

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Melville Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Schiller Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schilling Kralik Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Lafontaine Gerstäcker Raabe Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Mörike Musil
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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**The Colored Cadet at West Point
Autobiography of Lieut. Henry
Ossian Flipper, first graduate of
color from the U. S. Military
Academy**

Henry Ossian Flipper

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

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TO
The Faculty of Atlanta University, Atlanta, Ga.,
— AND TO
THE PRESIDENT IN PARTICULAR,
TO WHOSE CAREFUL
MENTAL AND MORAL TRAINING OF MYSELF IS DUE ALL
MY SUCCESS AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY
AT WEST POINT, N. Y.,
I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THIS VOLUME,
AS IN SOME SORT
A TOKEN OF THAT HEARTFELT GRATITUDE WHICH
I SO DEEPLY FEEL, BUT CAN SO
POORLY EXPRESS.

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PREFACE.

THE following pages were written by request. They claim to give an accurate and impartial narrative of my four years' life while a cadet at West Point, as well as a general idea of the institution there. They are almost an exact transcription of notes taken at various times during those four years. Any inconsistencies, real or apparent, in my opinions or in the impressions made upon me, are due to the fact that they were made at different times at a place where the feelings of all were constantly undergoing material change.

They do not pretend to merit. Neither are they written for the purpose of criticising the Military Academy or those in any way connected with it.

My "notes" have been seen and read. If I please those who requested me to publish them I shall be content, as I have no other object in putting them before the public.

H. O. F.

FORT SILL, INDIAN TER., 1878.

THE COLORED CADET AT WEST POINT.

CHAPTER I.

RETROSPECT.

HENRY OSSIAN FLIPPER, the eldest of five brothers, and the subject of this narrative, was born in Thomasville, Thomas County, Georgia, on the 21st day of March, 1856. He and his mother were the property (?) of Rev. Reuben H. Lucky, a Methodist minister of that place. His father, Festus Flipper, by trade a shoemaker and carriage-trimmer, was owned by Ephraim G. Ponder, a successful and influential slave-dealer.

In 1859 Mr. Ponder, having retired from business, returned to Georgia from Virginia with a number of mechanics, all slaves, and among whom was the father of young Flipper. He established a number of manufactories in Atlanta, then a growing inland town of Georgia. He married about this time a beautiful, accomplished, and wealthy lady. "Flipper," as he was generally called, had married before this, and had been taken back alone to his native Virginia to serve an apprenticeship under a carriage-trimmer. This served, Mr. Ponder joined his wife in Thomasville, bringing with him, as stated, a number of mechanics.

All were soon ready for transportation to Atlanta except "Flipper." As he and his wife were each the property (?) of different persons, there was, under the circumstances, every probability of a separation. This, of course, would be to them most displeasing. Accordingly an application was made to Mr. Ponder to purchase the wife and son. This he was, he said, unable to do. He had, at an enormous expense, procured and fitted up a home, and his coffers were nearly, if not quite, empty. Husband and wife then appealed to Mr. Lucky. He, too, was averse to parting them, but could not, at the great price asked for him, purchase the husband. He was willing however, to sell the wife. An agreement was finally made by which the husband paid from his own pocket the purchase-money of his

own wife and child, this sum to be returned to him by Mr. Ponder whenever convenient. The joy of the wife can be conceived. It can not be expressed.

In due time all arrived at Atlanta, where Mr. Ponder had purchased about twenty-five acres of land and had erected thereon, at great expense, a superb mansion for his own family, a number of substantial frame dwellings for his slaves, and three large buildings for manufacturing purposes.

Of sixty-five slaves nearly all of the men were mechanics. All of them except the necessary household servants, a gardener, and a coachman, were permitted to hire their own time. Mr. Ponder would have absolutely nothing to do with their business other than to protect them. So that if any one wanted any article of their manufacture they contracted with the workman and paid him his own price. These bond people were therefore virtually free. They acquired and accumulated wealth, lived happily, and needed but two other things to make them like other human beings, viz., absolute freedom and education. But

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform."

And through that very mysteriousness this people was destined to attain to the higher enjoyment of life. The country, trembling under the agitation of the slave question, was steadily seeking a condition of equilibrium which could be stable only in the complete downfall of slavery. Unknown to them, yet existing, the great question of the day was gradually being solved; and in its solution was working out the salvation of an enslaved people. Well did that noblest of women, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, sing a few years after:

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the
Lord;
He is tramping out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible
swift sword;

This truth is marching on.

"I have seen him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded him an altar in the evening dews and damps; I
can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps; His
day is marching on.

"I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows
of steel;
'As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace
shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with
his heel,
Since God is marching on.'

"He hath sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment-seat; Oh! be
swift my soul to answer him! be jubilant my feet! Our God is march-
ing on.

"In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across
the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you
and me;
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men
free,
While God is marching on."

