

Drayson Alfred Wilks

**The Young Dragoon: Every Day  
Life of a Soldier**



Alfred Drayson

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**Drayson A.**

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# Drayson Alfred W. Alfred Wilks

## The Young Dragoon: Every Day Life of a Soldier

### Chapter One

Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please;  
How often have I loiter'd o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endeared each scene!

*Goldsmith.*

I am a soldier, Frederick Trenchard, at your service. The prospect before me in my early days was, that instead of following the drum I should have followed the plough. My father was a farmer, living in the Midland counties; and I am the only one of a numerous family and a wide circle of family friends who ever took the Queen's Shilling, and turned the ploughshare into a sword. My grandfather was a farmer; my uncle was a farmer; my cousin who married the heiress was a gentleman farmer; my cousin who fell in love with beer and skittles was a farm labourer. We were all of us sons of the soil, and it was the popular opinion in our family, that even sailors were no better than they should be (and, Heaven help us all, I suppose we none of us are), but that soldiers were utter outcasts – Sawney Beans in her Majesty's livery – vultures in red coats and pipeclay – at which even Job Chequers, of the Green Man, shook his head, objecting strongly to the billet, and assuring everybody whom it concerned, or did not, that he would sooner pay the billet twice than lodge a soldier once.

There was a tradition in the village of a certain young Meadows who had gone for a soldier; what became of him I never heard, but always was taught to imagine the worst; as whenever it happened that any youngster had been engaged in a frolic, the wiseacres shook their heads, and said – “Ah! they saw how it would be – just like Meadows.” Now, I would not for a moment lead any of my readers to suppose that a soldiering life is the best a man can lead. Very far from that is the case. When I enlisted it was said of me, that I had given up a good home, sacrificed the esteem of every member of my family for the life of a vagabond. This was very far from being the case either. To be sure I gave up a good home, exchanging it for a life in barracks to begin with, and a life of peril to go on with; but I was not a vagabond, neither was there anything in what I had done to forfeit the esteem of good people. All sorts are wanted in this world. When we have all learned to be peaceable; when there is no foe to withstand, no skulking enemy to overcome, then I suppose Cincinnatus will return to his cabbages; till then the soldier is a necessity, and by his good sword and his strong arm the wealth of our country is preserved from the hand of the spoiler, and our honour maintained in the face of the world.

I am thinking of that dear old home of mine; the quiet village street, the little church, the *littler* clerk (forgive the grammar) who said Amen on Sundays – I am thinking of the squire's house, encircled by a brotherhood of ancient elms, of the green pastures that led down to the river, of the yellow uplands that made the farmer's heart rejoice – I am thinking of our own quiet homestead. A middling-sized farm was ours, but it had been ours for many a long year, and it was not burdened by mortgage; we were able to pay our way, and if father, when he rode his old cob “Billy” to market on Mondays, and dined with other farmers at the “Stag's Head,” grumbled, do not all farmers grumble? and I expect they have done so ever since the first sickle was thrust into ripened corn.

Well, I was to be a farmer. I was getting into farming habits. I was speculating what I should do when my turn came to ride to market. To market, however, I never rode – my style of riding was learned in another school, and it would rather have startled the steady paced villagers of – to have seen me, as once on an October day I rode – dashing forward wildly with a whole body of brave-hearted fellows – right in the face of destruction, but steadily forward in the name of duty – even though duty meant death.

And now, apologising for this introductory chapter, let me briefly tell you why I became a soldier.

## Chapter Two

Angels and ministers of grace defend us! —  
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,  
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,  
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,  
Thou comest in such a questionable shape!

*Shakespeare.*

Situate about a quarter of a mile from the village near which my father resided, was the parish church, a venerable structure clad with ivy. Near by a large yew-tree spread its branches over the centre of the churchyard. About one hundred yards from the church stood the cottage of Nicholas Hartley (more generally known by the name of “Old Nick”), the sexton and bell-ringer. He also carried on the business of a cobbler. “Old Nick” was by no means so sober a man as he ought to have been, considering the serious nature of his calling. He was quite as often to be found at the Green Man as at his own cottage. There were several youths in the village, including myself, who were prone to practical joking, and one unfortunate night we concocted a scheme to set the whole of the people in the village in wonder and fright.

It was a dark and stormy night in December, more than twenty years ago, when our plans were matured and successfully accomplished. Eight of us met, by a preconcerted arrangement, in the old churchyard, a little before midnight. One of the actors in the drama was the son of the blacksmith, who had found a key to open the door of the belfry. With this we gained admission. Thence unbolting a door, we were enabled to reach the roof of the chancel; this was composed of lead, and was quite flat, with a high stone coping all round it. Having gone so far we descended to the churchyard, and tied fast together the legs of the chimney-sweeper’s donkey, that pastured among the grave-stones. Sheltered under the yew-tree, and binding him so as to prevent his struggling, we attached a stout waggon-rope, procured from my father’s barn, to Neddy’s body. Leaving one to guide his ascent with a guy rope, the rest of us hauled him up to the roof of the chancel. We then untied the rope that bound his legs, and enveloped him in a snow-white sheet, tying his long ears down to his neck with a piece of twine, and so adapting the sheet to his body as to prevent its getting disarranged by the very high wind.

Thus was his “mokeship” left standing in the middle of the roof, apparently as contented as where we found him under the yew-tree. After this we fastened one end of the rope to the “pull” of the only bell in use, and passing the other through the grated hole in the wall of the belfry, carried it over the roof of the chancel and dropped it to the ground. The two doors were now made secure as we had found them, and one of us mounting with the rope to the very top branch of the yew-tree, we there made it fast; after this final step it was considered the best policy to move away as fast as we possibly could.

Being placed on rather high ground, the wind swayed the old yew-tree to and fro without hindrance, the consequence being that the solitary bell tolled forth its notes with strange, supernatural, and most irregular tones, all the more astonishing from their occurring at that time of night. The inhabitants were soon aroused, as we could distinctly see from our hiding-place, by the number of lights in the windows, and the lanthorns flitting about the main street – no gas or oil-lamps existing in our village. At length, a strong muster of farm-labourers, with “Old Nick” and the parish constable at their head, repaired to the church, the principal instigators of the mischief bringing up the rear. Knowing, as I did, that there was nothing to be alarmed at, I volunteered to accompany the sexton and policeman into the belfry. This was a job neither of them relished when they found the door securely locked, for they had at first an idea that some drunken men had broken the lock and were amusing

themselves at the expense of the whole village. Just at the moment we reached the door of the belfry, a piercing shriek was heard from a female in the midst of the crowd below – an arm was stretched out, with the finger pointed in the direction of the donkey, enshrouded in the snow-white habiliments as we had left him. Sir Moke played his part excellently well; one of his ears had escaped from under the twine, and moved to and fro in such a manner as quickly to be designated “one *arm*” of the “ghost” waving to the crowd to retire – and retire the more timid portion of them did, helter-skelter; but those with stouter nerves did not leave the churchyard. The wind moaned through the old yew-tree, and the ivy that covered the walls of the church-tower rustled and flapped in the strong midnight breeze; and the strange, irregular tolling of the bell continued, to the horror and surprise of the crowd.

There stood the “ghost!” He had moved from the middle to the corner of the roof – his “arm” moving backwards and forwards, and the white sheet flapping in the wind like a pair of huge wings. Old Howard, whom people called an atheist, had died in the village about ten days previously. The minister had refused to bury him in the churchyard, so he was interred outside the wall by the roadside. His exit from the world was said to have been “awful” in the extreme; he left the bed upon which he had lain for weeks in great agony, was brought down stairs, and died on the kitchen sofa. He had been one of Tom Paine’s disciples, but he died, people said, fearfully convinced of his error.

This circumstance had quite prepared the minds of the simple people for his re-appearance; “he could not rest in his grave,” and the excitement was intense. I was frightened myself – not at the “ghost,” but at the turn things were taking. My companions were all on the spot, and quite as uneasy as myself, with the exception of one Dick Smith, who said that “if he could be certain that the ‘ghost’ was old Howard’s, he would fetch his gun and shoot at it. It could not be murder to shoot a fellow that was already dead.” The proposition was negatived by every one present old enough to have a voice in the matter. The minister lectured Dick, and he slunk back into the crowd. Hours passed away, nobody was bold enough to enter the belfry, and the “ghost” stuck to its post on the roof of the chancel; however, the wind dropped about four o’clock, and consequently the tolling of the bell ceased, soon after which the “ghost,” being tired of standing, lay down, and its *body* being entirely hidden by the high stone coping was effectually concealed. It was said to have “vanished;” and the people retired to their homes, but many neither to bed nor to sleep.

Just as daylight dawned next morning, John Durden, a carrier, on his way through the village to D – from an adjacent town, had to pass by the church with his donkey and cart. The “ghost,” recognising the footfall of an ass and a brother, rose from his hard bed to salute him with a very long-winded *bray*.

Seeing the apparition on the church at such a time, Durden took to his heels; his donkey, profiting by the absence of the carrier’s cudgel, stood still, pricked up his ears, and returned the salute after his own familiar fashion. The villagers again crowded to the spot; all was discovered; daylight revealed the rope that connected the yew-tree with the bell-pull. The “ghost” had got his other ear at liberty, and his tail was wriggling, two hundred movements to the minute, with evident pleasure at beholding one of his race in the roadway below. With considerable labour he was lowered from his elevated position.

And now commenced the more serious part of the business for myself and my fellow-conspirators. The sheet was marked at one corner in red silk, with the names of “J. and E. Smith.” Now as there was only one family of that name in the village, and as they only had one son – the aforesaid Dick – the constable forthwith took him into custody on *more than* suspicion of being concerned in the business of the preceding night. It was well known that he never could have raised the donkey to the roof of the church without assistance; therefore Master Dick was induced to give up the names of his wicked accomplices. Five of the number, including Dick, were apprehended. Myself and two others only escaped by flight.

## Chapter Three

Roger he swore he'd leave his plough,  
His team and tillage all, by gum;  
Of a country life he'd had enou'; -  
He'd leave it all and follow the drum.  
He'd leave his threshing in the barn,  
To thresh his foes he'd very soon larn;  
With sword in hand he would not parley,  
But thresh his foes instead of the barley.

The names of my companions were Harry and Ned Glover, two brothers, the sons of the surgeon, or rather village apothecary, aged respectively sixteen and seventeen. Avoiding the main road as much as possible, we trudged on through the wet ground, over hedge and ditch, until we began to feel hungry. It was getting dark, and, on counting our coppers, we made the startling discovery, about which we had never previously thought, that we had but two shillings and eightpence halfpenny in our pockets, all counted. We held a consultation, and decided to sleep in a cow-shed, sitting under a hayrick adjacent to the shed where we intended to pass the night until quite dark. I went over the fields to the nearest point where I perceived a light, and found a provision shop; there I purchased three oaten cakes, at a penny each, and a pound of cheese for eightpence. I also made out that we were sixteen miles from our homes. Unfortunately I lost my way in returning to the place where I had left the two Glovers. After rambling among the fields, shouting and whistling until well-nigh exhausted, I came to a little mud hut inhabited by a besom-maker, and but for the oaten cake and cheese I believe I should have been worried by a large dog that resolutely opposed my approach nearer than about one hundred yards. Throwing down the cakes, however, the dog immediately seized them, and the man, coming out of the hut, warned me, whoever I might be, to “cut off, or he would put a bullet into me.”

Forgetting everything in my fright, I held a parley with him at some distance in the dark. The dog having made short work of the cakes, barked as furiously and appeared as intent upon worrying me as before. I told him all, and finding that I was a mere lad, he consented, for a shilling, to let me come into the hut, where a good fire was burning. I told him that my companions could not be far off, and described the place where I had left them. The good old fellow returned me my shilling, and placed some barley bread before me to eat to my cheese, while, he said, he would soon fetch the other two; but as I did not relish staying in the hut alone, and not feeling comfortable to eat until my companions were found, I decided on accompanying him. The night was pitch dark; but, aided by his dog, the besom-maker was not long in finding the haystack under which I had left them sitting. Tired out with walking, and weary of waiting for me, they were fast asleep on some loose hay pulled out of the rick. We had some difficulty in waking them, after which we all proceeded to the hut, made a hearty supper of barley bread and cheese and spring water. Our host placed a log of wood on the fire, and we slept upon the bed of heather that formed the working material for his brooms until morning, when the kind-hearted old man trudged off to the village, and soon returned with a can of nice new milk and a huge loaf of barley bread, of which we ate our fill; and after promising him to return to our homes, where, he said, “all would blow over in the course of a day or two,” we left him, and made our way on to the high road. We then held a council as to whether we should return home, or continue our course as far as Sheffield, and enlist in a regiment that we knew to be quartered there.

Hal Glover was the first to turn tail, and at once commenced his journey homewards. Ned bid him good-bye and called him “chicken-hearted,” and trudged on with me in a contrary direction. However, he frequently turned round to look at Harry's fast receding form.

At last we came to a sharp turn in the road. A tear stood in the boy's eye as he came to a standstill.

"I cannot leave *Harry* and my *mother*, Fred." said he; "I will go back to W – , let the consequences be what they may. Good-bye, Trenchard," and as he took my hand in his I could see the big tears rolling down his cheeks. He could not speak; but he pulled me towards him, as much as to say, "Come with me," and if the truth must be told, I would rather have returned with him than have gone on; but I thought of the taunts and jeers that I should be sure to experience from the greater part of the lads in the village. So I wended my way to Sheffield.

I arrived at Sheffield on the same night, and at once inquired my way to the barracks. The Second Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays) were lying there at that time. Entering the gates, I was at once interrogated by the sentry as to what I wanted.

"I want to enlist," said I.

It was nightfall. A rousing fire was burning in the guard-room, through the window of which I could perceive a group of soldiers seated around, some smoking, some eating, others talking and laughing, more or less.

I saw a slightly-built, gentlemanly looking figure at the door.

"Corporal of the guard," shouted the sentry, and that functionary instantly appeared. "This *young fellow* wants for to join the reg'ment."

"This way, my lad," said the corporal; and forthwith he entered the guard-room.

Presently he came out, and I never saw him again. I learned, however, that the next day an old limb of the law hunted him up, and induced him to give up his intention of enlisting, and made all things pleasant with the Queen's Bays by leaving them a golden medal of their mistress.

It was my turn now. I walked in.

"Well, my hearty," said one of the soldiers, "come up to the roast," as he made way for me to be seated near him. The corporal cast his eye from my head to my feet as I neared the light.

"Not big enough, nor never will be," he said, folding his arms.

The standard of dragoon guards at that period (more than twenty years ago) was not less than six feet for full grown, or five feet ten inches for growing lads whose appearance indicated that they would attain the desired height ere they had left off growing. I was under five feet seven, and was at once pronounced as "never likely to be a six-foot man," and therefore not eligible for *their* regiment; however, the corporal said I could sleep in barracks that night, if I thought proper, and he would introduce me to the recruiting sergeant of another regiment – then in the town – on the following day. To this I consented; and the guard orderly escorted me to one of the barrack-rooms, in which there were eight beds ranged side by side.

The bedsteads were of iron, and the beds stuffed with straw. To one of these I was shown as belonging to one of the men on guard and therefore vacant. There was an air of snug comfort in the room that contrasted favourably with the cold blustering wind outside. A good fire was burning in a large grate, the white belts, black sabretaches, and burnished scabbards hung around the room and glittered in the fire light. The carbines were neatly arranged in the "rack" with a bone "snapper" in each hammer – placed there in lieu of the flint – for the new percussion-caps were not in use at that period. The uniforms – scarlet coats with swallow-tails, and brass shoulder-scales – were neatly wrapped up and piled with the kit and spare clothing upon a shelf over each man's bed. The men were apparently as happy as a family – some were smoking and chatting, one was reading a newspaper, another writing a letter, and one, a "mounted orderly" just come in from a long ride, was busy cooking two herrings for his supper.

"Come to the fire," said one of the men.

I walked up and took my seat on one of the wood forms near the grate.

"I feel very dry," said the one who had now commenced to eat the herrings.

“Divil doubt you, an’ so you ought to feel dhry, you murtherin cannibal, for there you sit ating two as fine fellows of your own species as ever tuk a bath in the salt say,” said an old looking soldier.

“Jerry,” said the “orderly,” “have you any money?”

“Niver a farden,” said Jerry – the man who had jokingly called him a “cannibal.”

“I’ve got some,” said I, displaying one shilling and fivepence – all I had left.

“Bravo, youngster,” said the orderly, “will you pay for a quart of ale?”

“Yes, for two quarts if you like,” said I.

“Might as well have a gallon while we are about it, that’ll jist be a pint apiece,” said a big lump of a fellow rising from one of the beds, where he had been lying and smoking a dirty short pipe without speaking a word until now.

“Mind your own business, you moon-snuffing omedhaun, and let the lad do as he plases,” said the Irishman.

“I’ve only this one shilling and fivepence in copper, or I would pay for two or three gallons of beer,” said I.

“Do you live in Sheffield?” inquired the orderly.

“I came here from W – , to enlist, but they say I’m not tall enough,” said I.

“And what are you going to do next?”

“List in another regiment,” said I.

“S’pose you don’t pass the doctor, what shall you do then?”

I had never thought of that, and therefore could only say I didn’t know.

I now began to see the extent of my folly in leaving home in such a pitiable plight, without money or friends. If I did not enlist and *pass the doctor*, only fivepence would stand between me and absolute starvation. The orderly no doubt perceived my embarrassment.

“I’ll not hev any ale to-night. Hand me that pitcher of water there beside you,” said he.

“Faix an’ you must be a foolish young gossoon to lave home widout money. You’ll be in a purty fix if you don’t pass the doctor widout aither money or frinds, an’ thirty miles from home.”

My spirits were lowering fast. But, after all, I could *walk* home again; my seventeen pence would be enough to prevent me from starving by the way. Therefore, though I was not a little vexed and humiliated that the soldiers would not accept my treat, I was glad when I considered that the expenditure of my money would have reduced me to beggary, and I soon after retired to my bed of “long feathers” as the Irishman designated it. So long as the soldiers were up and moving about the room I never thought of home, but after the last trumpet had sounded, a little after nine o’clock, and the men were all in their beds, I began to think of my mother, brothers, and sisters, one of the latter being particularly attached to me, and I wished in my heart that I had returned to W – with Harry and Ned. Being very tired, however, I soon fell asleep, and did not awake until the morning.

## Chapter Four

“Who’ll serve the King?” said the Sergeant, aloud,  
Loud roll’d the drum, and the fife played sweetly.  
“Here, Mr Sergeant,” says I from the crowd,  
“Is a lad that will serve your turn completely!”

