the High School Boys Series.

During the plebe year Dodge, who was a fellow of little honor or principle had done his best to involve Prescott in serious trouble with the Military Academy authorities, but had failed. Dodge, however, had succeeded in escaping detection, and had succeeded in passing on from the plebe to the yearling class.

Anstey, however, who had been Dodge's roommate in the plebe year, was firmly resolved that he would not be roommate to Dodge when they returned to cadet barracks the next year.

Dodge hated all three of the bunkies in this tent, but Dick Prescott he hated more than the other two combined.

"Yes; we were near the spot," Dick said, answering Anstey's question. "But we didn't set off the crackers, or have anything to do with the matter. We don't even know, or have a guess, as to who the offenders were."

Though Dodge knew, in his soul, that he could believe Prescott, it was with an evil smile that Bert now hastened on, gaining his own tent.

Taps sounded, and fifteen minutes more went by. It began to look as though the Battle Monument affair would be allowed to go by until morning. Greg was asleep, and Dick was just dozing off, when there came a sharp step in the company street. The step had an official sound to it. That step halted, suddenly, before the door of the tent of our three bunkies.

"By order of the commandant of cadets," sounded the voice of Cadet Corporal Haynes. "Mr. Prescott and Mr. Holmes will turn out with all due speed, and report at the office of the officer in charge."

"Yes, sir," acknowledged Prescott, and nudged drowsy, half-awake Greg.

"Yes, sir," replied Holmes.

Dick leaped up, lighting the candle. Then he gave a slight kick that was enough to bring Holmes apart from his blanket.

Hastily, though with soldierly neatness, the two yearlings dressed themselves, then stepped out into the night, prepared to face the rapid-fire gun of official curiosity.

CHAPTER V

"I RESPECTFULLY DECLINE TO ANSWER, SIR."

"Mr. Prescott reports, sir."

"Mr. Holmes reports, sir."

Saluting, the two yearlings stepped into the tent of the O.C., then halted at attention.

Two officers returned their salutes. Captain Bates sat at his desk. Lieutenant Colonel Strong, commandant of cadets, sat back in lower chair at the right of Captain Bates's desk.

"Mr. Prescott," began Captain Bates, transfixing the yearling with his burning eyes, "you and Mr. Holmes were close to Battle Monument when the firecrackers were discharged there this evening.

"Yes, sir," Dick admitted.

"What do you know about the affair?"

"Only this, sir: That, after passing you, we walked along the same path until we turned in not far from the monument. We were walking toward it when we heard the discharges, and saw the flashes."

"Had you been nearer to the monument at any time through the evening, Mr. Prescott?"

"No, sir."

Dick answered with great promptness.

"Mr. Prescott, have you sufficiently considered my question and your reply?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will put a question of another kind. Did you see, do you know, or have you any knowledge of any kind, of those who placed the firecrackers by the monument, or who set them off?"

"Absolutely no knowledge, sir, on any point you mention," Dick rejoined promptly.

"Did you have any knowledge that such a breach of discipline was being planned?"

"I did not, sir."

"Mr. Prescott!"

It was Colonel Strong who spoke. Dick wheeled about, saluted, then stood at attention.

"A serious offence against military discipline has been committed

at Battle Monument tonight. Have you any knowledge about the matter which, if in our possession, would aid in any way in clearing up the mystery surrounding this offence?

"I have absolutely no knowledge of any form, sir, except that, as I stated, while Mr. Holmes and I were walking toward the monument, we heard the reports and saw the flashes."

"You realize the full import of your statement, Mr. Prescott?"
pressed the K.C.

"I do, sir."

"Then, on your honor as a cadet and a gentleman, you declare that your statement is true?"

"I do, sir," Cadet Prescott replied.

The pledge he had just given is the most solemn that is exacted of a United States military cadet. Usually, the cadet's plain word is accepted as ample, for the sense of faith and honor is paramount at West Point. A cadet detected in a lie would be forced out of the cadet corps by the ostracism of his own comrades.

"That is all, for the present, Mr. Prescott."

Dick respectfully saluted the K.C., then the O.C., next wheeled and marched out of the tent, going straight to his own tent. Prescott would gladly have remained, but he had been dismissed.

It was twenty minutes later when Greg crept back into the tent and began to undress.

"How about it?" whispered Prescott.

"I was asked more questions, but all of the same import," Holmes answered in a whisper.

"Did the O.C. make you tell on yourself, about being over by the reveille gun?"

"No; I thought some of his questions led that way, but my other answers stopped him in that line. As a last resort I would respectfully have declined to say anything to incriminate myself."

As was afterwards learned, Dick and Greg were the only witnesses examined that night. Captain Bates had followed the only trail at which he could guess, and had learned nothing.

* * * * *

"Mr. Prescott and Mr. Holmes both have the usual excellent reputation of cadets for truthfulness, haven't they, Captain?" asked Colonel Strong.

"Yes, Colonel."

"Then I am afraid we shall get no further in this investigation."

"Unless, sir, my questions were so badly put as to give them a chance of shielding themselves without giving untruthful answers. I shall sleep on this matter tonight, Colonel. I don't want these young men to think they can put such an easy one right over my head."

"I wish you luck, Bates. But I'm afraid you've shot off your only round of ammunition, and have found it a blank charge. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

"Mr. Prescott was clever enough to prevent my pouncing on Mr. Holmes at the reveille gun tonight," mused the O.C. "I can hardly suspect Mr. Prescott of untruthfulness, but I wonder whether he has been clever enough to baffle me in this monument affair, without telling an absolute untruth?"

For nearly a half an hour the O.C. lay awake, reviewing the method he had followed in questioning Cadet Prescott.

In the morning, after breakfast, there were a few minutes of leisure in camp before the squads or platoons marched away for the first drills.

"You were on the grill, last night, old ramrod?" asked Furlong, in a chuckling whisper.

"Yes," Dick nodded.

"You couldn't tell anything?"

"I knew less than nothing to tell."

"You didn't see us, last night, as we slipped away from the monu-----"

"Shut up, you sun-scorched idiot!" cried Prescott sharply, under his breath. "I don't want to know anything about it now."

"Oh, that's all right, I suppose," said Mr. Furlong, looking furtively towards Bert Dodge, who was standing some distance off.

The very thought that he was now practically certain, morally, at least, who one of the perpetrators of the monument affair was, made Dick uneasy. He knew there was still a danger that he and Greg might be summoned again to the tent of the O.C.

Bert Dodge saw, from a distance, the whispered talk between Dick and Mr. Furlong; he also saw the latter's quick, stealthy glance.

Now, Dodge, from having tried to visit Furlong the night before, knew that the young man had returned from the hop, for he had seen Furlong go into his tent shortly after ten. Dodge also knew that Furlong had been absent from camp at the time of the monument discharges.

"Furlong is one of the offenders," thought Bert, "and Prescott is roasting him about it. I suppose our highly conceited class president thinks it his place to lecture all the jokers in the

class. But how would it be possible, without getting myself into trouble, to pass on the hint that Prescott knows more than he is telling?"

It didn't take a fellow with all of Cadet Dodge's natural meanness very long to invent a plan that looked feasible.

Sauntering along near the guard tent, Dodge encountered a classmate with whom he was on fairly good terms, Mr. Harper, who was waiting to fall in when the next relief of the guard was called.

"Prescott was on the grill last night, I hear," began Bert.

"So I hear," nodded Harper.

"I guess he dodged the O.C. cold," chuckled Dodge.

"He denied any knowledge of the monument business, I've heard," replied Harper.

Bert chuckled.

"That sounds like old Prescott," laughed Bert. "And I'll bet he managed it without telling any lies. I know Prescott of old. Our family once lived in the same town with him, you know. Prescott was one of the biggest jokers in our High School. And he never got caught in those days. Prescott was always the artful dodger."

"What do you mean by that!" asked Harper. "You don't mean that Prescott is untruthful."

"Oh, no, not at all," laughed Bert. "But, if I could put him on the rack, and get the whole thing, unreservedly, out of Richard Prescott, I'd be willing to bet, in advance, that he knows just who set off the cannon crackers last night."

Dodge was careful not to speak so that he could be overheard by Prescott or Furlong, yet he was certain that, on the still morning air around the guard tent, his voice was carrying sufficiently to penetrate to the other side of the khaki walls of the O.C.'s tent.

"Prescott is the clever one, and the loyal one to all but tacs.," laughed Bert to Harper, as he strolled away. Dodge hoped that the O.C. was in his tent.

It is true---Captain Bates was there. Having drawn the flap, and being in the act of enjoying his morning newspaper, the O.C. heard.

"Hang it, I felt last night that, while answering me truthfully, Mr. Prescott was proving the possession of sufficient cleverness to keep me off the monument trail, just as he foiled my catching Mr. Holmes," mused the O.C. "And I said as much last night to Colonel Strong."

At that moment the flap of the tent was lifted and the K.C. returned the salute of his subordinate, who had promptly leaped to his feet.

In a few swift, low words, Captain Bates repeated the conversation he had just overheard.

"That bears out what you thought last night, Bates," rejoined the K.C. "I think there is nothing for it but to have Mr. Prescott in here and put him on the wheel again. Rack him, Bates!"

"I've just time, Colonel to catch Mr. Prescott before the drill squads go out. Corporal of the guard!" hailed the O.C., looking out from his tent.

In another moment a very erect young member of the guard was striding around the head of the encampment, and then down one of the company streets. Dick, in front of his tent, in field uniform, received the summons and responded at once.

"Caught him!" quivered Bert Dodge. "No if that infernal humbug will get hot-headed and answer the O.C. rashly, there may be something good coming in the punishment line! It would be a source of wild joy if I could get Dick Prescott on the wrong flank with the tacs.!"

The instant that Dick reported, and found himself in the presence of his two inquisitors of the night before, he knew that some hint of his new knowledge must have reached the tactical department.

"Mr. Prescott, last night," began Captain Bates, "you denied absolutely having any knowledge as to the persons who set off firecrackers near Battle Monument."

"Yes, sir."

"I have since gained good reason to think," went on the O.C., "that you know who at least one of the perpetrators was."

Mr. Prescott remained silent.

"Why do you not reply, Mr. Prescott?"

"I didn't understand, sir, that you had asked me a question."

Captain Bates flushed. He hadn't asked a question, in question form, and he saw how neatly this cadet had "caught" him. But that only served to increase the suspicion of both officers present that Mr. Prescott was a very clever witness who was successfully contriving to keep something back.

"Mr. Prescott, do you now know who was responsible for the monument affair of last night?" insisted the O.C.

"I don't know sir," replied Dick, putting all proper emphasis on the word.

"Yet you suspect?"

"I suspect one man, sir," Dick responded without attempt at concealment.

"Is the one you suspect a cadet?"

"Yes, sir."

"His name?" broke in Lieutenant Colonel Strong.

Dick Prescott whitened a bit. He knew the chances he was taking now, but he replied, in a clear, steady voice:

"I very respectfully decline to answer, sir!"

CHAPTER VI

GREG PREPARES FOR FLIRTATION WALK

"For what reason, sir?" demanded the K.C. sharply.

Prescott opened his mouth, closed it again, without speaking, then at last asked slowly:

"Sir, may I state my reasons in my own way?"

"Proceed, Mr. Prescott."

"My suspicion concerning a certain man, sir, does not cover a really direct suspicion that he had a hand in the affair. His remark led me only to infer that the man was present."

"That does not tell me, Mr. Prescott, why you have refused to answer the question that I put to you," insisted Colonel Strong.

"My reason, sir, for respectfully declining to answer is twofold: First, I do not know whether I am legally required to state a suspicion only. My second reason, sir, is that to state the name of the man I suspect would make me, in my own eyes, and in the eyes of my comrades, a tale-bearer."

Since the K.C. had started this line of questioning, Captain Bates remained silent. So, too, did the K.C. for some moments after Dick had finished.

It was the first problem that faced the tactical officers---much harder one than it would considered in civilian life.

In the first place, it is one of the highest West Point ideals never to treat a cadet with even a trace of injustice. The young man who is being trained to be an officer, and who will, in time, be placed over other men, above all must be just. In no other way can the cadet learn as much about justice as by being treated with it.

As is the case with an accused man in the civil courts, no cadet may be forced to testify in way that would incriminate himself. When it comes to testifying against another the question has two aspects.

The tale-bearer, the informer, is not appreciated in the military world. He is loathed there, as in civil life. Yet the refusal

of one cadet to testify against another might be carried, insolently, to the point of insubordination. So, when a cadet, under questioning, refuses to give evidence incriminating another cadet, his reason may be accepted; or, if it appear best to the military authorities, he may be warned that his reason is not sufficient, and then, if he still refuses to answer, he may be proceeded against as for disobedience of orders.

It is a fine point. The K.C. found it so at this moment. Dick Prescott stood rigidly at attention, a fine, soldierly looking young fellow. His face, his eyes, had all the stamp of truth and manliness. Yet the suspicion had arisen with these two facts that Mr. Prescott was a young man who was extremely clever in giving truthful answers that shielded offending cadets.

"You have stated your position unreservedly and exactly, Mr. Prescott?" inquired Colonel Strong at last.

"Yes, sir."

"You are certain that you have not more than the merest suspicion of the cadet off whom you have been speaking?"

"I am absolutely certain, sir."

"How does it happen, Mr. Prescott, that you have this suspicion, and absolutely nothing more?"

A cadet is not permitted to hesitate. He must answer not only truthfully, but instantly. So Dick looked the K.C. full in the eyes as answered:

"A cadet, sir, started to say something, and I shut him up."

"Because you did not wish to know more?"

"Yes, sir," Prescott admitted honestly.

Captain Bates fidgeted almost imperceptibly; in other words, as much as a military man may. There were a few questions that he wanted to ask this cadet. But it was Bates's superior officer who was now doing the questioning.

The K.C. remained silent for perhaps half a minute. Then he said:

"That is all, at present, Mr. Prescott."

Saluting the K.C., Dick next made a slight turn which brought him facing Captain Bates, whom he also saluted. Both officers returned his salute. Dick wheeled and marched from the tent.

As he passed through the camp the cadet face had in it a soldierly inexpressiveness. Even Bert Dodge, who covertly scanned Prescott from a distance, could not guess the outcome of the "grilling."

"May I ask, Colonel, whether you agree with my opinion of Mr. Prescott?" inquired Captain Bates.

"Your idea that he is an artful dodger?"

"Yes, sir."

"If he is," replied Lieutenant Colonel Strong, "then the young man is so very straightforwardly artful that he is likely to give us a mountain of mischief to handle before he is brought to book."

"If I can catch him at anything by fair means," ventured Captain Bates, "then I am going to do it."

"You are suspicious of Mr. Prescott?"

"Why, I like the young man thoroughly, sir; but I believe that, if we do not find a means of curbing him, this summer's encampment will be a season of unusual mischief and sly insubordination."

Perhaps there was something of a twinkle in Colonel Strong's eye as he rose to leave the tent.

"If you do catch Mr. Prescott, Bates, I shall be interested in knowing the particulars promptly."

Dick returned to his tent to find his bunkies gone to drills. The summons before the O.C. had relieved Prescott from the first period of drill.

On Dick's wardrobe box lay two letters that the mail orderly had left for him.

Both bore the Gridley postmark. The home-hungry cadet pounced upon both of them, seating himself and examining the handwriting of the addresses.

One letter was from his mother. Cadet Prescott opened that first. It was a lengthy letter. The young man ran through the pages hurriedly, to make sure that all was well with his parents.

Now Dick held up the other letter. This also was addressed in a feminine hand---as most of a cadet's mail is. It was a small, square envelope, without crest or monogram, but the paper and cut were scrupulously good and fine. It was the kind of stationery that would be used by girl brought up in a home of refined surroundings.

Dick broke the seal with a consciousness of a little thrill that he had not felt in opening his mother's letter. Dick did not have to look for the signature; he knew the penmanship.

"My Dear Mr. Prescott," began the letter. ("Hm!" muttered the reader. "It used to be 'Dick'")

"Your note came as a delightfully pleasant surprise," Dick read on ("Now, I wonder why it should have been a surprise? Great Scott! Now, I come to think of it, I hadn't written her before since last February!")

"Of course we are going to drop all other plans for a flying visit to West Point," the letter ran on. "Belle is simply delighted with the idea. She has heard from Mr. Darrin, but he suggests

September as the best time for us to visit Annapolis. So mother will bring Belle and myself to West Point. We can spend two or three days there. We shall arrive late on the afternoon on-----"

As Dick read the date, he gave a start.

"Why, they'll be here tomorrow afternoon," throbbed Prescott.

Then and there Prescott stood up in the low-ceilinged tent and tossed his campaign hat up to the ridgepole. That piece of headgear didn't have far to travel, but Dick accompanied it with an "hurrah!" uttered almost under his breath.

"Won't Greg be the tickled boy!" murmured Prescott; joyously.
"Some one from home---and folks that we both like!"

Presently some of the drill squads returned to camp. Greg and Anstey came in, warm and curious.

"Did you get into any trouble with the O.C., old ramrod?" questioned Anstey in his soft voice.

"I don't believe I did," Dick answered.

Anstey nodded his congratulations.

"Greg, old fellow, guess what's going to happen soon?" demanded Prescott.

"I'd rather you'd tell me."

"Folks from home! Mrs. Bentley, Laura and Belle Meade will be here late tomorrow afternoon!"

"Great!" admitted Cadet Holmes, but to Dick's ear his chum's enthusiasm seemed perfunctory.

"We'll drag femmes to the hop tomorrow night, eh, Greg?"

"Anything on earth that you say, old ramrod," agreed Holmes placidly, then stepped out of his tent to visit across the way.

"Spoony femmes?" inquired Anstey.

"Spooniest ever!" Dick declared.

"L.P.?"

"Not on your coming shoulder-straps!" retorted Prescott, an eager look in his eyes. "And say, Anstey, you're going to the hop tomorrow night, aren't you?"

"Hadn't thought so," replied the other quietly.

"Anything else on?"

"Nothing particular."

"Then be at the hop, Anstey, old bunkie--do! I want you to meet

both the young ladies, and dance at least a couple of numbers with each."

"I reckon I'd go through fire or water for you, or Holmesy," murmured the Virginian quietly.

"Oh, it isn't going to be anything like such an ordeal as that," laughed Dick happily. "Just wait until you've seen the young ladies. That's all!"

"As they-----" Anstey paused. Then he went on, after considering: "As they come from home, old ramrod, I should think you and Holmesy would want them all to yourselves."

"But don't you understand, you uncivilized being," demanded Dick, chuckling, "that we can't dance all the numbers with the girls? It would be a slight on the girls if only two men wanted to dance with them. Besides, we want to show them all that's best about West Point. We want them to meet as many as possible the very best fellows that are here."

"My deepest thanks, suh, for the compliment," replied Anstey, with a deep bow.

"Well, that describes you, doesn't it?" demanded Dick. "We want these girls to carry away with them the finest impression possible of good old West Point!"

When evening came, and Prescott and Holmes strolled through camp, listening to the band concert, Dick wanted to talk all the time about the coming visit of the girls. Greg answered, though it struck his chum that Holmes was merely politely enthusiastic.

"Say, Dick," whispered Greg presently, with far greater enthusiasm than he had been displaying, "look at that black-eyed, perfectly tinted little doll that is walking with Griffin!"

"Stroll around and meet them face to face presently, then," grinned Dick. "Griff won't mind."

"The deuce he won't" growled Greg. "I'd have a scrap on my hands, besides being voted a butter-in."

"Try it," advised Prescott, giving his chum a little shove. "I tell you, Griff won't mind. Her name is Griffin, too. She's his sister."

A moment later Prescott turned and tried to gulp down a great chuckle. For Greg, without another word, had left him, and now was strolling along with an air of slight absorption, yet his course was so managed as to bring Mr. Holmes face to face with Griffin. At least a dozen other gray and white-clad young men were also to be observed manoeuvring so as to meet Griffin casually. Thus it happened that Greg was but one of a group. Observing this, Holmes increased his stride.

"Hullo, Holmesy!" cried Griffin, with great cordiality. "Glad to encounter you. I've just been telling my sister about some of the best fellows. Della, I present Mr. Holmes. Mr. Holmes,

my sister!"

Greg lifted his cap in the most polished manner that he had been able to acquire at West Point, while a dozen other men scowled at Griffin, who appeared not to see them.

Miss Adele Griffin was presently chatting most animatedly about her new impressions of West Point and the United States Military Academy.

"Holmesy, you know so much more about things than I do," pleaded Griffin sweetly, "just be good to Dell for an hour, won't you? You're one of the best-informed men here. Now, mind you, Dell! No fun at Mr. Holmes's expense. Look out for her, Holmesy!"

With that Griffin "slid away" as gracefully and neatly as though he hadn't been planning to do it all along.

"Your brother has always been mighty pleasant to me, but he never was as downright good before," murmured Greg, looking down into the big black eyes that glanced laughingly up into his face.

"Oh, if you are ordinarily observant," laughed Miss Griffin, "just keep your eyes on a level, and you'll be able, in five minutes, to understand why he is so good to you in the present instance."

Nevertheless, it was fully ten minutes before they met Griff again. That young man was talking, with all animation, to a tall, rather stately blonde young lady.

"My brother," remarked Miss Griffin, "is good boy, but he is calculating, even in his goodness.

"I don't like to hear a word said against Griff," protested Greg, "for I feel that I'm under the greatest obligation of my life to him."

Miss Griffin laughed easily, but she glanced up challengingly into the eyes of her tall escort. Miss Griffin had heard of the gallantries of West Point's men, and didn't propose to be caught.

"You must find the cadets a good deal below your expectations?" remarked Mr. Holmes inquiringly.

"No; they're a wholly charming lot," replied the girl. "Oh, that word 'lot' simply escaped me. Yet it does seem rather apt. Don't you think, Mr. Holmes, that the wearing of identical uniforms gives the young men rather the look of a 'lot'?"

Greg felt just a bit crestfallen, but he wasn't going to show it.

"Why, I don't know," he replied slowly. "Some of the young ladies who come here seem able to distinguish units in the lot."

"Differences in height, and variations in the color of hair and eyes? Is that it?" asked Miss Griffin, with an air of mild curiosity.

"Why, perhaps we're like Chinamen?" laughed Greg good-naturedly. "Pig-tailed and blue-bloused Chinese all look alike at first

glance. Gradually, however, one is able to note individual peculiarities of appearance."

"Yes, I guess that's it, Mr. Holmes," replied the girl musingly.

"Now, I won't ask you to tax yourself unpleasantly in distinguishing one cadet from another," Greg went on bravely. "But I am hoping, with all my heart, that you'll know me the next time you meet me."

"I can tell you how to make certain," responded Miss Griffin demurely.

