

It is probable that the expression on the face of the recipient of that kick was not one of gratitude, for the donor remarked:

“‘You great hulking snooker, I suppose if you were not a *neux* you would thrash me?’

“‘Undoubtedly,’ was the reply. For which answer he was summoned to the racquet-court, the usual place of punishment, and very severely belted, the buckle end of the belt being sometimes used for emphasis, by the four senior corporals of his division, each in their turn, commencing with the junior. The correct thing was to stand perfectly still without flinching or remonstrance, and the arms folded—which had a dignified aspect, and saved the knuckles from the buckle end.

“At the conclusion of the punishment the senior remarked: ‘So much for being a mutinous looking beggar.’”

The author goes on to tell us of some of the pleasant little ways the old cadets had of amusing themselves with the *neux*. Two instances are well worth repeating. On one occasion “a dark-complexioned, sardonic ‘snooker,’ a professed atheist, who made himself conspicuous for blasphemy in a by no means strait-laced community, was appropriately nicknamed ‘the demon.’ To accentuate the resemblance (as Henry Irving’s limelight was not then in vogue) blue blazes were extemporised by pouring eau-de-Cologne on his hair and setting fire to it, with the result that not only his hair but his face was severely burnt, and his eyes only narrowly escaped.

“Another boy, of adipose tissue and sedentary habits that rendered activity distasteful, was styled the ‘Bounding Bâchute.’ His fat person was compulsorily arrayed in extremely tight and brilliantly coloured bathing-drawers, in which he was made to climb to the top of the high cupboard that nearly reached the ceiling of the barrack-room, and from this coign of vantage to jump through the top of the half-tester barrack-bed, splitting the calico, and coming down in a cloud of dust amid the applause of his tormentors.”

In the days when provincial theatres were few and far from comfortable, one of the great sources of amusement at the different towns and villages was the annual fair. That held at Old Charlton was particularly popular with all classes of people, and especially—owing to its proximity—with the cadets. The most cheerful time to visit it was the evening, when the quieter folk had gone home. Then the flaring lights, merry-go-rounds, shooting-saloons, and drinking booths attracted a crowd of wild “young bloods” and other roisterers, and affairs went very joyously indeed. So many breaches of discipline arose through this fair that, in 1840, the Master-General put the place out of bounds. But this was nothing to the cadets; and, as it was the general custom to wear masks if desired, many of them, so disguised, went there secretly.

The year 1845, however, witnessed the greatest outbreak in this respect. For many days previously the word had been passing round, and a well-organised expedition planned, in which practically every cadet, *volens volens*, was included. The only exceptions were the corporals whose turn it was to be on duty, as it was felt that their punishment, in event of discovery, would be too severe to make the game worth the risk. A rendezvous was selected outside the enclosure, and 8.30 p.m. fixed for the start.

As the clock struck the half-hour, 122 cadets—armed with bludgeons and head-staves—rushed from their rooms, leaped the “ha-ha,” and ran to the appointed spot. When the last arrived, they were fallen in, numbered, and marched off by the corporals in due military form. On their way to Charlton they were joined by many soldiers and marines, who fell-in in rear of the column, which soon attained formidable proportions.

Reaching the fair, they marched up the principal street, clearing everyone out of the way, overturning stalls and putting out lights. The people, however, organised a determined resistance, and the invading army was speedily

surrounded by a huge crowd which—to the battle-cry of “Miaouw! Pussy-cats! Miaouw!”—advanced fiercely to the assault. Taking possession of a handy booth, with a platform as an outwork, the cadets made a stout resistance, but were eventually compelled to retreat before overwhelming numbers and a fearful shower of hurtling brick-bats, sticks, and stones. Forming a compact body, they fought their way out of the fair in excellent order, a desperate attempt to carry off the “fat woman,” and to open the tiger’s cage, being fortunately frustrated by the police!

But the perils of the night were not over yet, for presently the head of the column ran into the officer on duty. The absence of all sound in the barracks had aroused his suspicions, and resulted in the discovery of the expedition. Hastily collecting the eight corporals who had not joined in the venture, his instinct had guided him in the direction of Charlton, with the above successful result. “*Sauve qui peut!*” became the order of the day, and, scattering in all directions, the cadets bolted for the Academy. A hot pursuit was made, and several captured—chiefly by the officer. One unfortunate, in endeavouring to leap the “ha-ha” in the dark, caught his foot firmly between two branches, and was suspended, head downwards, and quite unable to extricate himself. He was subsequently captured in this ignominious position.

The police authorities took a lenient view of the escapade, viewing it as mere boyish folly, and were satisfied by payment being made for the damages. Most of the stallholders put in for small amounts, and received due recompense. An item, which was, however, not allowed, was the claim for £10 made by the afore-mentioned “fat lady” for “damage to her nerves”! The Master-General also dealt lightly with the offenders: no one was dismissed; but the under officers and corporals concerned were reduced, and all leave was stopped.

In 1836 a Regulation Sword was first given as a prize

GENTLEMEN CADETS.

1799.

1820.



1825.

1848.

CORPORALS, R. M. A.

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