

148      THREE GIRLS UNDER CANVAS

"I say, Dodds, why are those people going ashore so soon? Have they been over the ship yet?"

"Saluting, the Lieutenant replied:

"No, sir; they were sent ashore for mutilating Her Majesty's Navy."

"And he pointed to the buttonless coat. Rich, wasn't it?"

"Eileen remarked that it was the date of the Hospital Ball.

"I'll never forget the first big ball I ever went to," I replied. "It was given by the Admiral, and two of the officers were very busy making everybody happy, by introducing their comrades, who couldn't dance to the best dancers in the room. I had struck three such snags. The first was a tall, lean fellow, with great gold epaulets on his shoulders. It was an utter impossibility to avoid those things. They kept coming up and hitting me in the most unexpected places. I tried by turning my head almost completely around to keep them from scratching my chin. This might have answered, if I could have found out what step my partner was dancing. The band was playing a waltz, and he kept taking long, swinging strides, with a little hitch at the end of them, and every time the hitch came, he would bob up against me and almost take my chin off.