"Then I shall be your debtor for life!"

"Wear a red carnation in your blouse, and carry a white handkerchief in your left hand."

"You're cruel," sighed Greg.

"Why?" demanded Miss Griffin.

"Both tests that you suggest are against cadet regulations. Let me suggest a better test?"

"If you can?" challenged Miss Griffin.

The band, at this moment, was playing a Strauss waltz. The young people had strolled just a bit beyond the encampment, and now Greg compelled a halt under the added shadow of a big tree.

"The test I long to suggest," replied Greg, "is so exacting that I hesitate to ask it."

"My curiosity is aroused," complained Miss Griffin.

"I had it in mind to ask you to look up into my face until you are certain that you will recognize it again."

"Mercy!" gasped the black-eyed beauty.

"I knew I was presumptuous and inconsiderate," admitted Greg meekly.

None the less, Miss Griffin laughed and stood looking coyly up into Mr. Holmes's face. But at last, feeling absurd, Miss Griffin shifted her glance.

"I knew I was asking too much," remarked Greg in a tone of resignation. "You couldn't stand it, could you?"

Laughing merrily, Miss Griffin turned her look upward again, meeting Greg Holmes's gray eyes.

Then, after a few moments, she remarked thoughtfully:

"My brother was over-solicitous in fearing that I would embarrass you in the least."

"Are you going to be at the hop tomorrow night?" Greg asked.

"I---would like to."

"Can it be possible," queried Mr. Holmes, "that I am so fortunate as to be discreet in asking whether I may escort you there?"

"If you care to be so charitable, Mr. Holmes."

Greg had a moment's uneasy impulse to seize her hand by way of answer. Fortunately, he restrained himself.

"If I call for you at the hotel tomorrow evening, Miss Griffin, may I hope that you will recognize me?" he challenged.

"I will take another look and make sure," she laughed softly, glancing up archly into Greg's face.

As the concert drew to a close Greg had to make a decent show of trying to find Griffin, and he succeeded. Griffin was still with the tall blonde. Griffin had permission to go to the hotel, and Greg didn't. So Greg strolled with Miss Griffin until near the hotel grounds. Then he bade her a cordial good night, and Griff escorted both "femmes" to the hotel.

"What do you think of Holmesy?" asked Griffin of his sister.

"He's quite agreeable," replied Adele Griffin. "Very soldierly, if I am any judge. I wonder how he will look in a second lieutenant's uniform?"

As our three bunkies prepared for bed that night Prescott remarked:

"Tomorrow, Greg, we'll see the folks from home! I hope you'll do nothing, though, to make Dave Darrin dislike you."

"I won't," promised Greg solemnly. Then: "Oh, great---Jove! I've-----"

"Well?" demanded Dick. "What have you done?"

"I've asked another femme to accept my drag to-morrow night!

"Miss Griffin?"

"Yes!"

"Anstey," continued Dick, turning quickly to hide a frown, "I shall have to draft you!"

"I was bo'n and reared a gentleman, suh!" replied the Virginian, with cordial gravity.

CHAPTER VII

THE FOLKS FROM HOME

Two tall, superbly erect young men, showing the soldier in every

line of bearing, stepped jauntily along the road leading to the hotel just before five o'clock.

Each wore the fatigue cap of the cadet, the trim gray, black-trimmed blouse of the cadet uniform. Their white duck trousers were the spooniest as to spotlessness and crease.

Dick and Greg went straight to the hotel office.

"The register, please," asked Prescott, for the clerk's back was turned over some work that he was doing.

This was not a request for the hotel register but for the cadet register. Understanding, the clerk turned and passed a small book known as the cadet register. He opened it to the page for the day, while Prescott was reaching for a pen.

In this register both young men inscribed their names. Each had secured permission from the O.C. to visit the hotel. At the close of every day, a transcript of the day's signatures by cadets is taken, and this transcript goes to the O.C. The clerk will send no cards for cadets who have not first registered. The transcript of registry, which goes to the O.C., enables the latter to make sure that no cadets have visited the hotel without permission.

Prescott laid down his visiting card. Holmes laid another beside it.

"Are Mrs. Bentley, Miss Bentley and Miss Meade here?" queried Dick.

After consulting the hotel register the clerk nodded.

"Our cards to Mrs. Bentley, please."

"Front! Fifty-seven!" called the clerk to a bellboy.

"Thank you," acknowledged Prescott.

"Wheeling, the young men turned from the office, striding down the hotel veranda side by side. They turned in at the ladies' entrance, then, caps in hand, stood waiting in the corridor. It is a rule that a cadet must enter no part of the hotel except the parlor. He must see his friends either there, or on the veranda. There is a story told that a general officer's wife visited West Point, for the first time, to see her son, a new cadet at West Point. The plebe son called---with permission---sent up his card, and was summoned to his mother's room. He went. A few minutes later there was a knock at the door. The clerk stood there, apologetic but firm.

"I am very sorry, madam, but the regulations provide that your son can visit you only in the parlor."

"But I am the wife of Major General Blank!" exclaimed the surprised lady.

"But, Mrs. Blank, your son is a cadet, and subject to the regulations on the subject. He must either go to the parlor at once, or leave the hotel instantly. If he refuses to do either I am forced to telephone to the tactical officer in charge."

The general's wife was therefore obliged to descend to the parlor with her plebe son.

No other room but the parlor! This prohibition extends even to the dining room. The cadet may not, under any circumstances, accept an invitation from a friend or relative to take a sociable meal with either.

"Tyrannous" and "needlessly oppressive," are terms frequently applied by outsiders to the rules that hedge in cadets, but there is a good reason behind every regulation.

Two or three minutes later a middle-aged woman came slowly down the staircase, gazing about her. At last her glance settled, with some bewilderment on Dick and Greg, who were the only two cadets in the corridor.

"Why, I believe you must be Mr. Prescott and Mr. Holmes!" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley, moving forward and holding out both hands. "Yes; I am certain of it," she added, as Dick and Greg, bowing gracefully from the waistline, smiled goodhumoredly. "Mercy! But how you boys have grown! I am not sure that it is even proper to call you boys any longer."

"If we were boys any longer, Mrs. Bentley, I am sure you would be in doubt," laughed Dick easily. "Yes; you see, cadets, under their training here, usually do shoot up in the air. We have some short, runty cadets, however."

Just then there was a flutter and a swish on the stairs. Laura Bentley and Belle Meade came gliding forward, their eyes shining.

"Yes; I know you both and could tell you apart," cried Laura, laughing, as she held out her hand. "But what a tremendous change!"

"Do you think it is a change for the better?" asked Dick, smiling.

"Oh, I am sure that it is. Isn't it, Belle? A how wonderfully glad I am to see you both again."

Dick gazed at Laura with pride. He had no right to feel proud, except that she was from Gridley, and that she had come all the way to West Point to see him in his new life.

Laura Bentley, too, had changed somewhat, though not so much as had her cadet friends. She was but a shade taller, somewhat rounder, and much more womanly in an undefinable way. She was sweeter looking in all ways---Dick recognized that much at a glance. Her eyes rested upon him, and then more briefly upon Greg, in utter friendliness free from coquetry.

"Can't you get excused and take us over to dress parade?" asked Belle.

Dick turned to look more closely at Miss Meade. Yes; she, too, was changed, and wholly for the better as far as charm of appearance and manner went. Both girls had lost the schoolgirl look. They were, indeed, women, even if very young ones.

"We can hardly get excused from any duty," Dick smiled. "But to-day---a most unusual thing---there is no dress parade."

"No parade?" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley in a tone of disappointment.

"No; the officers are entertaining some distinguished outside visitors at Cullum Hall this afternoon, and the band is over at Cullum," Greg explained.

"I am so sorry," murmured Mrs. Bentley.

"But you will be here until the close of tomorrow afternoon?" asked Dick eagerly.

"We had planned to go away about eleven in the forenoon," replied Mrs. Bentley.

"Then you girls would miss a stroll along Flirtation Walk," suggested Cadet Prescott. "It is a very strange thing for a young lady to go away from West Point and confess that she has not had cadet escort along Flirtation Walk."

"Then we must stay until to-morrow afternoon; may we not, mother?" pleaded Laura.

"Yes; for I wish you to see the most of West Point and its famous spots."

"Then to-morrow afternoon you will be able, also, to see dress parade," Dick suggested.

"Do you forget that tomorrow is Sunday?" asked Mrs. Bentley.

"No; we have dress parade on Sunday."

Mrs. Bentley looked puzzled. To her it seemed almost sacrilegious to parade on Sunday!

"Wait until you have seen our dress parade," Greg begged. "Then you will understand. It is really as impressive as a religious ceremony; it is the last honors of each day to our country's flag."

"Oh," murmured Mrs. Bentley, looking relieved.

By this time the little party had moved out on to the veranda.

"As there is no dress parade this afternoon," urged Dick, "may we not take you over, and let you see our camp from the outside. Then, after supper, we may, if you wish, take you to the camp for a look before going to the hop."

"As to supper," went on Mrs. Bentley, "you two young gentlemen must come to the hotel and take the meal with us. Wait; I will send word to the office that we shall have guests."

"If you do, you will give the clerk cause for a jolly smile," explained Prescott, smiling. "No cadet can possibly eat at the hotel. There are many regulations that will surprise you, Mrs."

Bentley. I will explain as many as occur to me."

Prescott walked between Mrs. Bentley and Laura, while Greg came along with Belle just behind them.

"Are you taking me to the hop tonight, Mr. Holmes?" asked Belle with her usual directness.

Poor Greg, seasoned cadet though he was, flushed uncomfortably.

"I should be," stammered Greg, "but it happens that I am already engaged to drag---to escort a young lady to tonight's hop."

"I like that word 'drag' better than 'escort'," laughed Belle.

"But Mr. Anstey, our tentmate, is to escort you tonight," Greg made haste to explain.

"That is the first I have heard of it," replied Belle, with an odd smile. "Does Mr. Anstey know about it, either?"

"Don't make fun of me," begged Holmes quickly. "Miss Meade, there are many customs here that are strange to outsiders. But they are very old customs."

"Some of them, I suppose," laughed Belle, "so old that they should be forgotten."

"All cadets are regarded as gentlemen," hurried on Greg. "Therefore, any cadet may be a suitable escort for a young woman. If one cadet has two young lady friends coming to the hop, for instance, he asks one of his comrades to escort one of his friends. Why, a cadet who, for any reason, finds himself unable to attend a hop, after he has invited a young lady, may arrange with anyone of his comrades to call for the young lady in his place."

"What if she should decline the unknown substitute who reported to fill the task?" teased Belle.

"It would betray her unfamiliarity with West Point," replied Greg, with more spirit than Belle had expected from this once very quiet young man. "Miss Meade, we look upon our comrades here as gentlemen. We regard the man whom we may send in our place as being more worthy than ourselves. Isn't it natural, therefore, that we should expect the young lady to feel honored by the substitution in the way of escort?"

"Wholly so," Belle admitted. "If I have said anything that sounded inconsiderate, or too light, you will forgive me, won't you, Mr. Holmes?"

"You haven't offended, and you couldn't," Greg replied courteously; "for I never take offence where none is meant, and you would be incapable of intending any."

The young people ahead were talking very quietly. Laura, indeed, did not wish to talk much. She was taken up with her study of the changed---and improved---Dick Prescott.

"Do you know, Dick," she asked finally, "I am more pleased over your coming to West Point than over anything else that could have happened to you."

"Why?" Dick asked.

"Because the life here has made such a rapid and fine change in you."

"You are sure it has made such a change?" Dick inquired.

"Yes; you were a manly boy in Gridley, but you are an actual man, now, and I am certain that the change has been made more quickly here than would have happened in any other life."

"One thing I can understand," pursued Laura. "The life here is one that is full of purpose. It must be. It takes purpose and downright hard work to change two young men as you and Greg have been changed."

By this time the little party was close to the west, or road side of the encampment.

"Isn't that Bert Dodge over there?" asked Laura, after gazing rather intently at a somewhat distant cadet.

"That is Mr. Dodge, Laura."

"Do you care to call him over to speak with us?" asked Mrs. Bentley.

"If you wish it," Dick responded evenly.

Laura looked at him quickly.

"Are you and Mr. Dodge no better friends here than at Gridley?" she asked in a low tone.

"Mr. Dodge and I are classmates, but we are thrown together very little," Dick replied quietly.

"I do not think we care about speaking with Mr. Dodge, do we, mother?" inquired Laura.

"There is no need to," replied Mrs. Bentley.

At that moment Bert Dodge espied the little party. After a short, but curious stare, Bert turned and came toward them.

CHAPTER VIII

CADET DODGE HEARS SOMETHING

It was an embarrassing position. So, at least, thought Laura Bentley.

"Let us walk on," she suggested, turning as though she had not seen Dodge.

"Humph!" muttered Dodge, turning his own course. "The girls are showing their backs to me. Humph! Not that I care about them particularly, but folks back in Gridley will be asking them if they saw me, and they'll answer that they didn't speak with me. There's no use in running into a snub, out here in the open. But it's easy! I'll stag it at the hop tonight, and I can get within range before they can signal me to keep away."

Smiling grimly, Dodge went to his tent.

After a while it was necessary for Dick and Greg to take their friends back to the hotel, for the cadets must be on hand punctually for supper formation.

"Mr. Anstey and I will call for you at 7:30, if we may," said Dick.

"We shall be ready," Laura promised. "And that we may not keep you waiting, we'll be down on the veranda."

And waiting they were. Dick and Anstey found Mrs. Bentley and the girls seated near the ladies' entrance.

Anstey, the personification of southern grace and courtesy, made his most impressive greetings to the ladies. His languid eyes took in Laura Bentley at a glance, almost, and he found her to be all that Prescott had described. Belle Meade won Anstey's quick approval, though nothing in his face betrayed the fact.

At first glance, it appeared that both girls were very simply attired in white, but they had spent days in planning the effects of their gowning. Everything about their gowning was most perfectly attuned. Above all, they looked what they were---two sweet, wholesome, unaffected young women.

"We have time now for a short stroll to camp," proposed Prescott. "If you would like it, you can see how we live in summer. The camp is lighted, now."

So they strolled past the heads of the streets of the camp. At the guard tent, Dick and Anstey explained the routine of guard duty, in as far as it would be interesting to women. They touched, lightly, upon some of the pranks that are played against the cadet sentries.

Wherever Mrs. Bentley and the girls passed, cadet friends lifted their caps to the ladies with Prescott and Anstey, the salutes being punctiliously returned.

Bert Dodge was in a rage. He could not get so much as the courtesy of a bow from these girls whom he had known for years. He was being cut dead and he knew it, and the humiliation of the thing was more than he could well bear. A half hour later, he saw the party coming, and discreetly took himself out of sight.

"I can play my cards at the hop," he muttered.

The over to Cullum Hall, through the dark night, the little party strolled, one of many similar parties.

Once inside Cullum Hall, Prescott and Anstey, looking mightily like young copies of Mars in their splendid dress uniforms, conducted the ladies to seats at the side of the ballroom. Dick and Anstey next took the ladies' light wraps and went with them to the cloak room, after which they passed on to the coat room and checked their own caps.

Laura and Belle gazed about them with well-bred curiosity---Mrs. Bentley, too---at the other guests of the evening, who were arriving rapidly. The scene was one of animated life. It would have been hard to say whether the handsome gowns of the young ladies, or the cadet dress uniforms, gave more life and spirit to the scene.

As Prescott and Anstey returned across the ballroom floor the orchestra started a preliminary march. Both young cadets fell unconsciously in step close to the door, and came marching, side by side, soldierly---perfect!

"What splendid, manly young fellows!" breathed Laura admiringly to Belle. Her mother, too, heard.

"Be careful, Laura," advised her mother, smilingly. "Don't lose your heart to a scrap of gray cloth and a brass button."

"Don't fear," smiled Miss Bentley happily. "When I lose my heart it shall be to a man! And how many of them we see here tonight mother!"

Nearly with the precision of a marching platoon the two young men halted before the ladies. Yet there was nothing of stiff formality about either Prescott or Anstey. They stood before their friends, chatting lightly.

"Tell us about some of the other hops that you have attended before," begged Belle Meade.

"But we haven't attended any," Dick replied. "Do you recall my promise in Gridley, Miss Bentley---that I would invite you to my first hop as soon as I was eligible to attend one?"

"Yes," nodded Laura smilingly.

"This is my first hop," Dick said, smilingly.

"Mine, too," affirmed Anstey.

"Gracious!" laughed Belle merrily. "I hope you both know how to dance."

"We put in weary lessons as plebes, under the dancing master," laughed Dick.

"But you danced well in Gridley," protested Laura.

"Thank you. But the style is a bit different at West Point."

"You make me uneasy," pouted Belle.

"Then that uneasiness will vanish by the time you are half through with the first number."

"There comes Mr. Holmes," discovered Laura. "What a remarkably pretty girl with him."

"Mr. Griffin's sister," said Dick.

"Isn't that Mr. Dodge?" murmured Laura.

Dick only half turned, but his sidelong glance covered the doorway.

"Yes; he appears to be staggling it."

Bert presently disappeared. As a cadet always claims the first number or two with the young lady whom he has "dragged" hither, "staggerers" have to wait until later in the programme.

Then, presently the music for the opening dance struck up. Dick had already presented Furlong, a "stagger," to Mrs. Bentley, so that she was not left alone. Furlong had asked the pleasure of a dance with Laura's mother, but Mrs. Bentley, with instinctive tact, realized that the older women did not often dance at cadet hops. So she begged Mr. Furlong to remain with her and tell her about the cadet hops.

As the music struck up, and Dick bent before her, he thrilled with the grace and unaffected friendliness with which Laura rose and rested one hand on his shoulder. She was a woman, and a magnificent one! Away they whirled, Anstey and Belle following.

"I greatly enjoyed the High School hops of former days," sighed Laura, "but this is finer."

"Same escort," murmured Dick.

"Same name, but in many ways much changed," laughed Miss Bentley. "Dick, I am so glad you came to West Point."

"So am I," he answered simply.

The first two numbers they danced together, then changed partners for the third dance. Between times, Greg had appeared with Miss Griffin and introductions had followed. Dick's fourth number was danced with Miss Griffin, while Anstey led her out for the fifth.

For that fifth dance Dick introduced one of his classmates to Laura, and, during that dance, Prescott stood and chatted with Mrs. Bentley. He saw to it that Laura's mother was very seldom without company through the evening.

The sixth dance Dick enjoyed with Laura.

"I had a reason for waiting and asking for this dance," he murmured

in her ear.

"Yes?" challenged Laura.

"I discovered that it is the longest number on the programme. I would dearly love the next number, also, but I must not make the evening too dull and prosy for you. Will you trust me to select your partner for the next dance?"

"I am wholly in your hands," smiled Miss Bentley.

After Dick had conducted Laura to a seat beside her mother he stepped away to find Sennett, of the yearling class.

"Sennett," murmured Dick banteringly, "I have seen you casting eyes at Miss Bentley."

"I fear I must plead my guilt, old ramrod. Are you going to present me?"

"For the next dance. I think, if you are very much on your guard, Sennett, you will pass for enough of a gentleman for a few minutes."

"I'll call you out for that on Monday," retorted the other yearling, in mock wrath. "But, for the present, lead me over that I may prostrate myself at the feet of the femme."

So Dick stood beside Mrs. Bentley and watched Laura dance with one of the most popular fellows of the class. As Sennett and Laura returned to Mrs. Bentley, Cadet Dodge suddenly slipped up as though from nowhere.

"Miss Bentley," he murmured, bowing before Laura, after having greeted her mother, "I am presumptuous enough to trust that you remember me."

"Perfectly, Mr. Dodge," replied Laura in her even tones. "How do you do?"

She did not offer her hand; within the limits of perfectly good breeding it was her privilege to withhold it without slight or offence.

"How have you been since the old High School days?"

"Perfectly well, thank you."

"And you, Mrs. Bentley?" asked Dodge, again bowing before her mother.

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Dodge," replied Mrs. Bentley, who subtly took her cue from her daughter.

"Now, Miss Bentley, you are not going to leave a broken heart behind you at West Point?" urged Bert softly. "You are going to let me write my name on your dance card---even if only once."

"You should have spoken earlier, Mr. Dodge," laughed Laura. "Every dance, if not already taken, is good as promised."

Yearling Dodge could not conceal his chagrin. At that moment Belle Meade returned with one of the tallest cadets on the floor.

Bert greeted her effusively. Belle returned the greeting as evenly and as perfectly as Laura had done---but nothing more.

"Miss Meade, you are going to be tenderhearted enough to flatter me with one dance?" begged Dodge.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" replied Belle, in a tone of well-bred regret that carried with it nothing more than courtesy, "but I'm promised for every dance."

Cadets Prescott and Sennett had turned slightly aside. So had Belle's late partner. Dodge knew that they were laughing inwardly at his Waterloo. And Anstey and Greg, who stood by at this moment, appeared to be wearing inscrutable grins. Dodge made his adieus hurriedly, walking up the ballroom just ahead of Furlong, who also had observed. Bert felt sure so many of his comrades had seen and enjoyed his plight that his fury was at white heat as he stepped just outside the ballroom.

Furlong came after him, looking at him quizzically.

"We stagers have a hard time of it, eh, Dodge?" grinned Mr. Furlong.

"Are you referring to the two femmes I was just billing?" shot out Dodge impetuously. "Oh, they're very inconsequential girls!"

Mr. Furlong drew himself up very straight, his eyes flashing fire.

"You dog!" he exclaimed, in utter disgust.

Yearling Dodge turned ghastly white.

"You---you didn't understand me. Let me explain," he urged.

"You can't explain a remark like yours," muttered Mr. Furlong over his shoulder, as he turned his back on Bert.

To be called a "dog" has but one sequence in cadet world. Bert Dodge had to send his seconds to Mr. Furlong before taps. Though they must have loathed their task, had they known the whole story, the seconds made arrangements with Mr. Furlong's representatives.

Before reveille the next morning Bert Dodge stood up for nearly two rounds before the sledgehammer fists of Mr. Furlong.

When it was over, Dodge sought cadet hospital, remaining there until Monday morning, and returning to camp looking somewhat the worse for wear.

Along with truth, honor and courtesy, tenderest chivalry toward woman is one of the fairest flowers of the West Point teaching.

Fellows like yearling Dodge cannot be taught. They can only be insulted to the fighting point, and then pummelled. Cadet Furlong went to considerable inconvenience, though uncomplainingly,

for two young women whom he had not the pleasure of knowing.

CHAPTER IX

SPOONY FEMME---FLIRTATION WALK

"So this is Flirtation Walk?" asked Belle Meade.

The four young people---Anstey was one of them---had just turned into the famous path, which begins not far to the eastward of the hotel. It was between one and two o'clock on Sunday afternoon.

