OHAPTER III.

CADET CUSTER.

THE Fourth Class, to which Cadet Custer belonged, was now safely ensconced in the barracks, and entering on the unvarying routine of cadet life. What that routine is, has been pictured by more than one old graduate, in that same storehouse of information from which we have already quoted, and it will serve, in addition to the personal reminiscences of his classmates, to complete the picture of Cadet Custer's life at West Point.

Let us commence at early dawn, when the faint grey light first steals over the heavens. The rounded tops of the encircling mountains are cut clearly against the bright sky, old Cro'nest brooding protectingly over the little settlement. The sentry by the gate looks northward over the plain, and hears through the silence the distant thunder of paddles, as the Albany night boat comes sweeping down the river on her way to the city below. There is a gay twittering of birds, growing louder and louder, from the woods that clothe the mountains from base to summit. The river in the distance gleams white in the dawn, and the lights of the steamer, not yet extinguished, glide slowly along. The edge of the plateau cuts the view, and it would hardly seem possible that the same river sweeps almost beneath our feet, black and glistening in little eddies, surrounded by the bold Highlands that form the bay at West Point. Nestled at the foot of those Highlands, on the opposite side of the river, are the white cottages of Cold Spring, and the distant murmur of Buttermilk Falls can be heard through the stillness. Now the faint white light of dawn grows stronger,

and a crimson flush is on the east, while the little floating clouds overhead are speckled with gold and rose color. Louder grows the sweet clamor of the birds in the early morning, and the barking of dogs from the village below announces the increasing stir of life. Anon the crimson flushes into scarlet, the scarlet flames into gold, and a bright shaft of light bathes the top of old Cro'nest and comes creeping down the mountain side.

Boom!!!

A bright flash and a volume of snow white smoke, as the morning gun awakens the echoes. The smoke goes drifting away on the breeze towards the water, and the sharp boom of the gun reverberates from hill to hill all round the bay, ending in a dull grumble far up the river. Simultaneously, the long roll of the drum-corps, mingled with the sweet notes of the fifes, softened by the distance into a strain of perfect sweetness, comes gaily out on the morning air, as the drummers beat the long reveillé.

Cadet Custer and his room-mate are sleeping the sound sleep of the tired plebe, in their little room in the North Barrack, when the loud boom of the gun comes through the open window. Up they spring, for the two months of camp life have already inured both to the soldier's habit of coming broad awake in a moment. No rubbing of eyes, stretching or yawning. Outside, the reveillé is beating, and the fifes are piping sweetly forth the first tune of the three that constitute the morning call. Each tune lasts about two minutes, and at the end of six minutes, every cadet knows that the orderly sergeant will be standing on the company parade ground, book in hand, ready to call the roll. Into their clothes as hastily as possible, little time for toilet comforts, and down the barrack staircase scud Custer and Parker. As the rollicking notes of the last quickstep are in full progress, they dart to their places, and a moment later reveillé ceases. There are the four companies, each on its own ground, the stiff orderly sergeant in front, book in hand, the cadet captain behind him, while the

officer of the day, arms folded, solemnly surveys the scene from his distant post. The cadets are standing at "parade rest," the weight resting on the right leg, hands crossed in front.

Hardly has the last strain of the fife, the final roll of the drum died away, when we hear the sharp voices of the First Class men, who act as sergeants, all together, "Attention, company!"

In an instant every cadet has stiffened into a statue, in "position of a soldier," eyes staring straight to the front, with that vacant glare which marks the modern soldier in ranks. Out come the books, and each sergeant rattles off the names of his men in alphabetical order, having the list by heart. He knows every voice in his company, and is as sharp as a needle. Not a late man can slink into his place but the sergeant notices him, and checks a mark against him in that inexorable roll-book. If a head turns, or a whisper mars the perfect stillness, the sergeant can pick out the guilty one in a moment; even the shelter of the rear rank is no protection for the offender, for the Second and Third Class sergeants and corporals are ready to report *him*, in terror lest that lynx-eyed sergeant should report *them*, for neglect of duty. The roll call is rattled off in a minute and a half, and the sergeant faces around, stiff as a stake, salutes, and says to the captain, "Sir, all are present or accounted for," or "Sir, so many absent." The young captain touches his hat, and proceeds forthwith to the cadet adjutant, where the same formality of report takes place for each company, the adjutant standing, book in hand, to receive the reports. Finally, the adjutant in his turn proceeds to the officer of the day, and reports the result of the whole battalion roll call to that mighty official, whose place it is to report the absentees at the end of his tour of duty. The sergeants then warn the cadets detailed for guard on that day, and ranks are broken. Now Cadets Custer and Parker are to be seen hastening to their little barrack room, having time to wash and comb, and clean up their room. Reveillé, during summer, is at five, and by half past five, every room must be

in perfect order, for the captain and lieutenants of each company come round for morning inspection.

