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WHEN BOYS WERE MEN

By John Habberton.
Author of "Helen's Babies," "George Washington," Etc.
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Continued From Page Eleven.

CHAPTER III.

OUR APPOINTMENT WITH THE MAJOR. RAINARD and I spent an hour and quite a lot of money in shops not far from headquarters, taking care to return in time to meet the major at noon, according to request. As we approached headquarters from the opposite side of the street we saw Hamilton and Cloyne coming down, and Rainard stopped me, exclaiming:

"Did you ever see two finer looking soldiers?"

I said I never had. Each was tall, straight, well formed and carried himself with the grace and ease that came of military training long before they, with us, had joined Billy Beecham's company of the Ninety-ninth. Their cavalry uniforms had been carefully altered and refitted, so there was none of the awkwardness about them that made the volunteer soldier appear more shabby than the average citizen. Each wore a slouch hat and plume, like the regulation "dress" hat, only much finer, and they attracted more attention from passersby than any of the commissioned officers whom one met every moment or two on Broadway in those days. I wanted to tell Rainard how much more distinguished they would look within a day or two when they had received the commissions, about which the major undoubtedly wanted to see them and me, but I hadn't the heart to speak of good fortune from which poor Rainard was to be excluded, so I said nothing.

The two fine fellows entered the stairway which led to the left in which our regiment's recruiting headquarters were, and I followed them. Quite a number of uniformed recruits were there in the back part of the room, so it seemed to me that other officers and would be officers must have been more successful than our trio at Summerton. I was about to tell Hamilton and Cloyne of my luck with Rainard, but Charley begged me not to. He said he wanted to surprise them when we returned to Summerton. Until then he would try to keep out of sight. I joined them alone, therefore, and the three of us walked about together, amusing ourselves by observing the old sergeant, who seemed to be trying to find some one or count the recruits, we could not discover which.

The major had not yet arrived. The lieutenant, who always seemed to be on duty as aid or assistant, leaned from the window as if looking for the major. Finally he withdrew his head, walked to the rear of the room and shouted:

"Attention, men! Fall in!"

"I wonder if he is going to indulge in a squad drill?" said Hamilton to Cloyne, as both of them stepped aside, followed by me, in order to be out of the line which the men were forming by the aid of the old sergeant.

"Fall in, men," said the lieutenant, approaching us.

"Beg pardon," said Hamilton, saluting gracefully, "but we've an appointment at noon with the major, at his own request."

"Yes, I understand," said the lieutenant. "I represent the major. Fall in—according to height."

"If he meant drill," muttered Hamilton to Cloyne, "why didn't the old duffer say so?" Did he think we wouldn't obey orders, that he got us here by such un military ways?"

"Right—dress!" shouted the old sergeant, who had stationed himself at the right of the line. Then he ran along the front, pushing some men back a little and pulling others forward. Finally he returned to the right and shouted "Front!" Then the lieutenant looked at us as carelessly as if merely to see if our general appearance was fair. At last he shouted:

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"Attention, men! Fall in!"

"Attention! Men, orders have come for all recruits for the Thirty-eighth cavalry to be sent to the regiment at once. You must remain here, therefore, until the order for transportation comes. We'll get off some time this evening. That's all. Break ranks—march!"

The yells, roars and oaths that went up from two or three score of the men were worse than any I ever had heard. I couldn't blame any of the other recruits, however, for I was as angry, shocked and frantic as they. "Get off some time this evening!" That meant I couldn't see father, mother or Ned before I started—couldn't see them in three years unless the war ended sooner. It was awful—it was worse than the worst thing I ever had imagined about war.

Some of the more excitable fellows made a rush for the door to find there for the first time an armed guard, beyond whom at the head of the stairs were several more. They did not belong to our own regiment either. Then they dashed to the rear of the left and

proached headquarters from the opposite side of the street we saw Hamilton and Cloyne coming down, and Rainard stopped me, exclaiming:

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Cloyne and I followed to the desk, "I beg a thousand pardons, but I know you'll forgive me if you'd put yourself in my place for a moment. I'm an old First militia man, and I know orders must be obeyed."

"First regiment, eh?" said the lieutenant, rising from his desk, while Cloyne and I pinched each other with delight at the impression which Hamilton's announcement had evidently made.

"Yes, and I've enlisted for service, not for money, for I'm quite well off already. My two friends here and I would like to see our families and acquaintances before we start."