### *Old Sons.*

I was aroused by the sound of the *réveillé* at six o’clock on the following morning. The soldiers all arose, rolled up their beds, or rather straw palliasses, turning up the bedsteads – made with a hinge in the middle – placed the roll of bedding upon it, folded the sheets, blankets, and coverlid neatly one by one, and arranged them on the beds in such a manner that the room presented the appearance of a draper’s shop in less than five minutes. They then went to stables, leaving me in bed. I soon got up and dressed myself, making a sorry attempt to put my bedding in the same state as the rest, and sauntered through the long passage down a flight of stone steps into the barrack-yard, until it was getting daylight. By this time I had made up my mind to return home at all risks, and in pursuance of this resolve, I started for the front gate, but having to pass the guard-room, I again came in contact with the corporal who had so kindly volunteered to find me a night’s lodging. He beckoned me towards him, and said that he had just sent for his friend the recruiting sergeant, of whom he had spoken the previous night, and that he expected him up every minute.

Wishing to avoid him, I said that I would go out and get breakfast, and might come back in the course of an hour. But the corporal probably suspected I might *not* return, and managed to keep me in conversation until the arrival of his friend the recruiting sergeant of a regiment of hussars.

Sergeant Brailsford, for that was his name, was a man eminently calculated for the duty to which he had been appointed. His splendid uniform, evidently got up for the purpose of dazzling the eyes of the unwary, was decidedly the handsomest suit of clothes I had ever seen.

He asked me to breakfast with him at an adjacent public-house: we had ham, eggs, and coffee, after which he invited me to have a walk with him. I felt quite proud of being seen in his company, as I trudged along the street in my blue smock-frock, round white hat, strong hob-nailed boots, and thought little of how my countrified gait contrasted with his fine soldierly bearing. The sergeant was in the full dress of his regiment, termed “review order” when mounted; but I afterwards found that, for the sake of effect, he wore the uniform of a *commissioned* officer, with the single exception of the “bars” or stripes on his arm, to indicate his rank. A bell-topped shako, the front of which was emblazoned with gold mountings, surmounted by a huge plume of cocks’ feathers; a dark blue dress jacket literally covered with gold lace, a handsome sash, blue overalls with broad gold stripes, and nicely-polished boots and spurs, were sufficient of themselves to make a country “gawky’s” mouth water; but the crowning part of the dashing sergeant’s attire, and one that most took the attention of passers-by, particularly the girls, was the bright scarlet pelisse – loose jacket – profusely trimmed with gold lace and bear-skin, hanging carelessly over his left shoulder. He had a jet-black moustache, not then so common as it is now, and no doubt thought no “small beer” of himself as he stalked majestically over the pavement, glancing in the shop windows that reflected his figure as he passed them. On our return towards the point from whence we started, we met the regiment of “Queen’s Bays,” in “complete marching order,” a style in which cavalry frequently turn out and march a few miles, to perfect the men in packing their kit and being ready to move quickly in case of emergency. They were all mounted on bay horses with *docked* tails; the band was playing “Paddy, will you now?” and although a dull and foggy December morning, the black and smoky streets through which the troops marched looked gay and animated. Every one admired the soldiers. My resolution was fixed.

I had never before seen a cavalry regiment mounted and in full dress. The sergeant probably noticed the effect produced on my weak mind, and struck while the iron was hot.

“Better ’list and be a soldier,” said he. “I don’t mind if I do,” said I. On arriving at the rendezvous he took me up a narrow staircase, on the landing of which was a standard, fixed to indicate the height of intending recruits. I was one inch below the standard height of the regiment, he said, but being young and evidently growing fast, *that* was immaterial. We descended to a sort of tap-room, where a huge fire was burning, and several soldiers with dirty-looking female companions were seated around, smoking and drinking. The men rose, and proposed my health. At a sign, however, from the sergeant they were seated, and were comparatively silent. The sergeant, assuming a pompous air, then put the following questions to me: —

“Are you married? Are you an apprentice? Did you ever serve in her Majesty’s army or navy? Have you ever been cupped or marked with the letter D?”

To all these questions my answers were an emphatic “No.”

“Are you free, able, and willing to enlist in her Majesty’s – th regiment of Hussars?”

“I am,” said I.

He then gave me a shilling, and informed me that I was a soldier, and that in addition to the shilling, he would advance me three or four days’ pay to stand treat to *my comrades*, several of whom – recruiting parties from infantry regiments – had by this time joined our company. The sergeant handed me four shillings; this, with the *seventeen pence*, amounted to six shillings and fivepence, and was soon spent in drink and tobacco. It was the beginning of a new era with me, and (shame though it be) I must tell the truth, and say that I rather liked it. I, however, managed to keep the enlistment shilling; and although now more than twenty years ago, during which I have passed through some strange scenes, I have still retained that identical coin, through which I had a hole drilled, and for the most part wore it suspended round my neck under my shirt by a lock of my youngest sister’s hair, sent to me about six months after in a letter, with a post-office order for five shillings to pay for its being plaited by the hairdresser.

On the day following my enlistment I was introduced to the doctor appointed for the purpose, who requested me to strip perfectly naked, after which I was subjected to a close examination, and declared sound. Two days after this I was forwarded, with five more recruits, to Norwich, the headquarters of my regiment, and on our arrival we were again examined by the *regimental surgeon*, and we all “passed.” My companions were mostly labourers, except one, who said he was a cutler out of work: he afterwards turned out to be a married man with one child, when he was punished and afterwards discharged.

Being supplied with my regimentals, I was ordered to “make away” with my old clothing, dealers in which attended the barrack-rooms every morning in search of plunder. My suit was rather primitive, and not likely to fetch much; still it was worth more than that of a fellow recruit who happened to be domiciled in the same room with me, for he had been a sort of labouring boy in a tallow-chandlery concern, and the sergeant had ordered him to take his greasy clothes away out of the room and bury them in the dung-heap. He had, however, a good silver watch, and therefore his *personal* effects were worth more than mine.

Like mine, his best clothes were at home; he had left home in a “hurry.” Every atom of clothing had to be sold. I tried hard to keep the blue worsted stockings which my poor old mother had knitted with her own blessed hands, and the calico shirt my sisters had made at the village school, but the hard-visaged, firm-toned sergeant of my squad was inexorable.

“Bundle ’em up, bundle ’em up, and be handy about it; you will have more to think about besides yer mother *now*,” said he.

I never liked the “old ruffian,” as the men frequently designated him, after that; and it was a relief to the whole troop when he fell one of the first victims to a fever that broke out in the camp at Chobham a few years afterwards.

I looked affectionately at my old clothes: the blue smock-frock, artistically worked with white thread all over the part that covered the back, breast, and shoulders – the white “Jerry” hat, in the brim of which stuck a feather from the wing of a rook hatched in the old rookery that had for many years before I was born stood at the corner of the bridlepath leading from my father’s farm-yard to the hills we called the “sheep pastures;” but the sergeant was inexorable. “Bundle ’em up, bundle ’em up.” I snatched the feather from under the greasy band, and for years it was deposited in the bottom of my sabretache. That simple crow’s feather I thought had flown over the old house at home, and I looked upon it as a sort of connecting link between myself and my family, and often have I gazed upon it until sick at heart. It may seem strange; and those people who have an idea that a soldier has no feeling – I have often heard people say that soldiers have *no souls*– may feel disinclined to believe my statement when I say that nothing in the shape of money, unless it would have insured my discharge, would have induced me to have parted with that simple *feather*.

But to return to my story. The hob-nailed boots stockings, shirt, fustian trousers, and waistcoat – I had no coat – were all sold to an Irishwoman for four shillings and sixpence: I spent the money among my comrades. My fellow recruit kept his watch, but freely assisted to drink the proceeds of my wardrobe.

I duly received my “kit,” which I may here remark absorbed the whole of the “bounty” (at that period amounting to four pounds, eleven shillings, and sixpence), and left me upwards of two pounds in debt; this was deducted from my daily pay of sixteen pence. The rations consisted of three-quarters of a pound daily of boiled meat – soup, potatoes, coffee, and bread – all of good quality; and these only cost eightpence, which, together with the stoppages, left me in the receipt of a daily income of threepence. The obliging corporal of my squad handed me over that sum every morning at breakfast-time. One penny of this I generally invested in a herring, rasher of bacon, or a lump of rancid butter, at the little chandler’s shop adjacent to the canteen in the barrack-yard; the other twopence was generally expended in beer, for I had not then learned the expensive habit of smoking. The cleaning materials – such as Bath-brick, soap, pipeclay, chrome-yellow, oil, blacking, etc – we could any time procure on credit from the sergeant-major of the troop, who booked our account and rendered it monthly. For these we paid most extravagant prices; and it was more than *eight months* before the two pounds, in which I was indebted at commencement, was paid off. I had, however, a new pair of overalls at a guinea, and a pair of Wellington boots at sixteen shillings and eightpence, during the interval. It is not, I believe, generally understood that, in addition to his rations, the soldier has to pay for a good portion of his clothing.

The regiment was composed of about equal numbers of Irish and English; and, to give the sons of Erin their due, I found them quite as agreeable and more obliging in their manner to recruits than their Saxon comrades. Strange to say, there was only one Scotchman in the corps, and he volunteered to the 9th, or Queen’s Lancers, and embarked with the regiment for India, in the winter of 184 – .