"This is Flirtation Walk," replied Mr. Anstey.

"But is one compelled to flirt, on this stroll?" asked Belle, with a comical pout.

"By no means," Anstey hastened to assure her. "Yet the surroundings often bring out all there may be of slumbering inclination to flirt."

"Where did the walk ever get such a name?" pursued Belle.

"Really, you have to see the first half of it before you can quite comprehend," the Virginian told her.

"I suppose you have been over this way times innumerable?" teased Miss Meade.

"Hardly," replied Anstey seriously. "I have been a yearling only a few days."

"But is a plebe forbidden to stroll here?"

"If a plebe did have the brass to try it," replied Anstey slowly, "I reckon he would have to fight the whole yearling class in turn."

Laura caught some of the conversation, and turned to Dick.

"Haven't plebes any rights or privileges?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Prescott gravely. "A plebe is fed three meals a day, like anyone else. If he gets hurt he has a right to medical and surgical attendance. He is allowed to attend chapel on Sunday, just like an upper classman, and he may receive and write letters. But he mustn't butt into upper-class privileges."

"Poor plebe!" sighed sympathetic Laura.

"Lucky plebe!" amended Dick.

"Weren't you fearfully glum and homesick last year?"

"Some of the time, desperately so."

"Yet you believe it is right to ignore a plebe, and to make him so wretched?"

"The upper classmen don't make the plebe wretched. The plebe is just on probation while he's in the fourth class---that's all. The plebe is required to prove that he's a man before he's accepted as one."

"It all seems dreadfully hard," contended Laura.

"It is hard, but necessary, if the West Point man is to be graduated as anything but a snob with an enlarged cranium. Laura, you remember what a fuss the 'Blade' made over me when I won my appointment? Now, almost every new man come to West Point with some such splurge made about him at home. He reaches here thinking he's one of the smartest fellows in creation. In a good many cases, too, the fellow has been spoiled ever since he was a baby, by being the son of wealthy parents, or by being from a family distinguished in some petty local social circles. The first move here, on the part of the upper classmen, is to take all of that swelling out of the new man's head. Then, most likely, the new man has never had any home training in being really manly. Here, he must be a man or get out. It takes some training, some probation, some hard knocks and other things to make a man out of the fellow. He has to be a man, if he's going to be fit to command troops."

Anstey, who had been walking close behind his comrade, added:

"The new man, if he has been spoiled at home, usually comes here with a more or less bad temper. He can't talk ugly here, or double his fists, or give anyone black looks---except with one invariable result."

"What?" asked both girls eagerly.

"He must fight, as soon as the meeting can be arranged," replied Anstey.

"That sounds rather horrible!" shuddered Laura.

"Does it?" asked Dick dryly. "We're being trained here for fighting men."

"But what do they fight about?" inquired Belle.

"Well, one man, who probably will never be thought of highly again," replied Anstey, "spoke slightly of a girl at the hop last night. The cadet who heard him didn't even know the girl, but he called the cadet a 'dog' for speaking that way of a woman."

"What happened?" inquired Laura.

"The man who was called a 'dog' was, according to our code, compelled to call his insulter out."

"Are they going to fight?" asked Belle eagerly.

"The 'dog' was whipped at the first streak of daylight this morning," the Virginian answered. "That particular 'dog' is now in a special

little kennel at the hospital. Hasn't he learned anything? He knows more about practical chivalry than he did last night."

"This talk is getting a bit savage," laughed Dick. "Let me call your attention to the beauty of the view here."

The view was, indeed, a striking one. The two couples had halted at a rock-strewn point on the walk. The beauty of the woods was all about them.

Through the trees to the east they could see the Hudson, almost at their feet, yet far below them. Looking northward, they saw a noble sweep of the same grand river, above the bend.

"Come forward a bit" urged Anstey of Belle. "I want to show you a beautiful effect across the river."

As they passed on, just out of sight, Greg Holmes came along, talking animatedly with Miss Griffin. At sight of Laura, Greg halted, and the four young people chatted. At last Holmes and Miss Griffin passed on to speak to Belle.

"I feel as if I could spend an entire day on this beautiful spot," murmured Laura contentedly.

"Let me fix a seat for you," begged Dick, spreading his handkerchief on a flat rock.

Laura thanked him and sat down. Dick threw himself on the grass beside the rock.

Then Laura told him a lot of the home-town news, and they talked over the High School days to their hearts' content.

"I don't know that I've ever seen such a beautiful spot as it is right at this part of the walk," spoke Laura presently, after a few couples had strolled above them. "And such beautiful wild flowers! Look at the honeysuckle up there. I really wish I could get some of that to take back to the hotel. I could press it before it withered."

"It is easily enough obtained," smiled Dick, rising quickly.

"O-o-o-h! Don't, please!" called Miss Bentley uneasily, for Dick, after examining the face of the little cliff for footing, had begun to scale up toward the honeysuckle.

"Hold your parasol---open," he directed, looking down with a smile.

In another moment he was tossing down the beautiful blossoms into the open parasol that Miss Bentley held upside down.

"How would you like some of these ferns?" Dick called down, pulling out a sample by the roots and holding it out to view.

"Oh, if you please!"

Several ferns fell into the upturned parasol. Then Dick scrambled down, resuming his lounging seat on the grass, while Laura examined

her treasures and chatted.

"What a splendid, thoroughbred girl she has become!" kept running through Prescott's mind.

Every detail, from the tip of her small, dainty boot, peeping out from under the hem of the skirt, up to the beautiful coloring of her face and the purity of her low, white feminine brow Dick noted in turn. He had never seen Laura look so attractive, not even in her dainty ball finery of the night before. He had never felt so strongly drawn toward her as he did now. He longed to tell her so, and not lightly, either, but with direct, manly force and meaning.

Though Cadet Prescott's face showed none of his temptation, he found himself repeatedly on the dangerous brink of sentimentality. Since coming to West Point he had seen many charming girls, yet not one who appealed to him as did this dainty one from his own home town and the old, bygone school days.

But Dick tried to hold himself back. He had, yet, nothing to offer the woman whom he should tell of his love. He was by no means certain that he would finally graduate from the Military Academy. Without a place in life, what had he to offer? Would it be fair or honorable to seek to capture the love of this girl when his own future was yet so uncertain?

Yet caution and prudence seemed more likely to fly away every time he glanced at this dear girl. In desperation Dick rose quickly.

"Laura," he said softly, "if we remain here all afternoon there is a lot that we shall fail to see. Are you for going on with our walk?"

Laura Bentley looked up at him with something of a little start. Perhaps she, too, had been thinking, but a girl may not speak all that passes in her mind.

"Yes," she answered; "let us keep on."

Dick, as he walked beside her, was tortured with the feeling that Laura Bentley might not wait long before making her choice of men in the world. Some other fellow, more enterprising than he, might-----

"But it wouldn't be fair!" muttered Prescott to himself. "I have no right to ask her to tie herself for years, and then perhaps fail myself."

Laura thought her cadet companion appeared a bit absent minded during the rest of the walk. Who shall know what passes in a girl's innermost mind? Perhaps she divined what was moving in his mind.

As they passed by the coast battery, then came up by Battle Monument, and so to the hotel, they found Greg and Anstey leaning against the veranda railing, chatting with Belle and Miss Griffin. These latest arrivals joined the others. Mrs. Bentley at last came down and joined them.

Thrice, in duty bound, Dick glanced at his watch. The third time a sigh full of bitterness escaped him.

"This is the meanest minute in my life," he declared. "It is time to say good-bye, for we must get back to camp and into full-dress uniform for parade."

"But shall we not see you after parade?" asked Laura, looking up quickly, an odd look flitting over her face.

"No; we are soldiers, and move by schedule," signed Dick. "After parade there will be other duties, then supper. And you are going at the end of parade!"

Bravely Prescott faced the farewells, though he knew more of the wrench than even Laura could have guessed.

"But you will come again in winter?" he murmured in a low voice to Laura.

"If mother permits," she answered, looking down at her boot tip, then up again, smiling, into his face.

"Mrs Bentley, you'll bring the girls here again, this winter, won't you?" appealed Dick.

"If Dr. Bentley and Belle's parents approve, I'll try to," answered the matron.

Then came the leave-takings, brief and open. With a final lifting of their caps Dick and the others turned and strode down the path. Laura and Belle gazed after them until the young men had disappeared into the encampment.

But you may be sure the girls were over on the parade ground by the time that the good old gray battalion had turned out and marched over, forming in battalion front.

It was a beautiful sight. Mrs. Bentley wasn't martial, but as she looked on at that straight, inflexible wall of gray and steel, as the band played the colors up to the right of line, the good matron was thinking to herself:

"What a pity that the country hasn't a thousand such battalions of the flower of young American manhood! Then what fear could we know in time of war?"

The girls looked on almost breathlessly, starting at the boom of the sunset gun, then thrilling with a new realization of what their country meant when the band crashed out in the exultant strains of the "Star Spangled Banner" and the Stars and Stripes fluttered down at West Point, to rise on another day of the nation's life.

It was over, and the visitors took the stage to the railway station.

What a fearfully dull evening it seemed in camp! Dick had never known the time to hang so heavily. He would almost have welcomed guard duty.

Over in another tent near by a "soiree" was in full but very quiet blast, for that bumptious plebe, Mr. Briggs, had been caught in more mischief, and was being "instructed" by his superiors in length of service.

Prescott, however, didn't even look in to see what was happening.

* * * * *

"Isn't West Point life glorious, Belle?" asked Laura eagerly as the West Shore train carried them toward New York.

"Fine!" replied Belle enthusiastically. "But still---wait until we have seen Annapolis."

At ten o'clock the next morning the young ladies and Mrs. Bentley were traveling in a Pullman car, on another stage of their journey. "I wonder what our young cadets are doing?" Laura wondered aloud, as she leaned forward.

"Enjoying themselves, you may be sure," Mrs. Bentley replied promptly, with a smile.

"That summer encampment seems like one long, huge lark," put in Belle Meade. "It must be great for young men to be able to enjoy themselves so thoroughly."

"I wonder just what our young men are doing at this moment?" persisted Laura.

"Well, if they're not dressing for something," calculated Mrs. Bentley, "you may be sure they're moving about looking as elegant as ever and making themselves highly agreeable in a social way."

Ye gods of war! At that very moment Dick, in field uniform, and dripping profusely under the hot sun, was carrying a long succession of planks, each nearly as long and heavy as he could manage, to other cadets who waited to nail them in place on a pontoon bridge out over an arm of the Hudson. Greg Holmes was one of four young men toiling at the rope by which they were endeavoring to drag a mountain howitzer into position up a steep slope near Crow's Nest, while Anstey, studying field fortification, was digging in a trench with all his might and main.

CHAPTER X

THE CURE FOR PLEBE ANIMAL SPIRITS

So the weeks slipped by.

Up at five in the morning, busy most of the time until six in the evening, the cadets of the first, third and fourth classes found ample time to enjoy themselves between dark and taps, at 10.30, except when guard duty or something else interfered.

Much of the "idle" time through the day was spent in short naps, to make up for that short six hours and a half of regular night sleep.

Yet all the young men seemed to thrive in their life of hard work and outdoor air.

Hazing was proceeding merrily, so far as some of the yearlings were concerned. Perhaps half of the class in all engaged in two or more real hazings through the summer. A few of the third classmen became almost inveterate hazers.

But Dick Prescott, true to the principles had stated at the beginning of the encampment, hazed a plebe only when he believed it to be actually necessary in order to keep properly down some bumptious new man.

Dodge returned from hospital after a very short stay there. Word had spread through the camp. Though Dodge, who admitted frankly that his thrashing had been deserved, managed to keep a few friends, but was avoided by most of the yearlings. Since he had taken his medicine so frankly, he was not, however, "cut."

One afternoon, when Dick had been dozing on his mattress for about ten minutes, during a period of freedom from drill, the tent flap rustled, and Yearling Furlong looked in.

"What is it?" called Dick.

"Sorry if I've roused you, old ramrod," murmured the caller.

"That's all right, Milesy. Come in and rest yourself. You won't mind if I keep flat, will you?"

"Not in training for sick report?" asked Furlong, glancing down solicitously. But he saw the glow of robust health glowing through the deep coat of tan on Prescott's face.

"My appetite doesn't resemble sick report," laughed Dick. "But, while you don't really look ill, Milesy, it's very plain that you have something serious on your mind. Out with it!"

"I guess that will make me feel better," assented Furlong, with a sigh. "It's all that little plebe beast, Mr. Briggs."

"Surely he hasn't been hazing you?" inquired Prescott, opening his eyes very wide.

"No, no; not just that, old ramrod," replied Furlong. "But Mr. Briggs is proving a huge disappointment to me. I've done my best to make a meek and lowly cub of him, but he won't consent to fill his place. Now, that little beast made a good enough get away with his studies during the three months before camp. He mastered all the work of the soldier in ranks. At bottoms Mr. Briggs is really a very good little boy soldier. But he's so abominably and incurably fresh that he should have gone to Annapolis, where there's always some salt in the breeze."

"What has Mr. Briggs been doing now?" asked Dick with interest.

"What doesn't Mr. Briggs do?" sighed Furlong mournfully. "Instead of sleeping nights, that beast must lie awake, devising more ways of being unutterably fresh. But now he's contaminating his bunkie, Mr. Ellis."

"Evil company always did work havoc with good manners," nodded Dick. "So Mr. Ellis has gone bad, has he?"

"Do you know," continued Furlong severely, "that three mornings ago, when Jessup, of our class, was dressing at forty horsepower so he wouldn't miss reveille formation, that he stepped into two shoes full of soft soap, and had to go out sloshing into line in that shape, just because he couldn't spare the time to take his shoes off and empty them?"

"Yes," nodded Prescott. "We suspected Haverford, of the first class, of that, because Jessup, on guard, challenged Haverford when Haverford was trying to run the guard after taps."

"Haverford nothing," retorted Furlong. "He's above such jobs. No, sir! This afternoon Jessup ran plumb into Mr. Ellis when that little beast bunkie of the other beast, Mr. Briggs, was just in the act of dropping soft soap into the shoes that Aldrich will wear to dress parade today."

"Where on earth did Mr. Ellis get hold of soft soap?" demanded Prescott, raising himself on one elbow.

"You're entirely missing the problem, old ramrod!" grunted Furlong wrathfully. "The question is, how can we possibly soak such habits out of Mr. Ellis and Mr. Briggs?"

"Perhaps it can't be done," suggested Dick.

"It must be done!" uttered Furlong savagely.

"Well, I can't think of any yearling better suited to the task that you are, Milesy!"

"One man? or one tentful, isn't equal to any such gigantic piece of work!" retorted Furlong. "Ramrod, you've got to appoint a class committee to take these two baboons in hand. It ought to be done this very night, too. Now, sit up, won't you, and get your thinking cap on?"

"Have you talked with any of the other men?"

"Yes; and they all agree that a soiree must be given to Mr. Ellis, and that you should be present."

"What is the call for me, Milesy?"

"You are the class president."

"But this is no affair that involves the honor of the class. Therefore, as president, I cannot see that there is any call for me."

"It is the feeling with all the members of the yearling class that you should be present."

Prescott looked at his visitor intently for a moment.

Dick understood, now. He had taken "too little" interest in the hazing of b.j. plebes, and the class did not want to see its president shirk any duties that might be considered his, either as yearling or as class president.

"Very good, Milesy," replied Dick quietly. "You may inform all anxious inquirers that I'll be on hand. Where and at what hour?"

"Eight o'clock, in Dunstan's tent."

"Very good."

Furlong arose with a satisfied look on his face. He had, in fact, been deputed by others to make sure that Prescott would be on hand. There is always a good deal of risk attendant on hazing. It may lead to discovery---and dismissal.

"I wonder if some of the fellows think I keep away from hazing simply because I'm afraid of risking my neck?" yawned Dick. "They practically insist on my sitting in to-night, do they? Oh, well!"

The hop took more men away from camp than usual that night. Other cadets met friends from the hotel or officers' quarters at post number one.

But over in Dunstan's tent a considerable group of yearlings gathered. A few, in fact, were obliged to stand outside. This they did in such a way as not to attract the attention of the O.C. or any chance tac.

Dick was there, and with him were Holmes and Anstey, to both of whom had been conveyed a hint as strong as that which had reached the class president. Furlong, Griffin and Dobbs were in the tent. Jessup and Aldrich were there as a matter of fact.

On the still night air came the clanging of eight on the big clock down in the group of barracks and Academic Building. Just as the strokes were pealing forth Plebes Briggs and Ellis came up the street and stood at the front pole of Dunstan's tent.

"Come in, beasties," summoned Furlong. "We are awaiting you."

Neither plebe looked over joyous as the pair entered.

"Stand there, misters," ordered Dick, pointing to the space that had been reserved for the victims of the affair. "Now, misters, there is some complaint that you have mistaken West Point for a theatrical training school. The suspicion is gaining ground that you two beasties imagine you have been appointed here as comedians. Is that your delusion?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Briggs and Mr. Ellis in one solemn breath.

"Then what ails you, misters?" demanded Dick severely.

Both plebes remained silent.

"Answer me, sirs. You first, Mr. Briggs."

"I think we must have been carried away by excess of animal spirits, sir," replied Mr. Briggs, now speaking meekly enough.

"Animal spirits?" repeated Dick thoughtfully. "There may be much truth and reason in that idea. Camp life here is repressive of animal spirits, to be sure. We who are your mentors to some extent should have thought of that. Mr. Briggs, you shall find relief for your animal spirits. Mr. Ellis, what is your defence?"

"I thought, sir---thought-----"

With the yearling President's eyes fixed on him in stern, searching gaze, the once merry little Mr. Ellis became confused. He broke off stameringly.

"That's enough, Mr. Ellis," replied the class president. "You admit that you thought. Now, no plebe is capable of thinking. Your answer, mister, proves you to be guilty of egotism."

Then Dick, with the air of a judge, yet with a mocking pretence of gentleness and leniency sounding; in his voice, turned back to Plebe Briggs.

"Mr. Briggs, you will now proceed to relieve your animal spirits by some spirited animal conduct. The animal that you will represent will be the crab. Down on your face, mister!"

Flat on the floor lay Mr. Briggs. The yearlings outside, at the tent doorway, scenting something coming, peered in eagerly.

"Now, spread out your arms and legs, mister, just as any good crab should do. Raise your body from the floor. Not too much; about six inches will do. Now, mister, move about as nearly as possible in the manner of a crab. Stop, mister! Don't you know that a crab moves either backwards or sideways? It will not give enough vent to your animal spirits unless you move exactly as your model, the crab, does. Try it again, mister, and be painstaking in your imitation."

Mr. Briggs presented a most grotesque appearance as he crawled about over the floor in the very limited space allowed him by the presence of so many others. The yearlings enjoyed it all in mirthful silence.

"As for you, mister," continued Dick, turning upon the uncomfortable Mr. Ellis, "your self-conceit so fills every part of your body that the only thing for you is to stand on your head. Go to the rear tentpole and stand on your head. You may brace your feet against the pole. But remain on your head until we make sure that all the conceit has run out of you!"

Mr. Briggs was still "crabbing it" over the floor. Every minute the task became more irksome.

"Up with you, mister," Prescott admonished. "No self-respecting crab, with an abundance of animal spirits, ever trails along the ground like that."

After some two minutes of standing on his head Mr. Ellis fell over sideways, his feet thudding.

"Up with you, sir," admonished Dick. "You are still so full of egotism that it sways you like the walking beam of a steamboat. Up with you, mister, and up you stay until there is no ballast of conceit left in you."

Crab-crab-crab! Mr. Briggs continued to move sidewise and backward over the tent flooring.

Mr. Ellis was growing frightfully red in the face. But Prescott, from the remembrance of his own plebe days, knew to a dot how long a healthy plebe could keep that inverted position without serious injury. So the class president, sitting as judge in the court of hazing, showed no mercy.

Some of the yearlings who stood outside peering in should have kept a weather eye open for the approach of trouble from tac. quarters. But, as the ordeals of both of the once frisky plebes became more severe, the interest of those outside increased.

Crab-crab-crab! continued Mr. Briggs. It seemed to him as though his belt-line weighed fully a ton, so hard was it to keep his abdomen off the floor, resting solely on his hands and feet.

Mr. Ellis must have felt that conceit and he could never again be friends, judging by the redness of his face and the straining of his muscles.

An approaching step outside should have been heard by some of the yearlings looking in through the doorway, but it wasn't. Then, all in an instant, the step quickened, and Lieutenant Topham, O.C. for the day, made for the tent door!

CHAPTER XI

LIEUTENANT TOPHAM FEELS QUEER

Yearling Kelton barely turned his head, but he caught sight of the olive drab of the uniform of the Army officer within a few feet.

Pretending not to have seen the officer, Cadet Kelton drew in his breath with a sharp whistle. It was not loud, but it was penetrating, and it carried the warning.

Swift as a flash Prescott caught upside-down Mr. Ellis, and fairly rolled him out under the canvas edge at the back of the tent.

Greg instantly shoved the prostrate Mr. Briggs through by the

same exit.

Fortunately both plebes were too much astonished to utter a sound.

"Crouch and scowl at me, Greg---hideously whispered alert-witted Dick."

As he spoke, Prescott swiftly crouched before Holmes. Dick's hands rested on his knees; he stuck out his tongue and scowled fiercely at Holmes, who tried to repay the compliment with interest.

Although all the yearlings in the tent had been "scared stiff" at Kelton's low, warning signal, all, by an effort, laughed heartily, their gaze on Prescott and Holmes.

"Yah!" growled Dick. "Perhaps I did steal the widow's chickens, and I'll even admit that I did appropriate the pennies from her baby's bank. But that's nothing. Tell 'em about the time you stole the oats from the blind horse's crib and put breakfast food in its place."

Everyone of the yearlings in the tent knew that trouble stood at the door, and that they must keep up the pretence.

There was a chorus of laughter, and two or three applauded.

"I did---admit it," bellowed Greg. "But you stand there and admit the whole shameful truth about the time that you-----"

"Attention!" called Kelton, turning, then recognizing Lieutenant Topham and saluting. "The officer in charge!"

On the jump every yearling inside turned and stood rapidly at attention.

"Gentlemen, I'm sorry to have spoiled the show," laughed Lieutenant Topham. He had seen the shadows of Briggs and Ellis on the canvas, and had expected to drop in upon a different scene. But now this tac. was wholly disarmed. He honestly believed that he had stumbled upon a party of yearlings having a good time with a bit of nonsensical dialogue.

"Mr. Prescott! Mr. Holmes!"

"Sir?" answered both yearlings, saluting.

"I will suggest that you two might work up the act you were just indulging in. You ought to raise a great laugh the next time a minstrel show is given by the cadets."