"Telegraph them to come at once," said the lieutenant. "Go to the nearest hotel and see them there. You wouldn't like to meet them before this crowd. I'll pass you through the guards."

We must have been a happy trio to look at just then as Hamilton took the lieutenant's hand and murmured:

"God bless you!"

"I hope he will," said the officer, "for everybody else is cursing me today, though I'm merely doing my duty."

We all moved through the door, the lieutenant leading. Just then I felt a clutch at my shoulder and, turning, saw Rainard, his face tear stained and most weebegone. Hamilton glanced to see him, too, stopped, stared and exclaimed:

"Eh? What's this?"

"This is a surprise," said I. "He's one of us after all."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Hamilton.

I was so pleased at this remark that I was hours in comprehending the entire meaning of it, which was that there was a woman in the case. Meanwhile Hamilton named the hotel to which we would go and where the lieutenant could notify us when it was time to start. We at once telegraphed our families and while awaiting them made some hasty goodby visits to friends in the city. Two hours later we felt as criminals condemned to death must feel during the final visit of their friends. My father—bless his dear, thoughtful heart—brought down the entire family and the dog besides. Had it not been for that dog's efforts to explore the hotel and Ned's efforts to bring him back there would have been little relief from the gloom of which all of us were full. Rainard's mother seemed to suffer worst of all. She had gone through the agony of giving her son away only to get him back again forever, she supposed. Now he was a soldier once more, and at scarcely an hour's notice she was to lose him. My own misery was doubled by her sorrow, for was not I to blame for his being in uniform?

My cousin May tried to put some cheer into the party, and as she always laughed heartily at the slightest provocation it was impossible not to be affected by her spirits. She made cheery though modest replies to some gallant speeches which Hamilton addressed to her, and she told Mrs. Rainard to think how much more Charley's quick wits would be to the nation than the guns of a dozen common men. She scarcely spoke a word to Charley himself, however, and he looked at her only slyly, for, as he told me afterward, he had caught a glimpse of himself in a hotel mirror and felt like a scarecrow.

A message from the lieutenant broke up our party. Cloyne departing first, followed by Hamilton and his friends. I had to drag myself away from my mother's arms and then tear Rainard away from his mother. I hope I may never again see such a picture of desolation as that couple made while taking a last look at each other. It seemed as if a sense of my own responsibility would kill me, but suddenly Cousin May relieved the feelings of all present by throwing her arms around Charley's neck and exclaiming:

"You poor, troubled little fellow, your mother shan't be lonesome while you are away."

How we got out of that room—why we did not fall dead at the final parting—I do not know. To my memory that is still the most dismal day of the entire war. We took pains not to tell our families where our rendezvous was or by what streets we would depart. We did not know ourselves. Just a quarter of an hour afterward, however, as we were tramped down Broadway, a dog sprang upon me, and as I turned to cast him off I saw it was mine—that little Ned was right behind him, and my father was following Ned.

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to sent. On the contrary, there were much the language and drunkenness, with some fighting, for men who had received large bounties and were not accustomed to having much money had apparently tried to invest all their cash in whisky. Some tried to desert by jumping from the car platforms as we passed slowly through the larger towns, and apparently we all were suspected by the officers in charge of the various squads of being possible "bounty jumpers."

It was not until this trip that we came to realize, recruiting officers though we had been, that the payment of bounties, which had not begun until the Ninety-ninth had taken the field, had developed a new and highly popular industry—that of selling, receiving, deserting, re-enlisting to receive more bounties, and so on indefinitely until the bounty jumper was detected or sent to the front too suddenly and securely to escape. One of the officers, with whom Hamilton and Cloyne scraped acquaintance, said we were lucky not to be sent down in locked cars, with windows so arranged on the outside that they could not be opened enough to let a man through. He said also that a number of hard characters had enlisted only for the purpose of robbing their comrades and that those of us who had much money would do well to hide it securely before dropping asleep.

None of these revelations promised well for the Union cause, and I asked Hamilton why it was that the army did not get a better class of volunteers.

"Because," said Hamilton between his teeth, "most members of the better classes are trying to become officers, instead of first enlisting as privates, like several fools with whom I am acquainted."

"But they can't all become officers," I argued. "There are too many of them."