From this time till seven o'clock the two cadets are hard at work at their books, studying for the morning recitations. At half past six they can hear the drummers beating the "sick call," when all the sick, lame and lazy troop to the surgeon, to be excused from duty or dosed as the case may be. Custer and Parker are healthy young fellows and the life of the Point leaves little excuse for sickness. Besides, both are yet Plebes, and have not learned so thoroughly as they will some day, how to play "old soldier." Very amusing stories are told of the efforts of older cadets, to appear terribly sick all of a sudden, when the day's lessons promise to be uncommonly hard. The Academy surgeon is no exception to army medical officers in time of peace; half of his time is wasted in detecting fraudulent cases of sickness, feigned to evade duty. One very ingenious trick by which a surgeon was completely deceived, was once played by a cadet who was out all night, and whose pulse was consequently feverish and irregular. He put a piece of chalk in his mouth which he chewed, and when his turn came to go to the doctor, complained of having a sunstroke. The pulse indicated not much the matter, and the doctor was about to put him off with a dose, when his forlorn aspect induced the functionary to ask to see his tongue. Its white and furry aspect alarmed the doctor, who pronounced it a clear case of high fever, and Cadet Foxey was excused from duty.

These and similar mean tricks were entirely uncongenial to the frank nature of Custer. His pranks at the Academy were those of a high-spirited boy anxious to escape from restraint, but he was always ready to take the consequences. The sick call this morning passes away, and he and Parker are hard at work on geometry and algebra, tactics and French, fortification and gunnery, till the welcome notes of "Peas upon the Trencher" echo through the quadrangle, calling to breakfast. Now another roll call, and the companies are marched to

the mess hall; from thence till eight o'clock there is leisure to study or look around one and watch guard mount. At eight, old Rentz, the Academy bugler for thirty years, calls the cadets to quarters, and now, for five mortal hours, the routine of study and recitation is unvarying. Now another roll call. The classes that recite are marched to the recitation rooms by the section marchers, and reported to the Instructor. The first half of the corps works till half past nine, when the second half relieves them, while the fencing classes are called up.

At one o'clock dinner call is beaten: and for this and recreation an hour is allowed. From two till four more recitations, after which afternoon drill for an hour and a half, then liberty till sunset.

Sunset is the signal for dress parade of the battalion, when there are more roll calls, and retreat is beaten by the drum corps, while the band plays, and everything puts on its most imposing and martial aspect. As the band paces up and down the front of the motionless line of cadets, the setting sun gleaming on the fixed bayonets, officers at parade rest, the solitary figure of the commandant standing with folded arms in front of the centre, the scene attracts multitudes of spectators, and the effect on the imagination is romantic and warlike in the highest degree. The band wheels into its place, the gorgeous drum major flings up his staff, and as the melancholy notes of "retreat" echo on the evening air they are interrupted by the sudden boom of the evening gun. Down comes the great standard, fluttering on its way from the summit of the lofty flagstaff. As the last roll of "retreat" ceases, the line springs into sudden life at the sharp voice of the adjutant, and the brief formality of dress parade proceeds on its way. A few moments later, the companies are marching away to the sweet strains of the famous West Point band, and the day's work is over. Now comes supper and half an hour's time for recreation, when the bugle is heard once more, calling "to quarters;" Every cadet must be in his room and studying, or at least

quiet, and orderly, till tattoo at half past nine, when the beds are spread.

At ten o'clock the quadrangle is nearly silent, the subdued murmur of conversation dying away, the light in the different rooms twinkling like stars.

Tap!

A couple of drummers proceed slowly along round the barracks, and at every hundred steps or so, each gives a single tap. As if by magic, the twinkling lights disappear, and the Academy is silent as the grave, buried in sleep.

The duties of the guards during barrack time are much less onerous than when in camp. They walk post only at meal times, during drills, at dress parade, and during evening study hours. Each sentinel is responsible for the rooms on his post, which he is required to inspect. He must report all absentees, as well as suppress all noise and disturbances. Of course this part of his duty is the most onerous and delicate he can have during the day, as the strict restraints of discipline, irksome at any time to young men, are doubly so when night and darkness give them an opportunity to escape surveillance. This is the time when cadets fall into most of their scrapes, by getting out of quarters, either during study hours, or more commonly after taps. In the case of Cadets Custer and Parker, these escapades and frolics were born of that irrepressible spirit of fun so common in the West, for Parker was a Missourian. There seems to be something peculiarly enticing to a high-spirited cadet in the idea of getting out of bounds, and when to that is added the attractions of "Benny Havens," the temptations to the bold spirits were much greater than the cadets could resist.

