

## HOME ON LEAVE.

A host of memories crowd the mental vision at the mention of these three little words—"Home on Leave." The expression has become a cryptic one, and is the prologue of good times for Tommy: maybe the epilogue will be a wedding! Who knows?

Think of those long, weary months spent at or near the fighting line! Think of day succeeding day and night succeeding night in hard fighting or steady endurance. Think of the hardships of weather, knee deep in mud, or chilled mid frost and snow. Think of the strain of incessant shot and shell. Think of that eventful morning when the company went into action and bore their share nobly in a brilliant and victorious charge. The aftermath found Tommy in hospital "all smashed up" (as he described himself). Think of the weary months of suffering and the long days and weeks of convalescence. Is it surprising if he throws his cap in the air and dances for joy when he is "marked out" at last?

"Home to-day, boys!" said a tall, bronzed Southerner one dull wintry morning, "I have been thirteen months in hospital, so you can't wonder I am a bit excited about getting home." One of his legs was partially disabled, and his face disfigured by spluttering shrapnel, but he was happy as a sand boy. Without fuss or heroics he had bravely "done his bit" for King and Country, and had borne pain and agony like a typical British soldier. For the remainder of his life he will only be fit for light duty; but every other consideration is crowded out to-day, he is going "home on leave." His wife and children are expecting him; the husband and father from whom they have been separated for three years.

Go with that brave soldier in thought to the quiet country village which sent him when war was declared. You see the train steaming into the little station. His eager eyes scan the platform, crowded with villagers to-day, turned out to honour their brave townsman. He is shy as a girl of their well-meant plaudits. When suddenly two little figures break through the crowd and rush wildly up to him, shouting Daddy, Daddy! Our own dear Daddy! and Tommy ceases to think of the waiting crowd. His bonny bairns absorb him. He kisses and caresses each in turn, holding them at arm's length to note how they have grown in his long absence. His sweet wife silently waits, entering into his overflowing feelings, until the children have finished their welcome. Her face lights up with pride and her bosom heaves with gratitude for the safe return of husband and father. What a glorious reunion! What a happy fireside! for daddy is "home on leave."

"Well, nurse, am off this morning, arm and all," said another of our heroes, "Am going 'home on leave,' so nothing matters, does it?" "Perhaps not," nurse replied, "but the arm may still hurt, poor boy."

"Well, what if it does? I am not so badly off,

I still have one good right arm and two good legs, and will make these do the work of the wounded limb." The boy looked the bright, brave man he was, brimful of pluck and good humour.

"Shall I tell mother you said I was a good patient, nurse? She always likes to know if her boy is a credit to her."

"Yes. And tell her how we all admired you when the pain was worst. You simply stuck it out, boy, while they howked away at your poor arm with grim courage, not less than when you were knee deep in mud in the front line trenches."

"Good-bye and God bless you."

"Home on leave to-morrow, nurse!" said another pale, delicate-looking boy, whose hospital blues hung loosely on his fragile form. He had been in hospital for over a year, and a malignant disease had reduced him to a shadow, while on his young face deep lines of suffering were indelibly traced. Yet his grey eyes lit up with eager expectancy as he thought of home. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. She had given her all in her boy, and worked the little farm herself that he might be free to join up. He, in turn, had given himself, for he would never again be fit for active service, and the remainder of his life, long or short, would be spent in the shadowland of impaired health. All these drawbacks are forgotten meanwhile, however, or crowded out of remembrance. Nothing matters to-day, for he is going home.

See yonder crowd of happy soldier boys waiting for the motor to take them to the station. They are all merry and bright, for they are going "home on leave."

Open wide your gates. Stand at salute as they pass. Give them a parting cheer. These are the heroes who have saved, and are saving, Britain to-day.

There was no stopping to count the cost in their offer of service. There was no question of fee or reward. There was no *quid pro quo* in their work. No picking and choosing. They simply heard their country's call and obeyed.

Methinks this spirit of true selflessness is winning the war as well as force of arms. It is no "flash-in-the-pan" job, but a steady, stubborn, dour determination to hold on with British bulldog tenacity that is going to conquer. And Tommy's staying power is equal to the test. Therefore send these soldier boys "home on leave" with all the enthusiastic good-will they deserve. The memory of those few brief days at home, spent among their own people, will cheer them bye-and-by when they are back again in the trenches mid the hell of shot and shell, or perchance on some lonely outpost duty, where danger lurks in every breath of wind and darkness broods evil.

East and West are calling our brave lads to-day. They are rallying to the fight for the defence of hearth and home, the honour of the British flag, and the vindication of right over might. Be it ours to help by genuine effort and real self-denial to "keep the home fires burning till the boys come home"

A. E. M.

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