"None of them will become a private soldier until there is a conscription," said Cloyne, who stood by. "It's the only way that men of the better classes ever get into the armies of other nations."

"But we are different," said I, with rising American pride. "Our better classes know they have more to be thankful for than the people of other nations, so they have more patriotism."

"They do, eh? From the appearance of this car and such others on this train I have gone through, I must say their patriotism is not hurrying them into the military service."

Then I had to change the subject of conversation.

Before reaching camp we became acquainted with some of the recruits for our own regiment and found enough varieties of human nature to interest us and to justify Cloyne's remark that it takes a net or an army to catch all sorts of queer fish. Hamilton, who had a head for statistics, took the trouble to ask each recruit for the Thirty-eighth what was his business

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one around him until I chanced to mention one of them to the other. To my great surprise, they were not even acquaintances. This fact or some other seemed to surprise the one I spoke to, and when I brought them together and introduced them they did not look and act at all as I imagined old comrades in a historic battle would. Thinking perhaps they preferred to review old associations in private, I left them, after which they began to chat quite freely, and when next I met one of them he told me they had identified each other at last, and glad they were to find they were old friends. It was a long time before I could get Cloyne to take the slightest interest in them, but he finally eyed them, first carelessly, then curiously. Later I saw him in earnest conversation with one of them, and when I joked with him about it he put on a queer smile and patted me on the shoulder in a patronizing manner that exasperated me.

Our reception at the camp of the Thirty-eighth was not what I had expected. The veterans of the regiment did not turn out to cheer the brave youths who had come to help them put down the rebellion. They did not even offer us something to eat, although it was long after breakfast time and our haversacks had been empty since the night before. A few sauntered over to the adjutant's tent, to which we had been marched, and looked at us as if in search of familiar faces, but no one took special interest in us except the orderly sergeants of the various companies, whom the adjutant had the sergeant major summon by bugle call. The company in which we had enlisted had not yet been organized, so we were allotted temporarily among the older companies, and the orderly sergeants swore frightfully, as they marched us off, at the trouble they would have to squeeze an extra man or two into every tent of a lot already well filled. The men in the tents did not do much to make us feel at home, although one or two put on some appearance of friendliness as they asked us if we had brought down anything in pocket flasks.

We Summerton boys were not made any more comfortable by being separated, as we chanced to be. No three of us were assigned to the same company, much less to the same tent. There seemed nothing for us to do or see either, for no drill was ordered during the morning. Before dinner call was sounded I had lost all interest in the service and the war. I could think of nothing but our farm at Summerton and the people who occupied it. My father had promised to visit me in camp before winter if the authorities would permit. How I hoped he would not do it! I should have been glad to have him see the camp of the Ninety-ninth, but the cavalry camp was very different. There seemed no end of detached tents and huts, with no particular purpose that I could discover. Nothing was as I had expected.

After dinner we boys had an opportunity to see each other again. We enjoyed the meeting, but not its purpose, for each new recruit was given a shovel and set to digging post holes and ditches for some new stables that were to be built. I could have had plenty of digging without coming several hundred miles from home, for my father had long intended to set a new fence. An excitable young Frenchman among the recruits seemed somewhat of my way of thinking, for he suddenly dropped his shovel and shouted:

"I will not dig so hole! I enlist for la gloire, not for dirty work like this."

"Ah, you want glory, eh?" said the German sergeant who seemed engineer in chief. "Den better it is you go back to your own country, vere dey ain't got no sense."

The Frenchman said something between his teeth and thrust out his fist. The sergeant collared the Frenchman and kicked him all the way to the guardhouse. There were no protests after that. Post holes and ditches increased rapidly, and I was somewhat astonished to discover that the short ditch dug by Phil Hamilton was the most shapely of the lot.

We recruits got some comfort after supper in criticizing the movements of the cavalry at dress parade. They marched with less style than the most awkward company of the Ninety-ninth, and looked shabby by the lack of resemblance in their hats, no two of which set alike, although all were of black felt.

Signs of hospitality continuing to be invisible, some of us Summerton recruits concluded to spend the night on the quartermaster's hay pile. Virginia dew, however, had grown cooler in the month that had elapsed since the Ninety-ninth went north, and we had to arise in the middle of the night and indulge in violent exercise to warm our blood. We talked a great lot, too, so much that the sergeant of the guard came over to see what was the matter. When we told him why we were there and how uncomfortable we were, he said: