

"Rubbish!" was the contemptuous rejoinder. Conversation at the cadet mess was abrupt in those days, but generally to the point. "If you can't think better than that, confine yourself to eating."

In an hour afterwards the bugle sounded for general parade. After the minute inspection of the gentlemen cadets' stocks, and belts, and boots—which was the chief feature of this ceremony—was over, the usual course was for the officer at command to address the Cadet Company in the soul-stirring words, "Stand at ease." "Break." And then everybody went about their pleasure until the next bugle sounded for study. On the present occasion the words of command were spoken, but without their ordinary effect. When the officer walked away, the "company," instead of "breaking," closed up, and senior under-officer Bex took command of it.

"Attenshon," was the counter-order he delivered; "Left turn," "Quick march;" and at that word the whole corps, in one long line of two files only—so that it resembled a caterpillar—wound out of the parade-ground, past the porter's lodge, and marched off across the common to Charlton Fair. The emotion of the officer on duty was considerable; but, perceiving the utter hopelessness of restraining one hundred and sixty gentlemen cadets with his single arm, or even both of them, he turned disconsolately into the library, wrote down a formal complaint for the inspection of old Pipeclay, and washed his hands of his young friends for the afternoon.

"Left, right, left, right, left, right;" the corps had never marched better to church upon a Sunday, than it did upon its mutinous errand; and Generalissimo Bex—if he had flourished in these days, he would have been a prig of the first water—expressed himself highly gratified with their soldier-like regularity of behaviour.

Upon leaving the common, and getting into the high road, he formed his army "four deep," and gave them a word of command that does not appear in the drill-books, and had, indeed, rather the air of a battle-cry than of a military order: "Unbuckle belts." Gentlemen cadets wore neither swords nor bayonets, but their belts had a large piece of metal in the centre with "Ubique" upon it (perhaps because they hit with it "in all directions"), and, when dexterously used, these were formidable weapons. In the hands of a novice it was apt to strike the wielder like a flail; but very few of the young gentlemen of those days were novices in the use of it; and not one who had chanced to have had any difficulty, however slight, with a policeman. There were swarms of Fair-people dotted about the lanes—costermongers, itinerant showmen, gipsies, and the like—but with these the advancing army were enjoined not to meddle; they reserved their belts and their "Ubiques" for the hive itself.