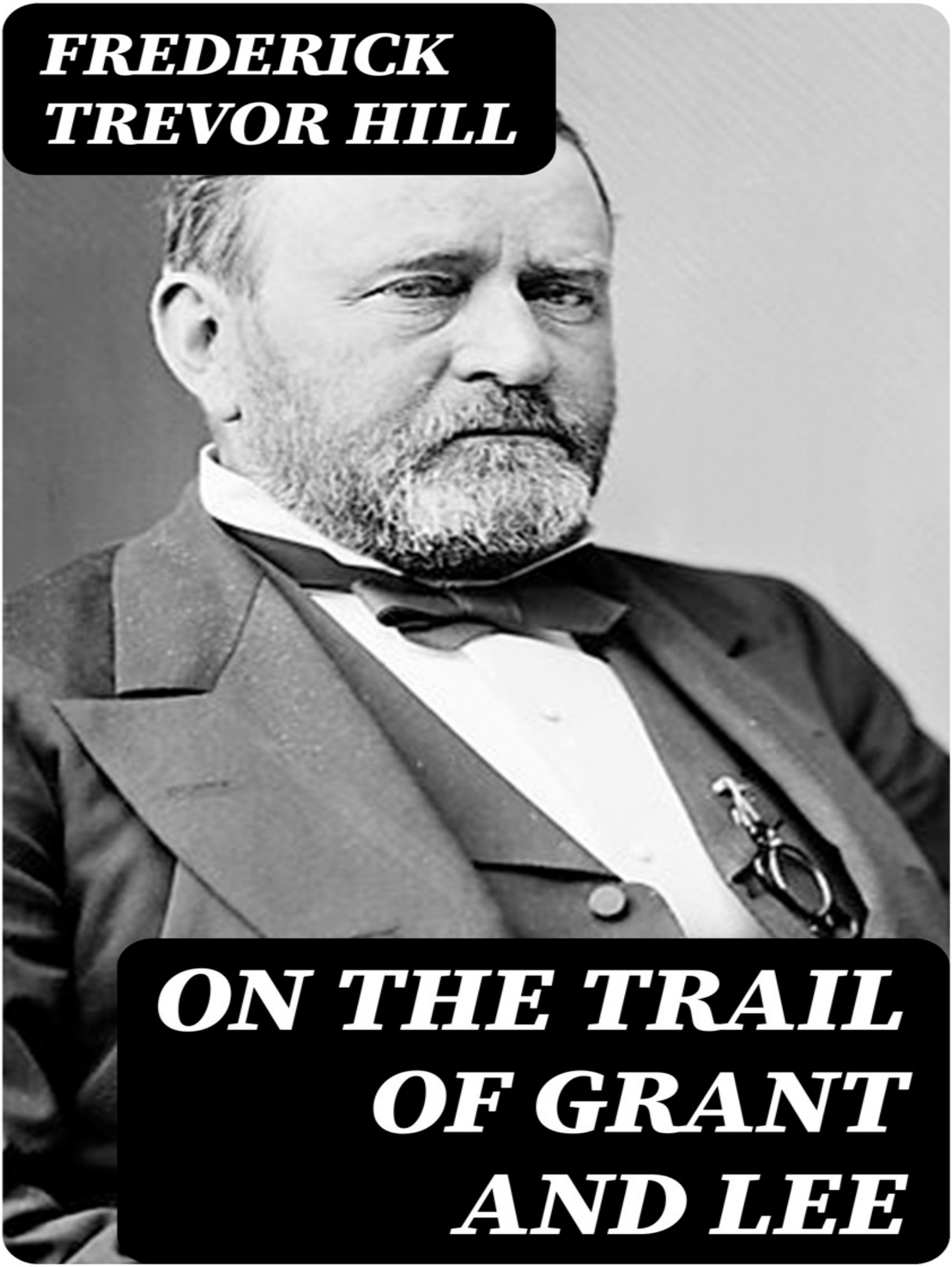
FREDERICK TREVOR HILL



ON THE TRAIL OF GRANT AND LEE

Frederick Trevor Hill

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Chapter I. — Three Civil Wars

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England was an uncomfortable place to live in during the reign of Charles the First. Almost from the moment that that ill-fated monarch ascended the throne he began quarreling with Parliament; and when he decided to dismiss its members and make himself the supreme ruler of the land, he practically forced his subjects into a revolution. Twelve feverish years followed—years of discontent, indignation and passion—which arrayed the Cavaliers, who supported the King, against the Roundheads, who upheld Parliament, and finally flung them at each other's throats to drench the soil of England with their blood.

Meanwhile, the gathering storm of civil war caused many a resident of the British Isles to seek peace and security across the seas, and among those who turned toward America were Mathew Grant and Richard Lee. It is not probable that either of these men had ever heard of the other, for they came from widely separated parts of the kingdom and were even more effectually divided by the walls of caste. There is no positive proof that Mathew Grant (whose people probably came from Scotland) was a Roundhead, but he was a man of humble origin who would naturally have favored the Parliamentary or popular party, while Richard Lee, whose ancestors had fought at Hastings and in the Crusades, is known to have been an ardent Cavalier, devoted to the King. But whether their opinions on politics differed or agreed, it was apparently the conflict between the King and Parliament that drove them from

England. In any event they arrived in America at almost the same moment; Grant reaching Massachusetts in 1630, the year after King Charles dismissed his Parliament, and Lee visiting Virginia about this time to prepare for his permanent residence in the Dominion which began when actual hostilities opened in the mother land.

The trails of Grant and Lee, therefore, first approach each other from out of the smoke of a civil war. This is a strangely significant fact, but it might be regarded merely as a curious coincidence were it not for other and stranger events which seem to suggest that the hand of Fate was guiding the destinies of these two men.

Mathew Grant originally settled in Massachusetts but he soon moved to Connecticut, where he became clerk of the town of Windsor and official surveyor of the whole colony—a position which he held for many years. Meanwhile Richard Lee became the Colonial Secretary and a member of the King's Privy Council in Virginia, and thenceforward the name of his family is closely associated with the history of that colony.

Lee bore the title of colonel, but it was to statesmanship and not to military achievements that he and his early descendants owed their fame; while the family of Grant, the surveyor, sought glory at the cannon's mouth, two of its members fighting and dying for their country as officers in the French and Indian war of 1756. In that very year, however, a military genius was born to the Virginia family in the person of Harry Lee, whose brilliant cavalry exploits were to make him known to history as "Light Horse Harry." But before his great career began, the house of Grant was

represented in the Revolution, for Captain Noah Grant of Connecticut drew his sword in defense of the colonies at the outbreak of hostilities, taking part in the battle of Bunker Hill; and from that time forward he and "Light Horse Harry" served in the Continental army under Washington until Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown.

Here the trails of the two families, AGAIN DRAWN TOGETHER BY A CIVIL STRIFE, merge for an historic moment and then cross; that of the Grants turning toward the West, and that of the Lees keeping within the confines of Virginia.

It was in 1799 that Captain Noah Grant migrated to Ohio, and during the same year Henry Lee delivered the memorial address upon the death of Washington, coining the immortal phrase "first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Ulysses Grant, the Commander of the Union forces in the Civil War, was the grandson of Captain Grant, who served with "Light Horse Harry" Lee during the Revolution; and Robert Lee, the Confederate General, was "Light Horse Harry's" son.

Thus, for the THIRD time in two and a half centuries, a civil conflict between men of the English-speaking race blazed the trails of Grant and Lee.

Chapter II. — Washington and Lee

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"Wakefield," Westmoreland County, Virginia, was the birthplace of Washington, and at Stratford in the same county and state, only a few miles from Wakefield, Robert Edward Lee was born on January 19, 1807. Seventy-five years had intervened between those events but, except in the matter of population, Westmoreland County remained much the same as it had been during Washington's youth. Indians, it is true, no longer lurked in he surrounding forests or paddled the broad Potomac in their frail canoes, but the life had much of the same freedom and charm which had endeared it to Washington. All the streams and woods and haunts which he had known and loved were known and loved by Lee, not only for their own sake, but because they were associated with the memory of the great Commander-in-Chief who had been his father's dearest friend.

It would have been surprising, under such circumstances, if Washington had not been Lee's hero, but he was more than a hero to the boy. From his father's lips he had learned to know him, not merely as a famous personage of history, but as a man and a leader of men. Indeed, his influence and example were those of a living presence in the household of "Light Horse Harry;" and thus to young Lee he early became the ideal of manhood upon which, consciously or unconsciously, he molded his own character and life. But quite apart from this, the careers of these two great Virginians were astonishingly alike.