I soon became reconciled to my new life, and entered on my duty with a determination to excel, if possible, in that most difficult and arduous duty for a cavalry recruit – riding drills, in which I most erroneously imagined I should be all but perfect. I had ridden the cart-horses to water and pasture; had often trotted, and even galloped, my father’s old cob “Billy” to the shoeing smith’s, and had never yet been thrown. The first introduction, however, to those tormentors of the poor recruit – the “rough-riders” – soon convinced me that I was most woefully mistaken, as I found that all I had practised at home must be abandoned, indeed forgotten, before I could be properly said to have advanced one step in the military style of equitation.

The staff of the riding-school consisted of the riding-master, who was also a lieutenant, a sergeant, one corporal, and a private. The riding-master, although an exceedingly clever man, was one of the most ugly and hard-hearted wretches that ever was born. He was only excelled in brutality, to the recruits committed to his charge, by the corporal, who was more like the being always represented as the “Devil,” than any human creature. The sergeant was a mild-spoken, kind-hearted man, who

patiently instructed his pupils, whether horses in course of training, or recruits; and I need not add, that he was idolised by the whole regiment, especially the “gulpin” class, or raw recruits. The private was agreeable enough in the barrack-room, or any where out of the riding-school, particularly while being treated to drink by a recruit in the canteen, but being in a subordinate position to the corporal, he was scarcely less brutal than that fiend in human shape. Many a poor lad has been injured for life by this monster, who was one of the most drunken fellows in the regiment. He had been three times tried by court-martial, and reduced to the ranks, for habitual drunkenness. At last, five years after I enlisted, he was again confined on the charge of drunkenness, and assaulting a private soldier in the barrack-room with a sabre, the private keeping him at bay with some beautiful, but terrible practice, for ten minutes, during which neither was injured. Being at length overpowered by numbers, he was carried like a raving maniac to the guard-room, and there locked up; but on being visited in half an hour afterwards, was found dead with his throat cut.

## Chapter Five

When first I met thee, warm and young,  
There shone such truth about thee,  
And on thy lip such promise hung,  
I did not dare to doubt thee.  
I saw thee change, yet still relied,  
Still clung with hope the fonder,  
And thought, though false to all beside,  
From me thou couldst not wander.  
But go, deceiver! go;  
The heart whose hopes could make it  
Trust one so false, so low,  
Deserves that thou shouldst break it.

I was fortunate, I have already said, in having the sergeant rough-rider (a superior man to the corporal in every shape) for my instructor generally during my “griffinage.”

“Well, youngster,” he would say, “suppose you give me your serious attention through this drill.” He fully and most patiently detailed his instructions in such a manner that I could properly understand both what he said and what he meant.

“I know,” said he, “that it is a very difficult matter for you to *practise* the instructions I am giving you. Yet, by perseverance, and, above all, a determination to overcome every difficulty, you, like the rest of us, will ultimately succeed, and, I hope, become a very smart and well-conducted hussar.”

I did persevere, and felt proud to do my best for such a man. My nerves were stronger, and my ideas more collected, than when subjected to the abuse of the corporal; the result being that the sergeant frequently applauded me. I soon became the leader of the “gulpin’s” ride, a post always allotted to the most intelligent recruit.

Having passed through the ordeal of riding without saddle, as also in a saddle without stirrups, I was allowed to ride with a sword. By this time I had learnt the sword and carbine exercise on foot – had, in fact, gone through my “facings,” and been drilled to marching, etc, for two hours every day in the barrack-yard, under the immediate instruction and supervision of the “drill corporal,” “drill sergeant,” “regimental sergeant-major,” and “adjutant.” At length, being considered quite perfect as a rider in the saddle, I commenced my drills with the sword and carbine on horseback, loading and firing the latter at a fast canter, “attack and defence,” “pursuing practice,” etc, with the sabre; finally being put through all the difficult manoeuvres of the “double ride,” and the high school of equitation, leaping lessons, etc, until I was considered fit to rank as a soldier, and do my duty as such.

Eight months had now elapsed since my enlistment, and I was much more reconciled to my soldier’s life; and now that I was a full-fledged hussar, I began to grow conceited. My appearance had undergone a complete change for the better: I could both *ride* and *walk*, and no mistake.

My moustache was beginning to bud, and the short down was carefully dyed by the aid of an old toothbrush and a small square of india-ink, presented to me by a *sweetheart*. Every soldier must have a sweetheart: mine was old enough to be my mother, but I did not care, because I had now dropped all my country diffidence, and grown “cheeky,” as my comrades designated my impudence. She courted *me*, and frequently came to barracks for the purpose of inviting me to her house, where she carried on a very respectable business as a milliner and dressmaker. Strange fancy, perhaps, but she professed to be *very* fond of soldiers: she confessed to having had *three* or *four* soldier sweethearts. I met her in the pit of the theatre, in company with another *milliner*, to whom one of my comrades, who was with

me, had been paying more than ordinary attention. I may as well confess that I did not care a rap for my girl (“Old Dorcas” my comrades used to call her, when chaffing me); but she was very kind to me at times. In fact, her house was my home on all occasions when I could be spared from my active duties. Every Sunday, Denis Mulroony (my comrade) and I took tea, and sometimes supper, with his Nelly and my Dorcas. We always had rum in our teas, plenty of ale to our suppers, and more rum *after* supper. At last the time came for us to part. Having learnt that my father was a well-to-do farmer, and that I had fairish expectations, “Old Dorcas” conceived the idea of purchasing my discharge, and offered to lodge the money (30 pounds) at once, if I would “marry her *first*.” Bah! I never thought of *marrying*— not I; indeed, I had never given her any cause to harbour such an unnatural design upon me — a mere boy.

I was not partial to soldiering, and glad as I would have been for my discharge, I sickened at the idea of selling myself. Only fancy my going home again, with a woman fastened to me! — what would my father say? I shuddered as I thought of the heavy pig-whip, of which I had more than a slight acquaintance.

I had been led into this dilemma by Denis Mulroony, who was eight years my senior.

“Denny,” said I, after parting with the two women at the barrack-gate, one night at watch-setting, “what shall I say to ‘Old Dorcas,’ when I go again?”

“Arrah, now, don’t be talking, you great mahoney. Can’t you get the money first, and marry her when it is *more convanient*? Shure she’ll give it you, no fear; and if she’ll not part wid the whole, no doubt she’ll be after giving you the half of it.”

We were at that time under orders to march; in fact, the route had come for a change of quarters, and I had promised to see her again on the following night, when, as good luck would have it, Denny was on guard, and therefore could not go with me. I went, saw, and told her that I was too young to marry, and that I must decline her generous offer to purchase my freedom. This she took all in good part, and I left her.

When Denny came off duty I told him all.

“Faix, thin,” said he, “I wonder would she marry me? Throth I’ll go and thry her this very night.”

“What’ll you do with Nelly, for she is sure to be there expecting you, it being the last night we have to stay here?” cried I.

“Shure I’ll send Andy Ryan down to tell Old Dorcas that you want to spake to her onest more before you lave her for ever.”

Andy Ryan was a fine, handsome man as ever stepped. He had been twelve years a soldier, and was near upon thirty years of age. Denny opened his mind and told him all the particulars, whereupon Andy started on his mission directly the trumpet had sounded the “dismiss from stables.” That was the last either I or Denny ever saw of Andy. He deserted, and most probably went abroad with or without “Old Dorcas.”

## Chapter Six

Bring forth the horse: the horse was brought;  
In truth he was a noble steed,  
A Tartar of the Ukraine breed,  
That seemed as though the speed of thought  
Were in his limbs.

I think no part of a cavalry soldier's duty is so agreeable to him as a long march during spring or summer weather. Apart from the change of scene and a variation to the dull monotony of barrack life, the ride through the country to some distant part, frequently of ten to thirty days' duration, is always looked forward to with feelings of pleasure. Country people, who seldom see soldiers, look upon the marching of a squadron of cavalry through the small towns and villages as a sort of pageant, especially if it be the head-quarters of a corps, which is always accompanied by the band.

Young and inexperienced as I then was, the prospect of a sixteen days' march in the merry month of May through the most delightful part of England held out unusual charms for me. The dress of a soldier was my sole weakness – I cared for nothing else; and I cheerfully endured all the miseries of military slavery and short-comings of a comfortable home for the sake of being thought something or somebody above the majority of individuals in my walk of life. My sole object was to attract the attention and, if possible, the envy of others – an idea too frequently indulged by young soldiers, until dear-bought experience teaches them their mistake.

I have stated before, that the costume of our regiment at the period to which I allude included a "pelisse" or loose jacket, slung carelessly over the left shoulder; but no man was allowed to wear this until he had been dismissed from drill, and deported himself in such a manner as became a smart, intelligent, and well-disciplined soldier. Those recruits who had enlisted about the same time as myself, but who were not yet proficient in horsemanship, etc, were told off to travel by railway; but to my great joy, the sergeant of my squad read out my name in orders at stable time the night before, to assemble with the detachment in "complete marching order" the following morning at seven o'clock.

I had a most beautiful, blood-like, dark-chestnut gelding for my trooper: his coat shone like a mole, and his mane flowed from his finely-arched neck almost to his knees. He was known by the general appellation of "Number Seventeen, D Troop," but I gave him the name of "Restless," from his habit of capering and prancing at every unusual noise or object that presented itself. He was neither nervous nor vicious, but impatient and anxious to be moving when he ought to stand still; and though the slightest feel of the rein imaginable would restrain him, he would champ his bit and throw the foam from his mouth all over his breast and my uniform in flakes as white as snow. One tap of the drum or a blast of the trumpet was a signal for "Restless" to show off his splendid form in a succession of graceful capers, if on the move; or if standing on parade, he would soon get up a shower of foam, and bespatter the horses on each side, all the while paddling with his feet and scraping the ground continually.

