

PRIVATE TRIMBLE.

By J. T. Fernan, in Denver Times Sun.

One day when Bull Private Trimble was wounded in the trenches before Manila, the wounded man himself thought that his end had come. He did not mind that so very much. He had volunteered for this war with a very clear understanding in his mind of its risks, and had sailed from San Francisco with the idea he was as likely as not to leave his bones either in the Philippines or at the bottom of the Indian ocean. Therefore, when he felt the curious numbness about both his legs and had made quite sure he could not move another step, he sat down at the bottom of the trench and closed his eyes, thinking of the folks he had left at home, but chiefly of one person.

However, after slowly and not unpleasantly losing consciousness, Private Trimble awoke, not knowing what length of time might have elapsed in an improvised hospital ward. The doctor told him he was not dead and Private Trimble thought the doctor ought to know. The doctor also told him that he was not likely to die, and that, too, Private Trimble tried to believe. After about a week of suffering, which tried even his philosophy to the utmost, he was pronounced convalescent.

Then came the hardest trial of all for his stoical patriotism. It was fever. Somehow, he had not laid much stress on the chances of fever in his anticipation of what he might have to suffer for his country; most of his calculations had been based on the probability of a quick and soldierly death, like what he had thought had really come to him when he felt that numbness in the trenches before Manila. But this slow, hot, delirious ordeal, with hardly enough sense of time and locality to make him feel human, was another sort of thing, not sufficiently "counted upon when he first put this uniform on."

Evidently there was no more fighting for him. His chum, who dropped in to talk to him every day seemed to think there was no more fighting for any of them. "The jig is up," he said, and repeated it day after day. In that case, Trimble wished they would send him home. He had left the counter of a hardware store to soldier in the far East for Uncle Sam; if there was no more soldiering "wanted—real soldiering as distinct from police duty—Trimble would like to get back to the counter and to that particular person.

And that was why his stern philosophy was not enough to keep him from yelling, "Harrsh," when the doctor came and told him he was to go home, invalided.

"Why, Trimble," said the doctor, smiling a quizzical smile, "I thought you wanted to see it out?"

"It is out, isn't it doctor?" said the pallid, hollow-eyed man. "There was only one thing I wanted here, and now there isn't much chance of that—somebody else got it, I guess."

"What was it?"

"I never told you about it, did I, doctor? Not when I was out of my head? Well, the truth is, I had a kind of fancy to carry back a Spanish flag as a present for my sweetheart, and that morning I got dropped I saw one on a little earthwork that I thought would just do."

"Never mind, Trimble," said the doctor, "You have the consolation of knowing that your regiment got the earthwork and I sup-

pose they got the flag, too."

"Yes, sir," said Trimble. "My chum Tevis told me that much. But the question is, who hoisted down that flag? I never would talk to Tevis about that—had my own reasons. The regiment has gone on ahead now, and I don't suppose I shall see any of them before I start."

In that Trimble was entirely right. He sailed within a few days after his conversation with the doctor.

Why they all made such a hero of him when he got home, Trimble was honestly unable to understand.

"Now, if I had done anything like Hobson, say," he told his mother, "it would be more natural. But what I did was no more than all the other boys did."

"But you got wounded," his sister put in by making it all plain to him.

"That was only a chance," Trimble insisted, "and the thing I started out to do I didn't do it."

"That was only a chance," his mother retorted.

"Mother," he said, "I want to ask you something privately. If Gracie will leave us alone for five minutes."

Gracie withdrew as requested, but smiled as if she could pretty nearly guess what the confidential communication was to be about.

"Mother has Carrie Neilson been to inquire about me?"

"Why, bless you, child, she's been here half a dozen times! What a question, to be sure!"

After a silence of a few seconds the invalid asked, "Do you know if she has heard from Wat Tevis?"

"No, Jack, I don't know. Does Wat write to her?"

"I didn't ask when I was out there," said Trimble. "He and I made it a point never to talk about Carrie. Mother, I want you to do something for me."

"What is it, child?"