"Thank you, sir"---from both "performers."

Lieutenant Topham turned and passed on down the company street.

The two expelled plebes, in the meantime, had a chance to slip off silently. Even had Briggs and Ellis been inclined to "show up" their hazers, they knew too well the fate that would await such a pair of plebes at the hands of the cadet corps.

"That shows how easily a suspicious man's eyes may deceive him," mused Lieutenant Topham as he walked along.

Kelton now allowed his gaze to follow the retreating O.C., while the yearlings in the tent stood in dazed silence. They were still panting over the narrow escape from a scrape that might have cost them their places on the roll of the battalion.

"Safe!" whispered Kelton. "You may thank your deliverers."

Then, indeed, the other yearlings pressed about Prescott and Holmes, hugging them and patting them extravagantly.

When Lieutenant Topham returned to his tent, he found Captain Bates there, with a visitor. By the time that he had stepped inside, Topham also discovered the presence of the K.C. likewise engaged.

"I've just had a good lesson in the pranks that a man's eyes and ears may play upon him," announced Topham, unbelting his sword.

Then he related, with relish, the occurrence at Dunstan's tent.

"Humph!" grunted Captain Bates. "You say Mr. Prescott was there?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Then, Topham, you didn't really see very much of what happened, after all," half jeered Captain Bates. "If Prescott was there, the crowd had a plebe on hand, depend on it."

"But I would have seen the plebe."

"Not when you have to contend with a man like Mr. Prescott! If he had a tenth of a second's warning it would be enough for him to roll the plebe out at the back of the tent."

"Now, I think of it," confessed Lieutenant Topham slowly, "I think I did hear a slight sound at the back of the tent."

"You didn't investigate that sound, Mr. Topham?"

"Why, no, sir. I thought I was looking at the whole show."

"Instead of which," chuckled Captain Bates, "you saw only the curtain that had just been rung down, and the author of the piece bowing to the audience."

"Well, I'll be---switched!" ejaculated Mr. Topham, dropping into his chair.

"Mr. Prescott has the reputation of being the cleverest dodger in the yearling class," declared the K.C., in a dry voice. "It was Bates who first discovered that quality in Mr. Prescott, but I must admit that he has convinced me. Tomorrow a new cadet corporal will be appointed, and the fact published in orders. The new corporal takes the place of Corporal Ryder, who has been busted (reduced). Mr. Prescott would have been appointed corporal, but for his reputation for dodging out of the biggest scrapes of his

class. So Mr. Dodge is to be the new cadet corporal."

"Oh, you sly old ramrod!" Dunstan was murmuring ecstatically, back in that other tent. "When I think of all the yearlings who've been dropped for hazing in past years! If each class had only had a Prescott all of those yearlings would have been saved to the service!"

But Dick, though he did not know it, had a reputation in the tac. department which had just prevented his attaining to the honor that he desired most---appointment as cadet corporal.

CHAPTER XII

UNDER A FEARFUL CHARGE

Cadet Corporal Dodge took his new appointment as a triumph in revenge. Of late he had been growing even less popular. He determined to be a martinet with the men in ranks under him. He made the mistake that all petty, senseless tyrants do. The great disciplinarian is never needlessly a tyrant.

* * * * *

The summer in camp passed quickly after July had gone.

In all, Miss Griffin made four visits to West Point that summer. Greg became her favored and eager escort, to the disappointment of fifty men who would have been glad to take his place.

Both Cadet Holmes and Mr. Griffin's very pretty sister kept up their attitudes of laughing challenge to each other throughout the summer. It was impossible to see that either had scored a deep impression on the other.

Not even to his chum did Greg confide whether Miss Griffin had caught his heart. Mr. Griffin, her brother, could hardly venture a guess to himself as to whether his sister cared for the tall and manly looking Holmes.

But when Miss Griffin had reached the end of her last summer visit to West Point she told Greg that she would not be there again for some time to come.

"At least," asked Greg, "you'll be here again when the winter hops start?"

"I cannot say," was all the reply Miss Adele Griffin would make.

"In three weeks she goes back to the seminary in Virginia," said Griff, when Greg spoke to him about the matter. "Dell won't see West Point before next summer. Our people are not rich enough to keep Dell traveling all the time."

Whether Greg was crestfallen at the news no one knew. Greg had

never believed, anyway, in wearing his heart on his sleeve---"just for other folks to stick pins in it, you know," was his explanation.

There came the day when the furloughed second class marched over to camp. Very quickly after that all classes were back in cadet barracks, and the charming summer of Mars had given place to the hard fall, winter and spring of the academic grind.

The return to studies found both Greg and Dick forced to do some extra hard work. Mathematics for this year went "miles ahead" of anything that the former Gridley boys had encountered in High School. Had they been able to pursue this branch of study in the more leisurely and lenient way of the colleges, both young men might have stood well.

As it was, after the first fortnight Greg went to the "goats," or the lowest section in mathematics, while Dick, not extremely better off, hung only in the section above the goat line.

As the fall hops came on Greg went to about three out of every four.

"A fellow can bone until his brain is nothing but a mess of bone dust," he complained. "Dick, old chum, you'd better go to hops, too."

Dick went to only one, in October. He staggged it, whereas Greg often dragged. But Prescott saw no girl there who looked enough like Laura Bentley to interest him. His standing in class interested him far more than hops at which a certain Gridley girl could not be present.

Laura had written him that she and Belle might be at a hop early in December.

"I'll wait and look forward to it," decided Dick. But he said nothing, even to Greg. Holmes was showing an ability to be interested in too many different girls, Prescott decided.

But it may be that Holmes, knowing that Griffin corresponded with his pretty, black-eyed little sister, may have been intentionally furnishing subjects for the news that was despatched to a Virginia seminary.

"Come on, old ramrod," urged Greg one Saturday night, as he gave great heed to his dressing. "You'll bone yourself dry, staying here all the time with Smith's conic sections. Drop that dry math. rot and stag it with me over at Cullum tonight. You can take math. up again after chapel tomorrow."

"Thank you," replied Prescott, turning around from the study table at which he was seated. "I don't care much for the social whirl while there's any doubt about the January exams. It would be no pleasure to go over to Cullum. There'll be real satisfaction if I can look forward to better marking this coming week."

Dick spent his time until taps at the study table. But when he closed the book it was with a sigh of satisfaction.

"If I can only go through a few more nights as easily as I have

tonight, I'll soon astound myself by maxing it" (making one of the highest marks), he told himself. "I think I'm beginning to see real light in conic sections, but I'll have the books out again tomorrow afternoon."

* * * * *

"Well?" challenged Holmes gayly, as he entered their room after the hop.

"I believe I'm going to turn over a new leaf and max it some," grinned Prescott.

"Don't!" expostulated Greg, with a look of mock alarm.

The daily marks were not posted until the end of the academic week, but Prescott knew, when Monday's recitation in mathematics was over, that he had found new favor in the eyes of Captain Abbott, the instructor. On Tuesday again he was sure that he had landed another high mark.

Greg caught some of the fire of his chum's example, and he, too, began to bone so furiously that he decided to drop the hops for the time.

Wednesday again Dick marched back in mathematics section with a consciousness that he had not fumbled once in explaining the problem that he had been ordered to set forth the blackboard.

"I hear that you're going to graduate ahead of time, and be appointed professor in math.," grinned Greg.

"Well, I'm at least beginning to find out that some things are better than hops," laughed Dick happily. "Greg, if I can kill math. to my satisfaction this year, I shan't have another doubt about being able to get through and graduate here!"

It was the end of November by this time, and Dick, on Thursday of this successful week, received a letter to the effect that Laura and Belle would arrive at West Point on Saturday afternoon at one o'clock.

The news nearly broke up Prescott's three hours of study that Thursday evening. However, he fought off the feeling of excitement and hampering delight.

When Dick marched with his section into mathematics Friday morning he felt a calm confidence that he would keep up the average of his fine performance for the week.

"Mr. Furlong, Mr. Dunstan, Mr. Prescott and Mr. Gray, go to the blackboards," ordered Captain Abbott. "The other gentlemen will recite from their seats."

Stepping nimbly over to the blackboard, in one corner of which his name had been written, Dick picked up the chalk, setting down the preliminaries of the problem assigned to him. Then his chalk ran nimbly along over the first lines of his demonstration.

At last he stopped. Captain Abbott, who was generally accredited with possessing several pairs of eyes, noted that Mr. Prescott had halted.

For some moments the young man went anxiously over what he had already written. At last he turned around, facing the instructor, and saluted.

"Permission to erase, sir?" requested Prescott.,

Captain Abbott nodded his assent.

Picking up the eraser, Dick carefully erased the last two lines that he had set down.

Then, as though working under a new inspiration, he went ahead setting down line after line of the demonstration of this difficult problem. Only once did he halt, and then for not more than thirty seconds.

Dunstan went through a halting explanation of his problem. Then Captain Abbott called:

"Mr. Prescott!"

Taking up the short pointer, Dick rattled off the statement of the problem. Then he plunged into his demonstration, becoming more and more confident as he progressed.

When he had finished Captain Abbott asked three or four questions. Dick answered these without hesitation.

"Excellent," nodded the gratified instructor. "That is all, Mr. Prescott."

As Dick turned to step to his seat he pulled his handkerchief from the breast of his blouse and wiped the chalk from his hands. All unseen by himself a narrow slip of white paper fluttered from underneath his handkerchief to the floor.

"Mr. Prescott," called Captain Abbott, "will you bring me that piece of paper from the floor?"

Dick obeyed without curiosity, then turned again and gained his seat. The instructor, in the meantime, had called upon Mr. Pike. While Pike was reciting, haltingly, Captain Abbott turned over the slip of paper on his desk, glancing at it with "one of his pairs of eyes."

Anyone who had been looking at the instructor at that moment would have noted a slight start and a brief change of color in the captain's face. But he said nothing until all of the cadets had recited and had been marked.

"Mr. Prescott!" the instructor then called Dick rose, standing by his seat.

"Mr. Prescott, did you work out your problem for today unaided?"

"I had a little aid, last night, sir, from Mr. Anstey."

"But you had no aid in the section room today?"

"No, sir," replied Dick, feeling much puzzled.

"You understand my question, Mr. Prescott?"

"I think so, sir."

"In putting down your demonstration on the blackboard today you had no aid whatever?"

"None whatever, sir."

"At one stage, Air. Prescott, you hesitated, waited, then asked permission to erase? After that erasure you went on with hardly a break to the end of the blackboard work."

"Yes, sir."

"And, at the time you hesitated, before securing leave to erase, you did not consult any aid in your work?"

"No, sir."

"This piece of paper," continued Captain Abbott, lifting the slip, "fell from your handkerchief when you drew it out, just as you left the blackboard. That was why I asked you to bring it to me, Mr. Prescott. This paper contains all the salient features of your demonstration. Can you explain this fact, Mr. Prescott?"

The astounded yearling felt as though his brain were reeling. He went hot and cold, all in a flash.

In the same moment the other men of the section sat as though stunned. All lying, deceit and fraud are so utterly detested at West Point that to a cadet it is incomprehensible how a comrade can be guilty of such an offence.

It seemed to Prescott like an age ere he could master his voice.

"I never saw that paper, sir, before you asked me to pick it up!"

"But it dropped from under your handkerchief, Mr. Prescott. Can you account for that?"

"I cannot, sir."

Captain Abbott looked thoughtfully, seriously, at Cadet Richard Prescott. The instructor had always liked this young man, and had deemed him worthy of all trust. Yet what did this evidence show?

In the meantime the cadets sat staring the tops of their desks, or the covers of their books. The gaze of each man was stony; so were his feelings.

Prescott, the soul of honor, caught in such a scrape as this!

But there must be some sensible and satisfactory explanation, thought at least half of the cadets present.

"Have I permission to ask a question, sir?" asked Dick in an almost hollow voice.

"Proceed, Mr. Prescott."

"Is the paper in my handwriting, sir?"

"It is not," declared the instructor. "Most of it is in typewriting, with two figures drawn crudely in ink. There are three or four typewriting machines on the post to which a cadet may find easy access. You may examine this piece of paper, Mr. Prescott, if you think that will aid you to throw any light on the matter."

Dick stepped forward, lurching slightly. Most of the silent men of the section took advantage of this slight distraction to shift their feet to new positions. The noise grated in that awful silence.

How Dick's hand shook as he reached for the paper. At first his eyes were too blurred for him to make out clearly what was on the paper. But at last he made it all out.

"I am very sorry, sir. This paper tells me nothing."

Captain Abbott's gaze was fixed keenly on the young man's face. White-faced Prescott, shaking and ghastly looking, showed all the evidences of detected, overwhelmed guilt.

Innocent men often do the same.

"You may return the paper and take your seat, Mr. Prescott."

As Prescott turned away he made a powerful effort to hold his head erect, and to look fearlessly before him.

It was a full minute, yet, before the bugle would sound through the Academic Building to end the recitation period. Dick was not the only one in this section room who found the wait intolerable.

But at last the bugle notes were heard.

"The section is dismissed," announced Captain Abbott. Dunstan, the section marcher, formed his men and led them thence. No man in the section held his head more erect than did Prescott, who was conscious of his own absolute innocence in the affair.

Yet, when he reached his room, and sank down at his study table, a groan escaped Dick Prescott.

His head fell forward, cushioned in his folded arms.

Thus Holmes found him on entering the room.

"Why, old ramrod, what on earth is the matter?" gasped Greg.

A groan from his chum was the only answer.

At that moment another step, brisk and official, was heard in the corridor. There was a short rap on the door, after which Unwine, cadet officer of the day, wearing his red sash and sword, stepped into the room.

"Mr. Prescott, you are ordered in close arrest in your quarters until further orders."

"Yes, sir," huskily replied Prescott, who had struggled to his feet and now stood at attention.

As Unwine wheeled, marching from the room, Dick sank again over his study table.

"Dick, old ramrod," pleaded Greg terrified, "what on earth-----"

"Greg," came the anguished moan, "they're going to try to fire me from West Point for a common cheat---and I'm afraid they'll do it, too!"

CHAPTER XIII

IN CLOSE ARREST

Ever since Greg Holmes first came to West Point he had been learning the repose and the reserve of the trained soldier.

Yet if ever his face betrayed utter abandonment to amazement it was now.

Cadet Holmes gazed at his chum in open-mouthed wonder.

"By and by," uttered Greg fretfully, "You'll tell me the meaning of this joke, and why Mr. Unwine should be in it, too."

It was several minutes before Prescott turned around again. When he did there was a furious glare in his eyes.

"Greg, old chum! This is no joke. You heard Unwine. He was delivering an official order, not carrying an April-fool package."

"Well, then, what does it all mean?" demanded Greg stolidly, for he began to feel dazed. "But, first of all, old ramrod, aren't you going to get ready to fall in for dinner formation?"

Mechanically, wearily, Dick obeyed the suggestion.

As he did so he managed to tell the story of the section room to horrified Greg.

"See here," muttered Cadet Holmes energetically, "you didn't do anything in the cheating line. Every fellow in the corps will know that. So you'll have to set your wits at work to find the real explanation of the thing. How could that paper have gotten

in with your handkerchief?"

"I don't know," replied Dick, shaking his head hopelessly.

"Well, you've got to find out, son, and that right quick! There isn't a moment to be lost! You didn't cheat---you wouldn't know how do a deliberately dishonest thing. But that reply won't satisfy the powers that be. You've got to get your answer ready, and do it with a rush."

"Perhaps you can also suggest where the rush should start," observed Prescott.

"Yes; I've got to suggest everything that is going to be done, I reckon," muttered Greg, resting a chum's loyal hand on Dick's shoulder. "Old ramrod, you're too dazed to think of anything, and I'm nearly as badly off myself. Say, did anyone, to your knowledge, have your handkerchief?"

Cadet Richard Prescott wheeled like a flash. His face had gone white again; he stared as though at a terrifying ghost.

"By the great horn spoon, Greg-----"

"Good! You're getting roused. Now, out with it!

"There were a lot of us standing about in the area, a little before time for the math. sections to start off."

"Yes? And some other fellow handled your handkerchief?"

"Bert Dodge found himself without one, and asked me for mine, to wipe a smear of black from the back of his hand."

"Which hand?"

"The left."

"It doesn't really matter which hand," Greg pursued, "but I asked to make sure that your mind is working."

"Oh, my mind is working," uttered Dick vengefully.

"But what else happened about that handkerchief?"

"Dodge used it, then started to tuck it into his own blouse. I grinned and reminded him that the handkerchief would fit better inside my blouse."

"And then?"

"Just then the call sounded, and we had to jump. Dodge handed me back the handkerchief with a swift apology, and raced away to join his section."

"And you?"

"I tucked the handkerchief in my blouse."

"Now, do some hard thinking," insisted Holmes. "Did you take that handkerchief out again until the unlucky time just after you had turned away from the board after explaining in math.?"

Dick remained silent, while the clock in the room ticked off the seconds.

"I am sure I did not," he replied firmly. "No; that was the next time that I took my handkerchief out."

"Huh!" muttered Greg. "We've got our start. And it won't be far to the end, either. Cheer up, old man!"

At that instant the call for formation sounded. The young men were ready and turned to leave the room on the jump. As they did so, Greg muttered in a low tone:

"Say nothing, but hold up your head and smile. Don't let anyone face you down. Not ten fellows in the corps will even guess that you could possibly be guilty of anything mean!"

Wouldn't they? West Point cadets have such an utter contempt for anything savoring of cheating or lying that the mere suspicion is often enough to make them hold back.

As the cadets moved to their places in the formations scores of cadets passed Prescott.

Short as the time had been, the news was already flying through the corps.

Usually Dick had a score of greetings as he made his way to his place in line. Today dozen cadets who had been among his friends seemed not to see him.

Dick recoiled, inwardly, as though from a stinging blow in the face. None of his comrades meant to be cruel. But most of them wanted to make sure that the seemingly reliable charge was not true. They must wait.

Utterly dejected, Prescott marched to dinner. On his way back to barracks a new and overwhelming thought came to him.

Laura Bentley and her mother, and Belle Meade were due at the hotel the next afternoon, and he and Greg had arranged to drag the girls to the Saturday-night hop.

"Greg, I can't leave quarters," muttered Dick huskily, as he threw himself down at his desk and began to write rapidly. "You'll have to attend to sending this telegram for me."

"On the jump!" assented Greg,

The telegram was addressed to Laura Bentley, and read:

"Don't come to West Point tomorrow. My letter will explain."

"I'll send it before the drawing lesson," Greg uttered, and vanished.

Confined to quarters in close arrest, Cadet Prescott put in more than two miserable hours endeavoring to get that letter written. But he couldn't get it penned. Then a knock came the door, and a telegram was handed in. It read:

"Wife and girls have left for shopping trip in New York. Don't know where to reach them."

It was signed by Dr. Bentley. The yellow paper fluttered from Prescott's hands to the floor. Mechanically he picked it up and carried it to his study table.

"I can't stop them," he muttered dismally. "Nor shall I be out of close arrest by that time, either. There's nothing I can do. I can't even see them---and I've been looking forward to this for months!"

Again Dick Prescott buried his head in his arms at the study table. To have Laura come here at the time when he was in the deepest disgrace that a cadet may face!

Greg came back to find his chum pacing the floor in misery.

"Well, it can't be helped," muttered Holmes philosophically.

"Of course you and Anstey can drag the girls to Cullum."

"Surely," muttered Holmes listlessly, "if the girls would go at all under such circumstances."

"I've made their trip a mockery and a bitter disappointment," groaned Dick.

"No, you haven't ramrod," retorted Greg. "Fate may be to blame, but you can't be held accountable for what you didn't do. Have no fear. I'll see to the ladies tomorrow afternoon. But I'm a pile more interested in knowing what is to be done in your case. The superintendent and the K.C. may see the absurdity of this whole thing against you, and order your arrest ended."

"But that won't clear me, Greg, and you know it. There would still be the suspicion in the corps, and---O Greg!---I can't endure that suspicion."

"Pshaw, old ramrod, you won't have to, very long. We'll bust this whole suspicion higher than any kite ever flew. See here, Dodge is responsible for your humiliation, and we'll drag it all out of him, if we have to tie him up by the thumbs!"

A knock at the door, and Anstey entered.

"I really couldn't get here before, old ramrod. But I'd cut you in a minute if I thought it really necessary to come here and tell you that I don't believe any charge of dishonor against you, Prescott, could possibly be true."

"It's mighty pleasant to have every fellow who feels that way come and say so," muttered Dick gratefully, as he thrust out his hand.

Another knock at the door. Cadet Prescott must report at once at the office of the K.C.

Down the stairs trudged Dick, across the area, and into the office of the commandant of cadets.

"I want to know, Mr. Prescott," declared that officer, "whether you can throw any added light in regard to the occurrence in Captain Abbott's section room this morning."

Dick had to deliberate, swiftly, as to whether he should say anything about having loaned Mr. Dodge his handkerchief briefly.

"I reckon I must speak of it," decided the unhappy cadet. "I mean to have Dodge summoned, if I'm tried, so I may as well speak of it now."

That, and other things, Dick stated. The K.C. listened gravely. It was plain from the officer's manner that he believed Prescott was going to have difficulty in establishing his innocence.

"That is all, Mr. Prescott," said the K.C. finally. Dick saluted and returned to his room.

In the few minutes that had elapsed, Anstey had done much. In the room were a dozen yearlings who were known to be among Dick's best friends. All shook his hand, assuring him that nothing could shake their faith in him. It was comforting, but that was all.

"You see, old ramrod," muttered Greg, when the callers had left, "there are enough who believe in you. Now, you've got to justify that faith by hammering this charge into nothingness. Someone has committed a crime---a moral crime anyway. In my own mind Dodge is the criminal but I'm not yet prepared to prove it."

In the meantime Cadet Albert Dodge was over in the K.C.'s office, undergoing a rigid questioning. Dodge freely admitted the episode of handkerchief borrowing but denied any further knowledge.

When Bert returned to barracks he was most bitter against Dick. To all who would listen to him Dodge freely stated his opinion of a man who would seek to shield his own wrong-doing by throwing suspicion on another.

"There were plenty who saw me borrow the handkerchief," contended Dodge stormily. "Whoever saw me take it also saw me return it. I'll defy any man to state, under oath, that I returned more than the handkerchief."

"How did the smear happen to be on your hand?" asked Dunstan, who, besides belonging to the same mathematics section with Prescott was also a warm personal friend.

Bert hesitated, looked uneasy, then replied:

"How about the smear? Why---I don't know It may have come from a match."

"Yes, what about that smear? How did it come there?" cried Greg, when Dunstan repeated Dodge's words.

Through Greg's mind, for hours after that, the question insistently intruded itself:

"How about that smear?"