Notwithstanding that I was about the youngest "old soldier" in the regiment, and but a short time previously only a common "clod-hopper," there was none more conceited or perhaps more vain than myself, when mounted on "Restless."

Not content with the light sprinkling of *down* which nature had planted and was nurturing on my upper lip, I spared from my scanty pay a sum of one shilling and sixpence for a bushy pair of false moustaches, which, however, all my efforts to make stick proved futile: they only made me sneeze; so I was obliged to fall back upon the old toothbrush and square of Indian ink presented to me by Dorcas, wherewith to blacken my young crop, to make believe that I was more of a man than

a boy. The regiment was divided into three detachments of two troops each, and I belonged to the first that marched out of our old quarters, including the band. A large crowd had collected to witness our departure. A deal of hand-shaking and clinging to the stirrups was going on as we filed out of the barrack-gate to the tune of “The girl I left behind me;” and many a tear was shed by those who, having made a short acquaintance with some of the men while they had been quartered here, were destined never to see them again; indeed, I recollect that four of the number that marched with me on that morning died, a few years after, of a fever that broke out in the camp at Chobham; the bones of eight were left to whiten in the death-vale, after the battle of Balaklava; and three were killed during the Indian revolt, whither they had gone, transferred, at their own request, to other regiments. Few, however, of the whole regiment were left when actions, disease, and the short-comings of the commissariat had done their work, at the conclusion of the Crimean campaign. But of this I shall write in due course, and proceed with my narrative and detachment on our line of march.

As is customary on a regiment leaving quarters, hundreds of the “tag, rag, and bob-tail” followed us through the streets to the outskirts of the town, the last to leave us being the girls; and they would have trudged on, keeping our company as long as they could have held out, but for the order to “trot,” which the trumpet sounded directly on leaving the street pavement.

“Good-bye, Mary!” “good-bye, Helen!” “farewell, honey, dear!” was followed by a series of wild shrieks that could be heard for some distance above the clattering of hoofs and the clanking of sabres. Our first day’s march was a distance of eighteen miles. The billeting party had preceded us in the usual way on the day before, and quarters were provided for every man, in numbers of from one to half-a-dozen, according to the accommodation to be obtained at the various hotels and public-houses in the town where we halted. All the inhabitants appeared to have turned out to welcome us, and they lined the roadside for nearly a mile ere we reached the market-place, where we formed up, surrounded by a dense crowd, while the band played, after which we were dismissed to our respective billets. I was particularly fortunate in having nice comfortable quarters to myself, in a small public-house near the outskirts of the town, kept by an aged widow; and she made a great fuss over me.

“Deary me! why, he is but a child,” she remarked, as my gallant “Restless” capered into her stable-yard. The neighbours, such as were left at home, collected about the place.

“Shame on the government for enlisting such a boy! I wonder how his poor mother took it!”

Impudent and conceited though I had become, this allusion to my mother broke through a little of my fortitude. However, I appeared not to notice the running fire of remarks these good-natured people made from time to time, as I dismounted and busied myself in cleaning my horse and accoutrements, after which my kind hostess invited me into her private parlour, to a nice dinner she had provided expressly for me, consisting of a roast leg of lamb, with mint sauce, and a “rhubarb dumpling.”

“I always make it a point to treat a soldier to the best I can afford, because he risks his life to save others and their property,” she said, as she reached me a chair, and told me to be seated.

Now, I was particularly fond of pudding, but I had never tasted any since I left home, and in reply to her question, as to which I would prefer first, pudding or meat, I preferred the former. A little boy, about six years of age (the old lady’s grandson) sat on a stool in the same apartment, and appeared completely absorbed in my every movement. I was very hungry – soldiers are invariably hungry, and thirsty too, after a long march – the nice rich dumpling, turned bottom upwards out of an earthenware basin in which it had been boiled, was already on the table, with the syrup oozing from a fissure in the side into the clean willow-pattern dish.

“Help yourself,” said this kind old woman.

I did help myself, with a will too, and she assisted by sprinkling sugar and pouring rich thick cream over the portion I had taken to myself. She then took her seat in the corner, and the manner in which her dumpling disappeared evidently gave her as much pleasure as it did me; but the little

boy – Tommy she called him – appeared, as I thought, rather spiteful in the frowns he gave me from time to time, as the demolition of the dumpling continued.

The old lady said that “puddings did not agree with her so well as they formerly did.” So I took it for granted that she intended the whole of it for myself, and I forthwith commenced to denude the dish of the lot. Tommy could hold his thoughts no longer.

“Granny, is the souger goin’ to eat it aw?” said he.

I at once dropped my fork, abashed and disgusted with myself for what might appear selfishness; however, as an act of reparation, Tommy had the satisfaction of clearing up the remnant, after which he appeared in better humour. After doing justice to the lamb and mint sauce, I completed my stable duty, and dressed for a walk until stable time in the evening. For several days nothing occurred that would interest the reader beyond the usual events incidental to a march, such as a few men misconducting themselves in being late for roll-call, not cleaning their appointments to suit the whimsicalities of a sergeant, for which they were reported to the commanding officer and ordered to *walk* from town to town behind the light-baggage cart, under escort of the “baggage guard,” their horses being led by their more fortunate, but in many instances more culpable comrades. Walking with high-heeled boots, leather stock, and tight-fitting clothes, with a heavy dress cap on the head in a blazing hot sun, is considered heavy punishment for a cavalry soldier, yet I have known men compelled to walk ten days successively for no other crime than being two minutes late for parade. During this march I came in for my first quota of punishment since I had been a soldier, which was administered in the form of a couple of days’ walking in the order I have described, twenty-two miles the first day, and sixteen the next, under a fearfully hot sun; the distance was nothing if I had not been encumbered with a costume totally unfitted for the purpose, and under restraint too, kept up to the pace of a horse’s walk so as not to lag behind the escort; and this punishment was awarded to me through no fault of my own.

It was on the seventh day after leaving barracks. Thirty of us were billeted at one house, and the rest upon private houses, in consequence of there being but one public-house in the village. The landlord of this was a farmer and maltster; we had to sleep and stable our horses as best we could; indeed, many of the animals were picketed in the open fields, the men were turned into the malt offices to clean their appointments, etc. The malting season being over there was plenty of room for them to do this. On the day we marched in we were at dinner all together in a “club room” adjoining the house; a loud report was heard, which every one knew to be from a carbine, being much louder than from a common gun. Every cavalry soldier carries ten rounds of ball-cartridge in his pouch on the line of march; these pouches and cross-belts to which they were attached had been left in the places where we had been cleaning them.

On sallying forth in the direction of the report we found four or five boys, apparently from ten to fourteen years of age; each was armed with a carbine, and adorned with a cross-belt. They had stuck a piece of white paper on an apple-tree in the garden behind the house, and were firing away our ammunition at the target, no doubt calculating upon a fine afternoon’s sport. Every carbine was loaded (one with the cartridge the wrong end downwards), and when we arrived another youngster was just taking up a position to “present” and fire in addition to the one that had already “let fly” and missed his mark. Whither the ball stopped it was perhaps lucky that no one knew, as both horses, cattle, and people were moving about within range.

One of these ammunition pouches was found to belong to me, and with the rest of the owners of carbines and pouches, I was at once taken before the commanding officer, and we were all ordered to walk a couple of days each. One of the men whose duty it became to lead “Restless,” came in for treble the amount of punishment by his failing to keep my horse within bounds. On one of these days the route lay along the road that skirts the ruins of Kenilworth Castle. Across this road runs a wide brook, which has to be forded by travellers. “Restless” seriously objected to be led through this water, and tugged at the bridle to such an extent as to pull the man off his horse plump into the middle of

the brook, the result being that both his own horse and “Restless” got loose, and were with difficulty caught. For this accident, the man was ordered to walk the remainder of the march to barracks. I well remember the scene that occurred on the arrival of the poor fellow in barracks after seven days’ walk.

“This,” said he, “shall be the last day’s duty I will ever do in the – th Hussars; not that I care a straw for the walking, as I can walk as well as any man in the regiment, but because I have been punished undeservedly by a man *who is a deserter from another regiment*,” this was alluding to the sergeant who had reported him to the commanding officer for “carelessness” in letting the horse loose, although the poor fellow had stuck to his hold on the bridle of “Restless,” until actually pulled out of his seat. There was a dogged determination about David Mason (for that was his name, and a better soldier never threw his leg over a saddle) as he uttered these words, while sitting on the edge of his bed and stripping his worsted socks from his blistered and bleeding feet, having limped into the barrack-yard with one hand resting on the rear part of the baggage cart, about half an hour after the arrival of the detachment.

“This is the last day’s duty I shall ever do in the – th Hussars,” he repeated to a lance-corporal who had heard a portion of his first ejaculation.

“You had better make haste and get down to stables,” said the corporal.

I was grooming my horse when David entered the stable, and he at once walked up to the sergeant and confronted him. “Sergeant D – ,” said he, “you are a *tyrant*, a *coward*, and a *deserter* from the 52nd Light Infantry!”

The sergeant trembled like an aspen leaf, and his face turned as pale as a sheet: turning to me and a comrade in the next stall, “Take this man to the guard-room,” and poor Mason was at once escorted to confinement.