Benny Havens has been for many years a famous character at the Point. Long before the Mexican War he was established within the lines, and under the guise of an honest seller of coffee and cakes, was wont to administer surreptitious egg-flip, when no officers were round, to the thirsty cadets. Ex-

pelled for this cause, he established himself about a mile from the Point, in a little cabin under a cliff, which has ever since been the rendezvous of innumerable pilgrims from the barracks. The attractions of Benny Havens' cabin did not seem, then nor now, to lie so much in the fact of his selling liquor. In the case of young Custer, who very seldom, except as hereinafter referred to, used spirits or tobacco, this could have been no temptation. But Benny has been so long at the Point, and seen so many generations of cadets, that he has become a perfect storehouse of interesting legends, and these constitute the charm which draws so many to his little cabin from far away.

Grey-headed general officers, distinguished in active service, come to-day to the Point, to revisit the scenes of their youth, and always pay a visit to Benny, and the old man knows them all, and can tell stories of the days when they were cadets. No wonder the cadets of all time have been fond of slipping out of quarters after taps, to visit Benny, to sit around his fire, to listen to stories of the day when Grant, Sherman, and Thomas were wild boys at the Point, to dream as they listen of the days when they perhaps may rival the fame of those great leaders. Meantime, they eat Benny's buckwheat cakes, for which he is famous, and drink his old wine, while at intervals they join in the time-honored song of "Benny Havens, oh!" This is one of the regular institutions at Benny's. The song was written by Lieutenant O'Brien, of the 8th Infantry, assisted by others, many years ago, and set to the tune of "Wearing of the Green." When O'Brien afterward died in Florida, stanzas were added to commemorate his death. A very few verses will give an idea of the song, which is quite long. Imagine a group of young cadets, who have stolen away after taps, gathered in Benny's little parlor, awaiting the coming of the celebrated buckwheats. One stands up and cries:

"Come, fellows, fill your glasses and—
(All join in.)
Stand up in a row.
For sentimental drinking, we're going for to go,

In the army there's sobriety, promotion's very slow,
So we'll cheer our hearts with choruses at Benny Havens, oh!
Benny Havens, oh! oh! Benny Havens, oh!
We'll sing our reminiscences of Benny Havens, oh!"

Then the song proceeds to describe the features of army life in various verses, till the chief breaks out rapturously:—

"To the ladies of our army, our cups shall ever flow,
Companions of our exile, and our shield against all woe,
May they see their husbands generals, with double pay also,
And join us in our choruses at Benny Havens, oh!
Benny Havens, oh! etc.

May the army be augmented, promotion be less slow,
May our country in her hour of need, be ready for the foe,
May we find a soldier's resting place beneath a soldier's blow,
With space enough beside our graves for Benny Havens, oh!
Benny Havens, oh! etc."

Year by year, as new generations of cadets have passed through the Academy, and former graduates attain fame, their names are embalmed in successive verses. In Custer's day the only heroes were Taylor and Scott, for the regular army, that within a few years was to produce so many distinguished names, was then sunk in the rust of peace, with little chance of distinction before it. It seems to us now, looking back at that indefinite period "before the war," as if a whole century had passed since then. The state of the army, its names and traditions, its very dress and appearance, are so different now, that in a few years all memory of that old army will have faded.

Quietly glided away the days and nights at West Point, in the monotonous round of duties that came to Cadet Custer and his room-mate, while in the fourth class; and the dreaded January examination came, when, if not successful, the Plebe would be "found deficient," and sent back to civil life. It was safely passed, however, and the spring wore on, bringing nearer and nearer the memorable June day that opened to Cadet Cus-

ter "third class encampment," when he ceased to be a Plebe, and became at one bound an "old cadet," no longer on probation, but only liable to be put back a class if he failed in studies.

Now came the real pleasures of camp, when visitors were present in crowds, when the evening balls were crowded with cadets on leave, when the new Plebes were to be drilled, and the old torments inflicted on a new generation. To join in these, young Custer was too good-natured and jovial, but at the balls he was in his element. His remarkably handsome face and figure were wonderfully effective among the ladies, as they continued to be all his life, and attracted no little of the envy of his brother cadets. In those days, before the heavy blonde moustache had come to lend an air of sternness to his features, his bright locks gave him a girlish appearance, which, coupled with the remarkable fact of his strictly temperate habits, procured him the nick-name of "Fanny." Boys always have good names for each other, indicative of character or personal appearance, and the name "Fanny" stuck to Custer through his academic life and long after, when he met his former classmates as enemies in the field. "That's just like Fanny," said one of them, when he received a note from Custer, left at a farm house, informing him politely that he had just whipped such an one (a former classmate) handsomely, and was coming next day to repeat the operation on the recipient of the letter.

