

length  
100  
lines

Jack Derrney  
An Episode of Missionary Ridge.

1. A figure bowed, and frail and spare,  
With vacant face and silvery hair,  
Of halting speech and drabful air,  
A broken man, and old;  
Would any here among you care  
To hear his story told?

2. He once was like, this half-dead man,  
Strong as an ox, with chutes of tan  
Which are so shrunken now, and worn,  
How strange the story seems,  
And smooth his young life's current runs  
With love, and hope's bright dreams.

3. One morn there rose a blood-red sun  
Through banks of dayless gloom. Was't one  
He loved, or the many? So began  
For him the better strife  
'Twill what to do and leave undone  
That comes to every life.

4. Love did not win. They tell us fables  
Inspired the players in the games  
Of war, or quid. If so, how came  
Our friend Jack to embark?  
Jack Derrney, so he signed his name  
And signed it with his mark.

5. D'ye think, he counted close the cost,  
The monthly doll, the love he lost?

(2)

Or was his honest nature tossed  
With hopes of "stripes", and "bars"  
In blue and gold on shoulder bared,  
Or did he dream of "Stars"?

6. No matter; in the ranks he stood,  
Fair-faced, and affronded brows and blood,  
All that the jauntyest hero could, -  
With no least hope of gain  
Or aught, beside the common good,  
Save laurier's trim and fern,

7. A soldier's need. The proof came soon.  
We forward marched from dawn till noon,  
And waited till the harvest moon  
Lit up the field of strife.  
The cannon's roar, with bullets' rime,  
Had stilled the drum and fife.

8. That twilight brought no tender mood.  
We lay in shadow; eastward stood  
A rocky creek with straggling woods.  
Beyond, the full moon rose.  
Silhouetted 'gainst its face of blood  
Stood ranks on ranks our foes.

9. How black the rifle-flashes made  
The darkness where we lay! Afraid?  
Man dies but once. A clattering aide  
Rides up, salutes and hallo.  
A hush; "Forward the Third Brigade!"  
It was a giddy waltz.

10. May saints and history tell, not I,  
What happened then, 'twixt hill and sky.

(3)

Historians seldom fear to lie,  
And angels, they may know,  
Too busy are, - who did not die,  
With fence and gallant foe.

11.

This much is true. When it was done,  
The moon rode high, a silver sun;  
Atride a smoking rebel gun, -  
When we were ordered back  
Upon the bloody crest we'd won, -  
We found our comrade, Jack.

12.

Blue forms and gray lay stark and still  
And heaped the mounds o' the rocky hill  
Their faces toward the moonbeams chill;  
But horror there was none  
Like Jack's flushed face and churning skull,  
On that hot southern gun.

13.

No scratch of steel nor sign of lead  
Was found on him, the surgeons said  
Who scanned him close from heel to head.  
Yet more the less we found  
That he, - whom now you mock - was dead,  
And died from love of gun.

14.

The lecturer left his shifting eye,  
His muscles shrank, as gears flew by,  
His step grew slack, his words more shy;  
The only words, they say,  
To all what listeners count a lie,  
The tale of that wild fay  
Whose body, said, he gave away.  
And what more could you do, or I?

Albion W. Tourgée

Beaumont, Virginia



*Never Published*