

**THE VETERANS OF
CHELSEA HOSPITAL, IN
THREE VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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The Veterans of Chelsea Hospital, in Three Volumes, Vol. II by George Robert Gleig

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GEORGE ROBERT GLEIG

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THE
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VETERANS,
OF
①
CHELSEA HOSPITAL. ①

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE SURVEYOR," "TRADITIONS OF CHELSEA COLLEGE,"
"COUNTRY CURATE," ETC.

① ② ③
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1844.

THE VETERANS
OF
CHELSEA HOSPITAL.

HARGROVE'S STORY.

CHAPTER V.

MY CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT IMPROVE.

THE day had fully dawned when I lay down; and my slumbers were, as may be imagined, both feverish and unrefreshing. I went through again, in my dreams, all the horrors which had been enacted while I was awake; and saw strange phantoms which, somehow or another, appeared to be connected with them. I fancied that from the sharper's room I had escaped to the Bungalow, on the Hoogley, and sought my mother from one apartment to another till I found her. She was very pale, and her raven hair hung in confused masses over her shoulders; while across them a bandage seemed to have been drawn, of the cause of which I was not ignorant. I knew, in fact, that she was dead; yet I spoke to her as if she had been a living woman.

What shall I say? She told me, more in sorrow than in anger, that my career would end fatally. She entreated me to have pity, not so much upon myself as upon her; and wrung her hands with a gesture so piteous, that to this hour I have never forgotten it. I started from my pillow, awoke with a cold sweat upon my brow, and saw that I was not alone. I rubbed my eyes; and, after an involuntary sob or two, ascertained that the individual that hung over me was Jem.

"Jem," said I, "what means this? Why do you disturb me thus early? I have only just lain down, and must have some sleep."

"So I suppose, your honour," replied Jem, dejectedly. "The state of your dress, and the disorder in which I find you, proclaim as much; and yet it is within half an hour of morning parade."

I sprang out of bed; and, running towards the mirror, beheld reflected there a spectacle which quite unmanned me. My coat was torn from the collar to the skirt; my epaulet was gone; there was blood upon my face, which had run down so as to stain my very small-clothes, and a large black weal blocked up one of my eyes. Whatever indistinctness of memory might have heretofore attached to me, was dispelled in an instant. I recollected all that had taken place over-night; and, in an agony of remorse, which amounted well-nigh to despair, I threw myself down upon the bed again, and groaned aloud.

"It's no use desponding now, sir," said Jem. "I need not ask what has happened; but if you wish to save your commission — if you hope to

escape absolute ruin, rise and put yourself to rights a bit, and be in readiness to turn out when the drum beats. The colonel is on the prowl; and should you be absent, or even late, there's no telling what may happen."

"I don't care what happens, Jem," replied I; "I am a lost man, in every sense of the word. They may take my commission from me, if they will; for I cannot fall lower than I am."

"Don't say so, my dear master," answered the kind and faithful fellow. "The money's all gone, I dare say; I was prepared for that, as soon as I saw that you were bent on keeping your last night's engagement. But it can't be helped. It was all your own, and you had a right to do with it what you liked. So, pray, pray get up and dress; and we can talk things over, if you are so condescending as to open your mind to me, when the morning parade is ended. At all events, you are no worse than you were this time yesterday."

I would have fain resisted the affectionate creature's appeals, but he would take no denial; so I rose, threw off my soiled and tattered garments, and dressed for parade. I washed my face, too, carefully, and had the satisfaction to perceive that, except in the matter of the black eye, no serious traces of an affray adhered to me; but that was terrible.

"How can I show myself on parade, with such a stamp as this on my forehead?" demanded I.

"Pooh, pooh! never mind that," answered Jem. "Put on your cocked hat a little askew, and draw it down over the left side of your face; and nobody

will notice, I'll undertake to say, whether there be a mark there or not."

I acted upon Jem's suggestion, and flattered myself, when all was done, that a pretty close examination of my features would be necessary to trace out the bruise; and, as I had no reason to suppose that we were going to be more narrowly inspected than usual, I counted on passing muster. But I was mistaken: whether the colonel had received intimation of the fracas over-night, or that his hawk's-eye perceived at once that my bearing was somewhat different from what it used to be, I cannot tell; but I had scarcely taken my place in the ranks, when he called aloud to me,—

"Mr. Hargrove, why do you wear your hat in that slovenly and unsoldier-like fashion? Don't you know that his Majesty's regulations require it to be worn athwart ships? Put it to rights, sir, immediately, and don't let the point of it come over the line of your eye-brows."

I could not refuse to obey, of course; and the consequence was that, no sooner was the position of the hat shifted, than the swollen and blackened cheek became visible. The colonel did not permit it to pass unnoticed.

"Halloo, sir!" cried he; "what's the meaning of such a mark upon your face? Have you been boxing over-night, and setting an example to the men of riot and insubordination?"

"I met with an accident, sir," replied I, lowering my sword; "and would have asked leave to absent myself from parade, had there been time; but there was not."

“And so you have come to disgrace yourself to the whole corps? Very well, sir; I have heard of some pretty doings in this part of the garrison; and, take my word for it, the truth shall be brought out. Mr. Jack, order a court of inquiry to assemble after parade, at the mess-room, to investigate certain matters affecting the credit of the regiment, and to report to me accordingly.”

So saying, the colonel turned his attention to somebody else; and, by and by, his ill-humour having fully vented itself, the business of the parade went on. I need not add that to me it was an affair more than ordinarily irksome, or that when it came to a close, I was somewhat puzzled to determine whether I should not have been thankful to have had it indefinitely prolonged. As soon as the word “dismiss” was given, I hurried back to my quarters. Jem was there, as I expected; and so completely had the kind-hearted fellow won my confidence, that I proceeded at once to unburthen my sorrows to him, as if we had been on a footing of the most perfect equality. He bore the announcement of the loss of his money with the calmness of a stoic; he heard what I had to say concerning the brawl with patience, and did not seem alarmed at the prospect of the court of inquiry, though he had no more doubt than myself that it would have some reference to the affair in question.

“Nobody saw your honour,” was his reply, “except they as won’t bear witness against you. The colonel may suspect what he will; but where evidence is wanting, what are his suspicions worth?”

Jem’s view of the case was at least a consolatory

one; and, as the event proved, it was a just one. The court met; I was called upon to answer certain questions, which I did as vaguely and generally as I could. Other persons were in like manner examined, and with a like result; so that the report given in neither confirmed nor removed the suspicions with which the colonel professed to have been haunted. But he seemed determined to get rid of some of his officers at all events; and with me, at least, he succeeded. He sent for me to his quarters; and told me that though he might not be able just at that moment to bring any charge home, he had the best reasons to believe that I had been conducting myself in a very improper manner. "As to your debts," continued he, "they are notorious to all the garrison; and it is very unpleasant to me to be told that duns are for ever haunting the barracks where my regiment lies. Besides, there will be writs out against you immediately, if none be already issued, — and what is to become of you?"

I answered that I really did not know.

"Well then," replied he, "I will tell you what to do. Take yourself off to the south side of the town, and I will give you leave from parades and guards for a time. If in that interval you have any friend that will come forward and clear you, good and well; you shall return to your duty, and we may get an exchange for you into some other corps: but if not, you must take the consequences."

I could not conceal from myself that in what the colonel said there was a great deal of reason. From morning till night my room door had of late been beset by duns, and the language of some of them