They were *both* deserters: Mason from the 82nd foot, and the sergeant from the 52nd; but by some means or other, never explained to me, Mason knew the sergeant while the sergeant did not know Mason, although it was said that he had more than once hinted that the latter had the appearance of a foot soldier in some peculiarity which he probably better understood than any man in the regiment.

Both men had joined our regiment in fictitious names, but Mason had the advantage of knowing the sergeant’s real name, and, when taken before the colonel on the following day, he made a clean breast of it by telling the sergeant’s name and the date of his desertion, also stating that he was himself a deserter, having enlisted in our corps only two days from leaving his own, solely because he thought he should like to be a cavalry soldier better than serving in an infantry regiment.

The adjutant of the 52nd was communicated with at once, and Mason’s story found to be correct. The sergeant was put under arrest, until an escort arrived from his own regiment to take him to head-quarters, where he was tried by court-martial and flogged. Mason also left our corps under an escort of the 82nd sent to fetch him; and I afterwards heard that, although he was tried by court-martial, he got off with a light punishment.

## Chapter Seven

Strengthening fare and a welcoming glance,  
More than rich dainties and pleasures entrance;  
When to droop we begin,  
Mine host joins in,  
Health to the soldier, and health to our land.

Some strange things occur during a soldier's time of service, many incidents and occurrences which are thought nothing of by the men themselves, but are nevertheless interesting to civilians. To these little incidents, such as I can remember, I shall confine my story, in the hope that the narration of them will prove more interesting to the general reader than the dry detail of a soldier's duty and his manner of performing it.

A comrade of mine was on sentry in Hounslow barracks from eleven to one o'clock one dark and very wet night in the depth of winter, at a post where the orders were that *no person* was to pass after nightfall. Willie Sherlock was his name, an Irish lad, and, if I remember right, he was from Galway. He had been at sea as a mere boy, and enlisted in our regiment when about nineteen. From his general smartness at drill and exceedingly good-tempered disposition he was a universal favourite. The post where Willie was placed on sentry commanded the approach to a path that led to some small cabins in the rear of the barracks, but out of its boundaries. These were inhabited by the "hangers-on" of the regiment (the locality is well known to those of my military readers who have ever been so unfortunate as to be stationed at Hounslow). The commanding-officer determined to put a stop to the egress and ingress of certain very fast non-commissioned officers, who, avoiding the front gate, stole out after watch-setting to these cabins for the purpose of playing cards and indulging in various other objectionable practices. We had at that time an uncommonly strict regimental sergeant-major, a regular "tickler," who would confine a man in the guard-room for a mere twist of the eye in the wrong direction when on parade.

This man was one of the most frequent visitors to the "huts," and on the night Willie Sherlock was on duty he was making his way stealthily past the sentry-box, that stood between the riding-school and the end of one wing of the barracks. "Who comes there?" sang out Willie; no answer was returned. "Who comes there?" again he challenged without receiving a reply. "Who comes there?" again repeated Willie, but still he received no answer.

"Be the mortal frost, I'll fire," said Willie as he rammed a ball-cartridge home into his carbine. "Who comes there? answer, or be the piper that played before Moses, I'll send a ball into ye."

All this time the figure was stealthily gliding past under the shadow of the riding-school. Quick as thought Willie dropped on one knee, by which he brought the outline of the figure between his sight and the sky. Bang went the carbine, and simultaneously a loud yell, succeeded by another and another, rang through the barracks with a strange unearthly sound at that hour of the night.

"Number 2, corporal of the guard," sung out Willie from his post. (All the sentries are numbered, so that if Anything occurs on their post, as in this instance, it is known in which direction to send assistance, should any be required.)

I happened to be in the guard-room at the time, waiting for my turn of duty on another post, and, with the rest of the guard-relief and the corporal, we proceeded in double-quick time to the scene of alarm. The yells and groans continued as we tramped across the barrack-yard. By the time we had reached the post we were joined by the orderly officer and sergeant of the guard.

"Who comes there?" shouted Willie, in a loud defiant challenge, as we neared his sentry-box, where he stood at attention.

“Rounds!” was the reply.

“What rounds?” said Willie, according to custom.

“Visiting rounds!”

“Advance, visiting rounds. All’s *not* well,” said Willie, and then briefly reported the cause of alarm.

The victim of his vigilance had by this time staggered to the sentry-box.

“Take me to the hospital. I am badly wounded. The scoundrel has shot me.”

“Halloo! serjeant-major. How is this?” inquired the orderly officer.

“Pray let me be taken to hospital, sir, and then I will explain,” said he; and thither he was escorted.

The assistant-surgeon examined him, when it was found that the ball had passed through the fleshy part of his leg. He soon got round, however, but was tried by court-martial, and reduced to the ranks for leaving barracks at an unseasonable hour of the night by a forbidden way. Willie, of course, only did his duty.

“Be the piper,” said he, “I thought I had kilt him intirely by the roar he med.”

Not long after this occurrence, Willie volunteered with about twenty mere of ours for service in India, and joined the 9th Lancers in the spring of 1843, that regiment having embarked in the early part of 1842.

At this period, the regiment was constantly being drained of many effective men, who volunteered for service in regiments under orders for or already in India; consequently, we had several recruiting parties out, among whom were a serjeant and a corporal at Liverpool; but they both deserted, and, it was supposed, sailed for America.

About nine or ten months subsequent to this, I was on guard at the front gate – which is always closed at nine o’clock, and all who pass in or out after that time do so through a small wicket door. One of the men had just struck twelve o’clock on a gong that hung in front of the guard-room of the barracks where we were then stationed.

Some one rapped gently at the wicket.

“Who comes there?” said I.

“A friend!”

The door was opened, and in stepped a tall individual, wearing a curious conical-shaped cap, apparently made of raccoon skins.

“Don’t you know me?” said he, shaking hands with the corporal of the guard, who was eyeing him over from head to foot; “I am Corporal L – , who deserted with Serjeant B – from Liverpool,” said he, laughing heartily.

He was immediately placed under arrest; and afterwards informed us that he had relatives in the United States, to whom he made his way on his arrival in New York. He was a medical student at the time he enlisted, and had wealthy connexions in London. Corresponding with these, he was informed that an old uncle had died and left him a princely fortune, and was advised by the family solicitor to come back to England without delay, give himself up to his regiment, and when he had undergone the punishment consequent on his indiscretion, arrangements would be made to purchase his discharge.

The most noteworthy portion of his examination before the colonel on the following morning was, that notwithstanding the hints thrown out that he would probably be flogged if he did not render some account of the serjeant who had deserted with him, he steadily refused to give any information.

“I know where he is,” said he; “but you may cut me to pieces before I will tell you anything concerning him.”

He was tried by court-martial, and, notwithstanding the intercession of his friends and the powerful interest employed in his favour, was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment; at the expiration of which he returned, very much broken down and emaciated, and was put to his duty, pending the necessary preliminaries for his discharge, which he gained in the course of a month; and

in about three weeks after he left the regiment he entered the barrack-yard, seated by the side of a lovely girl – his wife – in a splendid barouche, drawn by a pair of high-stepping Cleveland bays, coachman and footman in spanking new livery. He had brought his wife down from London to show her a specimen of barrack life.

We were at dinner. He laughed and chatted with all those with whom he had been on intimate terms, and left us a five-pound note. We gave him three cheers as he left the barracks; and, although once only a common soldier, he is now a gentleman, residing with his wife and a numerous family in the suburbs of the West End of London.

We had a youth in the regiment who came from the neighbourhood of Clonmel, Ireland. He also had a great sum of money bequeathed to him, while a private, by a relative who had resided and amassed his wealth in Liverpool or Manchester – I forget which. The amount was said to be upwards of 30,000 pounds, on the receipt of which he purchased his discharge and married the daughter of a farrier in the regiment. She and her relatives indulged in the most extravagant finery and excesses; the women connected with the regiment had all silk dresses presented to them; and the keeper of the canteen would have made his fortune, had not the colonel put a stop to the proceedings by issuing orders that neither one nor the other of the newly-married couple should be admitted in barracks. But the scenes in the public-houses in the vicinity of the barracks were something extraordinary while the money lasted. A drag was purchased, to which was attached a team of four horses, unbroken to work together, and unmatched in every shape. The drag being loaded with a motley lot of his companions, the madcap mounted the box and essayed the task of driving through the crowded streets; but the leaders turned completely round, and, facing their driver, commenced to plunge and kick, finally capsizing the coach, and more or less injuring all the passengers. The result of this foolish extravagance was utter ruin, and not having a shilling with which to bless himself, he was at last obliged to enlist again.

While the troop to which I belonged was stationed at Hampton Court, the chief duty at which place is to guard the various approaches to and about the palace, an incident occurred to one of our men worth relating.