Camp wore its way out, and the Third Class went into barracks once again for the same routine, the studies being advanced and much more severe than before, the principal recreation being mounted drill in the riding hall. Here it was that Cadet Custer developed that perfection in horsemanship which distinguished him afterward, with the more ease as every Western boy knows something of riding early in life. To those who do not, the riding school of West Point is a hard one, but very effective. The Third Class men take up riding

in November, and are exercised by platoons of about twenty at a time, the same old troop horses being used from year to year, in the riding hall. The floor is strewn with tanbark several inches in depth, so that there is no danger to life or limb in a fall, and the animals are caparisoned in full army rig at the close of the course. Usually the class commences on blankets alone, without stirrups, and when this is the case the lesson is comparatively easy; but sometimes the riding master orders on saddles, and gives the command to the cadets "Cross-Stirrups!" Those who have ever tried to ride in a large McClellan saddle without stirrups, on a hard trotting horse, can imagine the torments of the poor boys on strange animals. In the army a man gets used to his own steed and inured to his paces, but where rider and horse are frequently changed, as at West Point, it is a very different thing. The constant alterations spoil the horses' tempers, and most of them get to be hard-mouthed, unruly brutes, full of bad tricks, and always on the watch for a chance to unseat a rider.

Put a lot of green riders on such animals, and make them cross stirrups, then let the platoon start at a walk, and all is well, but when the command is given "Trot—March!" what a jolting and pounding ensues, the unlucky cadets trying to hold on with knees and thighs to a saddle flap that seems as slippery as glass! And yet two-thirds of the practice in the riding hall is done at the same trot, and the unfeeling riding master sits on his horse in the centre, cool as a cucumber. *His* stirrups are not crossed, you may be sure, or he could not smile so sweetly over the miseries of the poor pupils, bumping about. One of the late cadets—a young fellow, too, promoted from the ranks of the army during the war, and who had served in battle with the volunteer cavalry before he came to West Point, says: "It is one of the most cruel things that can be thought of, to be obliged to ride without stirrups for the first time on such perfect devils as some of these horses are. There were upwards of thirty in my class who were thrown, though

only three or four of them were injured—none severely. One had his foot stepped on in a playful manner by one of the incarnate fiends, mashing his big toe to a jelly; but that was not of much consequence, as it has now recovered. Many were severely bruised, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is impossible for a cadet to be hurt badly by being thrown in the riding hall. The only way is to ride right through and take the pounding and bruises, and get used to it. The remedy is a rough one, but the only one effectual."

Through all the troubles of the riding hall passed Cadet Custer, as blithe and debonair as ever. His length of limb gave him great advantage, his rough Western life still more. A tall wiry built man has greater ease in riding than a shorter aspirant; and it was not long before "Fanny" was known as one of the best riders at the Point, emulating the fame that belonged in by-gone times to Cadet Grant, whose famous leap on "Old York" is traditional to this day.

The winter passed away and another spring, and then the airs of June were felt once more, blowing over "Second Class Camp" and—blessed news—furlough to see home for the first time in two years.

Furlough lasts till the Second Class goes to work again in barracks, and there is no need to say how it was enjoyed by Cadet Custer at his home, nor how many of his buttons he exchanged for locks of hair and vows of affection. In this he was not peculiar. All cadets have done it from time immemorial, and Cadet Custer, nearly twenty, handsome as Apollo, was by no means behind the fashion. How he enjoyed his furlough, how he hated to go back, how his work during the winter seemed duller and harder than ever, all these things are understood. The daily routine of his further life was a repetition of the past.

But the time was coming, as Custer approached First Class and graduation, when a change passed over the spirit of West Point, such as it had never seen before and is never likely to see again. This it was which rendered the experiences of

Custer's classmates unique in the annals of the Academy, and from henceforth it is fitting that Custer himself should take up the story, as he has done in the opening chapters of his War Memoirs, wherein he rapidly summarizes his Academic career, in the following fashion:

The first official notification received by me of my appointment to the Military Academy bore the signature of Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War in the cabinet of President James Buchanan. Colonel Richard Delafield, one of the ablest and most accomplished officers of the Engineer Corps, occupied the position of superintendent of the Academy, and Lieutenant-Colonel William J. Hardee, of the cavalry, afterward lieutenant-general in the Confederate army, was the commandant of the Corps of Cadets.

Among the noticeable feature of cadet life as then impressed upon me, and still present in my memory, were the sectional lines voluntarily established by the cadets themselves; at first barely distinguishable, but in the later years immediately preceding the war as clearly defined and strongly drawn as were the lines separating the extremes of the various sections in the national Congress. Nor was this fact a strange or remarkable one. As each Congressional district and territory of the United States had a representative in Congress, so each had its representatives at the Military Academy.

