

WHEN BOYS WERE MEN

By JOHN HABBERTON.
Author of "Helen's Babies," "George Washington," Etc.

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(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER V.

THINGS SLOW AND LIVELY.

WITHIN a few days our company was organized, and we recruits were gathered into tents of our own. But we continued to be thoroughly miserable. The cavalry camp seemed such a shiftless, do nothing place for all who were not recruits that I thought seriously of writing a private letter to President Lincoln suggesting that he

should have this large and lazy body of men go out and kill some rebels or do something else that would help end the war. It seemed to me that the men I saw lounging about me could not possibly be the same who had been all the talk of the post when the Ninety-ninth was there.

We recruits did very little lounging. We were drilled pretty steadily in the use of a saber, a weapon which did not feel or act anything like we had supposed. For days it seemed too heavy and clumsy for me ever to use to any purpose, and I doubted whether I ever should be able to injure the Confederacy or defend myself by any of the



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thrusts, points or cuts of the manual of arms. I told Cloyne so one day, and he replied:

"That's the reason you're being taught. There'd be nonsense in teaching you if you already knew how."

The regiment—that is, the new companies—had no horses, and we Summerton boys would feel very dismal when we saw the older companies mount and go off on a scouting trip, as they did at least once a week, while we, instead, were marched out to drill or set to work on the stables, which were so many and large that it seemed they never would be finished. There were 12 of them, and each was more than 300 feet long and required 100 thick 10 foot posts, which had to be cut in the forest, besides hundreds of smaller ones for the roof and to divide the stalls. Many of the men made up their minds while this work was going on that a soldier's life was a dog's life, and they proved their sincerity by acting like dogs—growling, snarling, skulking and fighting.

During this wretched experience of cavalry life my spirits were strengthened frequently by observing the imperturbable manner of Hamilton, listening to Cloyne's sensible comments on whatever occurred and admiring the loyal spirit of little Brainard, to whom whatever the government did through any of its officials seemed entirely right. Whenever my mind was troubled

because I didn't understand the full meaning of everything that was done or left undone Brainard would remind me that if I knew everything about the war I probably wouldn't be a private soldier, but general of the army or perhaps president of the United States. "Leave something, a little something, to the colonel or the war department or at least the president," Brainard would say. "If you could do and manage everything, as you seem to wish, the higher officials wouldn't have anything to do but draw their pay, don't you see?"

There was some truth in this, and such a remark would generally pacify me for a few hours. I think, however, that I got most comfort out of my spurs and the joy I anticipated for the time when I should have a horse and tickle his flanks. My father had never allowed one of his horses to be touched with a spur—my experience with old Rover was unknown to him—so there was a pleasure in store for me. And what spurs they were! I had brought them from New York. They were "Mexicans," the wheels nearly three inches in diameter, with points as long as a shingle nail, and they gave out a bell-like jingle as I walked, which was such sweet music to my ear that I never was without them. I even wore them to bed, for, as no one removed any of his clothing when lying down for the night on the floor of his tent, where was the use in taking off one's spurs?

One night this question was answered to some extent. Our tent was round, and the 15 men who lived in it slept with heads toward the outside and feet to the center. By early November the nights were so cold that a man needed a blanket as well as his uniform to keep him warm. Several recruits who admired my spurs had purchased others as much like them as possible of the regimental sutler or storekeeper, and they wore them continually. One evening after our tentful had enjoyed a private supper of fried-seed goose, purchased from a colored woman, we all lay down peacefully to sleep. Whether the geese—there were two of them—were underdone or too rich for men whose ordinary supper was dry bread and sauce of dried apples I don't know, but some of us were affected in our dreams very much like small children after Christmas dinner and unlimited candy. How the trouble began I do not know, but I awoke from a dream of being heavily shackled in a rebel dungeon to find a terrible uproar and struggle going on in the tent, which was as black as Egypt during the plague of darkness. To make matters worse, the most serious part of my dream seemed still in operation, for I could not liberate my feet when I tried to crawl away from the center.