Washington's father had been married twice, and so had Lee's; each was a son of the second marriage, and each had a number of brothers and sisters. Washington lost his father when he was only eleven years old, and Lee was exactly the same age when his father died. Mrs. Washington had almost the entire care of her son during his early years, and Lee was under the sole guidance of his mother until he had almost grown to manhood. Washington repaid his mother's devotion by caring for her and her affairs with notable fidelity, and Lee's tenderness and consideration for his mother were such that she was accustomed to remark that he was both a son and a daughter to her.

Washington's ancestors were notable, if not distinguished, people in England; while Lee could trace his descent, through his father, to Lancelot Lee, who fought at the battle of Hastings, and through his mother to Robert the Bruce of Scotland. Neither man, however, prided himself in the least on his ancestry. Indeed, neither of them knew anything of his family history until his own achievements brought the facts to light.

Washington was a born and bred country boy and so was Lee. Both delighted in outdoor life, loving horses and animals of all kinds and each was noted for his skillful riding in a region which was famous for its horsemanship. There was, however, a vast difference between Washington's education and that of Lee. The Virginian schools were very rudimentary in Washington's day; but Lee attended two excellent institutions of learning, where he had every opportunity, and of this he availed himself, displaying much the same thoroughness that characterized Washington's

work, and the same manly modesty about any success that he achieved.

By reason of his father's death and other circumstances Washington was burdened with responsibility long before he arrived at manhood, making him far more reserved and serious-minded than most school boys. This was precisely the case with Lee, for his father's death, the ill health of his mother and the care of younger children virtually made him the head of the family, so that he became unusually mature and self-contained at an early age. Neither boy, however, held aloof from the sports and pastimes of his schoolmates and both were regarded as quiet, manly fellows, with no nonsense about them, and with those qualities of leadership that made each in turn the great military leader of his age.

Never has history recorded a stranger similarity in the circumstances surrounding the youth of two famous men, but the facts which linked their careers in later years are even stranger still.

Chapter III. — Lee at West Point

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As his school days drew to a close, it became necessary for Lee to determine his future calling. But the choice of a career, often so perplexing to young men, presented no difficulty to "Light Horse Harry's" son. He had apparently always intended to become a soldier and no other thought had seemingly ever occurred to any member of his family. Appointments to the United States Military Academy were far more a matter of favor than they are to-day, and young Lee, accompanied by Mrs. Lewis (better known as Nellie Custis, the belle of Mount Vernon and Washington's favorite grandchild), sought the assistance of General Andrew Jackson. Rough "Old Hickory" was not the easiest sort of person to approach with a request of any kind and, doubtless, his young visitor had grave misgivings as to the manner in which his application would be received. But Jackson, the hero of the battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812, only needed to be told that his caller was "Light Horse Harry's" son to proffer assistance; and in his nineteenth year, the boy left home for the first time in his life to enroll himself as a cadet at West Point.

Very few young men enter that institution so well prepared for military life as was Lee, for he had been accustomed to responsibility and had thoroughly mastered the art of self-control many years before he stepped within its walls. He was neither a prig nor a "grind," but he regarded his cadetship as part of the life work which he had voluntarily chosen, and he had no inclination to let pleasure

interfere with it. With his comrades he was companionable, entering into all their pastimes with zest and spirit, but he let it be understood, without much talk, that attention to duty was a principle with him and his serious purpose soon won respect.

Rigid discipline was then, as it is to-day, strictly enforced at West Point, and demerits were freely inflicted upon cadets for even the slightest infraction of the rules. Indeed, the regulations were so severe that it was almost impossible for a cadet to avoid making at least a few slips at some time during his career. But Lee accomplished the impossible, for not once throughout his entire four years did he incur even a single demerit—a record that still remains practically unique in the history of West Point. This and his good scholarship won him high rank; first, as cadet officer of his class, and finally, as adjutant of the whole battalion, the most coveted honor of the Academy, from which he graduated in 1829, standing second in a class of forty-six.

Men of the highest rating at West Point may choose whatever arm of the service they prefer, and Lee, selecting the Engineer Corps, was appointed a second lieutenant and assigned to fortification work at Hampton Roads, in his twenty-second year. The work there was not hard but it was dull. There was absolutely no opportunity to distinguish oneself in any way, and time hung heavy on most of the officers' hands. But Lee was in his native state and not far from his home, where he spent most of his spare time until his mother died. Camp and garrison life had very little charm for him, but he was socially inclined and, renewing his acquaintance with his boyhood friends, he was soon in

demand at all the dances and country houses at which the young people of the neighborhood assembled.