Another influence was as steadily tending to the same end. Its ob-
ject was to educate, to elevate intellectually, and then to let the
power thus acquired act.

The mistress of this fortunate household, far from discharging the
duties and functions of her station, left them unnoticed, and devoted
her whole attention to illegitimate pleasures. The outraged hus-
band appointed a guardian and returned broken-hearted to the
bosom of his own family, and devoted himself till death to agricul-
tural pursuits.

The nature of the marriage contract prevented the selling of any of the property without the mutual consent of husband and wife. No such consent was ever asked for by either. No one was, therefore, in that state of affairs, afraid of being sold away from his or her relatives, although their mistress frequently threatened so to sell them. "I'll send you to Red River," was a common menace of hers, but perfectly harmless, for all knew, as well as she did, that it was impossible to carry it into execution.

In this condition of affairs the "servants" were even more contented than ever. They hired their time, as usual, and paid their wages to their mistress, whose only thought or care was to remember when it became due, and then to receive it.

The guardian, an influential stockholder in several railroads, and who resided in another city, made periodical visits to inspect and do whatever was necessary to a proper discharge of his duties.

Circumstances being highly favorable, one of the mechanics, who had acquired the rudiments of an education, applied to this dissolute mistress for permission to teach the children of her "servants." She readily consented, and, accordingly, a night-School was opened in the very woodshop in which he worked by day. Here young Flipper was initiated into the first of the three mysterious R's, viz., "reading 'riting and 'rithmetic." Here, in 1864, at eight years of age, his education began. And the first book he ever studied—I dare say ever saw—was a confederate reprint of Webster's "Blueback Speller." His then tutor has since graduated at Westminster College in Pennsylvania, and is, at the time of this writing, United States Consul at Malaga, Spain, having served in the same capacity for four years at Port Mahon, Spain.

But alas! even this happy arrangement was destined to be disturbed. This dissolute mistress and her slaves, with all valuable movable property, were compelled to flee before Sherman's victorious arms. Macon, a city just one hundred and three miles south-east of Atlanta, became the new home of the Flippers. A spacious dwelling was secured in West Macon. In a part of this was stored away Mrs. Ponder's plate and furniture, under the guardianship of Flipper, who with his family occupied the rest of the house. Here all was safe. The terrible fate of Atlanta was not extended to Macon.

The only cause of alarm was Wilson, who approached the city from the east, and, having thrown in a few shells, withdrew without doing further damage or being molested. Every body was frightened, and it was deemed advisable to transfer Mrs. Ponder's effects to Fort Valley, a small place farther south. However, before this could be done, it became indisputably known that Wilson had withdrawn.

After an uneventful stay – other than this incident just related – of nine months in Macon, the office of custodian was resigned, and although yet a slave, as far as he knew, and without permission from any one, Flipper returned to Atlanta with his wife and two sons, Henry, the elder, and Joseph, the younger. This was in the spring of 1865. Atlanta was in ruins, and it appeared a dreary place indeed to start anew on the unfinished journey of life. Every thing was not destroyed, however. A few houses remained. One of these was occupied. The people were rapidly returning, and the railroads from Atlanta were rapidly being rebuilt.

During all this time the education of the young Flippers had been necessarily neglected. In the early spring of 1865, the family of an ex-rebel captain became neighbors of the Flippers, now well to do, and were soon on the most, friendly terms with them. With remarkable condescension the wife of this ex-rebel offered to instruct Henry and Joseph for a small remuneration. The Offer was readily and gladly accepted, and the education of the two, so long neglected, was taken up again. This private school of only two pupils existed but a short time. The American Missionary Association having opened better schools, the Flippers were, in March, 1866, transferred to them. They attended school there till in 1867 the famous Storrs' School was opened under the control of the American Missionary Association, when they went there. In 1869, the Atlanta University having been opened under the same auspices, they entered there. At the time of receiving his appointment Henry was a member of the freshman class of the collegiate department. His class graduated there in June, 1876, just one year before he did at West Point.

The following article from a Thomasville paper, published in June, 1874, will give further information concerning his early life:

"It is not generally known that Atlanta has a negro cadet at the United States National Military Academy at West Point. This cadet

is a mulatto boy named Flipper. He is about twenty years old, a stoutish fellow, weighing perhaps one hundred and fifty pounds, and a smart, bright, intelligent boy. His father is a shoemaker, and gave him the euphonious name of Henry Ossian Flipper.

"Flipper has been at the great soldier factory of the nation for a year. He was recommended there by our late Congressman from the Fifth District, the Hon. J. C. Freeman. Flipper has made a right booming student. In a class of ninety-nine he stood about the middle, and triumphantly passed his examination, and has risen from the fourth to the third class without difficulty.

"The only two colored boys at the Academy were the famous Smith and the Atlanta Flipper. It is thought that Smith at the last examination failed. If so, Atlanta will have the distinguished honor of having the sole African representative at West Point.