Yet the question seemed to lead to nothing.

The next morning, Saturday, it was known, throughout cadet barracks, that a general court-martial order for Prescott would be published that afternoon.

On the one o'clock train from New York came Mrs. Bentley, Laura and Belle. They entered the bus at the station, and were driven up, across the plain, to the hotel.

After dinner, the girls waited in pleasant expectancy for Dick and Greg to send up their cards.

Greg's card came up, alone.

Anstey was back in quarters with Dick.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIENDS WHO STAND BY

"Well?" cried Dick, darting up, his eyes shining wildly when Greg finally threw open the door.

"Oh, bosh!" cried Greg jubilantly. "Do you think those girls are going to believe anything against you?"

"What did they say?" demanded Dick eagerly.

"Well, of course they were dazed," continued Greg. "In fact, Mrs. Bentley was the first to speak. What she said was one word, 'Preposterous!'"

"There's a woman aftah my own heart, suh," murmured Anstey.

"Belle got her voice next," continued Greg. "What she said was: "'You're wrong, Mrs. Bentley. It isn't even preposterous.'"

"Miss Meade surely delighted me, the first time I ever saw her," murmured Anstey.

"Laura looked down to hide a few tears," continued Greg. "But she brushed them away and looked up smiling. 'I'm sorry, sorry, sorry for Dick's temporary annoyance,' was what Laura said. 'But of course I know such deceit would be impossible in him, so I shall stay here until I know that the Military Academy authorities and the whole world realize how absurd such a suspicion must be.'"

"She's going to remain here?" faltered Dick.

"All three of 'em are. They couldn't be driven off the reservation by a file of infantry, just now. But both of the girls insisted on sending you a note. Which will you have first?"

"Don't trifle with me, Greg," begged Prescott.

Anstey rose to go.

"Don't take yourself off, Anstey old fellow. Just pardon me while I read my notes."

Dick read Laura's note through, thrilling with the absolute faith that it breathed:

"Dear Dick: Don't be uneasy about us, and don't worry about yourself, either. I couldn't express what I think about the charges, without having a man's license of speech! But you know all that I would write you. Just keep up the good old Gridley grit and smile for a few days. We are going to be here to attend that court-martial, and to give you courage from the gallery---but I don't believe you need a bit. Faithfully, Laura."

Belle's note was much shorter. It ran:

"Dear Dick: What stupid ideas they have of comedy here at West Point!"

And, as Belle knew that she wasn't and couldn't be Dick's sweetheart, she had not hesitated to sign herself, "Lovingly, Belle."

Dick passed each note in turn to Anstey.

"Your town suhtinly raises real girls!" was the southerner's quiet comment.

Dick felt like a new being. He was pacing the floor now, but in no unpleasant agitation.

"Did you impress the girls with the knowledge that I begged them to go to the hop tonight?" asked Prescott, stopping short and eyeing Greg.

"Did you think I'd forget half of my errand, old ramrod?" demanded Holmes indignantly "I delivered your full request, backed by all that I could add. At first Mrs. Bentley and Laura were shocked at the very idea. But Belle broke in with: 'If we didn't go, it would look as if we were in mourning for some one. We're not. We're just simply sorry that a poor idea of a farce keeps dear old Dick from being with us tonight. If we don't go, Dick Prescott will be more unhappy about it than anyone else in the wide world.'"

"Miss Meade suhtinly doesn't need spectacles," murmured Anstey. "She can see straight!"

"So," continued Greg, "I'm going to drag Laura tonight, and Anstey is going to do the same for Belle."

"And we'll suhtinly see to it that they have, outside of ourselves, of course, the handsomest men in the corps to dance with!" exclaimed Anstey. "If any fine and handsome fellow even tries to get out of it, I'll call him out and fight him stiff, suh!"

"I'm glad you have persuaded the girls to go," nodded Dick cheerily. "That will give me a happier evening than anything else could do just now."

"What will you do this evening, Dick?" asked Greg.

"I? Oh, I'll be busy---and contented at the same time. Tell that to Laura and Belle, please."

Yet it was with a sense of weariness that Dick turned out for supper formation. There were more pleasant greetings as he moved to his place in ranks, and that made him feel better for the moment. At his table at cadet mess he was amiably and cheerily included in all the merry conversation that flew around.

Then back to quarters Dick went, and soon saw Greg and Anstey, looking their spooniest in their full-dress uniforms, depart on the mission of dragging.

Prescott hardly sighed as he moved over to the study table. He read over a score of times the notes the girls had sent him.

Then came an orderly, who handed in a telegram. Dick opened this with nervous fingers. His eyes lit up when he found that it came from Annapolis. The message read:

_"Dear old Dick!
You're the straightest fellow on earth! We know. Don't let anybody get your goat!_"

_"Darrin And Dalzell,
Third Class,
U.S. Naval Academy."_"

"Dear old Gridley chums!" murmured the cadet, the moisture coming to his eyes. "Yes, they should know me, if anyone does. Those who know me best are all flocking to offer comfort. Then---hang it!---I don't need any. When a fellow's friends all believe in him, what more is there to ask? But I wonder how the news reached Annapolis? I know---Belle has telegraphed Dave. She knew he'd stand by me."

It was a very cheery Prescott to whom Anstey and Holmes returned. Anstey could remain but an instant, but that instant was enough to cheer the Virginian, the change in Prescott was so great.

In the few moments left before taps sounded, Greg told his chum all he could of the hop, and of the resolute conduct of Laura and Belle in refusing absolutely to be downcast.

"Have you sent any word home?" asked Greg.

"To my father and mother? Not a word! Nor shall I, until this

nightmare is all over," breathed Dick fervently.

"Laura wanted to know," Holmes explained. "Of course Mrs. Bentley had to send some word to her husband, to account for their longer absence, but she cautioned Dr. Bentley not to let a word escape."

To himself, as he reached up to extinguish the light, Greg muttered:

"I believe that unchanged scoundrel, Dodge, will see to it that word reaches Gridley!"

In this conjecture Holmes must have been correct, for, the next forenoon, there came a telegram, full of agony, from Prescott's mother, imploring further particulars at once. Mrs. Prescott's dispatch mentioned a "rumor."

"That's Dodge's dirty work," growled Holmes. "So that fastens the guilt of this whole thing upon him---the dirty dog!"

Yet how to fasten any guilt upon Dodge? Or how force from him any admission that would aid to free Cadet Prescott from the awful charge against him that had now been made official?

That Sunday, Greg, besides paying a long visit in the hotel parlor, and seeing to the dispatch of Dick's answer to his mother, also called, under permission, at the home of Lieutenant Topham, of the tactical department. Prescott had decided to ask that officer to act as his counsel at the court-martial.

Prescott's case looked simple enough. Nor did the judge-advocate of the court-martial need much time for his preparation of the case. The judge-advocate of a court-martial is the prosecuting officer. Theoretically he is also somewhat in the way of counsel for the defence. It is the judge-advocate's duty to prosecute, it is also his duty to inquire into any particulars that may establish the innocence of the accused man.

Mr. Topham at once consented to act as Dick's counsel, and entered heartily into the case.

"But I don't mind telling you, Mr. Prescott," continued Lieutenant Topham, as he was talking the matter over with Dick in the latter's room, "that both sides of the case look to me, at present, like blank walls. It won't be enough to clear you of the charge as far as the action of the court goes. We must do everything in our power to remove the slightest taint from your name, or your position with your brother cadets will never be quite the same again."

"I know that full well, sir," Cadet Prescott replied with feeling. "Though the court-martial acquit me, if there lingers any belief among the members of the cadet corps that I was really guilty, then the taint would not only hang over me here, but all through my subsequent career in the Army. It is an actual, all-around verdict of 'not guilty, and couldn't be,' that I crave sir."
"You may depend upon me, Mr. Prescott, to do all in my power for you," promised Lieutenant Topham.

CHAPTER XV

ON TRIAL BY COURT-MARTIAL

Tuesday was the day for the court-martial.

In the Army there is little patience with the law's delays.

A trial must move ahead as promptly as any other detail of the soldier's life. Nothing can hinder a trial but the inability to get all the evidence ready early. In Cadet Prescott's case the evidence seemed so simple as to require no delay whatever.

The weather had been growing warmer within a short time. When Dick and Greg awoke at sound of reveille, they heard the heavy rain no sign of daylight yet.

When the battalion turned out and formed to march to breakfast a more dispiriting day could not be imagined. The rain was converting deep snow into a dismal flood.

But Dick barely noticed the weather. He was full of grit, burning with the conviction that he must have a full vindication today.

It was when he returned to barracks and the ranks were broken, that Dick discovered how many friends he had. Fully twoscore of his classmates rushed to wring his hand and to wish him the best kind of good luck that day.

Yet at 7.55 the sections marched away to mathematics, philosophy or engineering, according to the classes to which the young soldiers belonged.

Then Prescott faced a lonely hour in his room.

"The fellows were mighty good, a lot of them," thought the accused cadet, with his first real sinking feeling that morning. "Yet, if any straw of evidence, this morning, seems really to throw any definite taint upon me, not one of these same fellows would ever again consent to wipe his feet on me!"

Such is the spirit of the cadet corps. Any comrade and brother must be wholly above suspicion where his honor is concerned.

Had Dick been really guilty he would have been the meanest thing in cadet barracks.

At a little before nine o'clock Lieutenant Topham called. To Cadet Prescott it seemed grimly absurd that he must now go forth in holiday attire of cadet full-dress uniform, white lisle gloves and all--to stand before the court of officers who were to decide whether he was morally fit to remain and associate with the other cadets. But it was the regulation that a cadet must go to court, whether as witness or accused, in full-dress uniform.

"I'm going to do my best for you today, Mr. Prescott," declared

Lieutenant Topham, as they walked through the area together.

Into the Academic Building counsel and accused stepped, and on to the great trial room in which so many cadets had met their gloomy fates.

At the long table sat, in full-dress uniform, and with their swords on, the thirteen Army officers of varying ranks who composed the court.

At one side of the room sat the cadet witnesses. These were three in number. Mr. Dunstan and Mr. Gray were there as the two men who had occupied blackboards on either side of Prescott the Friday forenoon before. Cadet Dodge was there to give testimony concerning the handkerchief episode in the area of barracks before the sections had marched off to math.

Captain Abbott, of course, was there, to testify to facts of his knowledge. Never had there been a more reluctant witness than that same Captain Abbott, but he had his plain duty to do as an Army officer detailed at the United States Military Academy.

Lieutenant Topham and Dick, on entering, had turned toward the table reserved for counsel.

For a moment, Dick Prescott had raised his face to the gallery. There he beheld Mrs. Bentley, Laura and Belle, all gazing down at him with smiling, friendly faces.

Dick could not send them a formal greeting. But he looked straight into the eyes of each in turn. His smile was steady, clear and full of courage. His look carried in it his appreciation of their loyal friendship.

Among the visitors there were also the wives of a few Army officers stationed on the post. Nearly all of these knew Prescott, and were interested in his fate.

Among the spectators up there was one heavily veiled woman whom Dick could not see from the floor as he entered the room. Nor did that woman, who had drawn back, intend that he should see her.

The president of this court-martial called it promptly to order. The members of the court were sworn, then the judge-advocate took his military oath. It was then announced that the accused cadet wished to have Lieutenant Topham represent him as counsel. To this there was no objection.

In a twinkling the judge-advocate was again on his feet, a copy of the charge and specifications in his hand.

Facing the president of the court, standing rigidly at attention, his face expressionless, his bearing every whit that of the soldier, Cadet Richard Prescott listened to the reading of the accusation of dishonor.

In an impressive tone the president of the court asked what plea the accused cadet wished to enter.

"The accused offers, to the charge and specifications, a blanket plea of 'not guilty,'" replied Lieutenant Topham.

Captain Abbott was first called and sworn. In concise, soldierly language the instructor told the events of the preceding Friday forenoon. He described the dropping of the slip of paper, and of his request that it be handed to him. "The paper," continued the witness, "contained a crude, brief outline of the demonstration which Mr. Prescott had just explained so satisfactorily that I had marked him 2.9."

"Which is within one tenth of the highest marking?" suggested the judge-advocate.

"Yes, sir."

"Had you noted anything in Mr. Prescott conduct or performance at the blackboard that indicated any uncertainty, at any time, about the problem he was demonstrating?"

"When he had gone a little way with the writing down of the demonstration," replied Captain Abbott, "Mr. Prescott hesitated for some moments, then asked permission to erase, which was given."

"Did he then go straight ahead with his work?"

"To the best of my observation and remembrance, he did, sir."

"Had Mr. Prescott been doing well previously?" asked the judge-advocate.

"Only during the last week, sir. During the last week he displayed such a new knowledge and interest in mathematics that I was prepared, on his last week's marks, to recommend that he ascend two sections in his class."

"Is it not true, Captain, that Mr. Prescott, in the last week, showed such a sudden, new proficiency as might be accounted for by the possibility that he had then begun to carry written 'cribs' to the class?"

"His progress last week was such as might be accounted for by that supposition," replied the witness reluctantly.

"That is all, Captain."

Lieutenant Topham then took the witness in hand, but did not succeed in bringing out anything that would aid the cause of the accused cadet.

"Cadet Dunstan!" called the judge-advocate.

Dunstan stepped forward and was sworn. He had testified that, during the blackboard work, he had stood beside Mr. Prescott. Dunstan was positive that he had not seen any slip of paper in Prescott's hands.

"Did you look his way often, Mr. Dunstan"

"Not directly, sir; I was busy with my own work."

"Yet, had Mr. Prescott had a slip of paper held slyly in either hand, do you think you would have seen it?"

"I am positive that I would, sir," replied Cadet Dunstan.

Under the questioning of Lieutenant Topham, Dunstan stated that he had witnessed Prescott's loan of his handkerchief to Dodge before the sections formed to march to mathematics section room.

"In what condition, or shape, did Mr. Dodge return Mr. Prescott's handkerchief?" ask Lieutenant Topham.

"The handkerchief was crumpled up, sir."

"So that, had there been a paper folded in it, the paper very likely would not have been visible?"

"The paper most likely would not have been visible, sir."

"In what form was the handkerchief handed to Mr. Dodge by Mr. Prescott?"

"I am almost certain, sir, that Mr. Prescott passed it holding it by one corner."

"So that, had there been any paper in it at that time, it would have fallen to the ground?"

"Yes sir."

"What did Mr. Prescott do with the handkerchief when it was returned to him."

"My recollection, sir, is that Mr. Prescott took his handkerchief without examining it, and thrust it into his blouse."

"Are you sure that he did so?"

"I cannot state it with absolute certainty, sir. It is my best recollection, sir."

Bert Dodge had sat through this testimony trying to look unconcerned. Yet around the corners of his mouth played a slight, greenish pallor. The testimony of the cadets had not been looked for to be very important. Now, however, the president of the court regretted that he had not excluded from the room all of three cadet witnesses except the one under examination.

Cadet Gray was next called. He was able to testify only that, while at the blackboard, Mr. Dunstan had stood on one side of Cadet Prescott and the present witness on the other side. Mr. Gray was strongly of the belief that, had Prescott been slyly using a written crib, he (Gray) would have noted the fact. Mr. Gray had not been a witness to the handkerchief-loaning incident before formation of sections.

"Cadet Dodge!"

Dodge rose and came forward with a distinct swagger. He was plainly conscious of the cadet corporal's chevrons on his sleeve, and plainly regarded himself as a superior type of cadet. He was sworn and questioned about the handkerchief-borrowing incident.

He admitted the borrowing of the handkerchief to wipe a smear of dirt from the back of his hand. As to the condition of the handkerchief at the time of its return, Mr. Dodge stated his present belief that the handkerchief was very loosely rolled up.

Then Lieutenant Topham took the witness over.

"Would the handkerchief, when you handed it back, have held this slip of paper?" questioned Mr. Topham, holding up the slip that had brought about all of Prescott's present trouble.

"It might have, sir, had the paper been crumpled as well."

"Did you hand the handkerchief back with a paper inside of it?"

"Not according to any knowledge of mine, sir."

"Was there a paper in the handkerchief, Mr. Dodge, when Mr. Prescott passed his handkerchief to you?"

"To the best of my belief, sir, there was not."

"Now, pay particular heed, if you please Mr. Dodge," requested Lieutenant Topham, fixing his gaze keenly on the witness. Dodge tried not to look apprehensive. "Did you have any paper in your hand while you had Mr. Prescott's handkerchief in your own possession?"

"No, sir," replied Dodge with emphasis.

"Did you, knowingly, pass the handkerchief back to the accused cadet with any paper inside of it, or touching it in any way?"

"No, sir!"

Lieutenant Topham continued for some seconds to regard Mr. Dodge in silence. The witness began to lose some of his swagger. Then, abruptly, as though firing a pistol, Lieutenant Topham shot out the question:

"How about that smear of dirt on your hand, Mr. Dodge? How did it come to be on the back of your hand?"

If Mr. Topham had looked to this question to break the witness down he was doomed to disappointment.

"I do not know, sir," Dodge replied distinctly. "I am of the opinion, sir, that it must have come from the blacking on one of my shoes as I put it on before leaving my room."

There was no more to be gained from Dodge. He was excused. Now, Dick Prescott rose and was sworn, that he might testify in his own behalf. Yet he could do no more, under the military rules of evidence, than to deny any guilty knowledge of the slip of paper, and to repeat the handkerchief-loaning recital substantially as

Dunstan had given it.

This closed the testimony. The president of the court announced that a recess of ten minutes would be taken, and that the room and gallery would be cleared of all except members of the court and the counsel for the accused.

As Dick turned to leave, he again turned his face toward the gallery. He saw his Gridley friends and looked bravely into their eyes, smiling. Then he caught sight of a veiled woman up there, who had risen, and was moving out. Dicks started; he could not help it, there was something so strangely familiar in that figure and carriage.

The cadet witnesses had already left, and we returning to barracks. Lieutenant Topham touched Prescott's arm and walked with him to the corridor.

"I shall do my best for you, you may be sure, Mr. Prescott," whispered the cavalry officer.

"May I ask, sir, what you think of the chances?"

"Candidly, it looks to me like almost an even toss-up between conviction and acquittal."

Dick's face blanched. Then he turned, with starts The veiled woman was moving toward him with uncertain steps.

"Lieutenant Topham, I did not know my mother was to be present, but I am almost positive that is she."

Now, the veiled woman came a few steps nearer, looking appealingly at Dick.

"I am told, sir, that my son is in close arrest," she called, in a voice that thrilled the cadet. "But I am his mother. May I speak with him a moment?"

Mother and son were clasped in each other's arms for a moment. What they said matters little. Then Cadet Richard Prescott returned to his bleak room in barracks.

CHAPTER XVI

A VERDICT AND A HOP

Then followed days full of suspense for many besides the accused cadet.

Prescott went mechanically at his studies, with a dogged determination to get high markings in everything.

Yet over mathematics more than anything, he pored. He fought out his problems in the section room grimly, bent on showing that

he could win high marks without the aid of "cribs."

He was still in arrest, and must remain so until the finding of the court-martial--whatever it was---had been duly considered at Washington and returned with the President's indorsement. All this time Dick's mother and three faithful Gridley friends remained at the West Point Hotel. Dick could not go to them; they could not come to him, but notes might pass. Prescott received these epistles daily, and briefly but appreciatively answered them.

Then he went back furiously to his studies.

Grit could do him little good, except in his studies, if he were fated to remain at West Point. Grit could not help him in the settling of his fate. Either the court-martial had found him guilty, or had found him innocent, and all the courage in the world would not alter the verdict.

In the section room in mathematics, Captain Abbott did not show this cadet any disfavor or the opposite. The instructor's manner and tone with Prescott were the same as with all the other cadets.

When going to formations some of the cadets rather openly avoided Prescott. This cut like a knife. But evidently they believed him probably guilty, and they were entitled to their opinions. He must possess himself with patience for a few days; there was nothing else to do.

So the week rolled around again to Saturday. Now here were two afternoons when the young cadet might have gone to his mother and friends at the hotel, had he not been in arrest. There was to be a hop that night, but he could not "drag" the girl who had been so staunch and sweet.

On this Saturday, when he need not study much, Dick found himself in a dull rage with his helplessness. The day was bright, clear, cold and sunny, but the young cadet's soul was dark and moody. Would this suspense never end?

Dinner was to him merely another phase of duty. He had no real appetite; he would have preferred to sit brooding at his study table.

The meal over, the battalion marched back, halting, still in formation, at the north side of barracks near the sally-port.

The cadet captain in command of the battalion read some unimportant notices. Dick did not even hear them. He knew his fate was not to come to him through this channel.

While the reading was going on the Adjutant of the Military Academy came through the sally-port leisurely, as soon as he saw that the men were still in ranks.

Dick did not see the Adjutant, either. If he had, he might hardly have heeded the presence of that Army officer, the personal representative of the superintendent.

But, just as the cadet captain let fall the hand in which he had held the notices the adjutant called out crisply:

"Don't dismiss, Captain! Hold the companies!"

Between two of the companies stepped the adjutant, then walked to the front of center. Drawing a paper from his overcoat, the adjutant began to read. It was a "special order."

Even to this Prescott listened only with unhearing ears---at first.

Then, though he betrayed no more audible interest than did any of the other men in gray, Dick Prescott found his head swimming.

This special order referred to his own case. It was a report of the findings, these findings having been duly approved.

Cadet Richard Prescott's head began to whirl. The bright day seemed darkening before his dimmed vision, until he heard, unmistakably, the one word:

"Acquitted!"

What followed was a further order releasing him from arrest and restoring him to the usual cadet privileges.

"That is all, Captain," added the adjutant, folding the order and returning it to his overcoat. "Dismiss the companies when ready."

"Dismiss the companies!" came from the cadet battalion commander.

The separate commands of the various company commanders rang out. Ranks were broken---and friends in gray crowded about the yearling.

Then the corps yell was called for and given, with his name added. Some of the cadets slipped in through the sally-port, sooner than join in the demonstration.

"Thank you all---it's jolly good of you!" cried Prescott huskily.

As soon as these comrades in arms would let him, he broke through and made for his room.

"Hooray!" yelled Greg, turning loose.

And Cadet Anstey thrust his head into the room long enough to add:

"Hooray!"

But Dick, half stripped above the waist, was at the washstand, making a thorough toilet, though a hurried one.

Greg waited, his eyes shining.

"It's mighty good of you all," cried Dick, as he was pulling on his cadet overcoat. "I wish I could stop and talk about it---but there a duties that can't be hurried fast enough."

"Give my regards," called Holmes jovially after Prescott.

Crossing the barracks area, Dick strode into cadet guard-house, nimbly mounting the stairs to the second floor. Here he stood in the office of the O.C.