Among the many homes that welcomed him at this time was that of Mr. George Washington Parke Custis (Washington's adopted grandson), whose beautiful estate known as "Arlington" lay within a short distance of Alexandria, where Lee had lived for many years. Here he had, during his school days, met the daughter of the house and, their boy-and-girl friendship culminating in an engagement shortly after his return from West Point, he and Mary Custis were married in his twenty-fifth year. Lee thus became related by marriage to Washington, and another link was formed in the strange chain of circumstances which unite their careers.

A more ideal marriage than that of these two young people cannot be imagined. Simple in their tastes and of home-loving dispositions, they would have been well content to settle down quietly to country life in their beloved Virginia, surrounded by their family and friends. But the duties of an army officer did not admit of this, and after a few years' service as assistant to the chief engineer of the army in Washington, Lee was ordered to take charge of the improvements of the Mississippi River at St. Louis, where, in the face of violent opposition from the inhabitants, he performed such valuable service that in 1839 he was offered the position of instructor at West Point. This, however, he declined, and in 1842 he was entrusted with the task of improving the defenses of New York harbor and moved with his family to Fort Hamilton, where he remained for several years. Meanwhile, he had been successively promoted to a

first lieutenancy and a captaincy, and in his thirty-eighth year he was appointed one of the visitors to West Point, whose duty it was to inspect the Academy and report at stated intervals on its condition. This appointment, insignificant in itself, is notable because it marks the point at which the trails of Grant and Lee first approach each other, for at the time that Captain Lee was serving as an official visitor, Ulysses Grant was attempting to secure an assistant professorship at West Point.

Chapter IV. — The Boyhood of Grant

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Deerfield, Ohio, was not a place of any importance when Captain Noah Grant of Bunker Hill fame arrived there from the East. Indeed, it was not then much more than a spot on the map and it has ever won any great renown. Yet in this tiny Ohio village there lived at one and the same time Owen Brown, the father of John Brown, who virtually began the Civil War, and Jesse Grant, the father of Ulysses Grant, who practically brought it to a close.

It is certainly strange that these two men should, with all the world to choose from, have chanced upon the same obscure little village, but it is still stranger that one of them should have become the employer of the other and that they should both have lived in the very same house. Such, however, is the fact, for when Jesse Grant first began to earn his living as a tanner, he worked for and boarded with Owen Brown, little dreaming that his son and his employer's son would some day shake the world.

It was not at Deerfield, however, but at Point Pleasant, Ohio, that Jesse Grant's distinguished son was born on April 27, 1822, in a cottage not much larger than the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln first saw the light. Mr. and Mrs. Grant and other members of their family differed among themselves as to what the boy should be called, but they settled the question by each writing his or her favorite name on a slip of paper and then depositing all the slips in a hat, with the understanding that the child should receive the first two names drawn from that receptacle. This resulted in the

selection of Hiram and Ulysses, and the boy was accordingly called Hiram Ulysses Grant until the United States government re-christened him in a curious fashion many years later. To his immediate family, however, he was always known as Ulysses, which his playmates soon twisted into the nickname "Useless," more or less good-naturedly applied.

Grant's father moved to Georgetown, Ohio, soon after his son's birth, and there his boyhood days were passed. The place was not at that time much more than a frontier village and its inhabitants were mostly pioneers—not the adventurous, exploring pioneers who discover new countries, but the hardy advance-guard of civilization, who clear the forests and transform the wilderness into farming land. Naturally, there was no culture and very little education among these people. They were a sturdy, self-respecting, hard-working lot, of whom every man was the equal of every other, and to whom riches and poverty were alike unknown. In a community of this sort there was, of course, no pampering of the children, and if there had been, Grant's parents would probably have been the last to indulge in it. His father, Jesse Grant, was a stern and very busy man who had neither the time nor the inclination to coddle the boy, and his mother, absorbed in her household duties and the care of a numerous family, gave him only such attention as was necessary to keep him in good health. Young Ulysses was, therefore, left to his own devices almost as soon as he could toddle, and he quickly became self-reliant to a degree that alarmed the neighbors. Indeed, some of them rushed into the house one morning shouting

that the boy was out in the barn swinging himself on the farm horses' tails and in momentary danger of being kicked to pieces; but Mrs. Grant received the announcement with perfect calmness, feeling sure that Ulysses would not amuse himself in that way unless he knew the animals thoroughly understood what he was doing.