"What blanked cuss has been tying our feet together?" roared one man.

"Let go of my blanket," shouted another, "or I'll break your head!"

"You're a nice one to talk," said a

third, "when it's you that's making all the trouble!"

Meanwhile I, who had just awoke and didn't know anything about the difficulty, was being dragged one way and another by my feet, so I raised my own voice and complained of unfair treatment.

The din awoke the first sergeant, one of the only two noncommissioned officers yet appointed for our company, and he opened the tent flap and roared:

"Keep quiet here or I'll send you all to the guardhouse!"

"I'd be greatly obliged, sergeant," said Brainard plaintively, "if you'd send me there right away, if only to get out of this frightful snarl."

"Strike a light," said the sergeant.

GOOD LIVING

Quite often results in bad health, because what is termed "good living" is usually the gratification of the palate without reference to the nutrition of the body.

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Hamilton, who always carried matches, scratched one and lighted the candle, which was in a socket on the tent pole; then, as I struggled to a sitting posture, I beheld an odd spectacle. Nearly all the men in the tent seemed bound together by the feet by blankets or held down by blankets stretched tightly across their legs. After each man had investigated for himself a little while it appeared that the men with Mexican spurs, like all the others, had been tossing uneasily in their sleep, all on account of the goose supper, and had worked the point of their spurs through the blankets over their feet. As the blankets greatly overlapped one another at the center, a spur as often as not had contracted an entangling alliance with some other fellow's blanket, and the harder the wearer tried in his sleep to free himself, tossing and straining, the worse became the misery.

"Unloose yourselves!" said the sergeant.

"Unloose thunder!" shouted a big ex-drayman from New York. "You can't unloose a tie till you find the end, and the ends of these blankets is all inside somewhere."

"Be jabbers," grunted an Irishman, "I belave some spalpeen has stole the inds and tuk 'em away."

We picked and pulled and tugged and lost our tempers, and the few men who weren't in the tangle drew out of the crowd and laughed and jeered. Finally one desperate man drew his pocket-knife and began to cut himself loose. The others followed his example, and after five minutes of hard work we were free, with an immense heap of woolen rags in the center of the tent and a hard tuft on each spur to tell how the wretchedness began.

"No spurs in bed hereafter," said the captain, who had come over to see the fun and was nearly choking in an effort to keep down his laughter and his dignity. It took an hour of time next day to get the fragments of blanket from my spur wheels, and I wasn't helped by the fellows who sat around and said I was to blame for the whole row, for no one would have bought those infernal spurs if I hadn't set the example.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The man who is always calling for the fool killer would be the first to hide if he saw him coming.—Chicago News.

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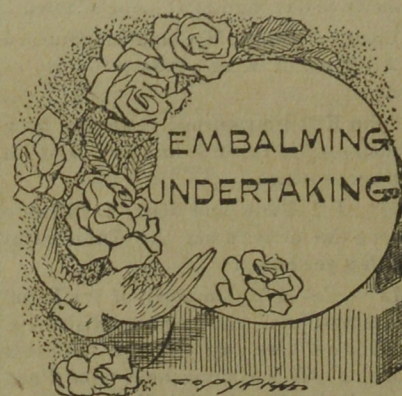
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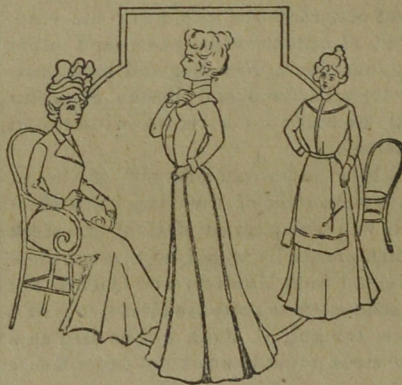
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