Saluting, he carefully phrased his request for leave to visit friends at the hotel.

This being granted, Dick went down the stairs at the greatest speed consistent with military dignity under the circumstances.

Out through the north sally-port and along the road running between officers' quarters and parade ground he hurried.

By the time he had walked to the hotel he had cooled off his first excitement somewhat.

He signed in the cadet register, then laid down his card.

"To Mrs. Prescott, please."

As ebony-visaged "front" vanished from the office, Dick turned and walked to the ladies' entrance, passing thence into the parlor.

Dick's mother was found at the dining table. So were her Gridley friends. All were finishing a light meal without appetite when the card was laid by Mrs. Prescott's plate.

"My boy, Dick---here?" she cried brokenly rising as quickly as she could.

Mrs. Prescott passed quickly from the dining room, though her friends were close at her heels. So they all rushed in upon the solitary young cadet standing inside the parlor by a window.

As he heard them coming, Dick wheeled about. There was a tear in his eye, which deceived them.

Halting, a few feet away, these eager ones stared at him.

Dick tried to greet them in words, but he couldn't at first.

It was Laura who found her voice first.

"Dick! Tell us in a word!"

But Belle Meade gave Miss Bentley a somewhat vigorous push forward.

"Use your eyes, Laura!" rebuked Belle vigorously. "In the first place, Mr. Prescott is here. That means he's here by permission or right. In the second place, you ninny---he still has the uniform on!"

"That's right," laughed Dick. "Yes, mother, and friends, the court-martial's finding was wholly favorable to me."

"Humph!" demanded Belle scornfully. "Why shouldn't it be? Wouldn't you expect thirteen old West Point graduates to know as much as

four women from the country?"

Belle's hearty nonsense put an end to all tension.

Mrs. Prescott met and embraced her son. The others crowded about, offering congratulations.

That night Dick and Greg "dragged" the Gridley girls to the cadet hop at Cullum, and Anstey was a favored one on the hop cards of both girls. Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Bentley looked on from the gallery.

"It's the jolliest hop I've been to," declared Dick with enthusiasm.

"Humph!" muttered Holmes. "Of course it is. You old boner, you've never been but to three hops!

"I understand," teased Belle, "that you're much more of a veteran, Mr. Holmes, than your chum is."

Cadet Dodge "missed" that hop.

CHAPTER XVII

"A LIAR AND A COWARD"

Long, indeed, did the memory of that hop linger with Cadet Dick Prescott.

It had come as the fitting, cheering ending of his great trouble---the hardest trouble that had assailed him, or could assail him, at the United States Military Academy.

"Well, you've been vindicated, anyway," muttered Greg cheerily, one day. "So you needn't look as thoughtful as you do half of the time these present days."

"Have I been vindicated, Greg?" asked Dick gravely.

"What did the court say? And you're still wearing the uniform that Uncle Sam gave you, aren't you?

"Vindication, Greg, means something more than a court-martial verdict of acquittal."

"What more do you want?"

"Greg, the verdicts of all the courts-martial sitting between here and Manila wouldn't make some of the men of this corps believe that I innocent."

"G'wan!" retorted Cadet Holmes impatiently.

"I see it, Greg, old chum, if you don't."

"You're morbid, old ramrod!"

"Greg, you know the cheery greeting, in passing, that one man here often gives another when he likes and trusts that man. Well, some of own classmates that used to give me the glad hail seem to be thinking about something else, now, when they pass me."

"Who are they?" demanded Greg, his fists doubling.

"You'd provoke a fight, if I told you," retorted Dick. "This isn't a matter to fight about."

"Then you don't know much about fighting subjects," grumbled Cadet Holmes, as he leaned back and opened his book of everlasting mathematics.

"Let me see, Greg; have you any show to get out of the goats in math.?"

"I'm in hopes to get out and step into the next section above," replied Greg. "I've been working hard enough."

"Then you'd better waste no thoughts on pugilism. Calculus will bring you more happiness."

"Calculus was never designed to bring anyone happiness," retorted Greg sulkily. "It's a torment invented on purpose to harrow the souls of cadets. What good, any way, will calculus ever be to an officer who has a platoon of men to lead in a charge on the enemy?"

This could not very well be answered, so Dick dodged the subject.

"Remember the January exams., old fellow," warned Dick. "And the general review begins Monday. That will show you up, if you don't keep your nose in math. and out of books on the Queensbury rules."

"Funny how Bert Dodge keeps up in mathematics, and yet takes in all the pleasures he can find," rumbled on Greg, as he turned the pages of his book, seeking what he wanted. "Dodge is in the section just under the stars, and I hear he has dreams of being in the star section after the January ordeals."

"Dodge always was a rather good student at Gridley High School" rejoined Prescott.

"But he never led our class there in the High School mathematics, which is baby's play compared with West Point math."

"Well, he gets the marks now," sighed Dick. "I wish we could, too."

The academic part of the cadet's year is divided into two halves. The first half winds up in January. During the last few weeks before the period for the winter examination, there is a general review in some of the subjects, notably in mathematics. This general review brings out all of a man's weak points in his subject. Incidentally, it should strengthen him in his weak points.

Now, if, in the general review, a cadet shows sufficient proficiency in his subject, he is not required to take the examination. If he fails in the general review in mathematics, he must go up for a "writ," as a written examination is termed. And that writ is cruelly searching. If the young man fails in the "writ," he may be conditioned and required to make up his deficiencies in June. If, in June, he fails to make up all deficiencies, he is dropped from the cadet corps as being below the mental standards required of a West Point graduate.

Neither Dick nor Greg stood high enough in mathematics to care to go on past January conditioned. Both felt that, with conditions extending over to the summer, they must fail in June.

"I'd sooner have my funeral held tomorrow than drop out of West Point," Greg stated.

Prescott, while not making that assertion, knew that it would blast his dearest hopes life if he had to go down in the academic battle.

Dodge, who was so high in mathematics that he need have little fear, was circulating a good deal among his classmates these days before Christmas.

"That hound, Prescott, made a slick dodge to drag me into his disgrace," Dodge declared, to those whom he thought would be interest in such remarks. "It was a clever trick! couldn't put me in disgrace, for there is no breach of regulations in borrowing a handkerchief for a moment. But Prescott made so much of that handkerchief business that it served his purpose and dragged him out safely before the court."

"Do you think Prescott was really guilty of a crib?" asked one of Dodge's hearers.

"I can't prove it, but I know what I think," retorted Dodge. "His effort to draw me into the row shows what kind of a fellow he is at bottom."

"I'd hate to think that Prescott would really be mean enough for a crib."

"Think what you like, then, of course. But a fellow guilty of one meanness might not stop at others."

Dodge talked much in this vein. Cadets are not tale-bearers, and so little or none of this talk reached Dick's ears until Furlong came along, one day, in time to hear Dodge holding forth on his favorite subject.

Yearling Furlong halted, eyeing Cadet Dodge sternly, keenly.

"Well," demanded Dodge, "what's wrong?"

"I don't know exactly," replied Furlong, with a quizzical smile. "I think, though, that the basic error lay in your ever having been born at all."

Dodge tried to laugh it off as a pleasantry. He had met Furlong

once, in a fight, and had no desire to be sent to cadet hospital again with blackened eyes.

"I don't want to mind other people's business, Dodge," continued Furlong coolly, "but you're going a bit too far, it seems to me, in what you say about Prescott. Why should you seek to blacken the character of one of our best fellows, and the president of our class?"

"Because he tried to blacken mine," retorted Dodge boldly.

"He didn't. All he did, at the court-martial, was to explain the adventures of his handkerchief just before that piece of paper fell to the floor of the section room."

"Wasn't that an insinuation against me?" demanded Cadet Dodge.

"Not unless your character here is on such a very poor foundation that it can't stand any suspicions," replied Furlong coldly.

"Now, see here, Dodge, the general review is on, and Prescott can't spare any time on private rows. After the general review is over, if I hear any more about your roasting Prescott, I'm going to call on you to go with me to Prescott's presence, and repeat your statements to his face. I don't want to stir up any needless personal trouble, Dodge, but I declare myself now as one of old ramrod's friends. Any slander against him must be backed up. I trust you will pardon my having been so explicit."

Furlong turned on his heel, striding away. The cadets to whom Dodge had been talking bitterly looked at Bert curiously. A good many men in the corps would have promptly resented such remarks as Furlong's, and to the limit, by calling him out.

"Queer how many friends, of some kinds, a fellow like Prescott can have," laughed Dodge sneeringly.

"Not at all," spoke up one of Dodge's listeners. "Everyone always knows where Prescott stands, and he'll back up anything he says. Furlong is another man of the same stamp."

With that the last speaker turned on his heel and walked away.

For some days after that, Bert Dodge was more careful of his utterances.

The general reviews came and passed. By sheer hard, undistracted work, both Dick and Greg succeeded in pulling through without having to go up for writs. For some reason Dodge did not do quite as well in the general review, and was forced to drop down a couple of sections. He still stood well, however, in math.

In the next week after the dangerous examination period Dick Prescott began to forge upwards in mathematics. He was now in the section fourth removed from the goats, and Greg was up in the section next above the goats.

On the afternoon of the Friday when the markings had been posted Dodge met Dennison, also of the yearling class.

"Say, what do you think, Dodge, of Prescott beginning to shoot

up through the sections toward you? He'll soon be marching at your side when math. is called."

"He'll bear watching," nodded Dodge sagely.

"That's what I feel about it," replied Dennison.

"Prescott isn't the kind of man who can climb high in mathematics, and do it honestly," continued Dodge. "Either he has the old crib at work again, or has hit on a safer way of working crib."

"Of course he has," nodded Dennison. "We ought to post the class---especially Prescott own section comrades. They can catch him, if they're sharp, and then pass the word through the class without bothering the authorities. If Prescott is doing such things he must be driven from West Point."

"He will be---see if he isn't," retorted Bert sullenly. "I'm going to pass the word to the class."

"And I'll post the men in the same section with him," promised Dennison.

"Why not post Prescott first?" demanded a cold voice. A cadet had halted behind the pair.

"Oh, you, Furlong?" snarled Dodge, turning.

"Yes," replied Cadet Furlong. "And I told you, on a former occasion, what I thought about back-biters."

"Be careful, Furlong!" warned Dennison angrily.

"At your service, sir, any time," coolly replied Furlong, though he was a head shorter than Dennison, who was one of the big athletes of the yearling class.

"But the class ought to know some truths," retorted Dodge harshly.

"Here comes some of the class now," replied Furlong, as seven yearlings, on their way back from the library, turned in at the sally-port. "Tell them for a start, Dodge, and I'll listen. Hold on there, fellows. Oh, you there, Prescott? That's lucky. Dodge has some 'facts' he thinks the class ought to know, and I want you to hear them. Now, Dodge, turn around and repeat what you were just saying."

There was no help for it. Dodge had to speak up, or be considered a cur that bit only in the dark.

So, with a show of defiance, Dodge spoke hotly giving a very fair repetition of what he had lately said. Prescott stood by, his fists clenched, his face white, but without interrupting or making any move.

"Now, state what you said, Mr. Dennison," requested Furlong coldly.

Thus cornered, Dennison, too, had to state truthfully what he had just been saying.

There was a pause.

Some of the yearlings looked straight ahead. Others glanced curiously at the principals in this little drama of cadet life. None of them took Furlong to be anything more than the stage manager.

"Have you said all you have to say, Mr. Dodge?" demanded Cadet Prescott.

"Yes," flared Bert.

"Have you anything that you wish to add, Mr. Dennison?" demanded Dick, wheeling upon his other foe in the corps.

"Nothing more, at present," replied Dennison coolly. He realized how much bigger and more powerful he was than Dick Prescott.

"Then, as for you, Mr. Dodge," continued Prescott, fixing his old-time enemy with a cold eye, "you're a liar and a coward!"

Dodge doubled his fists, springing forward, but two of the yearlings caught him and dragged him back, for old ramrod's back was already turned. Dick was eyeing his other detractor.

"You, Mr. Dennison," continued Prescott, "are a dirty scandal-monger, a back-biter and a source of danger to the honor of the cadet corps!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIGHT IN BARRACKS

"Let go of me!" roared Dennison, as two men held him. "Let me at that-----"

"Any name that you would see fit to call me, Dennison, wouldn't sting," retorted Dick. "You have forfeited the right to have your opinion considered a gentleman's."

"Don't you ever call names?" hissed Dennison.

"Only to the faces of the men to whom the names are applied," retorted Dick.

"And that's right," agreed Furlong heartily. "We've been classmates nearly two years, and I've heard old ramrod say disagreeable things, once or twice, behind men's backs. But it was never until after he had said the same thing to the man's face."

"This isn't fair," fussed Dennison, "to hold me back after I've been insulted."

By this time, half a dozen more cadets had stopped. Three of the newest comers were yearlings, one was a second classman and two were first classmen.

"Will you let me act as one of your friends, old ramrod?" asked Cadet Furlong.

"I think you've proved your right, on this and other occasions," laughed Dick quietly. "Go ahead, please, Milesy."

"This is not place for a fight," continued Furlong, "and this crowd had better break up, or we shall be seen and there'll be an inquiry from the tactical department. As Prescott's friend, I will say that he is prepared to give full satisfaction to both men. In fact, if they didn't demand it, he would."

Before so many, Bert Dodge had to appear brave.

"I demand the first meeting for satisfaction," Bert insisted.

"And I think you may count on getting the first meeting," nodded Furlong coolly. "Now, Mr. Dodge, to whom shall I look as your friend?"

"Let me act!" begged Dennison hoarsely.

"Go ahead, Dennison," replied Dodge, who felt that he would draw some comfort from having this big athlete of the class for a backer. "Now, break up, please, gentlemen," begged Furlong. "We don't want and wind of this to blow to official quarters. Dennison, I invite you to come to my room."

Like soldiers dismissed from ranks, the sudden gathering in the sally-port dispersed. Dick went on to his own quarters.

"Now, that's what I call huge!" chuckled Greg Holmes, as soon as he heard the news. "But see here, old ramrod, I'm to be your other second?"

"Of course," nodded Dick.

"Then I'm off for Furlong's room at once. And again---hooray!"

There being nothing to prevent a prompt meeting, it was arranged to take place that evening at 8.30. In the subdivision where Furlong lived there was an empty room up on the plebe floor.

Sharp to the minute of 8.30 the men were at hand. Packard, of the first class, had agreed to act as referee. Maitland, second class, held the watch. Dodge and Prescott were in their corners, stripped for the fray. Nelson, of the third class, was Dodge's other second.

Both men looked in fine condition as they waited for the referee to call the bout. Both had received the same amount of bodily training, some of it under Captain Koehler at the gymnasium, and a good deal more of it in infantry, cavalry, artillery and other drills. Over the chests and between the shoulder blades of both men were pads of supple muscles. Both men were strong of arm, though neither too heavy with muscle to be quick and active.

"Gentlemen," announced Referee Packard, "this fight is to be to

a finish, with bare hands. Rounds, two minutes each. Time between rounds one minute. There will be no preliminary handshaking. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

"Ready!" quivered Dodge.

"Ready," softly replied Prescott, a smile hovering over his lips.

"Time!"

Dodge came forward nimbly, his head well down and his guards well placed. Prescott was straighter, at the outset, and his attitude almost careless, in appearance. Dick had been a clever fighter back in the old High School days. Dodge, since coming to West Point, had vastly improved both in guard and in offence.

It was Dodge who led off. He was not by any means a physical coward, and possessed a good deal of the cornered kind of courage of the fighting rat. Dodge's first two or three blows were neatly parried. Then he began to mix it up in a lively way, and three heavy blows landed on Dick's body. But Dodge didn't get back out of it unscathed. One hard thump on his chest, in particular, staggered him.

Then at it again went both men, fire in Dodge's eye, mockery in Dick's.

The blows fell fast and furious, until the lookers-on wanted to cheer. There was little of foot work, little of getting away. It was heavy, forceful give-and-take until failing wind compelled both men to draw back.

They kept at it, but sparring for wind until the call of time came.

Both men were then hustled back into their corners, sponged, kneaded, fanned. A minute was mighty short time in which to recover fighting trim from such mauling as had been exchanged.

"Time!"

Biff, bump, pound!

It was the style of fighting that Dodge was forcing, and it had to be met. Yet all the time Dick was alert, watching for a chance to land a stinging blow somewhere except on the torso.

Just before the close of the second round Prescott thought he saw his chance. Feinting with his left, he drove in a hook with his right, aimed for Bert's nose.

It touched, instead, on the lip, not a hard blow, but a tantalizing one. As the men drew back at the call of time a blotch of red was seen on Bert's lower lip. When he came back for the third round, that lip was puffing fast.

"Third round, time!"

Again Bert Dodge started in with his heavy body tactics. But this time Dick himself changed the style. With swift, clever

foot-work he danced all around his now furious opponent. Dodge could follow the swift style, too, however, and defended himself, finally coming back with the assault.

Half way through the round Dick received a sharp tap on his nose that brought the red. Stung, Prescott became only the cooler. For some time he fought for the opening that he wanted, and got it at last, though Dodge's guarding left prevented the blow from landing with quite all the force with which it had been driven.

Dick's middle knuckles raked that already swollen lip, but the lower knuckles landed against the tip of Dodge's jaw with a force which, while not complete, nevertheless sent Bert to the floor, where he lay on his side.

"One, two, three, four-----" began Maitland, his gaze on the slipping second hand of his watch.

"Take the full count, Bert!" warned Dennison.

"Nine, ten!" finished Maitland.

In that instant Dodge was on his feet again, head down and working with great caution.

"Time!"

The third round ended ere Prescott could put in any finishing touches. Yet, under the skillful hands of his seconds, Dodge came up rather smilingly at the call for the opening of the fourth.

There was almost murder in Dodge's eyes now. He felt that he was the better man, and yet he had been getting slightly the worst of it so far. But he would show them!

Yet, after forty seconds of this work, when Dodge had just let fly a blow intended to land over Prescott's heart, his fist touched only air and he lurched forward. In the same instant Dick swung a smashing blow on Bert's left ear. Bert went down, lying there like a log.

In the silence that followed the finish of the count, and the referee's awarding words, Dick Prescott's voice broke in, as soft and cool as ever:

"In fifteen minutes, Mr. Dennison, I'll be ready for _you_!"

CHAPTER XIX

MR. DENNISON'S TURN IS SERVED

Furlong sprang forward to protest.

"See here, old ramrod, don't be foolish."

"I can handle it as well tonight as at any time," Dick laughed as coolly as ever.

"But you've taken a lot of punishment."

"Fifteen minutes is all I need, with seconds like you and Greg."

"Will it be fair to yourself, Prescott?" demanded Packard.

"Wholly," replied Dick unconcernedly.

"Let him alone," urged Greg. "Old ramrod always knows what he's doing."

"I'm not sure that we can get Dodge out of here and attended to, and be already for the start in fifteen minutes," replied Packard.

"Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five," insisted Dick. "Whatever time is necessary, so that we start in time to be through before taps."

"What do you say, Dennison?" asked Packard.

"I? Oh, I'll be ready," grinned the athlete.

"Will you serve Dennison?" asked Packard, turning to Nelson

"Yes; of course."

"Then, Nelson, confer with Dennison and see whom he wants to serve with you. The rest of us will work over Dodge. Whew! Look that ear puff up while you watch it!"

"Beauty, isn't it?" asked Greg grimly. "It will be a cauliflower decoration, all right."

Nelson went scurrying, soon returning with Anderson. Any yearling would gladly have served tonight, in order to see what doughty Dick Prescott would do against his second man in the same evening. With Nelson and Anderson came two other yearlings who had agreed to see Dodge safely to the door of cadet hospital.

Bert Dodge had been brought around at last. He was a bit dazed, but he grinned, as he went out, when Dennison murmured in his ear:

"Never you mind, old man. I'll take care of Prescott. I'll twist the ramrod into a figure 8."

"We must proceed as promptly as possible, gentlemen," rapped out Mr. Packard. "We must be finished before taps."

"Dennison will be finished, by that time," muttered Greg in a cheerful undertone.

Holmes had never provoked a senseless fight. He was good-natured almost to a fault. Yet, when a fight became inevitable, Greg could act as principal or second with equal cheeriness.

Nelson had brought back with him togs for Dennison, and that athlete

was quickly ready.

Every minute of the time had been utilized well in getting, Dick Prescott in condition for his second scrap of the evening. His nose-bleed had been stopped, but it was wind and lung power that he wanted most. He had taken some heavy body thumping, but rest and rubbing had worked out most of the soreness.

"Get up and kick a bit. See what you can do," advised Furlong.

Dick went through a few irregular gymnastics.

"There's one good thing about old ramrod," declared Greg, in a grinning undertone. "He's always ready, every minute of the time!"

Sharply, quickly, now, the combatants were brought face to face.

At the call of time, Dennison sailed in; Dick leaped forward. Dennison was amused, more than half contemptuous over the easiness of the work that he thought had come to him. But he felt in honor bound to make the thing short. In the first place, he had to avenge Dodge. In the second place, it would reflect upon himself if Dennison allowed Prescott to string the battle out.

Some sharp cracks were given and taken, and many more dodged or struck aside, when, up close to the end of the first round, Prescott landed one between the big fellow's eyes that made him see stars.

Right in close Prescott followed, before his opponent could recover.

But the time-keeper's call prevented further doings.

"He's a mosquito, that's all," growled Denison to Nelson, in the corner.

"Go in and swat him, then," grinned Nelson.

"Watch me!"

"Remember, then, that skeeters are dodgers."

"I'll saw him off, this time," grumbled the big fellow.

The call of time brought both men forward.

But Dick, the same quiet smile on his face, had planned new tactics with Furlong during that minute's rest.

Now, Dick struck Dennison, not very heavily, on the right shoulder. The next time it was a tap on the right chest.

Dennison strove to resent these indignities, but Prescott had a definite plan of sustained assault, and the big fellow could not read it in advance.

Twice Dick got caught by swings, though he was not sadly troubled. He was lancing in, lightly, all over the less vital parts on his man now. It did Dennison no harm, but the impudence of it stung the big fellow.

"Time!"

"That's the b.j.-est skeeter I ever saw," grinned Nelson, as he sprayed water over Dennison's biceps.

"You quit, Nelse!"

"All right. Don't get mad at me. Just catch Prescott on your face and mash him!"

Again the men were called to the center of the room. They eyed each other, "measured arms" in a few useless passes, then settled down to business.

On Dick's part that business was to dodge about as before, touching lightly here and there. Dennison's effort was to swing in one hard, sufficient blow.

Just thirty-five seconds from the start of the round Dick found his opportunity, and took it. His right smashed in fearfully on the end of the big fellow's jaw bone, just under the ear.

