
WEST POINT

Early in our history, the Government established a Military Academy at West Point, New York, which is still maintained. One cadet is admitted from each Congressional District of the country, and in addition some are appointed from the country at large by the President. These cadets are to serve at least eight years—four years as student cadets and four in active service, beginning as second lieutenants; but in practice, all who wish to do so may remain in the service of the Government for life.

Including the year 1897, 7,928 cadets had entered this Academy, and 4,067 had graduated before July 1, 1901. The present number of students is about five hundred, and it costs the government some eight thousand dollars to educate each student. All applicants for admission must be over seventeen and under twenty-two years of age. They are thoroughly

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examined as to physical and moral condition and mental attainments and capacity. In consequence of this, only the most capable and promising young men can be admitted.

The discipline is understood to be rigorous and the course of instruction thorough. Nearly all branches of a complete English education are covered, and the management seems to be in the hands of capable officers.

The curriculum, the regulations, and the instructions are designed to develop endurance, industry, and scholarship. Considering the fact that the young men are the pick of the land, one would expect the Academy to turn out hosts of great men. But in this respect the record is disappointing.

During the century of the existence of the West Point Academy, nearly eight thousand of the choice young men of the United States had entered its doors as students, and over four thousand had graduated; yet very few

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became famous in the history of our country, and nearly all of the few who became great had left the military service for years and had been following the pursuits of civil life, thus keeping in touch with their fellow-countrymen, and profiting by the expansion of mind and breadth of view which comes from trying to create something, and the strength and independence of character derived from shifting for one's self. Self-reliance is one of the progenitors of greatness; but it is something the professional soldier can seldom learn, because of his environment.

General Grant had left the army, and had been living the life of a civilian for a number of years, when the Rebellion called him back to his profession. General William T. Sherman had spent eight years in civil life, engaged in various pursuits, just before the Civil War. General Burnside had been in civil life about nine years before he re-entered the army again.

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General Joseph Hooker had resigned from the army and had been in civil life for eight years prior to the summer of 1861. General Meade did not at any time sever his connection with the government after graduating at West Point, but for many years he was engaged in detached service of such varied character that he had much experience of civil life.

The history of the Civil War shows that nearly all the officers who became conspicuous during the Rebellion were men who had a wide experience of life outside of the army.

There are reasons for the fact that so few West Pointers have become really great men.

The first is, that our military system, borrowed from the aristocratic and monarchical countries of Europe the mediæval and snobbish system of maintaining a wide gulf between the commissioned officers and the privates, and of making it impossible for a common soldier, no matter how deserving, to become a com-

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missioned officer without special appointment by the President.

This system, and the ideas underlying it, create in the mind of the cadet a false estimate of affairs in this world. The effect tends to make him vain and superficial. It is true that the cadets may in the first place be selected by democratic methods. But the moment they enter the Academy they begin to breathe an atmosphere hostile to the very principle of democracy. The whole tendency of their environment thereafter is to make them a class separate and apart from other people.

It is a remarkable fact that the parasite always claims to be superior to those who support him. But in the economy of the universe every truly great thing rests on a foundation of justice. This fact makes it impossible for a parasite to become great.

The young officer leaves the Academy with false ideas of life and honor. To be a gentle-

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man means, as he sees it, to observe certain rules of deportment in so-called polite society; and too often his thoughts are given up to dancing, flirting, posing, and in many cases to gambling and dissipation. To shine in the drawing-room, act the gallant to frivolous women, to draw their salary and wait for some superior to die in order to get promotion, constitute the life of many of the young officers.

It is needless to say that nothing great can come from such a life. On the contrary, it would deaden all noble impulses and aspirations. Twenty years of such a life must leave a man shrunken and barren, and incapable of the higher emotions. The discharge of his official duties becomes a dull routine, and he is a parasite maintained in comparative idleness by a great people, to whom he renders back little service of real value. One bridge-builder, risking his life in the construction of a passage-way across some turbulent water,

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displays more courage, and is worth more to his country than a whole regiment of strutting and posing army officials.

The disclosures during the Dreyfus case showed what an utterly calloused, degenerated and infamous condition existed among the officers of the French Army. The world looked on in amazement and disgust. A healthy mind must instinctively feel that men who could stoop to such infamy were incapable of rendering their country any valuable service; and an army under the control of such men must be a menace rather than a protection.

However, the Dreyfus case was but the natural fruit of the ideas and the spirit that prevail in professional military circles; and the same conditions are found in a greater or less degree in all military establishments.

Men whose business in life is to pose and dance and flirt, while they wait for someone

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to die that they may be promoted, cannot be expected to know anything about the heart-beats of a great and industrious people. They get their notions of society from the poisoned atmosphere and superficial twaddle of the drawing-room. The French officers who won the execrations of mankind no doubt began life with an honorable ambition, but they were ruined by their environment, by the ideas they imbibed, and they became the victims of false standards.

What has been said about the army applies with equal or greater force to the navy. It seems that the spirit of the cad and the snob prevails among the officers of the navy to a greater extent even than in the army. When the promotion of an intelligent and meritorious man in the ranks, who had won his promotion by brave conduct, is openly opposed by an admiral of the United States Navy, as lately happened, on the ground that the young man

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might not be able to shine at social functions on shore, then we have struck bottom in the pit of the contemptible.

No matter how great the capacity or how noble the aspirations of a young man when he enters the navy as an officer, if he is inoculated with this spirit of snobbishness there is no great career possible for him. He will become a polished parasite, and will be a bill of expense to his country.