The palace, as many of my readers are aware, is within an easy distance of London, and is visited by vast numbers of pleasure-seekers of all grades during the summer months; and at that period there were frequently families of distinction staying for some time at the Mitre Hotel, situate within a stone's throw of the front entrance to the palace. The soldiers stationed here always mount guard in full dress, and many a sly leer of the eye is bestowed upon them by the hundreds of pretty girls that pass in and out during a day. The front gates of the palace are always open for visitors to pass without restriction until nightfall. The splendid picture-galleries and other works of art and curiosities are guarded by policemen; but the approaches to the staircases, corridors, etc, are never without an efficient guard of soldiers. One of these posts is termed the "Garden-gate," situate in rear of the main building, and the entrance to the palace from the magnificent pleasure-grounds, bounded on one side by the river Thames. There is a broad flagway, or promenade, along the side of the palace, where seats are placed, upon which the visitors can lounge, with their backs to the palace and their faces towards the gardens. The sentry has to pace from one end to the other of this promenade, in front of the company that may be on the seats. I well remember, one sultry night in July, it was my turn to relieve a sentry on this post. It was eleven o'clock, and all the visitors were supposed to have been cleared out of the gardens at nine, or soon afterwards. The guard-relief tramped through the long and lofty passages from front to rear of the palace in silence, as far as speech was concerned; but the sound of their footsteps and the jingle of their appointments was quite sufficient to awaken a man, had he been sleeping soundly on his post. We approached and passed the point where it was usual for the sentry to challenge; but all was still. On reaching the promenade, we turned about to look for the sentry. There he sat on one of the seats, unbelted and unarmed, and, as if to keep up

the proverbial gallantry of his race, he had his arm around the waist of as pretty a girl as ever the sun or moon shone upon.

Lynch – Pat Lynch – I need not withhold his name now – was the gallant sentinel. The object that had won him from his duty spoke not a word, she held down her head, but we could easily perceive that she moved in superior society. In this Pat was her equal, for his father was an extensive landowner in the county of Waterford.

“Boys,” said Pat, “this is a bad job, to be caught loitering on my post, but this young lady is my sweetheart, and how could I help but sit beside her?”

Pat was marched to the guard-room, and the fair lady tenderly escorted outside the boundaries of the palace, and she was seen to enter the “Mitre Hotel.” Poor Pat was brought before the major on the following day, and sentenced to twenty-one days’ “kit drill,” namely, carrying all his “kit,” strapped on his back with the surcingle, for four hours each day, to and fro a prescribed distance marked out in the barrack-yard.

Shortly after he had completed his term of punishment, the young lady, who had money of her own, purchased his discharge. They were married, and for some years, to my knowledge, lived happily together at the pretty little bathing place, Tramore, in the county of Waterford.

## Chapter Eight

For once, upon a raw and gusty day,  
The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,  
Caesar said to me – “Darest thou, Cassius, now  
Leap in with me into this angry flood,  
And swim to yonder point?”

While the head-quarters of our regiment lay in Hounslow, and the out-quarters in Hampton Court, Blackwater, and Kensington, myself and a number of my comrades went to bathe in a stream not far from Hounslow Heath, as had been our custom while stationed at Hampton Court. Whether this water was public or private property, I know not: it was a kind of half river, half brook; probably, however, we were trespassers, as I remember we had to pass over some fields through which there was no public road before we reached it. There were seven of us, and we had no sooner stripped and piled our clothing on the water's edge than four policemen appeared on the scene. Suspecting our intentions, they had followed us from the outskirts of the town, and concealing themselves behind a hedge, like good generals, they waited until we were undressed and had entered the water, before warning us that we were doing anything contrary to the law. Now, if there is one thing that a soldier detests more than another, it is to be interfered with in any way or shape by a policeman. In this instance the police were striving to take a mean advantage over us, and as they seated themselves quietly on the brink of the stream, and collected every vestige of our clothing in a heap beside them, it appeared very probable that they would remain masters of the field, and that – as my own comrades remarked – we should be taken to “a piece of ground with a station-house over it.”

The water was no higher than our middles, and we moved down some distance to hold a parley as to the best means of getting out of the dilemma: some were for quietly surrendering to the enemy and trusting to our ignorance of the law to escape punishment. There were no notice-boards or anything to warn us that it was illegal, and what was more natural than that a pure stream of water situated within a mile of a barrack, should be used as a bath during the summer months?

The idea of surrender was rejected by the majority, who were for making a sortie on the police, and thus regain possession of our clothes and secure our liberty at all hazards. Naked as we were, we numbered nearly two to one; and although we should be sure to be freely beaten with their staves, we should ultimately succeed in getting away. We therefore agreed to make a semblance of surrender in order to get possession of our clothes, but arranged that we should all finish dressing at the same time, taking the initiative as to the donning of each article from a fugleman, so as not to be taken at a disadvantage before we were dressed and ready for a run or a fight, as circumstances directed. Accordingly we left the water and commenced to dress, during which one of the policemen produced a book and gruffly asked our names, the rest surrounding us, apparently ready for action at the same time. We looked at each other, and it was at once understood that we should decline to give any such information. By this time we were attired in our shirts, trousers, and boots, but were interrupted by each of the policemen producing a pair of handcuffs. This was too much: I had never before engaged in a serious encounter, but I was ready and willing for anything – indeed, both myself and comrades would have died before we would have submitted to be handcuffed. While one of my arms was in my jacket-sleeve, I was seized by two policemen; the remaining two grappled hold of another soldier. With the help of my comrades I managed to wriggle out of their grasp, but one of the brutes struck me a fearful blow on my arm with his staff, and one of my comrades was felled to the ground by a blow on his bare head.

By this time the fight had become general. Charley Dundas (one of the best soldiers in the regiment, who afterwards died of fever in Chobham camp) took hold of one policeman with his left hand on the collar of his coat behind, and with a firm grab of the right on the back of his trousers, he ran him before him like a wheelbarrow to the edge of the stream, from whence he pitched him headforemost into the water; the other three were thrown bodily into the brook. Hats, handcuffs, coat-tails, and staves, were pitched after them, and away we all started, over hedge and ditch, the nearest way to the barracks – but the policemen never chased us a yard.

It is very difficult to pick out a soldier that may be wanted by the police for such an offence as this, from amongst so many men of about the same height and weight, all wearing moustaches, and attired exactly alike; and we knew that if we could only reach the barracks, the chances of detection were very much in our favour; but it was policy to separate before we reached the gate, and enter it at different periods with others not of our party, to avoid suspicion, and this we managed very nicely.

The same evening, however, while reconnoitring from the barrack-windows, we espied the four policemen, who, having made a report of the case at the guard-room, were anxiously striving to recognise in the many men passing to and fro the parties who had left them in so ignominious a position. At last they appeared to have found one of the delinquents in one Barney Camel, who was making the best of his way across the barrack-yard from the canteen, with a rasher of bacon in his hand, to his room. Barney bore a striking resemblance to Charley Dundas, the man who had so unceremoniously tumbled one of our enemies into the brook. Like Charley, too, when the police attacked us, he had no jacket on, but his braces were about his hips, his forage-cap was cocked on “three hairs,” and the chin-strap turned over the crown. He was, as he afterwards remarked, “whistling the ‘Groves of Blarney,’ and thinking of nothing but the bacon;” when the four policemen surrounded him and forthwith proceeded to take him to the station-house, followed by a crowd who rapidly gathered from all parts of the barracks. Now, it so happened that Barney Camel had but one hour previously returned with a detachment who had formed an escort of Her Majesty and suite from Buckingham Palace to Windsor Castle (at that period the railway between London and Windsor had not been formed). Barney had groomed his horse, cleaned his saddlery, and was about to enjoy his frugal meal as he thought, in peace, when he was marched off to the police-station. A sergeant, however, was sent to tender evidence in his behalf, viz, that he had been on duty as stated, and at the time the alleged assault was committed on the police, he must have been on the road between Hounslow and Windsor. The result was that Barney was discharged, and we never heard any more of our eventful bathing-excursion, probably because the police had figured so ingloriously in the contest.

While stationed here, the Earl of Cardigan, who was then lieutenant-colonel of the 11th Hussars, frequently came down from London to be present at our reviews and field-days on Hounslow Heath. The gallant earl, when Lord Brudenell, held a commission in our regiment, and he had ever taken a great interest in the corps; indeed, it was said that soon after his duel with Captain Tucket, which occurred about the period of which I write, he had offered our colonel 8000 pounds to exchange commissions. Much has been written and said in reference to the public conduct of this distinguished officer, namely, “that he did not perform his duty at the battle of Balaklava as became a general.” To these scandalous and scurrilous assertions I am in a position to give a *decided* and most *emphatic* contradiction. The many incidents connected with the war in the Crimea, and that action in particular, will form the subject of the concluding portion of these chapters; but I may here observe that the Earl of Cardigan rode as far and fought as well as any other man engaged. The truth is, he never was a particular favourite with the officers of his own regiment, or any other corps collectively, although individually he has ever had many friends. The reason is plain: he invariably kept young officers to their duty. Officers and men must be thorough soldiers – not “Miss Nancy” sort of fellows – to please *him* at a field-day, through which he can, in my opinion, put a regiment or a brigade with more quickness and precision than any other officer in Her Majesty’s service.

