

THE MISSILE MEMENTOS

A Story of a War Veteran.

By JOHN TURNLEE.

WHEN Bert Franklin went out to fight for the Union in the summer of 1861 he was as handsome a young fellow as ever wore a uniform. You wouldn't think to see him now that he could have left half a dozen girls behind him, each of whom supposed she alone possessed his heart, for he is three-quarters of a century old, has hardy enough silver hair on his head to put in a souvenir locket, and his face is so covered with wrinkles that it resembles a ball of yarn.

But Bert in 1861 was straight as an arrow, had a superb figure, which showed to great advantage on horseback—he enlisted in the cavalry—and his merry laugh was equalled only by the jingle of his spurs. As to his eyes, he could look more love through one of them than any other man could through two. The girls of that day all had soldier lovers.

And Bert was as brave as he was handsome. In his first fight he was wounded and was made a corporal. In his second he was wounded again and was made a sergeant. In his third he received still another wound and was made a lieutenant. Now, it so happened that the first bullet lodged in the flesh and was cut out by a surgeon. Bert sent it to the girl he loved best, who treasured and revered it. His second wound came from a fragment of a shell, the force of which must have been spent, for the flesh was more bruised than torn. This fragment he sent to another girl he loved best. His third wound was made by a pistol ball while the regiment was charging. It went clear through the calf of his leg, so he did not secure it, but he sent one like it to a third girl he loved best as the original ball that had made a hole through him.

Bert steadily rose from private to captain and was constantly getting wounded. The consequence was that before the war ended no fewer than five girls possessed missiles that had pierced him in battle, and each girl thought that she alone possessed the only one that had been preserved. Shortly before the surrender at Appomattox the hero was so badly wounded that he was mustered out of service and after lying several months in a Washington hospital went home to limp about, an interesting character. Women passing him in the street would exclaim loud enough for him to hear, "Poor fellow!" "Noble soldier!" "What a pity!" and such other encomiums as were pleasing to the ear of the man referred to.

The pity was that this noble defender of the Union had been so dishonorable as to send missiles with which he had been wounded to a number of girls leaving each to suppose that she alone had been favored by the receipt of the only original lead or iron that had nearly bereft her of the handsome Bert. But his conduct only goes to prove that physical bravery is a very different quality from moral bravery and that war heroes are no more to be trusted by women than any other man.

Another feature of this case is disappointing. Bert, by sending so many bullets, fragments of shells and other articles used in war to kill persons to so many different girls,

showed plainly that something was wanting in his makeup. For there was great danger that some of these young ladies would tear that other true, original bullet that had nearly bereft the world, his country and the girl he loved best of Captain Bert Franklin, and should the secret get out there would be a more terrific stinging than occurred in the "Hornet's Nest" at Shiloh.

And this leads us to an inference—pessimistic. I admit—that physical bravery may after all be a want of appreciation of danger. Was not Captain Franklin's bravery in battle due to the same defect that led him to send the original bullet that wounded him to five different girls? In the one case he was liable to lose his life, in the other to bring down upon himself the contempt, to say nothing of the wrath, of these young ladies.

But this is not an essay on moral versus physical bravery. It is a simple story of a man who, having achieved honors in war, came home

to a hero a short time after his acts of heroism at the front to incur the scorn of those who had most honored him. There was something sacred in each of these missiles he had sent to his best girl that led her to treasure it in secret. It was not till the hero was at the height of his glory—that is, when he was walking about at home on crutches, pale and thin—that the secret of the many mementos of his sufferings and token of his love got out. Then one morning the postman left for him a little pasteboard box that had once contained a one of the many missiles that had wounded him. No word came with it as to why it was returned to him, but for the first time in his life he felt a sinking about the heart. He recognized the writing in which the box was addressed as that of the young lady he especially admired.


When the next delivery of mail was made Captain Franklin was handed another box, this time a wooden one, such as opticians use for mailing

glasses. Opening it, he took out a piece of iron that had been sent from a bursting shell. The fragment was large enough and heavy enough had it hit the captain to have torn a hole in him big enough to admit a cheese box. This one of the many mementos he had sent out was also returned without explanation.

Franklin on receiving the first missile had laid it on the mantel. He now placed the second beside it. When the postman came again he brought two boxes, each containing a piece of lead which had been sent from the barrel of some kind of gun. Neither of these returns was commented on by the sender, Franklin, who had faced them bravely in battle, now received them with every indication of fear. He remembered the storm in which they had come to him and wished that he were back in it rather than in his present position. He laid them beside the others on the mantel with a trembling hand.

Every memento he had sent out was now returned to him except one. A bullet had struck the metallic clasp of his sword belt and been flattened by the impact. He had shaped it with his pocketknife into the form of a heart and sent it to the fifth girl he loved best, Miss Alice Farnsworth, writing her how his clasp had saved his life. Alice pierced a hole in it and wore it on a gold chain about her neck. Bert did not know of the reception

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of his gift, but he wondered if it, too, would come back to him. He fully expected to receive it by the next delivery. He moved the four missiles on the mantel, stretching them along from end to end, leaving a place in the center for the leaden heart when it should come.

The next time Capt. Franklin went out on the street, hobbling on his crutches, he met one of the girls he had loved best and to whom he had sent a bullet. She cut him dead. The same day he met another of these

young ladies and received the same treatment. Within a week every one of the four who had returned his mementos had had an opportunity to show her displeasure, passing him with her head in the air.

"Where," moaned the transgressor, "are the encomiums these girls bestowed on me? 'My hero,' 'Noble defender of your country,' 'Poor fellow,' 'Sufferer for the cause.'"

These expressions, denoting the sympathy, the admiration of these young ladies, came up to mock him. We are seldom conscious of our strong points, and the captain, never having appreciated his deeds of daring, would now have exchanged them all for a nod from one of these girls who were displaying their contempt for him.

One day when he was wishing that some one of the various implements of war he had sent north had killed him he met Alice Farnsworth face to face.

She smiled at him. That smile was a healing balm to his distressed spirit.

"Come with me and I will tell you." She took him to her home and when they were alone together, seizing a gold chain about her neck, drew forth the heart shaped bullet.

"The secret that you had sent these mementos to all of the girls became known by comparing notes soon after your return. All were furious except

myself, my own conscience in such matters not being clear as crystal. It was suggested by one of our number that we send back your mementos and cut you when we met you. I found an excuse for not joining in your punishment—a poor excuse, I admit—in the fact that while each of the others received a missile that had drawn your blood I had been sent one that did you no injury whatever. I, therefore declined to participate in their plan."

This is the end of the story so far as the old vet tells it to-day but not only the flattened heart shaped bullet but the four other souvenirs, have been in the possession of Alice, his wife, ever since the memorable day he learned that she had stood by him in his degradation. She admits that there was even after her refusal to join the cabal against him, a coolness toward her on their part, but she has managed to bear it, since she has got more true affection from her husband than she got from the girls.

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