Bump! Dennison's big, muscular body hit the floor like the falling of a tree. Maitland counted, for he knew the big fellow couldn't rise in ten seconds after a blow like that.

"Nine, ten," finished the time-keeper, and dropped his watch into his pocket.

"I award the fight to Mr. Prescott," announced Packard. "Now, what are we going to do with this big hulk?"

That was a problem. It would hardly do to take another cadet to hospital that night. Anyway Dennison would need a stretcher, and four cadets to carry him, for he still lay on the floor in a stupor, from which the usual methods of reviving a man after a knockout failed to bring him.

It was just ten minutes before taps when Dennison was finally brought around and helped to his feet.

"Where's Prescott?" asked Dennison, after he had gulped down a glass of water.

"Here," answered Dick, stepping forward.

"Prescott, I don't suppose I'm very clear headed yet," rambled on Dennison. "But I want to apologize for my words this afternoon. And---I'm glad you whacked me right tonight. Perhaps I'll really learn something from it. But my apologies, anyway."

"Say no more," begged Dick, tendering his hand. "It is all forgotten."

Dick received hasty congratulations from the late officials of the fights. Then they, and Prescott and his friends, disappeared quickly to quarters. Dennison was helped to his room. When the subdivision inspectors went through with their bulls-eye lanterns immediately after taps, they found all present save Cadet Albert

Dodge.

Dodge passed a painful couple of hours until opiates won out and he passed into drugged sleep.

In one respect Dodge got far less out of the fight than had Dennison. Bert had not even learned, convincingly, that Prescott was a man to let alone.

CHAPTER XX

A DISCOVERY AT THE RIDING DRILL

Having once got a hard gait in mathematics, Dick went steadily on and up until he reached one of the middle sections. There he stopped. It was as high as he could go, with all this competition from the brightest young men in the country.

Greg, too, managed to get well away from the goats, and so was happy.

Through the winter the yearlings, in detachments, had attended the riding hall regularly during the afternoons.

Most of the men, as spring came along, had proven themselves very good cadet horsemen, though all would have chance to learn more during the two years yet ahead of them.

Dodge, who rode in the same detachment with Dick and Greg, was credited with being the poorest rider in the class.

"When you get to be an officer, Mr. Dodge, you'll have to take the yearly walking test for three days. You'll get over the ground quicker and safer than you would on a horse," remarked the cadet corporal.

"Oh, well, sir, I'm going into the doughboys, anyway," grinned Dodge. "It will be a good many years before I can get up far enough in the line to be called upon to ride a horse."

The "doughboys" are the United States Infantry. No company officer in the infantry mounted; only the field and staff officers of the doughboys are provided with mounts.

One cloudy Friday afternoon Cadet Corporal Haskins marched a yearling detachment down to the riding hall. Captain Hall, their instructor, was already in saddle. He turned to receive the report of Haskins after the detachment had been halted at the edge of the tan-bark.

"Stand to horse!" ordered Captain Hall.

The men of the detachments sprang over, each leading out his mount for the afternoon.

"Prepare to mount!"

Instantly each young man stood with one foot in stirrup, one hand at the animal's mane, and one at saddle.

"Mount!"

In perfect unison the yearling cadets swung themselves up into saddle, their right feet searching for and then resting in the stirrup boxes.

Then, at the command, Haskins led his men out in single file. Thus they circled the riding hall twice at a walk.

"Trot!" came Captain Hall's command.

A few rounds of this was followed by the command, "gallop!" Around and around the hall the cadets rode, every man but one feeling the blood tingling with new life through his arteries. It was glorious to stride a horse and to ride at this gait!

Glorious, that is, for all except one man. Dodge rode at the tail end of the line, on a fiend of a horse that had proven disastrous to more than one green rider.

As the "gallop" was ordered, Dodge's mount showed a longing to bolt and dash up to the head of the line. Dodge, throbbing uneasily, reined in hard. His horse began to chafe as it found itself forced back. In another moment Dodge was lagging behind.

"Keep the pace, Mr. Dodge! Keep the pace, sir!" called out Captain Hall.

Bert obeyed, but in fear. He did not know at what instant this uneasy animal would rear and unhorse him.

At last the detachment was halted and the line faced about. Now the detachment rode in reverse direction around the tan-bark.

By this means Dodge became the leader.

Through the walk and the trot, he managed to get along all right, though he was nervous.

"Stick to your saddle, Mr. Dodge!" called Captain Hall. "Don't bump it, sir. Settle down and ride steadily."

Then, an instant later, just as Dodge was beginning to feel secure:

"Gallop!"

Dodge's wild mount gave a snort, then bolted.

"Whoa, you unruly beast!" roared Dodge. Behind him rode the detachment, grimly merry, though with not a flicker of a smile showing.

Bert's horse pulled away, and bolted, with Dodge tugging at the bridle.

Greg, riding behind him, endeavored to bridge the gap.

"Steady, Mr. Holmes!" shouted the cavalry instructor. "You may set the pace until Mr. Dodge regains control of his mount."

Straight around the tan-bark went Dodge and his mount, until the animal was in danger of colliding with Haskins' mount.

"Hard on your off rein, Mr. Dodge! Swing out into the center and bring your horse down!" ordered Captain Hall sternly.

Bert managed to swing out of the line, but that was all. He shot along on the inside, for the horse seemed to have a notion that it was racing the entire detachment, lap by lap.

"Have you utterly lost control of your horse, Mr. Dodge?" shouted Captain Hall.

Plainly enough the young man had, for, at that moment, the beast, its mouth sore from the continued tugging against the bits, slackened its pace, then plunged on its forefeet, throwing its heels high in the air.

With a gasp of terror Dodge struck the tan-bark, one shoulder landing first. But he still retained the bridle, and was dragged. The vicious animal wheeled, rearing, and its fore-feet came down aimed at Dodge's face.

Dick Prescott was the nearest cadet horseman at this moment. Suspecting what might happen, Prescott had swung his own mount sharply out of line, riding straight after Dodge.

"Drop your bridle!" called Dick sternly.

Then, just as Dodge's horse was bringing its fore-feet down, Prescott rode against the angry animal, striking it against the flank and shoving it sideways and back. The brute's forefeet struck the tan-bark, but more than two feet from Dodge's head. Bert had presence of mind enough to roll to one side.

In an instant Prescott was down out of saddle, holding his own splendidly disciplined mount by the bridle while he bent over his class-mate.

Dodge lay on the tan-bark, his uniform awry and dirty, and his face blanched with fear of the horse.

"Are you much hurt, Dodge?" asked Dick.

"No, confound you!" muttered Bert under his breath.

As if to prove his lack of injury, he sat up, then rose to his feet.

"Mount, Mr. Prescott, and join the line," noting all with quick eyes. "Mr. Dodge, recapture your horse, mount and fall in."

That was the discipline of the tan-bark. If a cadet falls from a horse and has no bones broken, or no other desperate injury, he must wait until his horse comes around, catch it and mount

again. If the horse be excited and fractious, all the more reason why the cadet should capture the beast and mount instantly. A horse must always be taught that a cavalryman is his master.

The riderless brute had fallen in at the tail of the line now, behind Cadet Corporal Haslins, and was going along peaceably enough---until Bert Dodge made a lunge for the bridle. Then the beast shied, and got past.

"Run after your horse, Mr. Dodge; catch him and mount him," called Captain Hall, fuming that this episode should steal away drill time from the other more capable young horsemen.

"Mr. Dodge," rapped out the cavalry instructor sharply, after Bert had made two more efforts to get hold of the bridle, "are you waiting for a groom to bring your horse to you?"

At this some of the pent-up merriment broke loose. Half a dozen yearlings chuckled aloud.

"Silence in ranks!" ordered the instructor sharply. Then, patiently, though with more than a tinge of rebuke in his tone, the captain added:

"Mr. Dodge, you've taken all the time we can spare you, sir. Catch that horse instantly and mount!"

By sheer good luck Bert managed to obey. But his nerve was gone for the afternoon. He made a sad bungle of all the work, though he was not again unhorsed.

There was bareback riding, and riding by pairs, in which latter feat one man of each pair passed his bridle to the comrade beside him, then rode with folded arms. Then came riding by threes, with the center man holding the bridles from either side, while each of the outer men rode with folded arms. Then, cautiously, the men were taught to stand on the bare backs of their horses and to move at a walk. By and by they would be required to ride, standing, at a gallop.

All through this drill, Dick Prescott rode with precision, power, and even grace.

Yet never had his mind been further from the present work than it was this afternoon.

Had Bert Dodge known more of what Prescott had seen as the former lay for that instant on the tan-bark, Dick's enemy would have fallen from his horse in a delirium of fear.

For, as Bert fell in the center of the tan-bark the left sleeve of his coat had been pushed back, exposing the white linen cuff.

From the inner hem of that cuff, up to the middle, Dick Prescott had gazed, for an instant only, on row after row of small, evenly lettered words or rows of numerals. Prescott had not had time to bend close enough to see which.

Yet no sooner had Dick vaulted back into saddle again than the

remembrance of that cuff flashed upon him.

"Dodge has been excelling in daily recitations, yet can't do as well at general review!" flashed hotly through Prescott's mind. "And Dodge, the high-souled one who loathes cribs! If that writing on his cuff isn't a crib of today's math., then I'm a plebe!"

The thought would not down, even for a moment.

Dick became wilder in his thoughts the more he thought about it.

"The cribber! And he sought to blast me here on a false charge of cribbing. For now I know in my soul that he put that paper crib in my handkerchief that Friday morning months ago!"

Dick's indignation, as he rode, was more than personal. True, he longed to show up the sneak who had nearly wound up another and honest cadet's career here at West Point. But there was an even higher purpose in Prescott's mind at the same time. The corps of cadets loathes a cribber as it does any other kind of cheat or liar. It is justly regarded as a moral crime for any cadet, knowing another to be a sneak, stand by and silently allow that sneak to graduate into the brotherhood of the Army.

"Dodge, you cur, every minute, now, is bringing you nearer your own merited disgrace," muttered Dick savagely. "As soon as this detachment is dismissed at barracks I'll denounce you before all the fellows. I'll insist that you expose that cuff---and you'll have to do it!"

Once Prescott caught himself wondering whether he might not fail through being too hasty. Was it barely possible that the writing on Bert Dodge's left cuff was wholly innocent?

"No! I'm not making any mistake, and I'll prove it to my own satisfaction!" throbbed this cadet who had waited patiently all these months for complete vindication before the corps.

Never had Dick known such relief at being dismissed from riding drill. The detachment formed under Haskins' orders, and marched up the road from riding hall, across the street to the Academic Building, and then, with Corporal Haskins still at the head, turned in at the east sally-port.

But here, right at the entrance to the port, stood Chaplain Montgomery.

"Corporal Haskins," called the chaplain, as he returned the cadet officer's smart salute, "will you excuse Mr. Prescott that I may speak with him?"

"Mr. Prescott, fall out!" came Haskins' command.

With a feeling of horror and anguish Dick fell out, saluting Chaplain Montgomery, for the chaplain, though an ordained minister of the church, was also, by virtue of his post of chaplain, a captain of the United States Army.

On moved the detachment, the feet of the cadets moving at a rhythmic beat as these perfect young soldiers moved on across the barracks

area.

And all Chaplain Montgomery had to say to Cadet Prescott was to tell him in which bound file of a magazine at the Y.M.C.A. could be found an article about which Dick had asked the churchman a fortnight before.

Dick returned thanks, though he meant no disrespect to the kindly chaplain. Then, saluting, he hurried on after the detachment.

But more than a fatal minute had been lost at the sally-port, and now the detachment was dismissed. The men had been in their rooms for at least forty-five seconds.

"No use to go to Dodge now!" thought Dick despondently. "Whether he knows that I saw that cuff or not, he has removed it and has it safely hidden by this time. Oh, if Chaplain Montgomery could have been a hundred yards further away at that moment!"

It was no use to lament. Dick concluded to wait and bide his time. The chance might yet come to catch Bert Dodge red handed.

"Though, if he suspects that I saw his exposed cuff, he'll take pains that there is not further chance!" decided Cadet Prescott.

After that he went to his room, where he told Greg what he had discovered.

"It's suspicious---mightily so," declared Holmes. "But it isn't proof---not yet!"

Nevertheless, Greg, once he had heard, could not get the matter out of his mind either!

CHAPTER XXI

PITCHING FOR THE ARMY NINE

"Dick, old fellow, this is going to be a Gridley day for us! It will carry us back to the good old High School days!"

Cadet Greg Holmes was radiant as he moved about their room in quarters that Saturday morning while preparing for the call to breakfast formation.

Until one o'clock these young men of West Point would be busy in the section rooms, as on other week days. But the afternoon of Saturday belonged to pleasure---on this Saturday to sport!

Lehigh University was sending over the strongest baseball nine it could put up, in the effort to beat West Point on the Military Academy's diamond.

"It'll seem just like good old Gridley High School days," repeated Greg.

"Yes," smiled Dick darkly, "with the same rascal, Bert Dodge, to keep my thoughts going."

"Dodge won't be in the game, anyway."

"He wasn't much in Gridley, either," smiled Dick darkly.

"Oh, well, forget him until the game is over."

Morning recitations passed off as usual. It was when the cadets came back from dinner,

First, there was a brief inspection, after which cadets, with leave to visit the West Point Hotel, or officers' homes, strolled away to meet young women friends.

"I'm due to be only a rooter today," sigh Greg, as he saw his roommate start off to the gym to meet the other members of the nine.

"Your luck may change," rejoined Dick. "You'd better go along to the gym. You're the sub. shortstop, you know, and Meacham may not be on deck. Better come along, now."

"I will, then; I wasn't going over until just before time to get into togs and sit on the bench."

Up to this time, neither Prescott nor Holmes had judged their academic standing to be good enough to make it safe for them to enter into sports. This winter and spring, however, had found them "safe" enough for them to go into training with the baseball squad.

Dick had tried for the position of pitcher, but Kennedy had been chosen, while Prescott had gone to second base. Tatham was the sub. pitcher.

"Say, have you seen the Lehighs?" demanded Furlong, as the chums joined the crowd at the gym. "They're big fellows. They weigh a ton and a half to our ton."

"Lightness and speed count for more than beef in this game," smiled Prescott.

"Lehigh has sent some huskies, all right, and they look as if they'd give us a tough battle."

In baseball and football West Point plays college teams. The college men are generally older and much heavier. Besides, the college men, not having the same intense grind at their institutions, are able to devote four or five times as much actual time to the work of training.

Despite these handicaps, the West Point team generally holds its own end up very well indeed. The West Point men have one advantage; they are always in training, for which reason their bodily condition is always good. It is in the finer points of the technique of the game that the United States military cadets suffer from less

practice.

Maitland, of the second class, was captain of the team this year. He was a much disturbed man when Dick and Greg reached the gym.

"What ails Maitland?" Dick asked Furlong.

"Haven't you heard? Kennedy is a great tosser, but he has his bad days when his wrist goes stale. And Tatham, the sub., fought his way through a poor dinner, but then he had to give up and go to hospital. He's threatened with some kind of fever, we hear. That leaves us without a sub. today."

"Oh, does it?" thought Prescott. With quick step and eager eye he sought Captain Maitland, who was also catcher for the nine.

"Mr. Maitland, I understand you're without a satisfactory sub. pitcher for today?"

"Confound it, yes; we're praying for the strength of Kennedy's wrist."

"You may remember that I tried for pitcher."

"I know you did," replied Maitland gloomily. "But the coaches thought Kennedy and Tatham ahead of you."

"If Kennedy should go bad today," pressed Dick eagerly, "I trust you will be willing order me in from second to the box. I know that I won't disappoint you. Ebbett and Dunstan are both good men at second."

Captain Maitland looked thoughtful.

"I'm afraid, Prescott, if Kennedy does happen to go stale, we'll have to call on you."

"I won't disappoint you, if you do, Captain!"

Then Maitland turned to regard Meacham, who was entering at that moment.

"What on earth ails you, Meacham?" demanded the worried captain of the nine.

"I was at a loot party last night," confessed Meacham miserably.

"Overeating yourself---when you're in training, man?"

"Honestly, Maitland, I didn't believe the little that I put down was going to throw me. There wasn't a murmur until eleven this morning, and I felt sure that was going to work off. But it won't, and, oh, my!"

West Point's shortstop put his hands over his belt line, looking comically miserable. But to Captain Maitland there was no humor in the situation.

"You're a fine one!" growled Maitland. "Oh, Holmesy! Come over

here, please. You haven't been teasing your stomach, have you?"

"I don't know that I have a stomach," replied Greg promptly.

"You'll play shortstop today, then."

Half an hour later, the Lehigh fellows were out on the field, going through some practice plays. Below the center of the grandstand, the West Point band was playing its most spirited music. The seats reserved for officers and their families, and for invited guests, were filling up rapidly. At the smaller stand, over at the east side of the field, Lehigh had some two hundred friends and rooters.

Now on to the field marched the corps of cadets, filing into the seats reserved for them, just north of the officers' seats.

Now, the band began to play the U.S.M.A. songs, the cadets joining in under the leadership of the cheer-master.

Then, amid a storm of West Point yells, the Army nine strode on to the field. Things moved quickly now. Lehigh won the toss and went to bat.

Kennedy appeared to be in excellent form. He struck out the first two Lehigh men at bat. The third man, however, gained first on called balls. The fourth man at bat drove a two-bagger, and now second and third were occupied. As the fifth of the Lehigh batsmen stepped up to the plate, the Lehigh cheers resounded, and West Point's rooters sat in tense silence. What was the matter with Kennedy? But the Army pitcher struck out his man, and Lehigh went out to grass without having scored. Lehigh's revenge, though, was swift. Three West Point men were struck out almost as rapidly as they could move to the plate.

In the second inning both sides got men to bases, but neither side scored. In the third Lehigh took one solitary run, but it looked well on the score-board at the north end of the field. West Point, in the last half of the third, put men on first and second, but that was all.

By the fourth inning, Kennedy was pitching a bit wildly. Maitland gazed at his comrade of the battery with anxious eyes. Lehigh began to grin with the ease of the thing now. One after another men walked to bases on called balls, until all of the bags were occupied.

Suddenly Kennedy, after taking a twist on the ball, signaled Maitland. The captain turned the umpire and spoke.

"Kennedy's old trick! He's gone stale and Tatham is down at hospital," passed from mouth to mouth among the home rooters. "Now, what's left for us?"

After a brief conversation with the umpire Maitland signaled. Dick Prescott came bounding in from second, to receive the ball from Kennedy, while Ebbett was seen racing out to second.

"Play ball!" called the umpire crisply.

"Oh, pshaw!" called one of the cadets. "In training season Prescott tried for pitcher and the coaches turned him down. Now we're done for today!"

Spirits were gloomy among the West Point rooters. Yet, within a few moments, they sat up, taking notice.

Dick, with his nerves a-tingle, his eye keen, measured up the Lehigh batsman and sent in one of his old-time, famous Gridley spit-balls. It looked slow and easy. The Lehigh man swung a well-aimed crack at the ball.

"Strike one," announced the umpire.

Again Prescott turned his wrist and twirled.

"Strike two!"

Then an outcurve.

"Strike three! Out!"

Lehigh began to look with some interest at this new, confident pitcher.

The next Lehigh man to bat met a similar fate. So did the third man.

Now, the West Point yells went up with new force and purpose.

The corps yell rose, loud and thunderous, followed by three cries of "Prescott!"

In their half of the inning, West Point put men on first and second, but that was the best they could do.

So it dragged along to the seventh inning. Army rooters were now sure that West Point's star pitcher had been found at last, and that Lehigh would have rare luck to score again today. But West Point didn't seem able to score, either, and Lehigh had the one needed dot.

As Army went to bat Greg took up the stick and swung it expectantly.

"Do something, Greg," Dick had whispered. "I'm the second man after you, and I'll back you if you can get a start. Remember the old Gridley days of victory. Get some of that same old ginger into you!"

Holmes, as he swung the stick over the plate, seemed to feel himself back on the old athletic field of Gridley High School. And these stalwart college boys before him seemed to him to be the old, old Tottenville High School youngsters.

One strike Greg essayed and lost. At the second offer, he hit the ball a sharp crack and started. He reached first, but as he turned, the ball fell into the hands of Lehigh's second baseman, and Greg fell back to safety at first.

Ebbett, who followed, hit at the third offer, driving the ball almost under the feet of Lehigh's right-fielder. As that man seized it he saw that Greg was within kicking distance of second bag, so he threw to first and Ebbett was out.

Dick now stepped confidently forward. He looked at Lehigh's tired pitcher with a challenging smile.

At the first offer, Prescott struck the leather sphere---crack! In an instant Greg was in motion, while Dick raced as though bent on catching his chum. The ball had gone out over the head of center, who was now faithfully chasing it across outfield. Greg came in and hit the plate amid a cyclone of Army enthusiasm. The band was playing in sheer joy. Dick kicked second bag, then darted back as he saw the ball drop into the hands of the Lehigh catcher, who promptly sent it spinning straight into the third baseman's hands.

Then Maitland gained first on called balls, and Furlong did the same, which advanced Prescott to third.

Now Carson came up with the stick, sending out a slow grounder.

In like an Apache runner came Prescott, kicking the plate just before the ball dropped.

From the seats of the Army came the triumphant yell:

"North point, east point, south point, West Point---_two points_!"

The next Army man struck out, but West Point was breathing, now, with score two to one.

"Don't let Lehigh put another dot on the card, Prescott, and you'll be our pitcher this year," promised Maitland.

"Wait and see if the visitors can get any more from us," laughed Dick coolly. He felt that he had his old Gridley winning gait on now. He proved it by striking out three straight in the first half of the eighth. But West Point did not score, either, in that inning.

Then came Lehigh, grim and desperate, to bat for the ninth time. The first man Dick struck out. But even his wrist seemed to be treacherous now. The second Lehigh man offered at nothing, and went to first on called balls. So did the second, and a third man, and the bags were filled.

Maitland glanced appealingly at Dick.

The new batsman, at the second offer, drove a slow grounder. Greg Holmes raced forward for it, like a deer. As he caught it up there was no perceptible pause before he sent it straight into Maitland's hands, and the man headed for the plate was out. But the three bags were again full.

Another Lehigh man hit one of Dick's drives, but only faintly with the edge of his bat, and he went out on a foul hit.

"Now, I'm going to strike this new man out," resolved Dick desperately, steeling nerves and muscles for the effort.

"Strike one!" called the umpire. "Ball one! Ball two! Strike two! Strike three! Out!"

It was over, and Lehigh, covered with chagrin, gave up the contest, while a pandemonium of Army cheers went loose. Two to one!

"Prescott, I guess you're our pitcher here-after" called Maitland hoarsely. "And you, Holmesy, for shortstop!"

