

FROM NEBRASKA CITY TO MANILA
AND RETURN.

I looked at my watch; in thirteen minutes it would be midnight. I walked slowly down the street, turned to the left, entered the depot, fell into the nearest seat and tried to stop thinking, but something kept repeating: "Ten thousand, ten thousand, ten thousand; go back to work and stay where you belong. What do you want across the sea? Go back, you fool."

It was unbearable. Jumping up, I went out upon the platform and walked swiftly back and forth. Around the electric lights the moths flew in a never-ending stream. Click, click, click, went the telegraph instrument, and for once I understood it—fool, fool, fool. I was getting desperate. Should I go back or not? Ten thousand miles of land and water and not a tenth that many cents to take me there. What wild dreamers we mortals are.

On the side-track was a flat-car. Going over, I climbed on top, lay down on my back and gazed long into the sky. A star went shooting across the Heavens. It appeared to have started of its own free will and then couldn't stop. It reminded me of a story, I read once, about a man whose highest ambition was to swim a certain river. He got started all right but when a little way out he became frightened. The other side looked farther than at first. He wanted to turn back but couldn't stand the croaking of the frogs; so striking boldly out he reached the opposite shore in safety. That suited my case exactly. Turning back was easy enough, but to face the music was quite another thing.

There was a long, shrill whistle. A light came dancing over the rails. I pulled a ticket from my pocket and held it up. "Leavenworth, Kansas," was stamped on the back. Too bad! But there was no mistake. Taking a seat in the forward coach, I tried to smoke, but threw the weed away in disgust. As I looked out of the window, old familiar objects passed swiftly by, indistinctly in the gloom. Then I caught a glimpse of the bridge I knew so well. I did not dare to hope that I could keep on going west until I crossed its creaky planks again.

At last I went to sleep and then some one thundered in my ears, "Leavenworth." Catching up my valise I stepped off. It was a bright, clear morning. Over the river an August sun slowly rose from the willows and told of a sultry day. Going up the main street I found a small restaurant and ordered breakfast. The meat was tough; the coffee black and the pancakes weighed a pound apiece. I got up in dismay; paid my bill, inquired the way to the fort, and left.

Fort Leavenworth.

Upon reaching the grounds I went to

the 32nd infantry to see some friends. I did not wish to enlist but wanted to go in some other capacity. I called on captains and lieutenants, but in vain; they gave me no encouragement. I went down town that night feeling like a fellow recently sand-bagged. The sky was blacker than the night before.

Finding a hotel, I called for a room and went to bed; then reasoned. To enlist was the only way out; so back I went the next morning to the recruiting officer, filled out a blank and took it to the examining surgeon. "Strip off," he said, sharply. I did so. Then he thumped me all over, pulled my arms, held some letters across the room that I was told to read—first with one eye, then the other—then he opened my mouth and looked in, held a small nickel tube to my breast, listened a moment, then picked up a blank and wrote: "Rejected on account of—" and turning to me he said: "I'm real sorry, my boy, but you can't go along with us."

I put on my clothes in a dazed sort of way. Chance number two was no more; every opportunity gone; no ray of hope shone through the inky blackness. I spent all that night trying to think out some new plan, but it was useless. I tossed on the bed and tried to sleep. That was the most wretched night I ever spent.

But seven o'clock the next morning found me at the same camp upon the hill. I went to a certain company, told the quartermaster my troubles, gave the boys a hundred cigars, treated the cooks and promised to do anything I could to help them. I had struck the right chord. I had found the weak spot in the armor. The quartermaster was a royal good fellow. With his help I might squeeze through; so I donned the army blue and disappeared among a thousand more.

For the next two weeks I scrubbed pans, peeled potatoes, chopped wood and made myself scarce on inspection days. I laughed at every one's jokes, whether they were funny or not, and almost forgot my own personality, but it paid. I was making friends fast and when discouraged I went and listened to the band at guard mount; so passed the beginning.

Then came the all-important day, when the regiment packed up, two hundred tents came down with a mighty flop and the boys marched down the dusty road to the troop trains that were waiting. In single file they went aboard. Section after section was loaded and pulled out. I worked like a demon, carrying bundles, officers' trunks, rations, coffee, buckets and many things I now have forgotten. The critical moment was at hand. I jumped into the commissary car and fell back into a puddle of water, shook myself and climbed in again, while the boys laughed

as if their sides would split. The wheels went singing over polished rails.

Kansas City.

In the afternoon we reached Kansas City, Mo. The regiment paraded the streets through a howling crowd, while I sat on the west side of the cars and dried my pants in the sun.

There were four of us in the commissaries, the quartermaster, two cooks and myself and I was sent to give out rations, carrying them through the cars in a box.

A person who has never been on a troop train cannot realize the enjoyment one can have. Imagine yourself spinning over a beautiful land, to be met at every station by crowds of shouting men and pretty women with flowers, hat pins or anything else you might ask for remembrance sake. I knew one fellow who, upon reaching San Francisco, had nearly fifty hat pins and double that many buttons. It was about the best collection I ever saw, and to think of the girls they represented, it was glorious!

On and on we went. Soon the sand hills of Kansas were left far behind and the snow-capped peaks of southern Colorado flashed in crimson light above our heads.

Albuquerque, New Mexico.

One morning our section pulled into Albuquerque, New Mexico. Engines were changed, so it gave us time to look around.

Next day came the great desert of New Mexico and Arizona and we of the commissary car would sit in the open doorway with our legs hanging out. It was splendid weather and we were enjoying the ride hugely. There were Navajo Indians with bright-colored blankets, running along the cars whenever we stopped, with grapes and piñons for sale. Women with many yards of white muslin wrapped around their limbs, carrying fat, dirty babies while thin, yellow dogs composed the rear guard. A half dozen hard tack would buy a clay pigeon, saucer or some other home-made article, and "Gracious Soldado" was heard on every hand. With the Greasers we traded cigarettes, tried to talk Spanish, got things strangely mixed up and had great fun. Four hundred miles we went through little villages built entirely of mud, decorated on every side by red peppers or jerked meat, stockades of mud, fences of mud, barns of mud, and I did not wonder that the people were dirty themselves.

Upon a high hill in Arizona I saw many little crosses. I asked the conductor what they were for and he told me a story of how, not many years before, three hundred Mexicans went out against the Apache Indians. They were defeated and compelled to take to this hill or be cut to pieces. Up they went; but never a man came down.