"Flipper has had the privilege of eating at the same table with the poor white trash; but Smith and Flipper bunked together in the same room alone, without white companions.

"It is an astonishing fact that, socially, the boys from the Northern and Western States will have nothing to do with these colored brothers. Flipper and Smith were socially ostracized. Not even the Massachusetts boys will associate with them. Smith has been a little rebellious, and attempted to thrust himself on the white boys; but the sensible Flipper accepted the situation, and proudly refused to intrude himself on the white boys.

"The feeling of ostracism is so strong that a white boy who dared to recognize a colored cadet would be himself ostracized by the other white cubs, even of radical extraction.'

"We copy the above from the Atlanta Herald of last week, for the purpose of remarking that among colored men we know of none more honorable or more deserving than Flipper, the father of the colored West Point student of that name. Flipper lived for many years in Thomasville as the servant of Mr. E. G. Ponder—was the best bootmaker we ever knew, and his character and deportment were ever those of a sensible, unassuming, gentlemanly white man. Flipper possessed the confidence and respect of his master and all who knew him. His wife, the mother of young Flipper, was Isabella,

a servant in the family of Rev. R. H. Lucky, of Thomasville, and bore a character equal to that of her husband. Young Flipper was baptized in his infancy by the venerable Bishop Early. From these antecedents we should as soon expect young Flipper to make his mark as any other colored youth in the country."

(From the Louisville Ledger.)

"It is just possible that some of our readers may not know who Flipper is. For their benefit we make haste to explain that Flipper is the solitary colored cadet now at West Point. He is in the third class, and stands forty-six in the class, which numbers eighty-five members. This is a very fair standing, and Flipper's friends declare that he is getting along finely in his studies, and that he is quite up to the standard of the average West Point student. Nevertheless they intimate that he will never graduate. Flipper, they say, may get as far as the first class, but there he will be 'slaughtered.'

"A correspondent of the New York Times takes issue with this opinion. He says there are many 'old heads' who believe Flipper will graduate with honor, and he thinks so too. The grounds for his belief, as he gives them, are that the officers are gentlemen, and so are the professors; that they believe merit should be rewarded wherever found; and that they all speak well of Flipper, who is a hard student, as his position in his class proves. From this correspondent we learn that Flipper is from Georgia; that he has a light, coffee-colored complexion, and that he 'minds his business and does not intrude his company upon the other cadets,' though why this should be put down in the list of his merits it is not easy to understand, since, if he graduates, as this writer believes he will, he will have the right to associate on terms of perfect equality with the other cadets, and may in time come to command some of them. We are afraid there is some little muddle of inconsistency in the brain of the Times' correspondent.

"The Chicago Tribune seems to find it difficult to come to any conclusion concerning Flipper's chances for graduating. It says: 'It is freely asserted that Flipper will never be allowed to graduate; that the prejudice of the regular army instructors against the colored race is insurmountable, and that they will drive away from the Academy by persecution of some petty sort any colored boy who

may obtain admittance there. The story does not seem to have any substantial basis; still, it possesses considerable vitality.'

"We don't profess to understand exactly what sort of a story that is which has 'considerable vitality' without any substantial basis, and can only conclude that the darkness of the subject has engendered a little confusion in the mind of the Tribune as well as in that of the writer of the Times. But the Tribune acquires more confidence as it warms in the discussion, and it assures us finally that 'there is, of course, no doubt that some colored boys are capable of receiving a military education; and eventually the presence of colored officers in the regular army must be an accepted fact.' Well, we don't know about that 'accepted fact.' The white man is mighty uncertain, and the nigger won't do to trust to, in view of which truths it would be unwise to bet too high on the 'colored officers,' for some years to come at least.

"But let not Flipper wring his flippers in despair, notwithstanding. Let him think of Smith, and take heart of hope. Smith was another colored cadet who was sent to West Point from South Carolina. Smith mastered readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic, but chemistry mastered Smith.* They gave him three trials, but it was to no purpose ; so they had to change his base and send him back to South Carolina. But what of that? They've just made him inspector of militia in South Carolina, with the rank of brigadier-general. How long might he have remained in the army before he would have become 'General Smith?' Why, even Fred Grant's only a lieutenant-colonel. Smith evidently has reason to congratulate himself upon being 'plucked;' and so the young gentleman from Georgia, with the 'light, coffee-colored complexion,' if he meets with a similar misfortune, may console himself with the hope that to him also in his extremity will be extended from some source a helping flipper."

*Cadet Smith failed in Natural and Experimental Philosophy. In Chemistry he was up to the average. He was never appointed Inspector-General of South Carolina. He was Commandant of Cadets in the South Carolina Agricultural Institute at Orangeburg, S. C., Which position he held till his death November 29th,

1876.