Dick Prescott found himself the center of a swift rush of cadets. Then he was hoisted aloft, and rushed off the field in triumph and glory, while the corps yell rang out for him. Over in the gym. Prescott was forced to hold an impromptu reception. Greg got much of the ovation.

Captain Verbeck, the head coach, came up to grasp Dick's hand.

"Prescott, I don't understand how you ever got by us. But Maitland wants you for our star pitcher after this, and you'll have to be. It was the greatest Army game, from the box, that I've seen in many a year."

"Say, you fellows," greeted Anstey, breaking into their room after the chums had returned to barracks, "you two had better go over today, and the men who are to drag the spooniest femmes tonight are all plotting to write you down on the dance cards of their femmes."

"That's the best reason in the world for keeping away from Cullum, then," laughed Dick.

"But I mean it seriously," protested Anstey.

"So do I," replied Dick

"I'm really a committee of one, sent here by some of tonight's draggers," protested the Virginian.

"Tell them of your non-success, then, do," urged Dick. "For I'm not going to Cullum tonight. Are you, Greg?"

"Ye-es," returned Holmes promptly. Then, suddenly, he paused in his moving about the room.

He now stood looking at his left hand, on which appeared a small smear of black.

"No!" suddenly uttered Greg. "I'm not going. I've changed my mind---and for the best reasons possible."

"Now, what on earth has made you so excited?" demanded Anstey wonderingly.

CHAPTER XXII

GREG'S SECRET AND ANOTHER'S

"Are you going to the hop tonight?" asked Holmes, looking up with gleaming eyes from the smear on the back of his hand.

"No," admitted Anstey.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, suh; suhtinly."

"Then come here at 8.15 to-night."

"What are you talking-----"

"I'm not talking, _now_," retorted Greg with a resolute tone in his voice. "Like a wise man, I'm going to do some thinking first. But you call around this evening. It'll be worth your while."

Anstey looked and felt highly mystified. It must be something both sudden and important to make Greg change his mind so swiftly. For Cadet Holmes, who, in his home town, had not been exactly noted for gallantries to the other sex, had, in the yearling class, acquired the reputation of being a good deal of a "spoonoid." This is the term applied to a cadet who displays a decided liking for feminine company.

"I can see that it isn't any use to ask you anything now," went on Anstey.

"It isn't," Greg returned promptly. "I'm never secretive against you, Anstey, old man and the only reason I don't talk at once is that I don't know just what I want to say. But remember---8.15. By that time I think I shall have solved myself into a highly talkative goat yearling."

Rap-tap! at the door, and Furlong and Dunstan dropped in.

"Want to tell you what I think about your pitching, old ramrod," announced Furlong.

"It's rotten!" glowed Dunstan cheerfully "And your shortstop work, Holmesy-----"

"What kindergarten nine did you play with last?" insisted Furlong.

"I was just making up my mind not to pitch again this season," grinned Cadet Prescott.

"Why not?" Furlong demanded.

"Milesy," laughed Dick, "you should never go out on a kidding expedition until you're sure you're josh-proof yourself. Do you think anything less than the coaches and the team captain could stop me from pitching? But I sorry for Ken, if I'm to supplant him."

"You needn't be. Kennedy is glad. He hopes to make the cavalry, and he says he wants to train that wrist for wielding a sabre."

"Can you two near-plebes find time to drop in this evening, at just 8.15?" demanded Greg.

"Certain idea! What's up, Holmesy?"

"It isn't a feed," declared Greg. "But I think you'd be sorry afterwards if you failed to come."

"We'll be here," promised Dunstan.

"Then I guess our party will be complete," mumbled the mysterious Greg.

"Say, Holmesy," nudged Dunstan, "how did you get that smear on the back of your hand? Do you know, it looks like the famous one that Cadet Dodge rubbed off with a borrowed handkerchief, once on a time."

"Does it?" asked Greg innocently. "Be good enough to loan me your handkerchief, then?"

"Not much!" growled Dunstan, backing away. "The loaning of personal linen seems on its way to becoming a court-martial offence."

When the visitors had left, Dick turned on his chum, demanding curiously:

"What's the game for tonight, anyway, Greg?"

"You didn't see how I got this smear on my hand, did you, old ramrod?"

"No."

"Then I'm not going to tell you at present," replied Greg, going to his washbowl and pouring in water. "But the way I got it set me to thinking.

"About what?"

"Well, about the way Bert Dodge got his hand smeared back in the days of ancient history. And, old ramrod, I believe that following up the clue may lead to some other discoveries that will possess a vital interest for you."

"But-----"

"No more at present! That's a special order," affirmed Greg. "Be good, like the rest, and wait until 8.15 to-night."

At supper, in cadet mess hall, the talk all naturally turned to the diamond game with Lehigh that afternoon. The Army, at the outset, had hardly expected to win against that year's Lehigh nine. When the game was well under way, Army hopes had been still lower. Now, the talk was all on how Prescott and Holmes had saved

the game to the Army. Even Maitland, without a trace of jealousy, conceded them most of the credit.

"What has cherubic, spoonoid Holmesy got up his sleeve for 8.15?" asked Dunstan in an undertone of Anstey.

"I reckon, suh, you'll have to apply for particulars to the Information and Security Service, suh," replied the Virginian. "To the best of my belief, suh, the secret is all Mr. Holmes's."

So no more questions were asked. But at 8.15, to the second, Furlong and Dunstan tapped on the Prescott-Holmes door, and, as they did so. Anstey turned at the head of the stairs. Punctuality is one of the cardinal virtues of the soldier; to be a half minute late is a grave breach of etiquette; to be five minutes late amounts almost to a crime.

"Now, Holmesy, we want light," insisted Furlong.

"At first blush," returned Greg, "some of you may not like the job. It is nothing more nor less than a visit to Dodge's room, while he and Blayton are absent at the hop."

"It is an extreme measure, surely," murmured Dunstan.

Anstey remained silent, waiting for further particulars.

"What I would call to your attention," went on Greg, "is that my roommate, old ramrod, was nearly bounced out of West Point for something he never did. I believe, and probably you all do, that Mr. Dodge played an evil and guilty part in what became nearly a tragedy."

"I wouldn't put anything mean beyond Dodge," replied Furlong.

"Now, I believe I can take you to Dodge's room. Both he and Brayton are absent at the hop. Brayton has always been a decent fellow, I don't believe he admires Dodge any too much, but he has to put up with his roommate. Now, in that room I hope to find evidence which will prove that Dodge is not fit to be a member the corps of United States Military Academy cadets. Will you come with me and look for the proof?"

"I suhtinly will, suh," replied the Virginian promptly.

"If Anstey will go on a job like that," muttered Dunstan, "then I guess it's a proper undertaking for gentlemen."

"I thank you, suh," nodded the Virginian gravely.

"Then come along, all hands," begged Greg. "If we find anything of the sort that I expect to, then there will be witnesses enough to prove the find to the satisfaction of the class and of the corps."

Feeling like so many conspirators, this committee of five moved along to Dodge's room. Greg went a little ahead and tapped. Had Dodge been there it would not have interfered seriously with his plans. But there was no answer, so Holmes pushed open the

door, turning the gas half on and lighting it.

"This afternoon," declared Greg, "I dropped a stub of a pencil in our room. It fell on the bricks of the floor of the fireplace, and rolled into the space between two of the bricks. In getting that pencil out I got on the back of my hand the smear that you all saw.

"Fellows, I've been thinking for weeks and months about that smear on the back of Mr. Dodge's hand. When I saw the one on the back of my own hand it occurred to me at once how Mr. Dodge might have got that black spot on his hand. It came over me, all in a flash. I knew that Brayton and Mr. Dodge would be out of the way this evening at the hop. Dodge has a hiding place somewhere in this room. From the past history of the Academy we know that favorite hiding places have always been under the bricks of the fireplaces. For use in the winter time the hiding place must be in the outer edge of the brick flooring, close up to where it joins the boards. In such a hiding place the fire wouldn't harm the hidden objects. Now, some of you might help me to see what we can find."

Anstey, with a gravely judicial air, knelt beside Holmes. Together they tapped back and forth over the bricks with rulers taken from the study tables.

"This is the brick that hides the place, I reckon, suh," announced the Virginian rather deliberately.

"Let's pry it up, then," suggested Greg.

But the brick resisted rather strenuous efforts.

"That's odd, in itself," muttered Holmes. "Almost of the bricks in these fireplaces come up as easily as a naval apprentice's dinner. Anse, we've got to work at this brick until we have loose. It surely hides something."

"We mustn't damage either the wooden or brick flooring," warned Furlong. "If we did find anything, after all, think of the row Dodge could raise over the vandalism in his room."

So the time slipped by, faster than any of them knew. But these five cadets, now satisfied that the obdurate brick really did hide a secret toiled on with no thought of surrender.

At last they struck the combination. The brick back of the one that so resisted their efforts was finally pried up, after a good deal of effort. This opening laid bare a neat but powerful spring.

Had they had, at the outset, the whole secret of this spring, they could have raised the resisting brick in a second's time.

"Get it up---must have a look!" cried Prescott hoarsely.

It was Greg who raised the brick that had resisted their efforts for so long. Underneath Cadet Holmes found a collection of things that chained the attention of all, as each took eager looks in turn.

"Going to put the stuff back, for the present?" asked Anstey, with an odd quiver in his voice. The honorable Virginian was upset by what he had seen.

"Not never!" retorted Greg with ungrammatical emphasis. "It won't be just the thing for old ramrod and myself to have it, either. Miley, you and Dunstan take it along with you. Now, old ramrod, just what had we better do?"

"I don't see anything for it but to root out again after taps and the subdivision inspector's visit tonight," muttered Dick, who was alternately pale and flushed over the discovery, and all that it meant. "Gentlemen, will you come softly to my room fifteen minutes after the sub-division inspector's official visit at taps?"

Greg and Anstey restored the bricked flooring of the fireplace so that nothing indicated the late search.

Then, Dunstan and Furlong carrying away the discovered stuff, the five prowlers turned out the gas and separated.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE "COMMITTEE ON CLASS HONOR"

At a few minutes after eleven, that same April night, five cadets fully dressed stole down the corridor, and the leader laid a hand on Dodge's doorknob.

In another moment they had stepped inside and their arrival awakened Cadet Brayton.

"Plebes' quarters next floor up, brothers," called Brayton in drowsy good nature.

"I'm sorry to say, Brayton, we're on the right floor, and in the right room," responded Dunstan. "But this visit won't bother you!"

The noise of voices awoke Bert Dodge with start. He awoke with a snort, then sat bolt upright, peering in the dark.

"Wh---who's there?" he demanded hoarsely.

"A committee on class honor, Mr. Dodge," replied Furlong, while Anstey added, with ironic politeness:

"Don't be alahmed, suh. We do not believe you to be possessed, suh, of any of the commodity of which we are in search."

"Brayton" asked Greg, "will you be good enough to slip into your bathrobe and hang your blankets over the window? Then we can have some light. That's one thing we're going to need," he added significantly.

"Don't you do it, Bray," broke in Dodge stiffly. "As for you

fellows, the best thing you can all do is to go back to your cradles. Bray and I want to sleep the night through. And you've no business here, anyway."

"I'm afraid you've missed the point, suh?" replied Anstey with bored patience. "That is exactly why we're here, suh---because we have business here."

Brayton had slipped into his bathrobe and was now crossing the room with blankets on one arm.

"Chase 'em out, Bray; don't hang any blankets for them to run a light behind," begged Dodge.

"I'm afraid I'd better," murmured Brayton, as he stood on a chair and reached up to put the blankets in place. Didn't you hear the announcement that this is a committee of honor? The class has a right to send one to any man, and Prescott, the class president, is here. There, those blankets will hold and shut in all light. Turn on the gas, Holmesy, if you will."

"You'd better get into robe and slippers, too, Mr. Dodge," hinted Dunstan strongly. "Our business is with you, and I think you'll feel more at ease on your feet."

"What is all this nonsense about, anyway growled Dodge, as he slipped out of bed and wrapped himself in his dressing gown.

"That's what we'll ask you to explain," retorted Greg. "But let us go about this in a regular manner. In the first place, Brayton, please understand that you are not being investigated. It is Mr. Dodge who is under suspicion."

"Yes; under fine suspicion!" snarled Dodge. "You mean I'm to be the victim of a plot hatched by my two old enemies back in the home town."

But Greg, ignoring him, turned to his chum.

"Dick, old ramrod, as you're the aggrieved one, I don't suppose you can exactly act as class president in this case. But you can designate some other member of the class to act in your place."

"Then I'll name Mr. Anstey," replied Dick. "I believe he will be satisfactory to everyone."

"Not to me!" snapped Bert Dodge, his uneasy gaze roving from one face to another. "The class president can't name his own substitute."

"Silence!" commanded Brayton, turning on his roommate. "Of course the class president can delegate his duties, temporarily, to another."

"Take this matter in charge, Mr. Anstey," begged Dick, turning to the Virginian.

"Mr. Dodge," continued the Virginian, "be good enough, suh, to pay good heed to what I have to say. That will be necessary, in fairness to yourself, suh. I'll begin at the beginning."

Anstey began with the handkerchief-borrowing episode in barracks area. He dwelt upon the accusation against Cadet Prescott, the court-martial, and the further fact that even the verdict of acquittal had not, at first, been fully accepted by all members of the corps of cadets clearing Dick of the fearful suspicion against his honor.

"What has all this to do with me?" snarled Dodge. "Is Prescott trying to revive his old and infamous hints against me?"

"Wait a moment, Mr. Dodge," continued Anstey patiently. "Now will now move along to the drill in the riding hall yesterday afternoon."

Anstey then described the bared cuff that Prescott had seen on Dodge's left wrist.

"That's a lie," rasped out Dodge.

But Anstey heeded him not; Prescott merely smiled. But the sight of that smile maddened Dodge, who sprang up, crying:

"Yes! You think you have it all cooked up against me, Dick Prescott! But you'll find that truth and right will win."

Dick did not answer, but Anstey, looking impressively at the culprit, declared:

"Mr. Dodge, tonight, while you were away, we pried up that brick!"

Every vestige of color fled from Bert's face. He seemed about to fall, but he clutched at the chair back and remained standing.

"Of course, Mr. Dodge, you know what we found there. Brayton, you don't so you will interested in seeing the things. Miley, be good enough to spread the collection on that table. Here, you see, first of all, is the cuff of yesterday. Even the writing, in India ink, remains on it. And here are reddish stains, made by the impact of that cuff with the tan-bark of the riding hall. Here are slips of paper on which the main features of the hardest math. problems of each day have been noted down, ready for writing on a cuff. Here is the water-proof ink and the pen with which the writing on the cuff was done. And here are some other slips of paper, evidently older, on which other problems have been written out more fully. These older slips of paper contain problems of last November and early December---the time when Prescott was in his deep trouble. Now, these older slips are of paper just like the piece that fell from the handkerchief that Prescott took out of his blouse on that tragic day. Somewhere in the files the authorities have that slip that figured in the charges at Prescott's trial by general court-martial. I imagine, on comparison, that slip will be found to be on paper identical with these slips containing older problems. And you will note that these older slips are written on with a typewriting machine, with crude figures drawn in, just as in the case of the slip that figured Prescott's trial. Now, Mr. Dodge, isn't it plain to even the dullest mind that you have been systematically cribbing at math., and that it is to that fact you owe your present high standing in the yearling class?"

"Now that I think of it," remarked Brayton, turning and fixing his roommate with a frigid, hostile stare, "I have, on at least two occasions, entered this room just in time to see Mr. Dodge spring up hastily from near the fireplace. But I am a dull-witted fellow, I suppose, and I didn't suspect.

"Have you anything to say, Mr. Dodge?" demanded Anstey.

"Nothing," barely gasped the detected wretch.

"Then I will say something instead, suh," continued the Virginian. "I would rather the task fell to someone else, but this work has been delegated to me, and I must see it through, suh. Mr. Dodge, we are all satisfied that you are a miserable, lying, sneaking hound, suh, not worthy to associate with gentlemen. We are satisfied, suh, that you are without honor or principle, and that you will never be fit to become an officer of the Army."

"Now, see here, fellows," broke in Dodge in a whining tone, "if you'll be generous and give me another chance, I can live this down."

"Then you admit that which we have been stating against you, do you, suh?" questioned the Virginian. "It will be best for you to be wholly honest, suh!

"Yes---yes---I---admit---it," cried Dodge brokenly. "But I didn't deliberately plan for Prescott's undoing---on my honor, I didn't! What happened was this: When I took Prescott's handkerchief with one hand, I had that crib in the other hand. After using the handkerchief, I found that I couldn't pass it back without either letting the crib be seen, or else tucking the crib into the handkerchief. So I had to do the latter thing. But that was as far as I was guilty---on my honor, gentlemen!"

"Then you expect us to believe in the honor of a cadet who dishonors himself by sneaking cribs into a section room?" demanded Anstey with mild but withering sarcasm.

"Give me just one more chance, gentlemen!" faltered Dodge. "I pledge you my word that, henceforth, I'll do everything that is creditable and honorable, and nothing that isn't!"

"We have a somewhat different proposition for you, Mr. Dodge," observed the Virginian. "We want no more of your stripe. We would degrade the entire Army, and the whole people of the United States of America if we allow you to remain here. Tomorrow, at an early hour, you will hand in your resignation as a cadet, to take effect upon acceptance. If you fail, we will lay before the superintendent and the commandant of cadets all the evidence that we have against you, including your own confession. You will then have to face a general court-martial and be dismissed from the service in the deepest disgrace that can come to a cadet."

Bert Dodge sank to his knees, holding his clasped hands up before him.

"Don't insist on that, gentlemen! Don't! Spare me the disgrace! Spare my parents!

"Mr. Dodge," replied Anstey sternly, "honor is the watchword in the United States Military Academy, and all through the Army. We couldn't spare a dishonorable wretch like you, suh, without sharing in your disgrace. And I have not told you all that we require. As soon as you have gone to your home you will write a letter to the superintendent, exonerating Mr. Prescott from all suspicion in that fearful affair. You will admit that you alone were guilty. According to custom, that letter will be read before the battalion in special orders and the entire corps will then know how fully Cadet Prescott is worthy of being one of us."

"Write that letter?" demanded Dodge, leaping to his feet, but cowering. "Never! You are taking an unfair, unmanly, ungenerous advantage of me! You shall never have any such letter from me!"

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

Still patiently Anstey turned to Greg.

"Mr. Holmes, will you be kind enough to go to the room of Mr. Packard of the first class, also Mr. Maitland, of the second class, and present my very respectful compliments? Will you ask both gentlemen if they can make it convenient to come here, forthwith, on a matter of corps honor?"

Greg departed. He was back within five minutes, simply nodding. Very soon Mr. Packard and Mr. Maitland appeared. They listened silently while Anstey laid the story before them. Then Packard glanced at the second classman.

"Shall I speak for us both, Maitland?"

"If you please."

"Mr. Anstey, and gentlemen," continued Packard, "this is primarily a matter affecting your own third class, and should be settled by the members of your class. But, in its broader scope, the conduct to which Mr. Dodge has confessed affects the entire corps. Mr. Dodge charges that you are abusing your power. Maitland and I beg to differ with him. Mr. Anstey, you have done the only thing that can be done in such a case of infamy and dishonor. Mr. Dodge will, of course, send in his resignation tomorrow; it will be much easier for him than facing disgrace of a more public kind through a published verdict of a general court-martial. As soon as Mr. Dodge has reached his home he will also write that letter exonerating Mr. Prescott; I am sure he will. If he does not, the corps will then take steps to turn the evidence over to the representative of the Associated Press, and of the largest newspapers in the country. In other words, Mr. Dodge, by refusing to write that letter, will face a vastly larger exposure all through the country. Now, Maitland, as this is, first of all, a class matter, I feel that we have offered enough. Gentlemen, if you have no further need of us, we will withdraw."

The self-appointed committee of the yearling class withdrew a moment after, Furlong and Dunstan carrying with them the evidence.

Bert Dodge tendered his resignation promptly. Within a week the notice of its acceptance by the Secretary of War was published before the battalion, and Dodge skulked away, alone, unregretted and utterly crushed, to the railway station. During the last few days he had been "cut" by every man in the corps.

Three days after his departure the superintendent of the United States Military Academy received a letter that caused him much astonishment. In this letter Dodge briefly confessed that he, and he alone, was the guilty party in that cribbing affair, and Dick Prescott had had no guilty share or knowledge in the incident.

"Hm!" mused the superintendent, a grim smile passing over his face. "This Dodge business has all the ear-marks of another affair of Army honor settled unofficially by the corps of cadets."

Dodge's letter was published in a special order then read before the corps of cadets, and the affair was closed.

Dick and Greg continued to play in the Army nine the rest of that spring. It was one of the most brilliant of Army seasons on the diamond, and much of the credit was due to yearlings Prescott and Greg.

Baseball was at last cut short by the arrival of the busy graduation season.

Immediately after the proud and happy graduating class had left to take up its new life in the scattered Army of the United States, the yearling class dropped that designation and became the new second class at West Point. As members of the new second class, these happy youngsters laid aside their uniforms for two and a half months, and, in citizens' clothes, made their rush away from the Military Academy to begin the summer furlough that comes but once in the cadet's more than four years of Academy life.

That evening found Greg and Dick in New York City. Happy as small boys, they looked at the great city in genuine glee.

"I feel like rubbing my eyes, Greg, old chum!" laughed Dick. "Are we dreaming, or can such large cities actually be?"

"It seems to me that I have a remembrance of large towns in some previous stage of existence, somewhere in the universe," sighed Holmes ecstatically. "But this town is bigger, noisier, fuller of life and fun than anything I can recall."

"We have until midnight before the home train leaves," pursued Dick.

"Home! Now, that is something of which I have a much keener recollection!" cried Greg, his eyes moistening. "Dick, I'm afraid that, if there were a train earlier than midnight, even the big town wouldn't detain me."

"But there isn't an earlier train, Greg, and there are no taps

or sub-division inspectors tonight. What shall we do?"

"First of all, then," proposed Greg gleefully, "let us see if there is a place in New York where they know the meaning of the big feed."

"And then the theater!" chuckled Dick.

"Which we'll reach in one of those wonderful vehicles that the natives call taxicabs!"

They found a place without difficulty.

"Then to walk along Broadway with its flashing lights; then the railway station!"

"The train!"

"Home in the morning!"

"We'll start with a taxi," proposed Greg. "Here's an empty one coming. Here, chauffeur. Yes! The Waldorf!"

What befell our cadets thereafter will be reserved for the next volume in this series, which is published under the title, "_Dick Prescott's Third Year At West Point; Or, Standing Firm for Flag and Honor._"

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