

CHAPTER XXXIII

SHORT STORIES OF UNIVERSITY LIFE - 1869-1893

1. Military Drill

Military drill was required of all male Freshmen and Sophomores and was cordially disliked by all, partly because it was compulsory, partly because it cut into playtime two afternoons each week and chiefly because it seemed utterly useless. Approximately a quarter of a century had elapsed since the Civil War had closed, and that the United States would ever again be engaged in a war seemed to students of that day impossible. We never debated preparedness or, so far as Grandfather can recall, any militaristic topic except the uselessness of compulsory military training.

Shortly after registration day, all Freshmen were summoned out for drill, which was conducted by a regular army officer. After about a month of setting-up exercises, we were furnished with some old army muskets which were heavier than those in current use in the Army. A little later some mischievous elf stole all the metal bands which held the "barrels" on the "stocks" of the rifles. For several weeks we drilled without rifles, and no amount of university inquisition produced any light on the missing bands.

Then one day we were furnished with Civil War muskets borrowed from the State Capitol Museum. These were much heavier than the ones at which the student protest had been aimed. A day or so later all the missing bands were found in a sack lying on the campus.

2. Lectures on Hygiene

As if military drill were not enough to keep a new student humble, a brand new indignity was heaped upon the Freshmen of '93. All were ordered to enroll for a series of lectures to be given by the new dean of women's hall! The dean, Dr. Frisby, was a maiden lady with all the austere dignity expected of a dean of women in the early '90's, and it was obvious that '93 was in for a bad time.

The razzing received from upper classmen made this indignity seem well nigh unbearable. However, there was no escaping the inevitable, and the '93 Freshmen dutifully but with sportive conversation filed into the first lecture and in their most nonchalant manner let their minds wander to pleasanter fields, while the serious-minded dean of women explained to the young men of '93 that if they did not have enough bedding, they could keep warm on a cold night by putting newspapers between their quilts.

Shortly after, even a worse indignity befell the class of '93 - a quiz on Madam Frisby's preceding lectures was announced. "Mr. Rogers," says the stern-visaged dean of women to Charley Rogers, one of those irrepressible youths who never grew up, "if you did not have enough bedding and decided to put a paper between your blankets to keep you warm, what kind of paper would you use?" "To get the maximum of protection," says the clever Freshman, "I would use a Republican paper." The class laughed uproariously, but the dean lacked a sense of humour and "conned" Charley - i.e., conditioned him so that he had to improve his record by a second examination or take the course of lectures over again the next term - an added indignity which I regret to say dampened the youthful spirits of many of the class of '93.

3. Washington's Birthday

It was announced that the dean of the Law School would deliver to the students a lecture on George Washington on Washington's Birthday. A certain student who wished always to be in the limelight suggested that the students ought to show their appreciation of the dean for giving this lecture, and he worked it out that at the close of the dean's lecture, he would jump on a chair and shout: "Who was George Washington?" To which all would respond - "First in War, First in Peace and First in the Hearts of His Countrymen."

The dean delivered a scholarly and brilliant address. As he closed and the hand clapping died down, this self-assertive student leapt upon a chair and at the top of his voice, shouted: "Who was George Washington?" Whereupon there followed a great silence, and the dean, looking with surprise at the dazed student still standing on the chair, remarked: "Young man, either there is something the matter with you or else your early education was sadly neglected." Whereupon the meeting broke up amidst applause and laughter.

4. The Debating Society of the Short-Course Agricultural Students

During the winter months, young farmers came to the University for a few weeks to take courses in agriculture, and these short-course agricultural students had a debating society. To this society prominent debaters of the campus would sometimes go for a visit and, upon invitation, would take part, impressing the short-course agricultural students with their wit and brilliance.

One evening one of the Athenean seniors, known for his loud voice and power of emphasis rather than for brilliance of ideas, paid one of these visits and, upon invitation, orated loudly and forcefully after his usual manner. Following his oration, a green looking farmer lad stood up and said: "The preceding speaker reminds me of a bell on my pa's farm - all mouth and tongue and noise and nothing in it."

5. '93 Has a Wedding

In our junior year, two of our classmates - more rustic than romantic in appearance - surprised the class by getting married. They remained in the University and the following year kept house and attended school as well as caring for a son and heir.

Twenty years later, when '93 celebrated its twentieth reunion, Grandfather attended with his son Charles, aged thirteen. Another '93 man also had a son of about the same age with him. These were the two oldest children offered as class exhibits and Grandfather and the other '93 father felt very proud of themselves. But at the class luncheon where messages from absent members were presented, a wire was read from Anderson, of matrimonial fame in our college days, stating: "I regret that I cannot attend the reunion. I am detained at home by the birth of twin grandsons."

6. 311 Brooks Street

Grandfather and his roommate, Fred Jackson, got well acquainted with an ancient classical student who was in all their classes - Herbert Siggleko. Herbert and Grandfather also found a common bond of sympathy

in the fact that they were younger than most of the class and also were smaller in stature.