In looking back over the few months and years passed at West Point immediately preceding the war, some strange incidents recur to my mind. When the various State conventions were called by the different States of the South with a view to the adoption of the ordinance of secession, it became only a question of time as to the attempted withdrawal of the seceding States. And while there were those representing both sections in Congress who professed to believe that war would not necessarily or probably follow, this opinion was not shared in even by persons as young and inexperienced as the cadets. War was anticipated by them at that time, and discussed and looked for-

ward to as an event of the future, with as much certainty as if speaking of an approaching season. The cadets from the South were in constant receipt of letters from their friends at home, keeping them fully advised of the real situation and promising them suitable positions in the military force yet to be organized to defend the ordinance of secession. All this was a topic of daily if not hourly conversation. Particularly was this true when we assembled together at meal-time, when, grouped in squads of half-a-dozen or more, each usually found himself in the midst of his personal friends.

I remember a conversation held at the table at which I sat during the winter of '60–'61. I was seated next to Cadet P. M. B. Young, a gallant young fellow from Georgia, a classmate of mine, then and since the war an intimate and valued friend—a major-general in the Confederate forces during the war and a member of Congress from his native State at a later date. The approaching war was as usual the subject of conversation in which all participated, and in the freest and most friendly manner; the lads from the North discoursing earnestly upon the power and rectitude of the National Government, the impulsive Southron holding up pictures of invaded rights and future independence. Finally, in a half jocular, half earnest manner, Young turned to me and delivered himself as follows: "Custer, my boy, we're going to have war. It's no use talking; I see it coming. All the Crittenden compromises that can be patched up won't avert it. Now let me prophesy what will happen to you and me. You will go home, and your abolition Governor will probably make you colonel of a cavalry regiment. I will go down to Georgia, and ask Governor Brown to give me a cavalry regiment. And who knows but we may move against each other during the war. You will probably get the advantage of us in the first few engagements, as your side will be rich and powerful, while we will be poor and weak. Your regiment will be armed with the best of weapons, the sharpest of sabres; mine will have only shot-guns and scythe blades; but

for all that we'll get the best of the fight in the end, because we will fight for a principle, a cause, while you will fight only to perpetuate the abuse of power." Lightly as we both regarded this boyish prediction, it was destined to be fulfilled in a remarkable degree. Early in the war I did apply, not to the abolition Governor of my native State, but to that of Michigan, for a cavalry regiment. I was refused, but afterward obtained the regiment I desired as a part of my command. Young was chosen to lead one of the Georgia cavalry regiments. Both of us rose to higher commands, and confronted each other on the battle-field.

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina formally led the way by adopting the ordinance of secession; an example which was followed within the next few weeks by Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, in the order named. As soon as it became evident that these States were determined to attempt secession, the cadets appointed therefrom, imitating the action of their Senators and representatives in Congress, and influenced by the appeals of friends at home, tendered their resignations, eager to return to their homes and take part in the organization of the volunteer forces which the increasing difficulties and dangers of the situation rendered necessary. Besides, as the Confederate Congress was called to meet for the first time at Montgomery, Alabama, February 6, 1861, and would undoubtedly authorize the appointment of a large number of officers in the formation of the Confederate armies, it was important that applicants for positions of this kind should be on the ground to properly present their claims.

One by one the places occupied by the cadets from the seceding States became vacant; it cost many a bitter pang to disrupt the intimate relations existing between the hot-blooded Southron and his more phlegmatic schoolmate from the North. No school-girls could have been more demonstrative in their affectionate regard for each other than were some of the cadets about to separate for the last time, and under circumstances

which made it painful to contemplate a future coming together. Those leaving for the South were impatient, enthusiastic, and hopeful. Visions filled their minds of a grand and glorious Confederacy, glittering with the pomp and pageantry which usually characterizes imperial power, and supported and surrounded by a mighty army, the officers of which would constitute a special aristocracy.

