

The Homecoming

IT was an ideal Christmas eve. The snow was falling in large, beautiful flakes. It was not very cold, just good weather for snowballing and sleigh driving. Christmas was in the air, even the saddest of people could not but feel a little cheerful today. To the old the remembrance of some other Christmas was present while the young were in anticipation.

In the central part of the village of Westborough stood the small but cosy cottage of Mr. James Haliby, the grocer. The cottage was neat both within and without and, together with its surroundings, suggested peace and even happiness.

Within the cottage however Mrs. Haliby was not happy, for she was thinking of her only son, Louis, then absent at the front whither he had gone six months before. His absence alone was not the cause of her unhappiness, for she was very proud of her soldier boy. During the first five months of his absence, each Thursday had brought its message from her son, but it was now almost a month since she had received his last letter. Every day she expected either a letter from her boy or a telegram telling her——but no! she dared not think of it. She had been sure that she would hear from him for Christmas, but as yet no word had come.

That night Mr. Haliby and his wife sat before the fire talking. They recalled, as best they could, the occurrences of every Christmas since Louis was a child. Presently Mr. Haliby, in order to cheer his wife, remarked that perhaps Louis had some surprise in store for them and that he was leaving it so that it would reach them on Christmas. "And besides," he said, "there is yet the midnight mail to come and I told Jimmie Doyle to bring any letter or parcel which might come for either of us, up to the house as soon as he could."

An hour later the whistle of the midnight express blew and Mr. Haliby and his wife sat listening.

Presently a step was heard approaching the house. "At last," exclaimed Mrs Haliby, "here comes Jimmy with word from Louie. But no, it must be someone else, for Jimmy would never walk in without knocking." Husband and wife sprang to their feet and uttered a scream of delight, for a tall, magnificent figure, dressed in khaki, entered the parlor. It is useless to attempt to describe their greetings, but to give you the reasons for Louis' sudden homecoming, we must revert to an incident that occurred in the British lines in Flanders a month previous to this.

One night about ten o'clock, the regiment to which Louis was attached, had just repulsed an attack of the Germans and was on the alert for a fresh onslaught. For an hour they waited, and the captain of the division, being anxious to find out the enemy's plans, sent Louis and his friend Andy Murphy to do some reconnoitering.

Together they left their trench and crept stealthily in the direction of the Germans' line. When a short distance from the enemy Louis heard voices and whispered to his companion to listen. Since his coming to the firing line our hero had managed to learn a certain amount of German, and was therefore able, with a little difficulty to understand the conversation which he had overheard. An officer and two privates of the enemy were talking.

"You understand your orders," said the former, "You are to go near enough to the trench to drop your bombs in. Escape if you can, but, remember, drop the bombs in."

The two German soldiers began to move forward, and Murphy, in his excitement sprang to his feet in an effort to escape, but was immediately captured. Louis managed to keep himself concealed by lying flat on his stomach.

"Who and what is he, anyway?" asked the officer, running up.

"As far as I can tell, sir," answered one of the privates, "he is an English soldier."

"A spy, eh!" snarled the officer, "Look here, men, we might not have time to carry out our little

plan if we have to take him back to the lines. Here you," (to the private who had caught Murphy) "blow his brains out with your pistol."

"Are those your orders, sir?" asked the private.

"Those are my orders," answered the officer, "and see that you obey them quickly or else a whole horde of English will be upon us."

Louis' blood ran cold. He saw a pistol levelled at the head of his friend. Quick as a flash he whipped out his own weapon and shot the would-be assassin in the breast. In falling, the German discharged his pistol, and, unfortunately for our hero, the contents entered his hand. Murphy, as soon as the German's pistol went off, drew his weapon, but found that the others had disappeared. He and his companion lost no time in getting back to their own trench where Louis fainted.

When he regained consciousness he found that he had lost three fingers of his right hand as a result of the shot which was intended for his friend. At the end of a week he received a letter ordering him home, and appointing him a recruiting officer in Canada, with a liberal salary. Immediately after receiving the appointment he started for home, where he arrived just in time to gladden the hearts of his parents and to turn what would otherwise have been a miserable Christmas into a very merry one.

NORBERT HUGHES, '20.

Pursuits assiduously prosecuted become habits.

Absence of occupation is not rest ;
A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed

A learned man is a tank ; a wise man is a spring.

All mankind love a lover.