Now Herbert's parents ran a student's rooming house at 311 Brooks Street and Jackson and your Grandfather took a room there for their Sophomore year. Herbert's parents were very kind to all their roomers and proceeded to look after Jackson and your grandfather much as they did their own son Herbert. Grandfather always retained a very warm place in his heart for Mr. and Mrs. Siggleke.

Herbert was a good student, a loyal member of Philomatia, and the friendship between him and Grandfather grew stronger. But what Grandfather wished especially to write about was that Herbert had a kid sister, named Winnie, in high school, with a face like one of Fra Angelica's angels but with a mind uncommonly bent on mischievous pranks. She was a very lovely girl and a favorite with all the roomers in spite of her irrepressible tendency to disconcerting practical jokes.

A few samples will give you an idea of how she enlivened the house throughout the year. One of the roomers, a Freshman - Rohn by name - was huskily built and conceived of himself as a distance runner. Joining a squad, he arose early every morning for a mile run before breakfast. One morning the whole house was aroused by vociferous and prolonged profanity issuing from Rohn's room. Upon investigation, it appeared that Rohn was having a bad time trying to get into his running suit. Winnie, it developed, had run the trouser legs and the blouse arms through her mother's sewing machine.

On another occasion, Rohn and several of the students woke up with severe colds and had in their opinion suffered from a sudden and violent attack of LaGrippe. However, Mrs. Siggleko could not discover that any of them had a temperature and upon investigation - for whenever anything happened Mrs. Siggleko suspected that Winnie was somehow back of it - discovered that Winnie had sprinkled a little red pepper on their pillows the evening before.

Just one more of her pleasantries. Her older sister and a friend both had beaus one Sunday afternoon and they all decided to pop corn in the kitchen. Winnie offered to assist, but her offer was declined. One of the gallant young men started to build a fire in the cook stove which, as was usual in those days, burned wood. But it ended only in smoke. Then the other young man tried, with still more smoke. Then Winnie's sister tried, but again only volumes of smoke which began to fill the whole house. Mrs. Siggleko, attracted by the smoke, went into the kitchen which would have been suffocating with smoke except that the windows had been opened. She said: "Oh, you young folks do not know how to build a fire - I'll build one for you." But again nothing but volumes of smoke.

"I'll bet Winnie has been up to something," says Mrs. Siggleko. Winnie, with an angelic look on her face, was studying her lessons, but it happened that the stove pipe on its way to the chimney went up through Herbert's room and Winnie, slipping into his room unobserved, had pulled the pipe out of the chimney, tied a paper over the end and slipped it back into the chimney.

Perhaps one would surmise that one with so mischievous a disposition would come to some bad end, but as a matter of fact, Winnie grew into a fine young woman and married a successful young lawyer. Her untimely death a few years later brought sorrow to all the former roomers at 311 Brooks who had been sometimes vexed and many times amused by her pleasantries.

7. Halloween

In the early '90's every street car of Madison was drawn by a horse and one of the time-honored customs on Halloween was for the students to push these street cars off the tracks into the ditch, from which the lone horse could not extricate the car. Thus, in the course of a playful hour the students would tie up the whole street car system.

This peeved the management and one year they decided to break up the system. So they put on extra policemen in plain clothes and when the sport started, these plain-clothes "cops" nabbed some of the students, threw them into jail and left them to languish there the rest of the night. Among these students was Hooper, who was a good student and a prominent debater. Now it happened that Hooper got out of jail next morning just in time to attend his French class. The news of his evening's exploit had been noised about among the students, but had not yet reached the French teacher - Miss Gay. So early in the class she called upon Hooper to translate and he was forced, amidst some tittering on the part of the students, rather sheepishly to report himself "unprepared".

Miss Gay, quite perplexed at this sudden failure on the part of one of her excellent students, said: "What was the matter, Mr. Hooper,

did you not have time to study your lesson?" "Oh, yes," replied Hooper, "I had plenty of time, what I lacked was not time, but facilities." Miss Gay could see from the loud laughter on the part of the class that perhaps she had better not push for further information.

6. A Wrestling Match

Into the Poynton Club in Grandfather's Senior year, came a very large Freshman by the name of Kull. In age Kull was only about seventeen, but weighed well over 250 pounds and everybody thought him a living replica of the Fat Boy of Pickwick Papers. As a matter of fact, Kull was not fat, but muscular, and a couple of years later when football was introduced, Kull trained down to 235 pounds and became one of the star centers of all time.

However, that Kull was anything but hopelessly overfat had at the time of this story never occurred to the diners at Poynton Club. Among these diners was a Freshman by the name of Beffel, small of stature but quite athletic - in fact, he had been an athletic instructor in a small town Y.M.C.A. Now Beffel used to amuse himself by telling Kull that he would throw him down some day, to all of which Kull would grunt "Bet you won't."