Their comrades from the North, whom they were leaving behind, were reserved almost to sullenness; were grave almost to stoicism. The representatives of the two sections had each resolved upon their course of action; and each in a manner characteristic of their widely different temperaments, as different as the latitudes from which they hailed. Among the first of the cadets to leave West Point and hasten to enroll themselves under the banner of the seceding States, were two of my classmates, Kelley and Ball, of Alabama. Kelley became prominent in the war, and was killed in battle. Ball also attained a high rank, and is now a prominent official in one of the most extensive business enterprises in this country. They took their departure from the Academy on Saturday. I remember the date the more readily as I was engaged in—to adopt the cadet term—"walking an extra," which consisted in performing the tiresome duties of a sentinel during the unemployed hours of Saturday, hours usually given to recreation. On this occasion I was pacing back and forth on my post, which for the time being extended along the path leading from the cadets' chapel toward the academic building, when I saw a party of from fifteen to twenty cadets emerge from the open space between the mess hall and the academic building, and direct their steps toward the steamboat landing below. That which particularly attracted my attention was the bearing aloft upon the shoulders of their comrades of my two classmates Ball and Kelley, as they were being carried in triumph from the doors of the Academy to the steamboat landing. Too far off to exchange verbal adieus, even if military discipline had permitted

it, they caught sight of me as, step by step, I reluctantly paid the penalty of offended regulations, and raised their hats in token of farewell, to which, first casting my eyes about to see that no watchful superior was in view, I responded by bringing my musket to a "present."

The comrades who escorted them were Southerners like themselves, and only awaiting the formal action of their respective States on the adoption of the secession ordinance to follow their example. It was but a few weeks until there was scarcely a cadet remaining at the Academy from the Southern States. Many resigned from the border States without waiting to see whether their State would follow in the attempt at secession or not; some resigned who had been appointed from States which never voted to leave the Union; while an insignificant few, who had resolved to join the Confederate forces, but desired to obtain their diplomas from the academic faculty, remained until the date of their graduation. Some remained until the declaration and commencement of hostilities; then, allowing the government to transport them to Washington, tendered their resignations, and were dismissed for doing so in the face of the enemy. Happily the number that pursued this questionable course did not exceed half a dozen.

At no point in the loyal States were the exciting events of the spring of 1861 watched with more intense interest than at West Point. And after the departure of the Southern cadets, the hearts of the people of no community, State, town, or village, beat with more patriotic impulse than did those of the young cadets at West Point. Casting aside all questions of personal ambition or promotion; realizing only that the government which they had sworn to defend, the principles they had been taught from childhood, were in danger, and threatened by armed enemies, they would gladly have marched to battle as private soldiers, rather than remain idle spectators in the great conflict.

As the time for the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln approached,

rumors prevailed, and obtained wide belief, to the effect that a plot was on foot by which the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln was to be made the occasion on the part of the enemies of the government, of whom great numbers were known to be in Washington, for seizing or making away with the executive officers of the nation, and taking possession of the people's capital. Whether or not such a scheme was ever seriously contemplated, it was deemed prudent to provide against it. The available military resources of the government amounted to but little at that period. Lieutenant-General Scott, then Commander-in-Chief of the army, issued orders for the assembling at Washington of as large a military force as circumstances would permit. Under this order it became necessary to make a demand upon the regular military forces then employed at West Point. A battery of artillery was hastily organized from the war material kept at the Academy for the purpose of instruction to the cadets. The horses were supplied by taking those used by the cadets in their cavalry and artillery drills. The force thus organized hastened to Washington, where, under the command of Captain Griffin—afterward Major-General Griffin—it took part in the inaugural ceremonies. Then followed the firing upon Sumter, the intelligence of which waked the slumbering echoes of loyalty and patriotism in every home and hamlet throughout the North.

It is doubtful if the people of the North were ever, or will ever be again, so united in thought and impulse as when the attack on Sumter was flashed upon them. Opponents in politics became friends in patriotism ; all differences of opinion vanished or were laid aside, and a single purpose filled and animated the breast of the people as of one man—a purpose unflinching and unrestrained—to rush to the rescue of the government, to beat down its opposers, come from whence they may. In addition to sharing the common interest and anxiety of the public in the attack upon Sumter, the cadets felt a special concern, from the fact that among the little band of officers shut up in that fort-

ress were two, Lieutenants Snyder and Hall, who had been our comrades as cadets only a few months before.

As already stated, the time of study and instruction at West Point at that period was five years, in the determination and fixing of which no one had exercised greater influence than Jefferson Davis—first as Secretary of War, afterward as United States Senator, and member of a special congressional committee to consider the question as to whether the course should extend to five years or only include four.

In the general demand in 1861, not only from the National Government, but from States, for competent and educated officers to instruct and command the new levies of troops then being raised, in response to the call of the President, to oppose the rebellion, it was decided by the authorities at Washington to abandon the five years' course of instruction at the Military Academy, and re-establish that of four years. The effect of this was to give to the service in that year, two classes of graduates for officers, instead of but one. By this change the class of which I was a member graduated, under the four years' system, in June, while the preceding class was graduated, under the five years' rule, only a couple of months in advance of us. The members of both classes, with but few exceptions, were at once ordered to Washington, where they were employed either in drilling raw volunteers, or serving on the staffs of general officers, engaged in organizing the new regiments into brigades and divisions. I was one of the exceptions referred to, and the causes which led me in a different direction may be worthy of mention.