But it is time to return to my story. One of our officers had a very large monkey of the baboon species, which he kept chained in a kennel in rear of the stables set apart for officers' horses. It was a favourite diversion with some of our men to turn "Jocko" loose, and let him scamper all over the barrack-yard; and this he decidedly enjoyed, until perceived by the dogs, of which there were always a great number of all sorts about the barracks. When once these got sight or scent of Jocko, they would quickly unite themselves into a pack, and, followed by a motley crowd of partly-dressed men and the children of the married soldiers (the most mischievous of all children), Jocko would lead them a chase round and round the yard, until some of the dogs got unpleasantly near, when he would turn round on his pursuers and chatter in the most laughable manner, which mostly kept them at bay until he had got second wind, and off he would go again. On one of these occasions he was more than usually pressed by a new arrival in barracks – a very large Scotch deerhound, a complete stranger to Jocko. The monkey dashed round the barrack-yard at a tremendous pace, looking behind him and chattering to his enemies at every bound. It was during the mid-day stable hour, a period of the day when all the men and officers are supposed to be in barracks. On came Jocko at a tearing pace, with the jaws of Bos, the Highland deerhound, within a yard of his tail, and the rest of the pack scattered a long way behind, at distances according to their ability to keep up the pace. The sergeant-major of my troop, who had been promoted partly in consequence of his growing too fat to serve in the ranks, stood at a stable-door, which was open; and Jocko, being more anxious for a friendly shelter than ever I had before seen him, darted between the fat non-commissioned officer's legs, followed by Bos through the same opening into the stable. The sudden collision sent the sergeant-major plump on his back. Jocko jumped on to the back of the first horse he came near, from whence he sent such a tirade of chatter as set every horse in the stable capering and kicking at the unusual row. Bos was bundled out of the stable, but how to get at Jocko was quite another thing. He evidently thought Bos was waiting for him outside, and, determined not to be moved without a struggle, he stuck his sharp claws into the back of the horse, who, suffering from the acute pain and affright of his novel rider, was nearly mad; now rearing with his fore-feet in the manger, and then lashing out with his hind-feet, it was dangerous to approach him. In vain was Jocko pommelled with the handle of a stable-fork; it only made him stick the faster. At last we hit upon the idea of leading out the horse to the side of Jocko's kennel, which he no sooner perceived than he jumped from the horse's back and entered it.

## Chapter Nine

Who has done this deed? All are suspect,  
While yet the guilty one is undiscovered:  
We stand alike condemn'd, alike acquitted —  
The guilty innocent, the innocent guilty.  
Let rigid search be straightway made.

Amidst all the scenes of wild fun which even the life of a private soldier is at times enlivened, events occasionally occur that have a depressing effect upon the mind. We had a “sergeant shoemaker” who was at the head of the bootmaking department of the regiment; he was the very soul of “element, divarshun, and fun,” as my Irish comrades would say. It was his custom to visit the barrack-rooms every morning, generally while at breakfast, for the purpose of ascertaining whether any boots wanted repairing, or if any of us required a new pair. He always had a kindly word and a joke for such as he was well acquainted with, having served as a private in the ranks until promoted to his lucrative position. Going up to each of our beds, he would take down the boots from the shelf, and turn them soles upwards with as much diligence as the troop-farrier daily examined the shoes of our horses. “Pat,” he would say, “you want a new pair of heels on these boots.”

“Fred, you are born to be a rich man: your boot-soles are worn out in the middle, and the sides are scarcely touched.”

“Terry, I must speak to Sergeant Williams,” (the drill sergeant); “you are growing Sheffield-knee’d; the soles of *your* boots are worn down on the inside and not touched on the outside.”

“Denny Smith, your mother must have reared *you*, for shure you must have been bow-legged from an infant; *your* boot-soles are worn as much on the outside as Terry’s are on the inside.”

“Arrah, now, Tim O’Leary, I wonder you’re not ashamed of yourself for bringing disgrace on our illegant corps by wearing these thundering ould crab shells wid a patch on the side of each. Shure I’ll go bail there’s never a man in the regiment would wear a patch on his boots but yourself; I’ll report you to your captain, so I will, for the sergeant-major told me your account has been quite clear these four months, and there’s never a better-looking dragoon in the service: pity that you should be spoiled entirely for the matther of a pair of illegant boots.” In this fashion he would rattle away with his tongue while examining our boots, and, slinging such as wanted repairs over his arm, bustle out of one room into another.

The barrack-rooms are approached by a flight of stone steps leading from the yard, and one morning when our poor sergeant-shoemaker had been more than usually jocular, he unfortunately missed his footing at the top of one of these flights of steps, and falling headlong to the bottom, broke his neck and died on the spot. There he lay, poor fellow, with his face turned upwards, until the surgeon was summoned and pronounced him dead, when he was carried to the hospital. He was buried in the little churchyard at Heston with military honours, of which he was richly deserving.

Soon after this unfortunate incident, another occurred that caused some commotion in the corps. There is a powder-mill on Hounslow Heath, where we went through all our field-drill. On one occasion, during a field-day, a waggon was being loaded with powder, to which was attached a team of four horses: we had just thrown out a party of skirmishers, who were firing away some distance from the mill. It was then the custom for the “squad-sergeants” to visit the barrack-rooms for the purpose of serving out blank ammunition prior to the troops marching out to a field-day, and the men were supposed to take their ball-cartridges from their pouches and replace them with blank, leaving the ball-ammunition on the shelf above their beds. On the day to which I allude, the skirmishers were keeping up a brisk fire on an imaginary enemy, when one of the horses attached to the waggon

standing at the powder-mill was seen to drop suddenly, struggle for a few moments, and then lie still. Those who were not so intent on their duty as to be able to observe this circumstance, also observed the waggoner making signs as if something extraordinary had happened, and all the while pointing to the prostrate horse, while a crowd of workmen collected out of the mill; the colonel, however, took no heed of the matter until all the movements were at an end, and the skirmishers recalled to their places in the ranks; he then commanded the regiment to “sit at ease,” and the excited waggoner was permitted to explain what had occurred.

He said that one of his horses “there lying dead yonder” had been shot “clean through the head.” The adjutant rode up to the mill, and found that a *bullet* had entered the horse’s head just under the eye. Now, we had never had an officer in the regiment that was decidedly unpopular, and, it was *thought*, never a man that would be coward enough to adopt this manner of retaliation or revenge for any grievance he might be labouring under. The ball that killed the horse *might* have been intended for the breast of a commissioned or a non-commissioned officer, but the impression was decidedly to the contrary – that it was the result of some accident or carelessness which could be explained. Nevertheless, it was necessary that a searching investigation should take place, and, whether through design or carelessness, any man had left a ball-cartridge in his pouch, he would most assuredly be punished. Not one of us could be pronounced free from suspicion, for in the hurry of preparing for a field-day, any soldier (as these matters were then conducted) might have left one or more ball-cartridges in his pouch. The whole regiment was called to “attention,” and we were ordered to divest ourselves of the pouches and belts, and throw them on the ground in front of our horses; the squad-sergeants dismounted and made a strict examination of the remaining rounds of ammunition, but not one round of ball was discovered, and every man had his proper number of blank. Notwithstanding this, however, the same uncertainty existed as to which of us had discharged the round of ball that killed the horse, and a number of non-commissioned officers were told off to proceed at once to barracks to examine and count the ammunition left there. It seemed an age, though little more than an hour, till they returned.

At last a cloud of dust was seen along the lane that led from the barracks to the heath, and in a few minutes the messengers halted in front of the regiment: every man’s heart beat – at least, I know that mine did – as one of them delivered his report in an under-tone to the colonel. The adjutant ran his eye along the line until it rested on Bob Norris, one of the best, the steadiest, and most harmless men in the corps, who had borne an irreproachable character ever since he had enlisted. He was ordered to the front, and commanded by the adjutant (a man who had risen from the ranks), in a fierce tone and manner, to account for one of his ten rounds of ball-ammunition found to be missing, while one round of blank was found on the floor of the barrack-room close to his bed. Poor fellow, it was evident that he could not explain; indeed, he could not speak; all who knew the man’s disposition thoroughly, knew also that he must have made a mistake in the exchange of the ammunition. What so easy and so probable? Other matters of far less importance in the internal arrangement of a regiment were scrupulously observed with a fuss and a bother that was positively sickening to any man of sound common sense: why not have a box with a lock and key in every room, and let the troop-sergeants collect every round of ball-ammunition, and place them in this box prior to issuing the blank for field-firing?

Poor Bob Norris was divested of his arms, and marched off between two of his comrades, a prisoner to barracks. The case was investigated in due course; the owner of the horse was paid for his loss by the Government – 60 pounds; and Bob got twenty-one days’ kit drill. This was said by some non-commissioned officers to be a lenient sentence, in consequence of his previous good character and the commanding officer taking a merciful view of his case. The ball, he said, “might have been intended for one of the superior officers or it might not,” he was willing to take the latter view of the case and give the prisoner the benefit. As a punishment for carelessness, however, the prisoner would, in addition to the drill, be kept on the stoppages as long as he remained in the regiment, and in the

event of his requiring to purchase his discharge, he would not be allowed to do so unless the whole of the money advanced by Government to recompense the man for the loss of the horse was refunded.

Thus Bob was placed in a most unfortunate and pitiable position, positively *nailed to the service* for sixteen more years, without ever being allowed to draw a farthing of pay in money, and although he was as good as gold, and true to his colours as steel, he could not “put up” with such hardships as these: he had, he said, enlisted solely because “he thought he should like a soldier’s life, and had made up his mind to deserve, and, if possible, to attain promotion.” This stroke of pure misfortune had completely crushed all his hopes, he became sullen and morose, and after wearily plodding in the barrack-yard with the heavy burden of his kit (about 60 pounds weight) on his back for four hours during each of six days, he dashed the pack from his back with a heavy thud on the floor of the barrack-room. The expression of his fine open countenance plainly betokened that “something was brewing in Bob’s mind,” as old Jem Page remarked while burnishing his spurs. When the *réveillé* sounded the next morning at five o’clock, Bob Norris’s bed was empty: he had quitted it and scaled the barrack-wall during the night, and was heard of no more as a soldier in our regiment.

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