For military drill it was the custom of students to buy second hand uniforms, but, alas for Kull, no uniform had ever been made large enough for him and he was compelled to buy a new one. It was the custom of the students to come from drill directly to supper and when the gigantic Kull appeared proudly in a new uniform, all began to kid him. In those days, the streets of Madison were not paved and after a three days' rain

such as had just occurred, the heavy clay soil on the street would stand almost a foot deep and mud would be carried onto the sidewalks, covering them with a thin coating of slime.

The night Kull appeared in his new uniform Beffel again began to tell how he intended to throw Kull down and this time, putting his threat into action, gave Kull a sudden trip which sent him sprawling on the sidewalk. When Kull picked himself up and saw that his new uniform was smeared with mud, he lost his temper (a thing no one before had thought him capable of doing), grasped Beffel by the collar and lifting him off the ground, stepped into the street with the mud coming to his shoe tops. Kull evidently intended to wallow Beffel around in the mud, but had not as yet learned to use his strength and he unwarily let Beffel get his feet on the ground. Whereupon Beffel gave Kull a quick trip and sent him kersplash into the thick mud of the street. When Kull arose and shook himself lion-like to see whom he might devour, everybody - Beffel and spectators alike - thought it best to "beat it" speedily. The rain was over and as the street dried, curious students, hearing of the laughable exploit, came to see just where Kull's huge frame had left a pattern of itself in the mud.

The rumors of this encounter spread rapidly and the whole Freshman class wished they might see little Beffel throw the huge fat boy. That would indeed be a sight worth seeing. So it was arranged, with the consent of both, that as an added attraction to the next Freshman class meeting, Beffel would wrestle with Kull on the campus.

The day arrived. Kull was willing to let Beffel have any hold

he wanted and insisted on just one thing: Baffel must agree not to trip him before the word "go". All was agreed upon. Baffel selected a strong underhold and set himself to show the class a fancy trick. But at the word "go", Hill just dropped his whole 250 pounds onto Baffel, crushing him down to earth with such a thud that Baffel had to be sent home for repairs. This was a sudden and unexpected denouement to the match, but the Freshmen nevertheless reported that it had been a lot of fun.

9. The Gown and the Town

The University was at the west end of Madison and at the east end was a large agricultural implement plant. Thus the city was divided into two district sections - the University and the factory, which in 1890 were near enough equal in size to occasion rivalries and an occasional row.

Factory lads at times felt an urge to curb the overbearing manners of the students and, wandering up into the University end, would beat up some student whom they found out on the street by himself. How this practice came to an end perhaps merits a couple of pages.

It seems that a couple of factory lads out for an evening's enjoyment at this sort of sport saw a student wandering leisurely along and leapt upon him to beat him up. A little later a policeman found a couple of battered-up factory boys lying in a gutter. It seems the boys had made a bad mistake. How bad the mistake was will be the better understood after a little explanation.

South of Madison, the city of Beloit stood on the state line and hence had been selected for a school of pugilism. In that day prize

fighting was under the ban of the law both in Illinois and Wisconsin, but with the training school on the state line, the pugilists could, whenever police of one state showed up, quickly get across the line into the other state.

Now it happened that one of the champion pugilists was training at Beloit and it occurred to him to visit Madison. In the evening, as he, was walking out toward the University, suddenly two youths sprang upon him and began to beat him up. The pugilist had no idea what it was all about, but concluded that if this was the prevailing sport of the town, it was quite in his line and what he did to the two youths was reported to have been plenty.

Apparently word was passed through the factory end of town that one student single-handed had nearly killed two of their best fighters. At any rate, there were no further reports of students being beaten up by factory pugilists.

10. Stolen Nuts

One more story about Kill. One pleasant afternoon, as students sometimes were wont to do, Kill and some others who dined at the Poynton Club rowed across the lake and gathered themselves each a sack of butternuts. Shortly after, Kill's butternuts disappeared, which caused Kill a great pöeve and he started sleuthing around to find who stole them. At last one day he struck a clue - he was tipped off that two youths who dined at Poynton Club had stolen the nuts and had hidden them in the loft of a barn on the premises where they had rooms.

Next night Kull stealthily entered the barn and went upstairs. Then he heard footsteps and concluded that he had better hide, so Kull buried himself in the hay. It seems these youths (whether or not they had stolen Kull's nuts never was learned) had themselves been the instigators of the rumor which led Kull to the barn. Having started the rumor, they hired the owner of the Barn to watch for any trespasser, telling him that they had heard a rumor that someone was coming that night to steal nuts which they had secreted in the hay.

The owner, seeing someone sneak into the barn, went to the loft with his lantern and seeing no one, began to prod the hay with a pitchfork, which soon brought Kull out. The owner proceeded to march Kull off toward the police station. On the way, however, the owner was intercepted by the two youths responsible for the plot. They helped Kull buy the irate owner off, and it was agreed that Kull should treat them to an oyster supper at some later occasion. Kull gave the oyster supper, but so far as Grandfather learned, did not get any further trace of the stolen butternuts.