My career as a cadet had but little to commend it to the study of those who came after me, unless as an example to be carefully avoided. The requirements of the academic regulations, a copy of which was placed in my hand the morning of my arrival at West Point, were not observed by me in such manner as at all times to commend me to the approval and good opinions of my instructors and superior officers. My offences against law and order were not great in enormity, but

what they lacked in magnitude they made up in number. The forbidden locality of Benny Havens possessed stronger attractions than the study and demonstration of a problem in Euclid, or the prosy discussion of some abstract proposition of moral science. My class numbered, upon entering the Academy, about one hundred and twenty-five. Of this number, only thirty-four graduated, and of these thirty-three graduated above me. The resignation and departure of the Southern cadets took away from the Academy a few individuals who, had they remained, would probably have contested with me the debatable honor of bringing up the rear of the class.

We had passed our last examination as cadets, had exchanged barrack for camp life, and were awaiting the receipt of orders from Washington assigning us to the particular branches of the service for which we had been individually recommended by the academic faculty. The month of June had come, and we were full of impatience to hasten to the capital and join the forces preparing for the coming campaign. It is customary, or was then, to allow each cadet, prior to his graduation, to perform at least one tour of duty as an officer of the guard, instead of the ordinary duties of a private soldier on guard. I had not only had the usual experience in the latter capacity, extending over a period of four years, but in addition had been compelled, as punishment for violations of the academic regulations, to perform extra tours of guard duty on Saturdays—times which otherwise I should have been allowed for pleasure and recreation. If my memory serves me right, I devoted sixty-six Saturdays to this method of vindicating outraged military law, during my cadetship of four years. It so happened that it fell to my detail to perform the duties of officer of the guard in camp, at a time when the arrival of the order from Washington, officially transforming us from cadets to officers, was daily expected. I began my tour at the usual hour in the morning, and everything passed off satisfactorily in connection with the discharge of my new responsibilities, until, just at dusk, I heard a commo-

tion near the guard tents. Upon hastening to the scene of the disturbance, which by the way was at a considerable distance from the main camp, I found two cadets engaged in a personal dispute which threatened to result in blows. Quite a group of cadets, as friends and spectators, had formed about the two bellicose disputants. I had hardly time to take in the situation, when the two principals of the group engaged in a regular set-to, and began belaboring each other vigorously with their fists. Some of their more prudent friends rushed forward and attempted to separate the two contestants. My duty as officer of the guard was plain and simple. I should have arrested the two combatants and sent them to the guard tents, for violating the peace and the regulations of the Academy. But the instincts of the boy prevailed over the obligation of the officer of the guard. I pushed my way through the surrounding line of cadets, dashed back those who were interfering in the struggle, and called out loudly, " Stand back, boys; let's have a fair fight."

I had occasion to remember, if not regret, the employment of these words. Scarcely had I uttered them when the crowd about me dispersed hurriedly, and fled to the concealment of their tents. Casting about me to ascertain the cause of this sudden dispersion, I beheld, approaching at a short distance, two officers of the army, Lieutenants Hazen and Merrill (now Major-General Hazen and Colonel Merrill of the Engineer Corps). I sought the tent of the officer of the guards promptly, but the mischief had been done. Lieutenant Hazen happened to be officer of the day on that particular day, whose duty it was to take cognizance of violations of the regulations. Summoning me to his presence, near the scene of the unfortunate disturbance, he asked me in stern tones if I was not the officer of the guard; to which I of course responded in the affirmative. He then overwhelmed me by inquiring in the same unrelenting voice, "Why did you not suppress the riot which occurred here a few minutes ago?" Now, it had never been suggested to me that the settlement of the personal

difficulty between two boys, even by the administering of blows, could be considered or described as a riot. The following morning I was required to report at the tent of the commandant (Lieutenant-Colonel John F. Reynolds, afterward General Reynolds, killed at Gettysburg). Of course no explanation could satisfy the requirements of military justice. I was ordered to return to my tent in arrest. The facts in the case were reported to Washington, on formal charges and specifications, and a court-martial asked for to determine the degree of my punishment.

Within a few hours of my arrest the long-expected order came, relieving my class from further duty at West Point, and directing the members of it to proceed to Washington and report to the Adjutant-General of the army for further orders. My name, however, did not appear in this list. I was to be detained, to await the application of the commandant for a court-martial to sit on my case. The application received approval at the War Department, and the court was assembled at West Point, composed principally of officers who had recently arrived from Texas, where they served under General Twiggs, until his surrender to the Confederate forces. The judge advocate of the court was Lieutenant Benét, now Brigadier-General and Chief of the Ordnance Corps. I was arraigned with all the solemnity and gravity which might be looked for in a trial for high treason, the specification setting forth in stereotyped phraseology that "He, the said cadet Custer, did fail to suppress a riot or disturbance near the guard tent, and did fail to separate, etc., but, on the contrary, did cry out in a loud tone of voice, 'Stand back, boys; let's have a fair fight,' or words to that effect."

