

A Patient's Vision of Christmas

By Pte. E. Houldcroft

In the wardmaster's room the Sister was just finishing her papers when a patient limped in. "Well, Shinwobble," she said gently, "you are just the boy I was wanting. Stay a while and mind the office for me, and be sure and not let the fire out." The bright red glow looked so inviting that Shinwobble sank into the wicker arm-chair without a word, and by the time he was comfortable the Sister had glided away.

So this was Christmas Eve—in Buxton—and miles from home and Canada. What a time he could have back there with the old folks and friends, getting ready surprises for the kiddies, and putting up the holly. But no, his hopes had been vain, for this year it was to be far from all that, and the "other," too. Many a time he had cursed the German shells, but now he was really grateful for the one that sent him back to spend Christmas out of the mud. His thoughts wandered to bygone days, and made his head slide back against the chair. He shifted and sank a little lower. So did the fire.

There was an air of expectancy about the group of patients, and Shinwobble felt an inward pang which told of dinner-time. Presently, the R.S.M. led the way into the large dining hall. Here was a sight, indeed. Long white tables, laden with flowers and fruit, bon-bons and cigars stacked military fashion, dishes of chocolates and nuts, with plum cake and shortbread galore. The sight of the steaming food made the patients stand motionless with eager eyes and their tongues hanging out. Ah! the R.S.M. was clearing his throat to speak: "Men," he said in penetrating tones, "this isn't where you eat now, this is where you will eat later. The O.C., knowing your kind heartedness, has arranged for the poor, lonely German prisoners, in the quarry, to have your dinner instead." You could have heard a fly sneeze. Every tongue was now dry and speechless, and the crowd could only linger around, waiting for the Fritzes to arrive. And then—

Bang! Shinwobble woke with a start to see the postman dropping parcels and letters on the table. Yes, there was a parcel for him, from Canada. Shinwobble's spirits soared, for here was luck indeed, something urgently needed to take the edge off that dream. Hasty fingers cut open the package revealing a pretty card with greetings, and—hold my hand—cigars, chocolates, plumcake, and shortbread. What a feast! All his own, too. And no R.S.M.