Certainly this confidence in the boy's judgment was entirely justified as far as horses were concerned, for they were the joy of his life and he was never so happy as when playing or working in or about the stables. Indeed, he was not nine years old when he began to handle a team in the fields. From that time forward he welcomed every duty that involved riding, driving or caring for horses, and shirked every other sort of work about the farm and tannery. Fortunately, there was plenty of employment for him in the line of carting materials or driving the hay wagons and harrows, and his father, finding that he could be trusted with such duties, allowed him, before he reached his teens, to drive a 'bus or stage between Georgetown and the neighboring villages entirely by himself. In fact, he was given such free use of the horses that when it became necessary for him to help in the tannery, he would take a team and do odd jobs for the neighbors until he earned enough, with the aid of the horses, to hire a boy to take his place in the hated tan-yard.

This and other work was, of course, only done out of school hours, for his parents sent him as early as possible to a local "subscription" school, which he attended regularly for many years. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" was one of the maxims of the school, and the first duty of the boys

on assembling each morning was to gather a good-sized bundle of beech-wood switches, of which the schoolmaster made such vigorous use that before the sessions ended the supply was generally exhausted. Grant received his fair share of this discipline, but as he never resented it, he doubtless got no more of it than he deserved and it probably did him good.

Among his schoolmates he had the reputation of talking less than any of the other boys and of knowing more about horses than all of them put together. An opportunity to prove this came when he was about eleven, for a circus appeared in the village with a trick pony, and during the performance the clown offered five dollars to any boy who could ride him. Several of Ulysses' friends immediately volunteered, but he sat quietly watching the fun while one after another of the boys fell victim to the pony's powers. Finally, when the little animal's triumph seemed complete, Grant stepped into the ring and sprang upon his back. A tremendous tussle for the mastery immediately ensued, but though he reared and shied and kicked, the tricky little beast was utterly unable to throw its fearless young rider, and amid the shouts of the audience the clown at last stopped the contest and paid Ulysses the promised reward.

From that time forward his superiority as a horseman was firmly established, and as he grew older and his father allowed him to take longer and longer trips with the teams, he came to be the most widely traveled boy in the village. Indeed, he was only about fifteen when he covered nearly a hundred and fifty miles in the course of one of his journeys, taking as good care of his horses as he did of himself, and

transacting the business entrusted to him with entire satisfaction to all concerned. These long, and often lonely, trips increased his independence and so encouraged his habit of silence that many of the village people began to think him a dunce.

His father, however, was unmistakably proud of the quiet boy who did what he was told to do without talking about it, and though he rarely displayed his feelings, the whole village knew that he thought "Useless" was a wonder and smiled at his parental pride. But the smile almost turned to a laugh when it became known that he proposed to send the boy to West Point, for the last cadet appointed from Georgetown had failed in his examinations before he had been a year at the Academy, and few of the neighbors believed that Ulysses would survive as long. Certainly, the boy himself had never aspired to a cadetship, and when his father suddenly remarked to him one morning that he was likely to obtain the appointment, he receive the announcement with uncomprehending surprise.

"What appointment?" he asked

"To West Point," replied his father. "I have applied for it."

"But I won't go!" gasped the astonished youth.

"I think you will," was the quiet but firm response, and Grant, who had been taught obedience almost from his cradle, decided that if his father thought so, he did, too.

But, though the young man yielded to his parent's wishes, he had no desire to become a soldier and entirely agreed with the opinion of the village that he had neither the ability nor the education to acquit himself with credit. In fact, the whole idea of military life was so distasteful to him

that he almost hoped he would not fulfill the physical and other requirements for admission. Indeed, the only thought that reconciled him to the attempt was that it necessitated a trip from Ohio to New York, which gratified his longing to see more of the world. This was so consoling that it was almost with a gay heart that he set out of the Hudson in the middle of May, 1839.

For a boy who had lived all his life in an inland village on the outskirts of civilization the journey was absolutely adventurous, for although he was then in his eighteenth year, he had never even as much as seen a railroad and his experiences on the cars, canal boats and steamers were all delightfully surprising. Therefore, long as the journey was, it was far too short for him, and on May 25th he reached his destination. Two lonely and homesick weeks followed, and then, much to his astonishment and somewhat to his regret, he received word that he had passed the examination for admission and was a full-fledged member of the cadet corps of West Point.