To which accusations the accused pleaded "Guilty," as a matter of course, introducing as witnesses, by way of mitigation, the two cadets, the cause of my difficulty, to prove that neither was seriously injured in the fray. One of them is now a promising young captain in the Engineer Corps.

The trial was brief, scarcely occupying more time than did the primary difficulty.

I dreaded the long detention which I feared I must undergo while awaiting not only the verdict, but the subsequent action of the authorities at Washington, to whom the case must by law be submitted.

My classmates who had preceded me to Washington interested themselves earnestly in my behalf to secure my release from further arrest at West Point, and an order for me to join them at the national capital. Fortunately some of them had influential friends there, and it was but a few days after my trial that the superintendent of the Academy received a telegraphic order from Washington, directing him to release me at once, and order me to report to the Adjutant-General of the army for duty. This order practically rendered the action and proceedings of the court-martial in my case nugatory. The record, I presume, was forwarded to the War Department, where it probably lies safely stowed away in some pigeon-hole. What the proceeding of the court or their decision was, I have never learned.

Thus ends the record of Cadet Custer's life at West Point as traced by his own hand. It shows him as he was, but, as usual with the author, tells far less of himself than we should like to know. We see the generous impulsive boy before us, always doing the first thing that came to his hand, and never recking of the consequences. There is something in this wild free character that seems utterly unsuited to the pedantic martinetry and restraint of the Point. "Let's have a fair fight" smacks of the old days of chivalry. It was to be the watchword of the young cadet's future career. It seems plain, although Custer did not say so, that in his heart he had long chafed against the arrogant superciliousness of the Southern members of his class, who in those days thought to monopolize

all the chivalry in America. As his first recorded escapade tells of the chivalrous spirit, so his early career was to be the very incarnation of chivalry, and he was fairly to eclipse the most romantic heroes of the South in brilliancy and dash. But after all, this was only one phase of his character, overlying the sterling sense at the bottom of it, as will appear in its place. During his career at West Point, Custer kept up a strict correspondence with his sister Mrs. Reed, and spent a large part of all his furloughs at her house in Monroe. He seems to have become much enamored of this sleepy little country town, with its broad streets planted with handsome trees, the brawling little river that runs through its midst, its old houses, and general air of quiet respectability. So fond was he of the place that he even persuaded his parents to move there, which they did, remaining for about a year. Not liking the place, they concluded to return to New Rumley, but afterwards compromised the matter by moving to the vicinity of Toledo, taking a farm in Wood County, near that of Mr. David Kirkpatrick, Mr. Custer's stepson. From his first entrance to Monroe, young Custer seems to have identified himself with it, to have been a "Monroe boy," to have loved all the "Monroe boys." Years after, we find his staff full of "Monroe boys," and right well they fought, too.

What was the magnet that drew him to Monroe? The place never did him any material good. He owed his cadetship to Ohio, and his parents lived there. Every thing seemed to point his way to his native state. Yet there was a little thing, a mere trifle in the world's eye, a secret vision locked in his own breast, which even his sister, who was his closest confidant in all else, never suspected : that was the magnet that drew him to Monroe. The vision of a little dark eyed maiden of only eight summers, swinging on a gate, and flinging him a careless salutation in very want of thought, then shyly fleeing into the house when she met his eye, and realized something strange and undefined in its glance. It was four, five, six, seven, eight

years later, as he came home on his several vacations, that he saw the little maid shooting up into a shy, modest young lady, guarded around so closely by parental care that he could rarely catch a glimpse of her. No more salutations for him: she no longer recognized him. The innocent freedom of the child had been changed into the reserve and dignity of the young lady. She was either at home with her father, or at school in the Seminary (by this time a young lady's school), of which she was one of the most promising and pains-taking scholars. The gulf that divided the Judge's heiress from the penniless cadet seemed to grow wider and wider, and more impossible to leap, for as yet he had not even been introduced to the young lady.

All the same, Custer bided his time in silence. He felt that time was coming, and meantime his "vision" was out of danger from any one else, hedged round with every safeguard. To pass away the time, a candid biographer is compelled to admit that he flirted with other girls considerably, even what strict church members would call outrageously, but it was all only skin-deep. He was still, after all, only a boy. When we next come to him, it will be as a man among men.