"If she—if Carrie—comes here, you and Gracie talk to her. Anyway, you must never leave her and me together without one of you in the room."

"Well, I declare! And you! What makes you talk that way, Jack? I thought Carrie and you—"

"Never mind, mother. You see—you see, it wouldn't be fair—to Tevis. You promise me?"

"Yes I promise you, if you want it so."

The result of this self-denying ordinance was that on the only two occasions when Carrie came after that, and was allowed to see the sick man, their conversation was of the most conventional and impersonal character. Not only did the boy's mother marvel at the injunction he had laid upon her, but his sister was astonished at the orders she received from her mother. However, under the circumstances, Jack's will was law in that home. Still, Gracie Trimble found it hard to pass by and hear patiently her brother calling Carrie "Miss Neilson," and Carrie calling him "Mr. Trimble," as if everyone in the town didn't know they had been sweethearts for over a year.

As for what Carrie herself thought—that may all come out later on.

But when Trimble was strong enough to go out of the house and walk without assistance, his discharge came. And then he went back to the same counter for which he had been longing when he lay on his cot at Manila. And, in the natural order of things, as understood by his mother and his sister, and everybody else, he ought to have begun again the calls on

Carrie Neilson which had been interrupted by his—and Wat Tevis—marching away to war. But he did not.

Of course people talked. People talked so much that they ended by concocting a whole romance utterly unlike the true romance that was going on under their noses. This romance, the resultant of dozens of hints, surmises, jokes and idle remarks, made out that Jack Trimble, while he lay gravely wounded at Manila, had been nursed by a lovely Tagal girl who could speak only Tagal and a few words of Spanish. Jack had made love to her in sign language. He had forgotten the girl he had left behind him at home. The Tagal and Jack would have been married if the colonel of the regiment had not interfered and sent him home.

It was a gaudy, patchwork piece of romance. It did not hang together very well, but many people—some even who had unconsciously helped to fabricate it—ended by believing it.

And the romance was disastrously effective. From having been a hero, Trimble became regarded as a dastardly, faithless Lothario.

"He ought to be kicked," said one or two men, who, however, did not offer to carry out their own verdict.

"Just wait till Wat Tevis comes home," said the women—Jack's own mother and sister, of course, not being of this number. They had to stand by and hear all sorts of insinuations against their kinsman's character and conduct, because he himself had imposed silence on them.

"It's pretty tough," said the victim. "In fact it's fierce. I don't know but what they may end by running me out of town."

And then, echoing the aspiration of the women, he added, "Wait till Tevis comes home."

So everything was waiting till Tevis came home.

And in the course of time Tevis did come home. And when he came, the first thing he was asked was, "What's all this story about Jack Trimble and the yellow girl?" "What yellow girl?" said Tevis. "The girl he wanted to marry."

"Bless if I don't think you folks here must have gone crazy," was all Tevis had to say to that.

He did not let any more time go by before hunting up his chum.

"Say, old man," he said to Trimble, after they had shaken hands warmly, not to say violently, and passed reciprocal compliments about each other's appearance.

"I've got a parcel for you."

"What kind of a parcel?"

"Don't know. Here it is."

And Tevis produced a tightly rolled package done up in hospital blue paper and carefully sealed.

"What's inside of it?" said Trimble. "It looks like disinfectant dressing."

"It came from your doctor, anyway," said Tevis, "so perhaps it is."

Trimble broke the seal. A slip of writing paper fell out on which he read: "I got this for you from Sergeant Plymmer. I had to draw two of his teeth for him before he would let me have it. Take it and be happy—" and the doctor's initials.

"It's the Spanish flag off those breastworks, said Tevis. Trimble was dumb.

"Now I know why the doctor kept on so at Plymmer about all of his front teeth coming out," Tevis went on.

"Say, old man," said Trimble, "have you seen—her?" "No, and I'm not going to. You've had three months' start of

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me, and I guess I haven't any more chance."

Tevis was right there. He knew nothing at the time of the sacrifices his friend had made for loyalty. But he was right so far.

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